



**Thucydides in the 'Age of Extremes' and Beyond.
Academia and Politics**

Edited by Luca Iori and Ivan Matijašić

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LOOKING FOR NEW PATHS IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY RECEPTIONS OF THUCYDIDES*

— LUCA IORI & IVAN MATIJAŠIĆ —

ABSTRACT

The introduction sets out the aims of the volume, offers a review of the state of the art on the reception of Thucydides in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and a summary of the chapters included in this collection.

1. Introduction

On 21 June 2017 the American online magazine *Politico* published an article on ‘Why the White House is Reading Greek History: the Trump team is obsessing over Thucydides, the ancient historian who wrote a seminal tract on war’.¹ The article reported that the Harvard Professor of Government Graham Allison briefed President Trump and his staff on the Peloponnesian War — the war between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies between 431 and 404 BC — in order to better contextualise USA–China current relations. Allison is the author of the provocative book *Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (2017), in which he claims that Thucydides, the Greek historian who described the Peloponnesian War, offers a key to understanding contemporary international relations when he declared that the rise of Athens and the fear that it caused in Sparta made war between these two ancient superpowers inevitable. ‘As a rapidly ascending China challenges America’s accustomed predominance, these two nations risk falling into a deadly trap first identified by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides’.²

* This introduction is in every respect the result of a joint effort by the two authors; for the purposes of Italian academic accountability, section 1 (pp. 1–4) can be attributed to Ivan Matijašić, section 2 (pp. 5–16) to Luca Iori.

¹ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/21/why-the-white-house-is-reading-greek-history-215287/> (last accessed 11 January 2022).

² Allison (2017: vii). Cf. Harvard Thucydides’ Trap Project: <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/book/thucydides-press> (last accessed 11 February 2022).

Thucydides of course never talked about ‘traps’: in fact, there are a number of inaccuracies and plain mistakes in Allison’s interpretation, both from a classicist’s perspective and from the point of view of international relations theory, as pointed out by a number of reviewers and critics.³ However, this has not prevented the phrase ‘Thucydides’ Trap’ gaining international traction. It was first used by Allison in a 2012 article in the *Financial Times*, and only a few months later President Xi Jinping reportedly told a group of Western visitors: ‘We must all work together to avoid Thucydides’s trap’.⁴ It seems that Thucydides — who wrote the *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2,500 years ago — captured the attention not only of scholars, but of policymakers and leaders too, in both Washington and Beijing.

A few weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, scholars, political analysts, and journalists started reconsidering ‘Thucydides’ Trap’ in the light of the ongoing conflict. However, they display a superficial understanding of the problems tackled by Thucydides and an almost complete reliance on Allison’s analysis alone. Graham Allison himself intervened on 14 April 2022 at an event organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, discussing the consequences of the Russian invasion for the future of USA–China relations.⁵ Today, the phrase ‘Thucydides’ Trap’ has become an empty tag for discussing contemporary international crises.

In the light of these recent discussions of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides on both sides of the Atlantic and in the Far East, we felt it was time to reconsider our own place as Classicists and Ancient Historians in moulding the reception of Thucydides and the ways we cope with the uses and abuses of his historical work. We will attempt to evaluate the current politicisation of Thucydides by analysing a wide range of readings of his *History* from the past hundred years, which also involve the scholarly community. The interaction between politics and academic practices is in

³ Allison writes that Thucydides, a former soldier and seemingly a complete outsider, observed the outbreak of armed hostilities and did not live to see the bitter end of the war (2017: xv). He seems to be unaware of the fact that Thucydides was one of the Athenian generals (a *strategos*) in the first phase of the war and that he did actually witness the end of the war and wrote his *History* accordingly. One is tempted to question whether Allison read Thucydides at all, not to mention any scholarly work on the Athenian historian. His assumptions have been challenged by Chinese IR theorists too: see Feng & He (2020).

⁴ See Allison (2012) and Rachman (2018) who claims that ‘As early as 2013, I was present when China’s President Xi Jinping told a group of western visitors: “We must all work together to avoid Thucydides’s trap”’. Cf. also Mo & Chen (2016).

⁵ See <https://www.iiss.org/events/2022/04/the-russia-ukraine-war-the-us-china-rivalry-and-thucydides-trap> (last accessed on 5 May 2022).

fact the thread that connects our collective efforts. This will allow us, among other things, to interpret the recent veneration of the Athenian historian as just one chapter in a long tradition of political and ideological appropriations of his work, which often intersect with the main trends in Thucydidean scholarship.

The frequent interplay that has emerged between Thucydides and the contrasting ideologies that shaped world history during the twentieth century has led us to evoke in the title of our volume the famous historiographic category of ‘Age of Extremes’, coined in 1994 by Eric J. Hobsbawm to define the past century.⁶ In adopting Hobsbawm’s label, it is important to note that we do not necessarily intend to completely adhere to his interpretation of this historical phase. Rather, we align ourselves with his characterisation of the twentieth century as an ‘age of ideologies’, which played a decisive role in triggering the great historical processes over the last hundred years.⁷ Furthermore, Hobsbawm’s well-known periodisation of the ‘Age of Extremes’ as the ‘short century’ between 1914 and 1991⁸ serves to isolate two essential fractures — the outbreak of the First World War and the end of the Cold War — which can also be considered as major turning points in the history of Thucydidean reception, as various scholars have recently pointed out and as the present volume will show.⁹

The idea of focusing on the *Fortleben* of Thucydides in the so-called ‘Age of Extremes’, however, is nothing new. The last decade has seen a surge of publications on this topic. If the *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides* (2006)¹⁰ included only one chapter that considered briefly Thucydides’ reception in scholarly works of the twentieth century,¹¹ in 2010 a monumental collective work appeared edited by Valérie Fromentin, Sophie Gotteland, and Pascal Payen: *Ombres de Thucydide*.¹² It contained detailed studies on some aspects of Thucydidean reception in the past hundred years: the involvement of academics such as Julius Beloch, Gaetano De Sanctis, and Edward Schwartz; the readings of Thucydides by German classicists during and immediately after the First World War;

⁶ Hobsbawm (1994).

⁷ Hobsbawm (1994: 5).

⁸ Hobsbawm (1994: 5–11).

⁹ Important observations on the First World War as a turning point in the reception of Thucydides can be found in Keene (2015: 361–365) and Morley (2018a); cf. also Earley (2020) with Rood (2020). On the link between the reception of Thucydides and the Cold War, see Tritle (2006).

¹⁰ Rengakos & Tsakmakis (2006).

¹¹ Murari Pires (2006: 830–837).

¹² Fromentin, Gotteland & Payen (2010).

the reception of the Funeral Oration in Germany between 1850 and 1930; and, finally, Thibaudet's *La campagne avec Thucydide*, a popular book published in 1922, where Thucydides serves as a companion to the reading of the developments of the First World War.¹³ Very recent monographs by Dino Piovan and Benjamin Earley have explored the afterlife of Thucydides in early twentieth-century Italy and Great Britain respectively.¹⁴

These are some fascinating episodes of the reception of the *Peloponnesian War* in the past hundred years, but the main scholarly line of enquiry has focused on Thucydides as the interpreter and forefather of political theory. Two seminal volumes resulting from the Bristol research project led by Neville Morley, *Thucydides: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence*, show the strong interest in Thucydides among theorists of international relations.¹⁵ John Bloxham, in a recent book on *Ancient Greece and American Conservatism*,¹⁶ has further drawn attention to how interpretations of Thucydides' work by scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and Leo Strauss influenced American conservative politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Most recently, Johanna Hanink provided a concise and useful overview on the political reception of Thucydides in her introduction to a translation of the historian's most celebrated speeches.¹⁷

These trends in recent scholarship, as important as they may be, are nonetheless only a fraction of the variety of approaches that the reception of Thucydides in the twentieth century can offer and that still need to be explored. The purpose of the present volume is to reflect on at least some of the underexplored areas of Thucydidean reception within different academic traditions and political circumstances, as well as reconsidering in a new way the more recent and controversial developments in the Athenian historian's *Fortleben*. Contextualising his interpretations — especially the most daring and questionable ones, albeit often quite successful — is perhaps the only way to grasp not only Thucydides' authentic message, but also his legacy in an ever-changing world that still seeks reliable voices from the past to interpret the present.

¹³ See esp. Andurand (2010), Bleckmann (2010), Butti de Lima (2010), Lanzillotta & Costa (2010), and Cantier (2010).

¹⁴ Piovan (2018), Earley (2020).

¹⁵ *Thucydides and the Modern World* (Harloe & Morley (2012b)); *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides* (Lee & Morley (2015b)).

¹⁶ Bloxham (2018).

¹⁷ Hanink (2019: xv–liv).

2. Overview of the Volume

The nine essays collected in this volume explore more than a century of readings of Thucydides. The journey starts in Oxford in the years immediately preceding the First World War and ends with the early twenty-first-century American ‘Thucydidology’. The breadth of the chronological span considered has imposed a highly selective treatment of the subject, which, as stated above, has privileged the possibility of opening new avenues of research in the study of the reception of, and scholarship on, Thucydides in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each chapter contains significant original insights, which we leave to the reader to tease out and judge. Here we limit ourselves to an account of the structure of the volume and of the criteria that have led us to arrange the contributions in such a way as to suggest, through their juxtaposition, potentially fruitful research itineraries.

2.1. Thucydides in the Interwar period

The triptych of chapters at the beginning of the book — Tim Rood’s on Alfred Eckhard Zimmern, Ben Earley’s on Charles Norris Cochrane, Ivan Matijašić’s on John Enoch Powell — offers substantial advances in the study of early twentieth-century Anglophone Thucydidean scholarship, a topic which is gaining a steadily increasing attention.¹⁸ A second group of chapters by Dino Piovan and Luca Iori investigates the thus far underexamined Italian receptions of Thucydides in Fascist Italy.¹⁹ Both these groups can be also complemented, at least from a chronological point of view, by Hans Kopp’s study of the re-use of Thucydides by the Danish social democratic politician and classicist Hartvig Frisch during the Finnish–Soviet crisis of 1939/40.

All these essays are mainly devoted to the Interwar period and in turn form a larger core of texts, which aims to integrate the few existing studies on the reception of Thucydides at this essential juncture of world history, so far examined with reference to specific national contexts.²⁰ The essays

¹⁸ Cf. Earley (2020) with Rood (2020).

¹⁹ On the neglect of this subject cf. esp. Piovan (2018: 17–20), with Rhodes (2019: i–ii), and Iori (2019: 267–276).

²⁰ For Thucydides in post-war France, cf. Leymarie (2006: 79–84), Andurand (2010), Cantier (2010), Suzzoni (2016); on the reception of Thucydides in Weimar and National Socialist Germany, see Näf (1986), Chambers (1992), Butti de Lima (2008), Bleckmann (2010), Butti de Lima (2010), Piovan (2018: 23–47). For early twentieth-century Italy and Great Britain, see, respectively, Lanzillotta & Costa (2010), Piovan (2018), Fantasia (2018), and Earley (2020) with Rood (2020).

published here offer a broader look at this epoch from an original transnational perspective. They also try to adopt an approach that is less confined to the reuse of the ancient text in a purely political key but opens up to investigate wider issues concerning the history of classical scholarship and the process of consolidation of the social sciences in the academic systems of the time. What emerges is a picture of a period — between the end of the 1910s and the late 1930s — of crucial importance for the receptions of Thucydides, marked by certain specific features that deserve to be briefly recalled.

First, it was a phase of extraordinary expansion in Thucydidean scholarship. John Enoch Powell emphasised this advance in a paper presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Classical Association in January 1936, titled ‘The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies’ (here for the first time published by Matijašić). ‘In mere bulk’, wrote Powell, ‘the Thucydidean literature of the past seventeen years is probably superior to that of any preceding period of equal length, not even excepting the last third of the nineteenth century, the heyday of German scholarship’.²¹ Moreover, in these two decades, classicists produced fundamental works that contributed to a major renewal in the landscape of Thucydidean studies.

To give just a few examples, the seminal monograph by Eduard Schwartz on *Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (1919) cleared the way for an innovative season of essays on the historiographical method of Thucydides and the composition process of the *History*. Schwartz’s book inspired a wave of new research in German-speaking academia,²² but also had a wide international echo, especially in Italy, as demonstrated by the works of the young Arnaldo Momigliano and his mentor Gaetano De Sanctis, here examined by Piovan.²³ On the purely philological side, fundamental studies by Giorgio Pasquali, Vittorio Bartoletti, Karl Hude, and John Enoch Powell led to a revision of the history of Thucydides’ text.²⁴ Other scholars made relevant and sometimes controversial contributions to the reconstruction of Thucydides’ intellectual profile and style.²⁵ In the same years, Arnold W. Gomme began drafting the first

²¹ Powell (1936: 1).

²² Among the most relevant: Schadewaldt (1929), Jacoby (1930), Zahn (1934), Münch (1935), Grosskinsky (1936), Pohlenz (1936), Patzer (1937).

²³ In particular, Momigliano (1930), De Sanctis (1930: 299–308), De Sanctis (1937), De Sanctis (1939: 413–429).

²⁴ Pasquali (1934: 318–326), Hude (1927), Bartoletti (1937). For Powell’s contributions, see Matijašić in this volume.

²⁵ Cf. esp. Ferrabino (1927), Cochrane (1929), Regenbogen (1933), Jaeger (1934: 479–513), Berve (1938), Ros (1938), De Sanctis (1939: 409–436), Luschnat (1942).

purely *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*: volume one was published in 1945, but the book could be considered in all respects the product of pre-1939 scholarship.²⁶

Alongside this impressive flowering in the field of the classical studies, the Interwar period is also characterised by a marked influence of Thucydides in the varied array of the social sciences. As Tim Rood shows when analysing some important pages by Alfred Zimmern,²⁷ modern practitioners of these newer sciences considered the Greek author as, if not the initiator, at least an intellectual ancestor of their emerging disciplines. The legitimising power of Thucydides' *auctoritas* was thus mobilised in early twentieth century academia to support or reject a range of interpretative paradigms in sociology, anthropology, geography, and psychology. This was not too dissimilar from what Hartvig Frisch did in the following decade, when he tried — as Hans Kopp shows — to identify in Thucydides an anticipator of modern geopolitics.²⁸

Behind this tendency one can probably perceive the enduring vitality of the so-called 'nineteenth-century cult of Thucydides' that started with the first generation of German historicists. This kind of veneration of the ancient historian pretended to consider the Greek author as the founder of modern scientific historiography, but ended up feeding a widespread and sometimes caricatured image of Thucydides as the forerunner of *any* discourse on human societies that could potentially have a scientific character.²⁹ The use of Thucydides' authority in a debate on the circulation of paper money during an 1811 meeting of the Prussian government is as paradoxical as it is well known.³⁰ This sort of glorification of

²⁶ Cf. Gomme (1945: vi): 'Owing to the war I have seen no continental books or periodicals later than the summer 1939, and by no means all American work since the end of that year. [...] This is, practically, a 1939 book.'

²⁷ Esp. Zimmern (1911) and Zimmern (1921).

²⁸ Frisch (1940).

²⁹ Cf. Harloe & Morley (2012a: 3) and Piovan (2018: 7). On the historicist veneration of Thucydides during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Morley (2014), with the bibliography discussed in Iori (2019). The expression 'nineteenth-century cult of Thucydides' is taken from Momigliano (1990: 49–50).

³⁰ The episode was recalled by Friedrich von Raumer, secretary to the Prussian Chancellor. Reinhard Koselleck takes it as a paradigmatic example of the traditional, humanistic approach to the past that relies on the *auctoritas* of the Greek–Latin classics as a guide to decisions about the future, cf. Koselleck (1979: 38–40). According to Koselleck, this attitude was already in decline, as recently reiterated by Harloe & Morley (2012a: 2): 'From the second half of the eighteenth century, the past was increasingly perceived in terms of its difference from the present, in economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual terms [...]. The nature of contemporary society and its likely future development needed to be understood through the study of present

Thucydides was increasingly challenged during the twentieth century by the most advanced trends in the study of Greek historiography, which emphasised the growing distances separating Thucydides' way of reconstructing historical reality from that of modern historians.³¹ However, the interpretative frameworks of the previous century were still very much alive in the academic culture of the Interwar years, and came to influence essays of wide circulation such as Charles Cochrane's *Thucydides and the Science of History* (1929), here discussed by Ben Earley.

A third and most characteristic element of this phase of the reception of Thucydides is the marked incidence of contemporary politics. Obviously, the close interaction between Thucydides and the political contexts in which his work was read is nothing new but constitutes a long-term constant from the Renaissance onwards.³² The typical trait of the political readings of the Interwar period lies rather in the evident *ideologisation* of Thucydides' text. Indeed, many interpreters of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s organically integrated the worldview of the Greek author within the *Weltanschauung* proposed by the opposing ideologies that shaped the history of the twentieth century. This attitude concerned not only intellectuals operating outside the universities, but also those organically involved in the most accredited milieux of European scholarship.

In 1920s Italy, for example, Piero Gobetti's anti-fascist circle — the focus of Luca Iori's essay — played a leading role in the provocative reuse of some famous Thucydidean passages in a cento titled 'Tucidide e il Fascismo' ('Thucydides and Fascism'), published in the journal *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. The article aimed to denounce the abuses of Mussolini's power and presupposed the inclusion of the Athenian historian in a small 'liberal' canon of classical authors perceived as serving the cause of freedom. This reading was in all probability influenced by the interpretation of Thucydides proposed by Gaetano De Sanctis, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Turin, whose courses were assiduously attended by several members of Gobetti's circle.

As Piovan explains, De Sanctis filtered the contents of the *History* through a profound Catholic sensibility and, especially in his works of the

conditions, applying the methodology of the natural sciences to the study of society and testing ideas against present reality rather than relying on ancient examples and authorities.' In fact, the essays we publish tend to complicate and blur this picture, as, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, some of the most committed advocates of the social sciences identified Thucydides as a sort of forerunner of their scientific approaches to reality.

³¹ Cf. esp. Piovan (2018), with Iori (2019).

³² Cf. Fromentin, Gotteland & Payen (2010), Harloe & Morley (2012b), and Lee & Morley (2015b).

late 1930s such as *Storia dei Greci* (1939), recognised in Thucydides a love of freedom and a clear aversion to imperialism tinged with sincere religious sentiments.³³ This interpretation was consolidated in opposition to the views of one of his most talented pupils, Aldo Ferrabino, who in 1927 had published a history of Athenian imperialism (*L'impero ateniese*), which offered a radically different reading of Thucydides. Ferrabino acknowledged the Athenian historian's merit in having revealed that force is the supreme law of a state and that politics was basically free of moral constraints. Moreover, Ferrabino understood the whole of Greek history in the light of a celebration of the strong state that revealed clear convergences with Fascist ideology.

Not too dissimilar were the political readings of Thucydides in Nazi Germany, which extolled the omnipotence of the *Reich* and the cult of the *Führer*, both stigmatised by Powell in his paper on 'The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies':

The intensely political outlook of Thucydides may be made serviceable to a doctrine [sc. Nazism] which asserts the absolute dominion of the state over every phase of individual existence; and, as the more striking figures of Caesar and Augustus had already been captured as prototypes of Mussolini, Hitler might still be made to look very like Pericles, — or Pericles, rather, to look like Hitler.³⁴

Still in close dialogue with German culture, but moving in a radically different political framework, the Danish social democrat Hartvig Frisch saw in Thucydides — as Kopp explains in this volume — a proto-Marxist who had identified the driving forces of historical processes: the geographical and economic conditions of states, as well as the interests and aspirations of peoples.

From these few observations it is clear to what extent, in the period between the two World Wars, Thucydides' text became a sort of battleground between opposing critical orientations that made the *History* into a prism reflecting the most disparate ideological sensibilities. Of course, this kind of politically oriented approach was not confined to the interwar years, but developed, in different forms, throughout the twentieth century. In the last part of the volume, we have tried to collect essays that explore other promising lines of research in

³³ On De Sanctis's interpretation of Thucydides, see Piovan in this volume.

³⁴ Powell (1936: 14). Powell's main polemical targets were Berve (1931–1933), Wassermann (1931), Jaeger (1934), and Weinstock (1934). More generally, on the Nazification of ancient history in school and university contexts, see the rich set of insights in Chapoutot (2012), Roche & Demetriou (2018), and Roche (2021).

this direction, insisting on the links between politics and academia in Thucydidean scholarship after the Second World War.

2.2. Thucydides and Marxism

The first of these lines concerns the relationship between Thucydidean studies and the Marxist tradition, already examined by Kopp for the Interwar period. This interaction is still largely unexplored, not least because Thucydides' politico-military narrative has always been considered distant from the analysis of economic issues at the heart of Marxist scholarship (the 'ancient mode of production', land ownership, slavery, and so on).³⁵ And yet, the lack of interest shown by critics does not exclude the existence of relevant interweaving between the reception of the Athenian historian and the intellectual paths of eminent scholars of Marxist orientation. This is the case, for example, of the British classicist G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, here discussed by Carlo Marcaccini.

Marcaccini's contribution is thus in close dialogue with Kopp's essay, as both explore the re-use of Thucydides by Marxist classicists — Frisch and de Ste. Croix — who, despite the differences in their intellectual profiles, resorted to Thucydides' *auctoritas* to legitimise the theoretical foundations of the Marxist interpretation of reality.

Frisch discovered in Thucydides a realist vision of international politics capable of 'saving' the Marxist theory of inter-state dynamics. As is well known, Marxist interpretations foresaw a rigid dichotomy between the imperialism of non-socialist states and the internationalist, pacifist aspirations of the world's working classes — a schema which seemed to be drastically contradicted by the Soviet Union's war of expansion against Finland in 1939. This event could nevertheless find, according to Frisch, a coherent explanation from a Marxist perspective when read through the lense of Thucydides. Indeed, the dialogue between Melians and Athenians offered a materialist reading of international politics that denied any ideological justification for politico-military action, which instead rested solely on economic and geopolitical interests. Then, applied to the Soviet–Finnish crisis, Thucydides' lesson made it possible to unmask the regression of Moscow's despotic socialism into a crude

³⁵ For a concise account of the relationship between Marxist historiographies and ancient history, see Cartledge & Konstan (2012) and Vlassopoulos (2018). Cf. also Núñez López & Sierra Martín (2021). Vegetti (1977) and Wood (1981) remain important. On Marxist readings of fifth-century Athens, cf. esp. Marcaccini (2012) and Marcaccini (2021).

imperialism, not unlike that of the European powers before the outbreak of the First World War.

De Ste. Croix, on the other hand, develops an articulate defence of Thucydides' view of history as it emerges from the methodological chapters of his work (Thuc. 1.20–22). In the *Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972), the British scholar focused on three main aspects: 1. the affinity between Thucydides' methodology and Hippocratic hermeneutics, which makes the historian a kind of scientist; 2. the conviction that human nature is immutable and that it is possible to deduce constants of behaviour; 3. the possibility of elaborating a fairly accurate forecast of the future capable of orienting political choices. Such an apology was functional, for de Ste. Croix, to defend a Marxist paradigm of interpretation of reality based on the repeatability of human events and the existence of fixed patterns of human action. A kind of paradigm which, in the Marxist vision — and of de Ste. Croix too, especially in *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981) — coincided with the principle of class struggle as the driving force of historical becoming in the various eras.

Therefore, for both Frisch and de Ste. Croix the study of Thucydides became strategic for the consolidation of a Marxist epistemology that aspired to confirm itself as a valid heuristic and predictive model in the analysis of human societies. In both scholars, moreover, one senses an idealisation of Thucydides' work, which bore evident traces of the abovementioned scientising nineteenth-century cult of Thucydides. In light of all this, it will be worth investigating further the relations between Thucydidean scholarship and Marxism, trying to identify broader convergences between Marxist historicism and the widely established image of Thucydides as an interpreter of the universal laws that regulate historical development. This would lead to a closer examination of whether and to what extent the ancient author played the role, so to speak, of a crutch for Marxism.

2.3. Receiving Thucydides in Contemporary America

A further line of research concerns the impressive fortune of Thucydides in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century America. This kind of enquiry requires a special focus in the field of global politics, strategic studies, and international relations. As Christine Lee and Neville Morley noted a few years ago, 'these are areas in which the study of his reception and influence is farthest advanced, at least in terms of the volume of

material published on the subject'.³⁶ And indeed, over the last three decades there has been an increasing amount of reflection on *specific* areas: the use of the *History* as an archetype for current models of analysis of international relations (realism, neorealism, constructivism);³⁷ the canonisation of Thucydides in Senior Military Education during the Vietnam War years;³⁸ the logic of citation and appropriation of Thucydides' text in American political debate;³⁹ the role of Thucydides in US foreign policy.⁴⁰

In spite of these in-depth, albeit fundamental, examinations, there is a growing need to undertake a broader and more systematic analysis of these trends as a whole, with a twofold objective: on the one hand, to explore the essential moments in the evolution and reform of the US higher education system that led to the establishment of Thucydides as an *auctoritas* in the fields of IR and strategic studies.⁴¹ And on the other hand, to clarify the structural entanglements that exist between the growing veneration of the Athenian historian in certain academic circles and the concrete policy-making pursued by the top echelons of the American administration.⁴²

Virgilio Ilari's essay moves exactly in this direction. Ilari focuses extensively on the turning point of the late 1970s, but also reconstructs a long tradition of political readings of the *History* that begins from the Founding Fathers to the most recent orientations of American 'Thucydology', including the aforementioned Thucydides' Trap. This wide-ranging investigation allows Ilari to clarify some organic links between the study of Thucydides in the field of IR and strategic studies and its conversion into military strategy and political ideology, functional to the global hegemony of the United States.

Ilari's essay also reflects another relevant fact: the clear divide between the academic study of Thucydides in the spheres — respectively — of classics, political science, and strategic disciplines. This cleavage, which has already been highlighted by scholars,⁴³ involves both the purposes and the ways of reading the ancient source, not only in the US.

³⁶ Lee & Morley (2015: 6).

³⁷ Cf. esp. Johnson (1993), Johnson Bagby (1994), Crane (1998: 1–71), Gustafson (2000), Welch (2003), Monten (2006), Low (2007: 16–21), Forde (2012), Lebow (2012), Keene (2015), Johnson (2015), Ruback (2015), Thauer (2015), Morley (2018b).

³⁸ Sawyer (2013: 75–99), Stradis (2015).

³⁹ Morley (2013), Sawyer (2015), Hanink (2019: xlvi–liv).

⁴⁰ Bloxham (2018).

⁴¹ Particularly helpful in this respect is Sawyer (2013).

⁴² Cf. *e.g.* Bloxham (2018), limited to the field of US foreign politics.

⁴³ Cf. esp. Thauer & Wendt (2015).

On the one hand, classicists tend to regard Thucydides as an extraordinary source for reconstructing ancient reality from a historical, cultural, and literary perspective. On the other, specialists in IR and strategic studies exploit the ancient author as a model for elaborating general interpretative schemes for studying contemporary interstate dynamics or to understand some basic concepts related to war, policy, and strategy.⁴⁴

In 1972, for example, Vice-Admiral Stansfield M. Turner, the man who placed Thucydides at the centre of the Naval War College curriculum, described the spirit of his reform as follows: ‘Scholarship for scholarship’s sake is of no importance to us’. In the words of one of Turner’s advisors: ‘We were not creating a history course, but a course in decision-making’.⁴⁵ Regarding IR, Ilari points out two prevailing ways of dealing with the Greek source. The first follows in the footsteps of a centuries-old philosophical tradition that seeks in Thucydides’ pages ‘universal truths’, valid for all times. The other emphasises the historical parallels between ancient contexts and contemporary scenarios, using the former to analogically illustrate the latter. Thus, in the era dominated by the political and military opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Peloponnesian War served as an interpretative paradigm to describe the Cold War, in light of a supposed similarity between strictly bipolar geopolitical systems.⁴⁶ In more recent years, as mentioned above, the Thucydides’ Trap model aspires to elucidate USA–China relations.

To better illustrate this disciplinary divide, we have decided to precede Ilari’s essay with a chapter by Francis Larran, which offers an overview of the main trends in Thucydides’ interpretation that have been consolidated among ancient historians in the last century. These trends, especially in the last decades, have increasingly explored the literary nature of the *History*, investigating the style and internal structures of the work.⁴⁷ In detail, Larran’s contribution analyses a crucial episode of Thucydides’ narrative, which is also central to the reflections of IR scholars and strategists: the Athenian expedition to Sicily in 415–413 BC. Larran highlights a surprising plurality of readings among classicists, who focused on a fairly homogeneous range of historical problems (the unity of the Peloponnesian War; the nature of Athenian imperialism; the structure and technique of Thucydidean narrative), quite different from

⁴⁴ Morley (2021) critically discusses this approach.

⁴⁵ Sawyer (2013: 84).

⁴⁶ On this aspect, cf. esp. Tritle (2006).

⁴⁷ See also Rusten (2009: 14–15) and Hesk (2015: 224–228).

the issues investigated in the fields of political science and military strategy.

Despite these differences, however, there are potentially fruitful spaces for dialogue between classics, IR, and strategic studies. Already a few years ago, John Hesk drew attention to the fact that ‘when classics and ancient history and other disciplines listen to each other, some of the freshest perspective on the *History* emerge’.⁴⁸ Thus, some of the most stimulating interpretations of Thucydides in the field of IR — such as Richard N. Lebow’s reading of the *History* in a constructivist sense⁴⁹ — necessarily presuppose narratological sensibilities matured in the field of historical research. On the other hand, Josiah Ober has proposed a fascinating account of how the paradigms of modern political science might illuminate the most inner aims of Thucydides’ own narrative.⁵⁰ More recently, Geoffrey Hawthorn published a thought-provoking book on Thucydides’ vision of politics, thoroughly grounded in classical scholarship and in a lifetime’s experience of reflection on political issues;⁵¹ Christian Thauer and Christian Wendt, instead, launched a broad interdisciplinary dialogue between historians and political scientists around the concept of political order in Thucydides.⁵² It is not the purpose of this introduction to verify the legitimacy of each of these readings. Rather, we are interested in pointing out their existence and their heuristic value. We hope that a joint reading of Larran’s and Ilari’s chapters will provide useful hints in this sense as well.

2.4. Further insights

While the thematic sections so far discussed focus on precise historical contexts and academic traditions, there are some more general issues that

⁴⁸ Cf. Hesk (2015: 219), who noted the productive role assumed by an interdisciplinary dialogue on Thucydides in examining theoretical controversies concerning the nature of historical narrative and the proper limit of the historical method. Important discussion of recent approaches to Thucydides by classicists drawing on theories from other disciplines include Hornblower & Stewart (2005) on Sahlins (2004), Greenwood (2006), Rusten (2009: 1–28), Grethlein (2010). Thauer & Wendt (2015) examine the possible interplay between history and political science.

⁴⁹ Cf. Lebow (2001), Lebow (2003), Lebow (2012). As Lebow acknowledges, his interpretation is largely based on the narratological reading of Thucydides proposed by Connor (1984) — cf. esp. Lebow (2012: 208). On Lebow’s Thucydides, cf. also Wendt (2016).

⁵⁰ See Ober (2006).

⁵¹ Hawthorn (2014).

⁵² Thauer & Wendt (2015–2016).

run through the whole book and are worth mentioning briefly, not least as they provide further insights for future research.

The first one concerns the interplay between academia and politics in moulding twentieth- and twenty-first-century receptions of Thucydides. The essays gathered in this volume suggest that this interaction should not be understood as a dialectic of separate spaces, but rather as a continuous osmosis between realities that are *structurally interconnected*. This kind of intersection emerges from the range of the media conveying the readings of the *History* presented in this volume. They include not only specialist publications (often of high standing), but embrace a very broad range of texts, directed at rather heterogeneous audiences: newspapers and periodicals, political magazines, educational materials, public speeches. The same connection between academic and political milieux emerges if we examine the biographies of many of the protagonists in these chapters: some, like John Enoch Powell, embarked initially on an academic career and then devoted themselves full-time to politics; others, like Hartvig Frisch, pursued both activities; most never abandoned their primary vocation for scholarship, but nonetheless worked for state-funded bodies — that is the case, for example, with Alfred Zimmern and Gaetano De Sanctis. A broader and more systematic investigation of these types of sources and personal histories is hence to be hoped for, as it would allow for a deeper examination of the crucial entanglements between academia and politics that have shaped the reception of Thucydides in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Secondly, if we flip through the chapters, we cannot help but notice the frequency, at times obsessive, with which references to certain specific passages of the *History* occur: most of all, the Melian Dialogue (5.85–113) and Thucydides' reflections on the civil war of Corcyra (3.82–83), but also the Archaeology (1.2–19), the Funeral Oration of Pericles (2.35–46), the Athenian expedition to Sicily (Books 6–7), and the oligarchic coup in Athens in 411 BC (8.63–98). The rest of Thucydides' work, on the contrary, seems to be almost neglected. This gives us the impression that the political readings of the *History* that have been undertaken over the last century have tended to privilege a *highly selective approach* to the source, as if the relevance of Thucydides for the present could be measured within the restricted perimeter of a handful of key passages, which contain the political distillation of the author's thought. This tendency is far from surprising, since it is a constant in the

modern — as well as ancient — reception of Thucydides.⁵³ Rather, it is worth verifying whether and to what extent the same passages read and re-read over the last hundred years have maintained the same political centrality in other historical periods. If so, it does not seem too far-fetched to imagine, for the future, the idea of tracing a sort of twentieth- and twenty-first-century canon of the ‘most political’ sections in Thucydides’ work, and to cross-check it with the reception of the same passages in previous centuries.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, several chapters draw attention to the important contribution that archival research can offer to the study of the twentieth-century reception of Thucydides. The most interesting insights in this respect have been drawn from the papers of Gaetano De Sanctis, Piero Gobetti, John Enoch Powell, and Alfred Zimmer, respectively held at the Archivio storico dell’Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica (Rome), the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti (Turin), the Churchill Archives Centre at Churchill College and the Wren Library at Trinity College (Cambridge), and the Bodleian Library (Oxford). However, several of the essays also take account of other recognition of important archival materials scattered all over the world. Broadening the scope of future research in these directions will undoubtedly lead to the discovery of new documents and the scoping of innovative perspectives on the afterlife of Thucydides in the ‘Age of Extremes’ and beyond.

However, these chapters are all yet to be written. We leave it for the readers to explore these themes in greater depth, and perhaps discover new research avenues that have eluded us. If this is the case, and if we have contributed to stimulating further investigations on the many paths followed by modern and contemporary receptions of Thucydides, our aim will have been achieved.

* * *

This edited volume is the result of the online workshop *Thucydides in the ‘Age of Extremes’ and Beyond. Academia and Politics* that we organised in the final months of 2020. Given the restrictions on travel and movement that the Covid-19 pandemic imposed on the participants, we opted for video presentations of each paper, which we uploaded to YouTube. It includes an introductory video by the organisers (and editors of the present volume) Luca Iori and Ivan Matijašić, followed by talks by

⁵³ For the ancient reception of Thucydides, many insights are to be found in Nicolai (1992), Nicolai (1995), Iglesias-Zoido (2012), Fromentin, Gotteland & Payen (2010: 27–273), Matijašić (2018), and Iori (2020).

Tim Rood, Francis Larran, Ivan Matijašić, Dino Piovan, Hans Kopp, Luca Iori, Elizabeth Sawyer, Benjamin Earley, and the conclusions by the late Peter J. Rhodes, which he read at an online Zoom meeting on 4 December 2020.⁵⁴ At the same meeting we gathered to discuss individual papers, and give the audience the opportunity to ask questions and offer comments. We would like to thank our contributors for their enthusiasm in accepting our invitation, and the participants in the event on 4 December 2020 for their comments and contributions. We would also like to express our gratitude to the institutions that supported our initiative: Newcastle University, the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of London, and Università di Parma. The publication of this volume has been generously funded under the grant MSCA SoE@UNISI 2021 awarded to Ivan Matijašić at the Dipartimento di Filologia e Critica delle Letterature Antiche e Moderne (DFCLAM), Università di Siena. We would like to thank Stefano Ferrucci, Matijašić's supervisor at the DFCLAM, and Pierluigi Pellini, Director of the DFCLAM. Finally, our most sincere thanks to Lorenzo Calvelli and Federico Santangelo for accepting this book in the *HCS Supplementary Volumes* series and for their unfailing support in the final stages of this publication.

The present volume includes most of the papers that were delivered in the 2020 seminar series and several invited contributions, which have widened the thematic range of the collection. We are very conscious that the contributors to this book are all male, and we very much regret that the attempts we have made to address this imbalance at various stages of the project have been unsuccessful.

A final note on Peter J. Rhodes' conclusions. Peter passed away unexpectedly on 27 October 2021. He joined our project from the very outset with enthusiasm and commitment. He presented his thoughts on the contents of the papers that are now on YouTube: his contribution has been recorded and features on YouTube alongside the rest of the videos. He also read most of the chapters included in the present volume and managed to write his concluding remarks in late summer 2021, but was unable to make the final revisions. With the generous assistance of Lynette Mitchell, his literary executor, and the friendly support of Tim Rood, we undertook the task of putting the finishing touches to the text, limiting ourselves to very minor interventions of an almost purely formal nature. Nothing that Peter wrote was changed, except for some slight tweaks in the arrangement of his text, which now reflects more closely the

⁵⁴ They are available at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC11JyqOe2prPafUcQpRiwkA> (last accessed 11 January 2022).

final structure of the book. We are deeply grateful to both Lynette and Tim for their help and advice in the process.

Peter Rhodes was always supportive of younger scholars and did not shy away from invitations to share his immense knowledge on Greek history and historiography. We are immensely proud to be able to include his chapter in our edited volume. We dedicate this book to his memory.

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A.E. ZIMMERN, THUCYDIDES, AND
THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN DISCIPLINES*

— TIM ROOD —

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores, largely through the writings of A.E. Zimmern, how the reception of Thucydides (especially the Archaeology) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was linked to disciplinary formation in the academy. Zimmern's reading of Thucydides' relationship to modern disciplines is set against his own academic trajectory within and beyond Oxford as he moved from Classics to Sociology and International Relations; against his use of Thucydides in The Greek Commonwealth; and against the connections drawn by other scholars between Thucydides' concerns and the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, and Psychology.

KEYWORDS

*Thucydides, A.E. Zimmern, Literae Humaniores,
University of Oxford, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, Psychology*

1. Thucydides as Academic Pioneer

Scholars have paid considerable attention to the ways in which Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* was received in the emerging profession of History over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ In this article, I discuss a related subject that has been less closely examined: how Thucydides' work was read against the new academic disciplines that were created in the latter part of this period. My analysis will have two, related, strands. One of these is

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¹ Morley (2014) offers an overview.

the reception of Thucydides in the writings of the British scholar Sir Alfred Zimmern. Zimmern, son of a German Jewish immigrant and recipient of an elite classical education, began his career as an Ancient History don at Oxford, left Oxford to write his famous study of fifth-century BC Athens, *The Greek Commonwealth*, and subsequently held positions in the fields of Sociology and International Relations; his use of Thucydides is interesting not least for his conscious application of different disciplinary perspectives.² The other strand is the institutional context in which Zimmern himself was trained – the *Literae Humaniores* course at the University of Oxford, with its twin focus on Ancient History and Philosophy. This course (commonly known as Greats) was read in this period by numerous students who became important thinkers in a variety of disciplines; what makes it particularly relevant for my analysis is that, from the 1870s onwards, the whole of Thucydides was a compulsory part of the syllabus.³ These two strands will come together in the use of biographical information (partly derived from archival sources) to trace the educational settings through which Zimmern's reception of Thucydides was forged.

Zimmern offered explicit reflections on Thucydides' relation to modern academic specialisations in his 1921 essay 'Political Thought', which was published in the Oxford University Press volume *The Legacy of Greece*. At the time of the book's publication, the position of Greek in elite education was under threat: a government enquiry into the teaching of Classics in schools was set up in 1919; the compulsory Greek requirement at Oxford and Cambridge was scrapped in 1920; and that year also saw the creation at Oxford of a new degree in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics that was commonly called Modern Greats.⁴ *The Legacy of Greece* was one of a number of defensive measures organised by its

² A.E. Zimmern (1879–1957): Winchester College; Lit. Hum., New College, 1902 (first class); pp. 29–30 for his career; knighted 1936; see further *ODNB* (there is no full biography). On Zimmern's move from Ancient History to IR see Low (2007: 7–17); on his writings on IR see Baji (2021); the best study of *The Greek Commonwealth* (which Murray (2000: 360) calls 'the most important work on Greek history to emerge from pre-war Oxford') is Millett (2007). The treatment of Zimmern's reception of Thucydides in Earley (2020) is unreliable: see Rood (2020b).

³ For late Victorian and Edwardian Greats, see Jenkyns (2000), Murray (2000), and Walsh (2000); for Oxford Classics more generally see Stray (2007). Prior to the 1872 reforms, Thucydides was regularly offered as a text for Greek history: the reforms brought in the study of periods with fixed texts.

⁴ For the enquiry, see Stray (1998: 265–270); for compulsory Greek, Raphaely (1999) (on Cambridge); for the creation of PPE, Chester (1986: 31–37).

editor, R.W. Livingstone, a friend of Zimmern's since their schooldays.⁵ In Livingstone's words, the book was to give some idea 'of what the world owes to Greece [...] and of what it can still learn from her' — for 'behind the veil woven by time and distance' the face that meets us as we study Greek thought is 'our own', albeit 'younger'.⁶

Zimmern supported Thucydides' claim to modernity by appealing to two passages in particular — his account of the growing power of the Greek cities (1.1–19, generally known in modern scholarship as the *Archaeology*) and his analysis of their disintegration owing to *stasis* (3.82–83). While Zimmern drew on the *stasis* passage to imagine how a modern-day Thucydides might understand the internal problems of European nations, he used the *Archaeology* to map Thucydides' intellectual contribution against the new contours of the academic world:

turn to the opening chapters of Thucydides' book. You will find most of the sciences on which long modern treatises are written: but you will find something more: you will find them blended into a unity. Let those who deny that Thucydides was a sociologist, who continue to claim that Herbert Spencer, inventor of the horrid word, invented also the science, re-read Thucydides' account of the evolution (for it was as an evolution that he saw and depicted it) of Greek society from the earliest times to his own day. Let those who cry up anthropology examine into his treatment of legend and custom and his power, untrained in Seminar or institute, to use it as sociological evidence. Let the geographers, too forgetful sometimes that man is not the creature of environment alone, refresh their minds by recalling those brilliant sallies in geographical thinking in which he explains some of the features of early Greek settlement and city-building. It is not only orthodox history, of the school of Ranke, of which Thucydides is the father and inspirer: there is not one of the many movements which have sought to broaden out

⁵ R.W. Livingstone (1880–1960): Winchester College; Lit. Hum., New College, 1903 (first class); Fellow in Classics, Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1904–1924); Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast (1924–1933); President, Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1933–1950); knighted 1931. For Zimmern and Livingstone at school, see *e.g.* MSS Zimmern 6.38 (cycling together in the Hampshire countryside), 119.89 (both in the same 'chamber', *i.e.* dormitory, in the scholars' boarding-house).

⁶ Livingstone (1921b); for the context, and later *Legacy* volumes, see Stray (2013: 430). Livingstone subsequently edited as 'pro-Greek propaganda' (letter to Zimmern, MSS Zimmern 75.22) the 1923 OUP volume *The Pageant of Greece*, in which he cited the passage from Zimmern (1921) quoted below and included (with small omissions) Zimmern's translation of the Thucydidean Funeral Oration (201–202, 205–211); he also included that passage in a 1943 abridgement of Thucydides (on which see Sawyer (2013: 16–20, 66, 130–132, 138)).

historical study in recent years, from Buckle and Leplay and Vidal de la Blache down to the psycho-analysts of our own day and of to-morrow who will not find in Thucydides some gleaming anticipation along the path of their own thought.⁷

Zimmern here presents Thucydides as a pioneer, an amateur who can outmatch modern specialists both aesthetically, through his concision, and intellectually, through his holistic vision.⁸

Zimmern's use of Thucydides in this passage is part of a long tradition of modernising appropriations within the Anglophone world stretching from sixteenth-century England to contemporary America. Throughout this period, the *History of the Peloponnesian War* has on numerous occasions been brought to bear on a range of contemporary problems, including sea power, civic unrest, and the tension between democracy and empire.⁹ When *The Legacy of Greece* appeared, the feeling of Thucydides' contemporaneity had been strengthened for many by their experience of the First World War, not least because of the uses that had been made during the war of Zimmern's earlier reception of Thucydides (excerpts from the translation of the Periclean Funeral Oration in *The Greek Commonwealth* appeared on posters in London trains, and the translation itself was issued as a small pamphlet which drew overt parallels between Athens and England). Some of the psychological trauma of the war can perhaps be felt, too, in Zimmern's attempt in the war's aftermath to anchor the emerging academic disciplines of modernity in the classical past.

Zimmern's assimilation of Thucydides to recent attempts to 'broaden out' the study of history contrasts with a common perception of Thucydides' work as narrowly focussed on politics and war.¹⁰ That view was expressed in numerous treatments of the history of historiography: it will be enough here to pick out an Oxford prize essay on 'Historical Criticism' written in 1879 by the young Oscar Wilde in which the *History* is called 'one-sided and incomplete' on account of its focus on 'the intricate details of sieges and battles' rather than '[the] condition of

⁷ Zimmern (1921: 341–342).

⁸ For the imagery of gleaming, cf. Zimmern's account in *The Greek Commonwealth* (1961: 255) of how the 'pioneers' of Greek colonisation 'followed the gleam' (an echo of Tennyson's poem 'Merlin and the Gleam').

⁹ For a general overview of Thucydidean reception see the essays in Harloe & Morley (2012) and Lee & Morley (2015); for the First World War reception, Morley (2018), with p. 426 for the posters.

¹⁰ See Rood (2020a) for contrasting perceptions of (broad) Herodotus and (narrow) Thucydides.

private society in Athens, or the influence and position of women'.¹¹ While some earlier writers had questioned that view by appealing to the *Archaeology*,¹² Zimmern goes further by parading four modern disciplines for which he claims Thucydides' intellectual ancestry.

The disciplines Zimmern names had recently started to establish themselves in Britain.¹³ At his own former institution, Oxford, Anthropology made its formal appearance with the appointment of E.B. Tylor, first as Reader (1884) and later as Professor (1896); and while proposals for a separate Honour School in Anthropology were rejected, a Diploma (managed by a Committee for Anthropology) was introduced in 1905.¹⁴ Geography followed a similar path: a Readership in 1887 (half-funded by the Royal Geographical Society) was followed by a School of Geography with its own Diploma at the turn of the century, while an older tradition of studying classical topography through surviving historians and geographers was cemented by the appointment in 1896 of G.B. Grundy to the new position of University Lecturer in Classical Geography.¹⁵ As for the other movements Zimmern names, Sociology and Psychoanalysis, they were slower to take root in Britain, but the first Professors in Sociology were appointed in 1907 at the London School of Economics and Political Science (henceforth LSE),¹⁶ and a course on Psychoanalysis was taught at University College London by the time Zimmern was writing.¹⁷

In the rest of this paper, I shall discuss how Thucydides was read against these emerging disciplines both by Zimmern and by modern practitioners of the disciplines themselves. I will concentrate on the reception of what Zimmern typically calls Thucydides' 'introduction', that is, the *Archaeology* – including its use in *The Greek Commonwealth*, a book that is itself presented as an 'introduction' to Thucydides' account

¹¹ Wilde (2007: 17).

¹² See Rood (2015) on the reception of the *Archaeology*.

¹³ On the development, definition, and interrelation of disciplines at this time see the essays in Anderson & Valente (2002), Daunton (2005), and Lightman & Zon (2020); for the diversification of the Oxford curriculum see Brockliss (2016: 378–385).

¹⁴ See Gosden, Larson, & Petch (2007); Rivière (2007a); more generally Turner (2014: 328–356).

¹⁵ See Scargill (1976). For the broader history of Geography as a university subject in Britain, see Withers (2001); for the earlier study of historical geography see Withers & Mayhew (2002).

¹⁶ The history of Sociology in Britain has been extensively discussed in recent years: important contributions include Abrams (1968), Halsey (2004), Renwick (2012), Husbands (2019), and Scott (2020).

¹⁷ For the early history of Psychoanalysis in Britain see Hinshelwood (1995), (1999); Richards (2000).

of the Peloponnesian War.¹⁸ As a prelude, I will set Zimmern's analysis of Thucydides' disciplinary connections against his own intellectual development — for his praise of Thucydides hints at the same time that Zimmern was himself a pioneer, ready to look beyond the orthodox (German¹⁹) academic tradition to French thinkers and even to the controversial new ideas of Sigmund Freud.

My analysis will necessarily be highly selective. A fuller treatment would bring out what is distinctive about the reception of Thucydides by contrast with readings of his historiographical predecessor, Herodotus, and his successors in political thought, Plato and Aristotle. It would also explore an important modern discipline with which Zimmern elsewhere connects Thucydides, namely Economics. And it would pay more attention to a context for the disciplinary reception of Thucydides that will be intermittently visible: European imperialism and its intellectual and practical links with the academy. These links have been explored in relation to Zimmern himself by recent scholars of international relations; their complexity and importance, however, is such that they require separate discussion.²⁰

The main aims in this article are twofold. One is to increase our understanding of the early intellectual development of Alfred Zimmern by setting his work alongside currents in Ancient History rather than reading back from his later career in IR. The other is to cast light on an underexplored area of Thucydidean reception that illuminates the history of Classics' relations to competing disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, the article aims to complicate the polemical narrative of those relations promoted by scholars such as Keith Hopkins (himself a Professor first of Sociology, then of Roman History).²¹ According to this story, there was an early period of fertile interaction in which founding figures in the social sciences such as Marx and Weber showed a deep interest in the classical economy and Durkheim (a pupil of Fustel de Coulanges) was read by scholars of Greek religion. But this early cross-

¹⁸ Zimmern (1961: 108, 432). For the language of 'introduction', see n. 34.

¹⁹ Besides the explicit mention of Ranke, note that 'Seminar' (first *OED* attestation 1889) still had associations with Germany at this date (hence perhaps its capitalisation; Arnold Toynbee as an undergraduate put the word in quotation marks in a letter to Zimmern (MSS Zimmern 12.107, 17 January 1910)).

²⁰ Mazower (2009: 68–78), Morefield (2014: 31–68), and Baji (2021: 33–80) suggest that Zimmern draws idealising analogies between Athenian and British imperialism; they neglect his consistent goal of highlighting differences between ancient and modern (Athens could not afford to be what Zimmern thought Britain might aspire to be). I hope to return to this issue elsewhere.

²¹ Hopkins (1972).

fertilisation gave way in the 1920s to a period of mutual indifference that theoretically-minded historians such as Hopkins and Moses Finley sought to overcome. As we shall see, one problem with this account is that it is shaped by retrospective views of the history of the social sciences rather than by perceptions of those disciplines at the time when they were founded.²²

2. Zimmern between Classics and the Human Sciences

Alfred Zimmern's academic career can be read as mirroring the path he describes for Thucydides in his contribution to *The Legacy of Greece*. When that volume was published, he had recently resigned the position of Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth — a professorship founded in 1919 to promote world peace.²³ His election to that position confirmed his departure from his original academic trajectory. Zimmern was the product of an intensive classical education in the course of which he started reading Thucydides aged 11, at his prep school; then read more Thucydides at Winchester; and finally the whole of the *History* at New College, Oxford.²⁴ On completing his degree, he studied for five months in Berlin before returning to New College, first as Lecturer, then as Fellow in Ancient History. He left that position in 1909 to travel in Greece and stay at the British School in Athens (where he wrote most of *The Greek Commonwealth*). After a year at the LSE as an

²² See e.g. Shils (1971) and Hamilton (2003) on the role of hindsight in modern histories of Sociology and on Weber's slow rise to a central place in Anglo-American scholarship. Contrast Davies (2005: 397 n. 51), where, in a rich discussion of Zimmern's relationship to agrarian scholarship, the passage quoted pp. 37–38 below (Zimmern (1928: 60–63), written in 1910) is taken to refer to Weber; there is in fact no evidence that Zimmern knew Weber's work. For Durkheim see n. 46.

²³ This is commonly seen as the world's first Chair in International Relations; Zimmern's resignation after two years was caused by an affair with another professor's wife (he subsequently married her).

²⁴ See Zimmern (1918: 87) for his study of Thucydides at prep school; for Winchester, see MSS Zimmern 119.123 (a scholarship paper on Thucydides 1) and 121 (Greek History notebook). The combination of Winchester and New College (sister foundations, the two 'St Mary Winton Colleges' to which *The Greek Commonwealth* is dedicated) produced many scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, including (besides Livingstone and Myres, both discussed in this article) F.J. Church (1872), C.W.C. Oman (1882), F.J. Haverfield (1883), D.G. Hogarth (1885), F.G. Kenyon (1886), and J.D. Denniston (1910).

unpaid Lecturer in Sociology,²⁵ he joined the Board of Education to pursue his interests in the extension of working-class education (an Edwardian secular version of the earlier Victorian progression from college tutor to vicar); at the same time he became involved in international affairs, first through the Round Table (a thinktank on the future of the British Empire) and then through war-work in the Foreign Office. It was this work (which included a role in drafting British proposals for the League of Nations) that led to the position at Aberystwyth, and ultimately to his return to Oxford in 1930 as the first Montague Burton Professor of International Relations.

In taking this path, Zimmern was following, and himself followed by, many other students of *Literae Humaniores* who went on to professorships outside Classics and Philosophy at Oxford and beyond.²⁶ This trajectory reflected the privileged status of *Literae Humaniores* at Oxford: one of two Honour Schools established when the BA syllabus was reformed early in the nineteenth century, it was for the rest of the century the most prestigious and popular course; even when further Honour Schools were established in the middle of the century, it was still required for the BA, and while this requirement was removed in the 1860s, many students read *Literae Humaniores* first before undertaking a second Honour School such as Modern History in a single year. The sort of trajectory taken by Zimmern reflected, too, the intermeshing of ancient and modern that was the distinctive intellectual feature of *Literae Humaniores*: engagement with the post-classical world was fostered not just by the teaching of some modern philosophy, but also by examination questions and prose compositions that invite comparisons and contrasts between ancient and modern.²⁷

²⁵ For this appointment see Husbands (2019: 49–50). Husbands doubts that Zimmern delivered any course, but the LSE archives (SMALL LSE DEPOSITS/135/1) contain a student's notes on a 10-lecture series and some seminars.

²⁶ To limit the list to some of those appointed in the twentieth century: (a) within Oxford, H.W.C. Davis, M. Powicke, V.H. Galbraith, Regius Professors of Modern History (1925, 1928, 1947); F. de Zulueta, Regius Professor of Civil Law (1919); R. Coupland (a pupil of Zimmern), Beit Professor of Colonial History (1920); G.N. Clark, Chichele Professor of Economic History (1931); G.D.H. Cole, I. Berlin, Chichele Professors of Social and Political Theory (1944, 1957); (b) outside Oxford, A.J. Toynbee, International History, LSE (1925); R.M. Maciver, Sociology, Columbia (1927); E. Barker, Political Science, Cambridge (1928); R.H. Tawney, Economic History, LSE (1931). Cf. also nn. 59, 71, 128 (Hobhouse, Quiller-Couch, Wallas).

²⁷ Exam questions: *e.g.* 'What is meant by Political Progress? Is the idea modern?' (Political Philosophy, 1860); 'Did the Greek Colonists succeed generally in solving the problem of their relations to the original inhabitants more easily than modern emigrants?' (Greek History, 1873); 'How far were the modern objections to the

Zimmern frequently returned to Thucydides even after his professional interests moved away from Greek history. During his year at the LSE he gave a lecture course on ‘Ancient Greece and Modern Problems’ that (like *The Greek Commonwealth*) took the Thucydidean Funeral Speech as its central text.²⁸ In his later writings on international affairs he made repeated allusions to Thucydides’ analysis of *stasis*.²⁹ And once back in Oxford he referred to Thucydides in his inaugural lecture as Montague Burton Professor, suggesting that ‘we can learn something from Thucydides as to the structure and the philosophic, political, and economic principles of the society of fifth century Greece’.³⁰ Such intellectual genealogising is conventional in inaugurals, but Zimmern’s phrasing was nonetheless pointed: in claiming Thucydides as a writer of contemporary history, he was both defending the concern with current affairs that was a hallmark of his new academic discipline and presenting one of the core texts of traditional Greats as concerned with the same three disciplines as its modern successor, PPE.³¹

By applying his knowledge of Thucydides to new disciplines, Zimmern reversed his earlier practice of applying his knowledge of new disciplines to Thucydides. Ancient historians, he complained in the late 1900s, had been ‘slow in assimilating the methods of workers in other fields of historical and social inquiry’.³² How he himself set out to remedy this defect and re-invigorate the study of ancient Greece is shown by his choice of lectures at Oxford.³³ While initially either devoted to narrow periods or else survey courses for students beginning Greats,³⁴ they

institution of slavery anticipated in antiquity?’ (Ancient History, 1902 – Zimmern’s year). Gaisford Prose Prize themes set for treatment in a Thucydidean style included ‘Warren Hastings’ defence of his administration in India’ (1908) and ‘A Turkish Agent urges the Ameer of Afghanistan to make war on India, and is answered’ (1920, picking up German and Turkish aspirations during the war).

²⁸ See MSS Zimmern 137 for the notes, flyers, and handouts for four lectures delivered for the University of London University Extension Board in 1911.

²⁹ See Millett (2007: 199 n. 46) for references.

³⁰ Zimmern (1931: 6).

³¹ See p. 26 above.

³² Zimmern (1928: 165), from an essay ‘Suggestions towards a political economy of the Greek city-state’ written in the late 1900s, but, *pace* Millett (2007: 177), not originally intended for inclusion in *The Greek Commonwealth* (see n. 135).

³³ Tutorial Fellowships at this time were not normally combined with university positions; initially for the students at the tutor’s own college, lectures were by the 1900s often attended by students from other colleges, but there was considerable repetition across colleges in what lecturers offered.

³⁴ For the former, ‘Greek History BC 404–355’ (Hilary 1905); for the latter (all Trinity), ‘Some Landmarks in Greek History’ (1904) and ‘Greek History (Introductory)’

changed over time to topics such as ‘Slavery’ (Michaelmas 1906), ‘The Social Problem in Greek History’ (Michaelmas 1907), ‘Slavery and Free Labour in Greece’ (Hilary 1908 and 1909), and ‘The Economics of the City States’ (Michaelmas 1908). This range was matched among the other Greek historians at Oxford at that time only by Zimmern’s close colleague and fellow Wykehamist, J.L. Myres, who lectured on topics such as Greek Commerce (Michaelmas 1904) and Geography and Ethnology of the Eastern/Western Mediterranean (two separate series, Trinity 1907), and who was also, as we shall see, strongly committed to interdisciplinary approaches.³⁵ The intellectual excitement of Zimmern’s approach inspired some of his auditors (notably Arnold Toynbee) to expand their sense of the cross-currents of past and present.³⁶

The discipline with which Zimmern was most closely involved during his career as an Ancient Historian was Sociology. ‘The Oxford sociologist’ was the description of Zimmern later offered by one of his former colleagues, B.W. Henderson, Fellow in Ancient History at Exeter College, in a book derived from his own more conventional lectures.³⁷ This sneer may have drawn on memories of Zimmern’s time at Oxford, when, besides his lectures, he offered teaching on Slavery in Sociology (which

(1905), continuing as ‘Introduction to the Study of Greek History’ in 1907, 1908, and 1909; the equivalent series in 1906 was entitled ‘Introduction to Thucydides’, but presumably covered the same ground. The title of the first lecture in the 1904 series was ‘The fundamental conditions of Greek life (Thuc. I.1–19)’ (MSS Zimmern 117.112). Titles of lecture series can be found in the *Oxford University Gazette*. Michaelmas, Hilary, and Trinity are the three Oxford terms.

³⁵ J.L. Myres (1869–1954): Winchester College; Lit. Hum., New College, 1892 (first class); Student of Christ Church, 1895–1907; Secretary of Section H (Anthropology) of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1895–1904 (President, 1909); founder and editor of *Man*, the monthly journal of the Royal Anthropological Society, 1901; Gladstone Professor for Greek and Lecturer in Ancient Geography, University of Liverpool, 1907–1910; inaugural Wykeham Professor of Ancient History, 1910–1939; knighted, 1943. See *ODNB*; Myres (2012) (memoir); Samiei (2014: esp. Chs 3–4). Myres and Zimmern corresponded on and sought to promote University reform, notably by membership of two different progressive groups, an older one called ‘The Club’ (to the Secretaryship of which Zimmern succeeded Myres in 1907), and a new and more radical one informally called the ‘Catiline Club’ (Myres 2012: 63).

³⁶ See *e.g.* Toynbee (1934–1961: 10.232): ‘As I sat listening to those catalytic words, the conventional partitions between “Past” and “Present” and between “Ancient” and “Modern” dissolved out of my mind.’

³⁷ Henderson (1927: 181). The sneering tone is suggested by Henderson’s comment that he would be tempted to apply Zimmern’s phrase ‘Such are the ironies of industrialism’ (1961: 402, used of Thucydides’ comment on the death of Nicias at 7.86.5) ‘if the meaning of the epigram were more clear’.

was available as a branch of the Diploma for Anthropology³⁸) and published two articles on the same topic in the recently founded *Sociological Review* (the journal of the Sociological Society).³⁹ If so, early suspicions of Zimmern's soundness would have been reinforced by his subsequent career: besides briefly holding, as already noted, a Lectureship in Sociology at the LSE, he was on the council of the Sociological Society from 1911,⁴⁰ made further contributions to its journal⁴¹ — and wrote *The Greek Commonwealth*.

The full range of Zimmern's disciplinary interests is apparent from that book. It starts with a much-admired section on 'Geography' that draws on the regional approach to the Mediterranean promoted by the German Jewish geographer Alfred Philippson;⁴² among the other works cited is a discussion of Norwegian fisheries by the French sociologist Edmond Demolins.⁴³ The references in the next section, 'Politics', range from a study of urban children by the American social activist Jane Addams, who was also involved in the development of the Chicago School of Sociology, to a recent work on University Administration by the President of Harvard.⁴⁴ The last and longest section, 'Economics', opens by discussing the definition of that discipline offered by its leading modern British theorist, Alfred Marshall, and cites other recent writings such as Hartley Withers' *Meaning of Money* (1909) and the economic historian Georges d'Avenel's chapter on 'the levelling of pleasures' in his

³⁸ Parkin's claim (1992: 5) that Sociology was 'smuggled' much later into Oxford 'under the skirts of politics' is true only of the undergraduate curriculum (it became available as a paper in PPE in 1964: Harris (1994: 244–245)).

³⁹ Zimmern (1909); re-printed in Zimmern (1928: 105–163). These essays were based on a paper delivered at the Sociological Society in November 1908; the title echoes an examination question set in the Ancient History paper in Lit. Hum. in 1908 ('To what extent was it the case that the ancient City State was based on slave-labour?'). Zimmern also gave the inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham's Sociological Society (*Sociological Review* 7 (1909) 216).

⁴⁰ *Sociological Review* 4 (1911) 180. Zimmern told Gilbert Murray in October 1910 that he had been offered (but refused) the Honorary Secretaryship (MSS Gilbert Murray 19.28 (Bodleian)).

⁴¹ Article: Zimmern (1912), on American migration. Classical reviews: Zimmern (1914a), (1914c), (1915). Non-classical reviews: *e.g.* Zimmern (1914b).

⁴² On which see Ben-Artzi (2004).

⁴³ Zimmern (1961: 34 n. 2). This section is still recommended in the bibliographical notes to Osborne (1996: 360), to be replaced in Osborne's second edition by a work on a different scale, Horden & Purcell (2000). Harold Laski, a prolific reader, wrote that *The Greek Commonwealth* is 'the only book I ever read except Demolins which made me interested in geography' (Howe (1953: 169)).

⁴⁴ Zimmern (1961: 68 n. 1).

1910 monograph *Découvertes d'histoire sociale, 1200–1910*.⁴⁵ This section ranges, moreover, across many other topics, including suicide (as analysed by the Finnish Edvard Westermarck, a Professor of Sociology at the LSE);⁴⁶ servant-keeping in London (using statistics compiled by the social reformer Charles Booth); homosexuality (citing ‘one of our most thoughtful modern writers’, the socialist Edward Carpenter); and eugenics (critiquing the moral extracted from fifth-century Athens by Francis Galton, the best-known representative of that strain in Sociology).⁴⁷ At the same time, some of the classical scholarship Zimmern cites offers hints of forgotten disciplinary affiliations: he translates, for instance, a long passage from Gabriel d’Azambuja’s *La Grèce ancienne* (1906), which was published by the Bureaux de la Science sociale in Paris — ‘a brilliant work which exhibits all the merits and many of the weaknesses of its attempt “to explain history by social science”’.⁴⁸

Zimmern himself flagged his disciplinary range in the Preface to *The Greek Commonwealth*, where he opposed the ‘traditions of classical learning’ to the ‘newer methods of social enquiry’.⁴⁹ This range was much noted, too, by the book’s numerous reviewers, who commented on his interests in sociology and psychology; one of them even mistook him for a professional Political Economist (‘Nationalökonom’).⁵⁰ Reviewers commonly linked it, too, with the book’s generous use of continental scholarship — again following a hint planted by the Preface.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Zimmern (1961: 213–214, 301 (Withers, juxtaposed with a Demosthenes quotation), 224 n. 1). Withers (Lit. Hum., Christ Church, 1890) became editor of the *Economist* in 1916, succeeding F.W. Hirst (Lit. Hum., Wadham, 1896).

⁴⁶ Suicide was the topic of a monograph by Durkheim, who was at this time better known to British sociologists than Weber, but Zimmern does not seem ever to engage with his work.

⁴⁷ Zimmern (1961: 227 n. 1, 275 n. 1, 344, 367 n. 2).

⁴⁸ Zimmern (1961: 241 n. 1). D’Azambuja’s book, the first in a series *L’histoire expliquée par la science sociale* established by Demolins, offers a broad-brush sketch of the development of Greece in terms of ‘types’ both ethnic (Pelasgian) and individual (Minos).

⁴⁹ Zimmern (1961: 8).

⁵⁰ Sociology: e.g. *Daily Chronicle*, 18 September 1911; *The Nation*, 4 November 1911; *New York Sun*, 30 December 1911; *The Mirror* (St Louis), 8 February 1912; *Classical Journal* 8 (1912) 124 (L.E. Lord); *Sociological Review* 6 (1913) 60 (A.D. Lindsay); *Journal of Education* 37 (1915) 284. Psychology: e.g. two German reviews of the fourth edition (*Literarisches Zentralblatt für Deutschland* (1926) 277 (M. Arnim) and *Philologische Wochenschrift* (1926) 1087 (T. Lenschau)); cf. also one of Moses Finley’s rare citations of Zimmern (1951: 249 n. 29). ‘Nationalökonom’: *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 33 (1913) 651 (H. Swoboda).

⁵¹ Zimmern (1961: 8). See e.g. *Athenaeum* 4377 (16 September 1911) 318; *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 31 (1911) 318; *Evening Post* (New York) (9 December 1911); *Studies*:

How much the institutional structures outlined in this section shaped the interpretation of Thucydides is impossible to quantify. In what follows, we shall keep Zimmern as guide as we move through the four fields he names in ‘Political Thought’, starting with the discipline in which he was most immersed, Sociology; moving on to Geography and Anthropology, where, in Oxford and elsewhere, the connection with Classics was strong; and concluding with Psychoanalysis, where it was much weaker.

3. Thucydides and Sociology

When Zimmern appealed to the account in the *Archaeology* of the ‘evolution’ of Greek society to rebuff those who ‘deny that Thucydides was a sociologist’, he was adopting a common trope in histories of Sociology: Thomas Hobbes, Montesquieu, and John Millar are among those who have been retrospectively claimed as sociologists.⁵² Elsewhere in the same essay Zimmern applied the same trope to Aristotle, whose *Politics* are said to offer ‘biological, psychological, and sociological generalizations’, albeit ones that are ‘hazardous’ owing to ‘the embryonic condition of those sciences at the time’.⁵³ And in *The Greek Commonwealth* he extended it to Homer, ‘the old epic writer who wrought out his sociology on the Shield of Achilles’.⁵⁴ More recent historians of scholarship have tended to be suspicious of this type of description, with its attendant language of ‘anticipation’ — ‘that most sterile of intellectual history’s categories’.⁵⁵

Zimmern adopted a different approach to Thucydides’ sociology towards the start of an essay on ‘The Study of Greek History’ that he originally planned as an introduction to *The Greek Commonwealth*.⁵⁶ Zimmern there wrote that Greek history offers ‘the best introduction (excepting perhaps only the Bible) to the study of sociology’ — a sociology concerned, that is, ‘with life as it is, not with life as it should be’, and with

An Irish Quarterly Review 1 (1912) 208. A fluent speaker of French, German, and Italian, Zimmern had earlier translated the first two volumes of the radical Guglielmo Ferrero’s *Grandezza et Decadenza di Roma*.

⁵² The trope is discussed, with examples, by Williams (1976: 77); Burke (2005: 3–4); Sica (2012); cf. Finley (1981: 251 n. 20) for the German economist Werner Sombart’s description of Millar.

⁵³ Zimmern (1921: 345). For Aristotle as sociologist, cf. *e.g.* Myres (1908: 159).

⁵⁴ Zimmern (1961: 86). Zimmern structures his chapter on ‘The Soil’ (43–55) through the scenes depicted on the Shield. One of the *HCS* referees contrasts Moses Finley’s neglect of the Shield in *The World of Odysseus*.

⁵⁵ Collini (1978: 18).

⁵⁶ As shown by MSS Zimmern 126.29–61.

‘interests more comprehensive than those of the narrative historian’. The reason why Greek history offers the best route, he went on to explain, lies in the simplicity of the ancient world:

Who could explain, for instance, in brief general statement exactly wherein consists the stability of the English monarchy, or how and why it was affected, favourably or unfavourably, by a Royal victory in the Derby? Hundreds of factors enter in; and it would take even Thucydides, settling in England as a stranger, half a lifetime to understand the inner meaning of the scenes at the funeral of King Edward.

But in Greece the sociologist has a far easier task. He is in a younger and less complex world, where life has not yet been specialized [...].⁵⁷

Rather than anachronistically calling Thucydides a sociologist, Zimmern draws a parallel between modern sociological investigation of ancient Greece and the approach Thucydides might take to modern Britain. The implication is that Thucydides’ comprehensive interests would naturally lead him to investigate complex social and political phenomena such as royal funerals.

Zimmern’s two essays point to two distinct understandings of Sociology. On the one hand, the discipline was associated with statistically informed analyses of modern social and political questions — the sort of analysis that J.A. Hobson wrote for the *Sociological Review* on the first of the two General Elections held in 1910.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Sociology was seen as a scientific study of social evolution that included in its scope the development of Greek civilisation. Greek history played a role, for instance, in the works which (after Greats and spells as a Philosophy don and *Manchester Guardian* journalist) were L.T. Hobhouse’s route to the first Chair in Sociology in Britain;⁵⁹ while that role was incidental in *Mind in Evolution* (1901), which dealt extensively with animals, the two-volume *Morals in Evolution* (1906) discussed male–female relations and attitudes to warfare in ancient Greece, citing, among other sources,

⁵⁷ Zimmern (1928: 60–62).

⁵⁸ J.A. Hobson (1858–1940): Derby School; Lit. Hum., Lincoln College, 1880 (third class); Chair, Sociological Society, 1913–1921; author of *Imperialism* (1902) and numerous other political and economic works.

⁵⁹ L.T. Hobhouse (1864–1929): Marlborough College; Lit. Hum., Corpus Christi College, 1887 (first class); tutor in Philosophy, Corpus, 1890–1897; Martin White Professor of Sociology, LSE, 1907–1929; founder of the *Sociological Review*, 1908. See Collini (1979), who quips that ‘some men achieve sociology’, but ‘sometimes, as in Hobhouse’s case, they have sociology thrust upon them’ (147).

Thucydides' own analysis of the evolution of moral attitudes to brigandage.⁶⁰ More strikingly, a quarter of the Scottish liberal John Mackinnon Robertson's overtly sociological 1900 monograph *An Introduction to English Politics* was devoted to Greek and Roman history, and the proportion was increased to almost a half when it was revised in 1913 as *The Evolution of States*.⁶¹

These two models of Sociology came together in an ameliorist strand merging social reform and evolution. This strand is best represented by the work of Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), who was himself influenced by one of the figures named by Zimmern in the passage cited above, Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882), a conservative social reformer noted for regional family-oriented studies of France.⁶² While not a Classicist by training, Geddes offered an expansive historical narrative when he delivered the Dunkin Lectures on Sociology at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1905: entitled *Civics as Applied Sociology*, the series (which Zimmern attended) included a lecture on 'The Ancient City' that covered, among other themes, the 'persistence and expansion of Phoenician and of Hellenic elements in modern life and development, in commerce and colonisation, in culture'.⁶³

Zimmern's writings, then, present Thucydides as a sociologist in two different ways. In 'The Study of Greek History', a time-travelling Thucydides is given the difficult research project of analysing a complex public event. In 'Political Thought', by contrast, Thucydides is an evolutionary sociologist, presenting the growth of the Greek states not as a random accumulation of facts, but as a social and political process governed by principles that can be subjected to rational analysis.

⁶⁰ Hobhouse (1906) 1.265. The earlier monograph sees the Greeks as the start of the 'forward movement' of civilisation — while decrying the cynical imperialism of the Athenians in Melos and the British in South Africa (1901: 421, 347).

⁶¹ J.M. Robertson (1856–1933): left school at 13; author of numerous books, including *Buckle and His Critics: A Study in Sociology* (1895) and *Essays in Sociology* (1904); Liberal Member of Parliament, 1906–1918. The preface to the first edition suggests that J.P. Mahaffy's 1897 *Survey of Greek Civilization* would count as Sociology but for its reactionary spirit, and criticises the reading supposedly set at an Oxford college to prepare for a Greats essay on 'What support does Socialism receive from the doctrine of evolution?' (1900: xix–xxi, xxvi).

⁶² On Le Play see e.g. Abrams (1968: 58–66); Livingstone (1992: 271–280); among his pupils was Demolins (nn. 43, 48). In 1920 the new home of the Institute of Sociology in London was named Leplay House (with the name spelt as one word, as by Zimmern).

⁶³ For the printed syllabus for the lectures see MSS Zimmern 11.67–68. The Dunkin lectures were founded in 1899; Manchester College was not formally part of the University of Oxford until 1990.

How unusual was Zimmern's vision of Thucydides' links to Sociology? His language in 'Political Thought' suggests that he was responding to critics who *did* deny Thucydides the right to be called a sociologist. To see who these critics were, let us glance at some key moments in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates on the history and nature of Sociology.

One critic Zimmern could have had in mind was the man he labelled as the inventor of the 'horrid word', Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Spencer (who did not in fact coin the word 'sociology', though he did much to popularise it⁶⁴) applied biological modes of analysis to social structures, tracing analogous patterns of evolution (another term he popularised) from simple to complex; he also drew inferences for social policy from evolutionary patterns. Notoriously, Spencer was hostile both to historians, whom he saw as mere fact-grubbers, and to the traditional classical education. Both targets were in view in a periodical essay in 1860 where he attacked the 'blunders of our legislation' committed by men who 'had mostly taken University-degrees' and yet had 'the profoundest ignorance of Social Science': 'Do but take a young member of Parliament, fresh from Oxford or Cambridge, and [...] it will become manifest that neither his familiarity with Aristotle nor his readings in Thucydides, have prepared him to answer the very first question a legislator ought to solve.'⁶⁵ Spencer's overtly sociological writings would later build on this polemic against the conventional defence of university curricula as offering lessons in statesmanship.

Notably less hostile to the claims of Thucydides was the man who did invent the word 'sociology', the French positivist Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte argued that human societies move through three stages, theological, metaphysical, and scientific, and saw Sociology as an empirical science that would contribute to their perfection as they moved to the last of the stages. While he thought that Thucydides, along with contemporary thinkers such as Herodotus and Hippocrates, belonged to a pre-scientific stage, he did find in them an incipient interest in 'les phénomènes sociaux', even if they offered not 'le vrai caractère théorique', but 'aperçus spontanés'.⁶⁶ A similar vision of Thucydides' position in the development of a science of history was offered by one of the writers praised by Zimmern for his expansive approach to history, Henry Thomas

⁶⁴ For uses of 'sociology' in English before Spencer, *e.g.* by J.S. Mill, see Branford (1903). Zimmern's abuse of the word was a trope: R. Lowe in 1878 called it 'a half Greek, half Latin compound, to which it is impossible to attach any definite idea' (quoted by Renwick (2014: 79)).

⁶⁵ Spencer (1860: 501 = Spencer (1868: 2.373).

⁶⁶ Comte (1851–1854: 3.312–313).

Buckle (1821–1862).⁶⁷ A self-taught follower of Comte, Buckle sought in his *History of Civilization in England* to provide a general theory of how the development of civilisation followed fixed historical laws. He also linked historical progress to progress in the writing of history, tracing a development from ‘picturesque’ to ‘philosophic’ history,⁶⁸ and seeing Thucydides as ‘most philosophic’ of the Greek historians.⁶⁹ Nominally a historian, Buckle influenced the development of Sociology and indeed was often seen as a sociologist by the time when Zimmern was writing.⁷⁰

Thucydides was invoked, too, in the increasingly vigorous discussions of Sociology and History that took place later in the nineteenth century. Some of the issues in these discussions are caught in an exchange in the weekly *Speaker* following the appointment of J.A. Froude as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford in 1892. Responding to an attack on the appointment by the columnist H.M.S. (p. 133, 30 July), another columnist, A.T.Q.C.,⁷¹ stood up for Froude’s style of historical narrative by berating the ‘New Scholarship’ and ‘New Historiography’ that were produced by ‘manual labour’ (p. 173, 6 August). ‘Sociologist’ then wrote in a letter (p. 201, 13 August):

Do you prefer your history true or pretty? To paraphrase Thucydides: Is it to be a basis for scientific prediction, or a glorified prize essay in which manipulation counts for much more than truth of fact? At Oxford, their honoured Lord and Chancellor takes the latter view,⁷² the history lecturers take the former [...] history is a science, and a good deal of science involves drudgery and is dull — until its matter is brought into its due relation with other knowledge. Call your science sociology, if you like, and your popular treatment of it history; but do not let the student of the past weaken himself with fears that he may not be sufficiently artistic.

⁶⁷ P. 28 above. Buckle’s famous discussion of soil and climate (p. 49) was known to Zimmern from his Greek History lessons at Winchester (MSS Zimmern 121.1, 4–5).

⁶⁸ Buckle (1872: 1.486); for a definition of philosophic history see Buckle (1857–1861: 1.18–19).

⁶⁹ Buckle (1857–1861: 1.181).

⁷⁰ Reading Buckle at Oxford inspired William Graham Sumner to teach the first Sociology course in the United States at Yale in 1875 (Bierstedt (1975: 2)). For Buckle as sociologist, see e.g. Carver (1906: 174–270), a textbook on *Sociology and Social Progress* which re-prints the famous second chapter of Buckle’s *History* (on which see p. 49), and n. 61 for Robertson’s monograph.

⁷¹ I.e. Arthur Quiller-Couch: Lit. Hum., Trinity College, 1886; editor, *Oxford Book of English Verse* (1900); knighted, 1910; King Edward VII Professor of English Literature, Cambridge, 1912.

⁷² Lord Salisbury, who as Prime Minister had awarded the Regius Chair to Froude.

In response to another column by A.T.Q.C., ‘Sociologist’ then wrote a further letter, explaining that H.M.S.’s original protest against Froude was a defence of ‘the New History’, of which ‘Thucydides was the first champion (for the protests against the belletristic view held by A.T.Q.C. originated with him)’, and that the New Historian ‘supplies the material’ for his own field, Sociology (p. 322, 10 September). As in Comte, then, Thucydides’ style of history is subservient to Sociology, even as the ‘paraphrase’ of Thucydides (a clear allusion to 1.22.4) implicitly contrasts competitive Oxford prize essays with the useful lessons that Sociology can draw from works such as Thucydides’.

While related to a debate that had run since Sociology’s inception, Zimmern’s defence of Thucydides in ‘Political Thought’ was presumably responding mainly to recent contributions to that debate. Among these was a 1919 essay in the *Sociological Review* by S.H. Swinny, one of Zimmern’s former colleagues on the council of the Sociological Society. Suggesting that among the Greeks, for all their inquisitiveness, interest in social studies was ‘confined [...] to their static aspects’, Swinny explained that ‘the historical development of Greek civilisation was too short, the contact between the free city-states of Hellas and Eastern despotism too destitute of intermediate stages to allow of the formulation of laws of social evolution’. More promising circumstances when ‘the Western mind [...] resumed its scientific advance’ led to the ‘first systematic Sociologist’, Hobbes, and in due course to the three dominant nineteenth-century figures, Comte, Spencer, and Le Play.⁷³ While Swinny does not refer to Thucydides or any other ancient by name, his formulation in effect denies the *Archaeology*’s status as sociology.

A more explicit opposition between Thucydidean history and Sociology was drawn in a long article ‘History, its Rise and Development’ published the same year in the *Encyclopedia Americana*. Its author, Harry Elmer Barnes, a Lecturer in Historical Sociology at Columbia, was a keen advocate of the ‘New History’ promoted by the Columbia Professor J.T. Robinson, which would ‘avail itself of all those discoveries that are being made about mankind by anthropologists, economists, psychologists, and sociologists’.⁷⁴ With Robinson in mind, Barnes suggested that as ‘the scope of history has been broadened in recent years through the reassertion of the value and position of “Kulturgeschichte”’, Thucydides has lost ground to Herodotus — his theme being ‘as much more narrow and restricted a field [...] as the American Civil War would be as compared

⁷³ Swinny (1919: 1).

⁷⁴ Robinson (1912: 24).

with the evolution of civilization in the 19th century'. While acknowledging that Thucydides' 'sketch of the rise of Greece shows [...] that he had rare power in portraying the past if he had seen fit to utilize it', Barnes complained that 'he missed the vital significance of the deeper social and economic forces in history'. He traced the sociological approach back instead to the fourteenth-century Arab writer Ibn Khaldun — while listing Zimmern's *Greek Commonwealth* as part of 'a powerful movement' in the revival of a 'broad social mode of approach to historical problems'.⁷⁵

While Zimmern departs from these recent writers in his insistence that it is appropriate to apply the language of evolution to Thucydides' account of early Greece, his claim that Thucydides was a sociologist seems to stand in tension with what he says about Thucydides in some of his other writings. In a 1905 Oxford lecture, for instance, he complained that Thucydides 'does not care for the *personae mutae* of the whole drama of his book, the women, the children, and the slaves' — the subjects of some of his own sociological investigations into ancient Greece.⁷⁶ In addition, Zimmern's characterisation of Thucydides in *The Greek Commonwealth* as someone 'who liked centralization' and 'who admitted nothing between Athens and the individual'⁷⁷ suggests a historian blind to the complex texture of social institutions. This apparent inconsistency results in part from conflicting dynamic and static conceptions of Sociology. But in addition, the Thucydidean division into city and individual was, for Zimmern, itself an ideology that resulted from the evolution traced in the *Archaeology* — and, as we shall now see, it was in tracing the stages of that evolution that Thucydides, in Zimmern's view, displayed an acumen that was both sociological and anthropological.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Barnes (1919: 211, 259, 252); cf. Barnes (1922: 289), where the 'broad sociological analysis' needed to explain, in part at least, 'the complicated nature of Hellenic civilization', is opposed to the writings of 'conventional historians, who have, like Thucydides, centered their attention on the superficial political, military and diplomatic aspects of Greek history'. *The Greek Commonwealth* informs the treatment of Greece in Barnes (1921), an outline syllabus on *The Social History of the Western World*.

⁷⁶ Zimmern (1928: 103), from 'Thucydides the Imperialist', the second in a 16-lecture series on Thucydides in Michaelmas 1905 (MSS Zimmern 117.86). For slaves, see p. 34; for women, see Zimmern (1961: 334–342) on the Athenians' failure to set intercourse between the sexes 'on an intelligent basis' (342).

⁷⁷ Zimmern (1961: 147, 157). Zimmern's insight is fleshed out by Crane (1996) and Hornblower (1991–2008: 3.23–31) in relation to Thucydides' suppression of kin and religious ties and his handling of political institutions respectively.

⁷⁸ For the idea of an evolutionary approach as itself the outgrowth of an evolutionary process, cf. *e.g.* Posnett (1901: 865).

4. Thucydides and Anthropology

When Zimmern called on ‘those who cry up anthropology’ to explore Thucydides’ ‘treatment of legend and custom and his power [...] to use it as sociological evidence’, what he had in mind can be seen from his treatment of early Greece in *The Greek Commonwealth*. In the ‘Politics’ section he exploits ‘the sympathetic researches of the anthropologists’ into the ‘complex [patriarchal] system of social and religious custom’ of the first Hellenic migrants into Greece.⁷⁹ But he also suggests that Thucydides can in some way match those researches. As he draws (albeit with some criticisms) on the account presented in the *Archaeology*, Zimmern alludes to ‘the development which Thucydides so well describes’, and explains that ‘Thucydides, in the first pages of his history, has imagined for himself, without any of our scientific aids, this early semi-nomadic economic stage, and modern investigation has done little more than amplify his brief account’.⁸⁰ Again in the ‘Economics’ section, when he reverts to using Thucydides as ‘our guide’, he praises the ‘vivid imaginative sketch of the economic life of the earliest Greeks’ that ‘Thucydides has left us, on the first page of his book’.⁸¹ The language of ‘stage’ and ‘development’ implies that Thucydides saw an ordered progression according to generalisable principles, and that idea is reinforced when Zimmern imports into his translation of Thucydides the anthropological model of a move from tribal to civic identity.⁸² Zimmern, then, in making Thucydides a proto-anthropologist was thinking not so much of anthropological investigation into contemporary ‘primitive’ cultures for their own sake as of approaches to the more distant past that were informed by the interests of present-day anthropologists, including the prevalent use of evolutionary models according to which societies advance at different speeds through distinct cultural stages.

⁷⁹ Zimmern (1961: 71).

⁸⁰ Zimmern (1961: 85, 76). For the *Archaeology* see esp. 76–80 (with 76 n. 1, 78 n. 1 for criticisms); also 62 n. 1, 85, 86 n. 1, 108 n. 1, 110 n. 1, 126, 128 n. 1, 136, 180–181, 186 n. 3. The combination of praise of the whole with criticism of parts of Thucydides’ treatment of poetic traditions or ‘myth’ was a standard response to the *Archaeology* from Grote onwards: see, in addition to the sources discussed in Rood (2015), Murray (1897: 199); Leaf (1915: 88–89, 196–197, 243 (positive), 91–93, 214–215 (critical)).

⁸¹ Zimmern (1961: 228). Use of the *Archaeology* is most intense in the sub-section on ‘The Growing City’ (228–229, 236–238, 242, 247–248, 252 n. 1); see 347 n. 1, 367 n. 2. The repeated formulation ‘the first page(s)’ echoes, perhaps, David Hume’s claim that ‘the first page of Thucydides is, in my opinion, the commencement of real history’ (1985: 422).

⁸² Zimmern (1961: 229): ἑκαστοὶ at Thuc. 1.2.1 is rendered ‘the several tribes’.

Zimmern's high valuation of Thucydides' anthropology was shared by scholars such as his friend J.L. Myres. In one published lecture, Myres gave Herodotus rather than Thucydides the title of 'father of anthropology', but suggested that Thucydides' explanation of the Pelasgian conversion to Hellenism 'marks a distinct advance in analysis beyond the point reached by Herodotus'.⁸³ In other lectures, he compared both E.B. Tylor and John Locke with Thucydides for their use of comparisons between the 'primitive' cultures described by modern travellers and early stages of human development (alluding to Thuc. 1.5–6).⁸⁴ That same passage was cited by a Cambridge classical scholar with an interest in anthropology, E.E. Sikes, in a paper on 'The Comparative Method in Ancient Anthropology', delivered to the Cambridge Philological Society in February 1913 (in A.E. Housman's rooms). Sikes argued for a progression according to which the comparative method is 'implicit in Aeschylus', 'vaguely acknowledged by Herodotus', but 'explicitly stated in plain terms by Thucydides'. While he thought that Thucydides was probably influenced by the sophist Protagoras, he went on to speak of Plato being converted to Anthropology under the influence of 'the Thucydidean school'.⁸⁵

Zimmern's claim that Thucydides could match the achievements of anthropology came towards the end of a period of fertile interaction between Classics and Anthropology.⁸⁶ In Oxford, these links began with the first Professor of Anthropology, E.B. Tylor, whose lectures were listed in the *Gazette* under both 'Natural Science' and 'Literae Humaniores', and included series such as 'Anthropology in Ancient History' (Michaelmas 1904). They were strengthened by Myres, who 'did the most to organize an effective school of Anthropology in the University of Oxford',⁸⁷ and by the man who paid Myres that tribute, R.R. Marett.⁸⁸

⁸³ Myres (1908: 125, 153). Zimmern cites this essay several times in *The Greek Commonwealth* (1961: 22 n. 1, 48 n. 1, 181 n. 1, 337 n. 1).

⁸⁴ Myres (1915: 40–41, and cf. 46–47), (1916–1917: 33, 37).

⁸⁵ Sikes (1913: 8–9), a summary of the paper: the arguments were developed in a subsequent monograph (Sikes (1914: 7)) which Zimmern reviewed for the *Sociological Review* (1915). Oscar Wilde, too, saw Thucydides as 'anticipating in some measure the comparative method' at 1.5–6 (2007: 19).

⁸⁶ See Ackerman (2007) for an overview building on his own earlier research; he locates the 1920s as the moment when the disciplines' interests diverged. His main focus is Cambridge, on which see also Cook (2016).

⁸⁷ Marett (1908b: 4); cf. n. 35 above.

⁸⁸ R.R. Marett (1866–1943): Lit. Hum., Balliol, 1888 (first class); Green Prize for essay on 'The Ethics of Savage Races', 1893; Fellow in Philosophy, Exeter College, 1891–1928; Secretary of the Committee for Anthropology, Oxford, 1907–1928; Reader

Marett lectured not just on Plato and Aristotle but also on topics such as ‘Primitive Religion in Relation to Social Life’ (Michaelmas 1907–Hilary 1908); he also edited a volume *Anthropology and the Classics* that arose from a series of lectures at Oxford in 1908 organised by the new Committee for Anthropology, and lectured on ‘Anthropology’ in a new series ‘Sources and Methods for the Study of Ancient Greece’ (Trinity 1909) that was organised by Gilbert Murray in his first year as Regius Professor of Greek. These disciplinary links were further promoted by regular examination questions on anthropology and ‘primitive’ cultures in Ancient History papers in *Literae Humaniores*.⁸⁹

The relation between the two disciplines was often seen as hierarchical. In the preface to *Anthropology and the Classics*, Marett suggested that Anthropology studies the simpler and lower culture, that is, ‘the dawn of what Lecky so happily describes as “the European epoch of the human mind”’, while the Humanities study cultures that are more complex and higher ‘as we are wont to say (valuing our own achievements, I doubt not, rightly)’. He further explained that the lectures aimed to meet ‘the need of inducing classical scholars to study the lower culture as it bears upon the higher’ — for they were concerned with ‘the central and decisive path of social evolution’, namely ‘the track of advance that leads past Athens and Rome’.⁹⁰ That Anthropology studied the early stages of human development while Classicists dealt with a decisive moment of transition also had implications for the disciplines’ standing in the University. Within the *Literae Humaniores* faculty the hierarchical distinction of lower and higher cultures was used on the one hand to oppose the development of a distinct Anthropology Honour School and

in Social Anthropology, 1910–1937; Rector, Exeter College, 1928–1943; see further p. 46; *ODNB*; Stocking (2005: 163–172).

⁸⁹ *E.g.* Greek History, 1891, qu. 1: “Herodotus is the father not only of history, but of anthropology.” In what respects is Herodotus’ account of the manners of primitive nations confirmed by what we know of other races?; Ancient History, 1896, qu. 1: ‘Πολλὰ δ’ ἂν καὶ ἄλλα τις ἀποδείξειε τὸ παλαιὸν Ἑλληνικὸν ὁμοίωτροπα τῶ νῦν βαρβαρικῶ διαιτώμενον [an unreferenced quotation of Thuc. 1.6.6]. Illustrate this remark.’ It would be interesting to know if any candidates answering the second question referred νῦν to their own present.

⁹⁰ Marett (1908b: 3–5). Morley (2016: 166), in describing this volume as ‘dedicated to claiming that the roots of anthropological thought lay in the Classics’, and suggesting that ‘the anthropologists themselves seem to have been unimpressed’, neglects the fact that it was the Committee for Anthropology that organised the lectures and underestimates the close links between the two disciplines (cf. Turner (2014: 355–356), and Burrow’s (1966: 241) ironic comment on the post-Tylor generation: ‘they were not all Oxford classicists primarily interested in religion and folk-lore’). Tylor himself had earlier called Herodotus an ‘anthropologist’ (1888: 386).

on the other to resist yielding control of Anthropology to the Natural Sciences.⁹¹

In claiming Thucydides for anthropology, then, Zimmern and others could be seen as supporting this hierarchical divide. It was not just that the classical Greeks had progressed from barbarism. It was also that some of them had developed the conceptual tools for analysing the path of evolution.

5. Thucydides and Geography

When Zimmern encouraged geographers, ‘too forgetful sometimes that man is not the creature of environment alone’, to remember Thucydides’ ‘brilliant sallies in geographical thinking’, he was indirectly boosting his own ‘Geography’ section in *The Greek Commonwealth*, where he cites the analysis in the *Archaeology* of the use of sea-power in the Mediterranean and of corn-growing in early Attica,⁹² and also implicitly alludes to the Thucydidean picture (1.7) of early settlements away from the sea.⁹³ At the same time, his comment suggests an even stronger hierarchy than we have seen obtaining between Classics and Anthropology: the ancient writer outdoes rather than matches modern research.

Who were the geographers whom Zimmern uses Thucydides to criticise? Two possibilities are the leading German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, whose system of ‘anthropo-geography’ had a strong deterministic strain, and the American Ellen Churchill Semple, whose *Influences of Geographic Environment* popularised Ratzel’s theory for English-speakers. ‘Man is a product of the earth’s surface’ was the blanket claim at the start of Semple’s work; the rest of it addresses first the environmental factors operative at different stages of society and then the various influences of different sorts of physical settings (including coasts, rivers,

⁹¹ Van Keuren (1991: 55–56). Cf. the resistance from the Lit. Hum. board to an Anthropology Honour School in 1949, on the grounds that ‘we are not convinced that a satisfactory education can be obtained from a School so predominantly confined [...] to the study of man in a primitive or uncivilised stage’ (quoted by James (2007: 103)).

⁹² Zimmern (1961: 33–34), opposing ‘the larger sea powers, or Sea Lords, as the Greeks called them’ to the “bad men” of the rock islands and coastlands’, a feature of ‘the history of the Mediterranean from Minos down to the bombardment of Algiers’, with n. 1 alluding to Thuc. 1.8.3; 49–50 (citing Thuc. 1.2.2) on early corn-growing. See also 52 n. 2 for a discursive note on Greek uncleanliness, citing Thuc. 1.6.3 for the opposition of ‘linen underclothing’ and ‘woollens, which are not the cleanest wear in a hot country’.

⁹³ Zimmern (1961: 49); cf. 237 for an allusion to this phenomenon in a paraphrase of Thucydides.

plains, and mountains).⁹⁴ Semple and Ratzel would themselves, however, have rejected any suggestion they neglected Thucydides. In her *magnum opus*, Semple praised Thucydides as ‘broad-minded’ and several times cited the *Archaeology*’s analysis of piracy and patterns of migration and settlement; she reinforced Thucydides’ status as an authority figure, moreover, by naming him in the main text rather than (as she did with most modern authorities) in the notes.⁹⁵ Ratzel similarly drew on the *Archaeology* in his *Anthropo-geographie*,⁹⁶ while in his later monograph *Der Staat und sein Boden geographisch betrachtet* (which is presented as a work ‘aus dem Grenzgebiet der politischen Geographie und Sociologie’) he starts by identifying a tradition from Thucydides to Mommsen of political historians who have acknowledged ‘die Bedeutung des Bodens für den Verlauf der Geschichte’.⁹⁷ Historians of Sociology in due course saw in Thucydides and his contemporaries Herodotus and Hippocrates some similarity with Ratzel’s anthropo-geography, while criticising this doctrine as ‘one-sided’ by contrast with a proper sociological approach.⁹⁸

It is particularly instructive to compare Zimmern’s reading of Thucydides’ geography with one of the figures he lists as widening the traditional historical field — Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918). Vidal is generally seen as one of the founders of Human Geography in France and an inspiration for the close integration of history and geography in the *Annales* school.⁹⁹ While his career was promoted by a concern with national revival after the Franco-Prussian War, his route to Geography had been Ancient History: he was a student at the French School at Athens from 1867 to 1870, and wrote his doctoral thesis on Herodes Atticus before becoming a Professor of Geography at Nancy in 1873. It is no surprise, then, that Vidal alludes to Thucydides at various points in his writings. He more than once applies to areas of the modern Mediterranean (Albania, parts of northern Africa and southern Italy) Thucydides’ analysis of the survival of an old-fashioned village way of life in remote

⁹⁴ Semple (1911: 1). See Keighren (2010) on Semple and her book’s reception.

⁹⁵ Semple (1911: 78; 77, 78, 250), alluding to Thuc. 1.2, 5, 7, 8.

⁹⁶ See Ratzel (1899: 1.115, 279 n. 127, 2.309–310) on mobility (with Thucydides among the ‘Geschichtschreiber weiten Blickes’), piracy (1.4–5), and ruins (1.10); also (1899: 1.363, 2.319) on 6.2 (from the later Sicilian *Archaeology*).

⁹⁷ Ratzel (1896: 3).

⁹⁸ Barth (1897: 1.224). He was followed in this perception by Albion Small, the founder of the first Sociology department in the US (Chicago, 1892), in his textbook *General Sociology* (1905: 53).

⁹⁹ On Vidal see e.g. Livingstone (1992: 266–267); Berdoulay (2001); for his transformation from Classicist to geographer, see Andrews (1986a); for his influence on his pupil Marc Bloch see Friedman (1996).

parts of the Greek world (1.5) — one of the passages responsible, as we have seen, for claims that Thucydides was an anthropologist.¹⁰⁰ While here Thucydides is made to support an overtly hierarchical discourse with national and colonial implications, Vidal also drew on Thucydides to establish the genealogy of modern Geography, both at the beginning of his career, when he made Thucydides the subject of his seminar in his first year at Nancy and alluded to him in the final sentences of his inaugural lecture, and again towards the start of his posthumous *Principles of Human Geography*.¹⁰¹

Vidal's allusions to Thucydides are marked by a tension between determinism and a position closer to his own 'possibilism' (the idea that the natural environment offers a number of different possibilities for humans rather than narrowly prescribing a single use). In the posthumous work, he pushed Thucydides closer to the determinist end of the spectrum: he claimed that the focus of Greek thought on environmental influence shifted from the physical to the geographical, and that this shift is seen in Thucydides' account of archaic Greece (*i.e.* the *Archaeology*), which he saw as indebted to the same 'exigences d'esprit' as certain chapters of Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* (presumably Part 3) and Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* (evidently the second chapter, which stresses the influence of climate, food, and soil).¹⁰² Vidal then opposes this vision to the increasing control over the environment extracted by modern science — a degree of control fortunate for 'l'entreprise de colonisation à laquelle notre époque a attaché sa gloire'.¹⁰³ At the close of his inaugural lecture, by contrast, Vidal cited Thucydides in support of the position that a civilisation could fashion for itself the conditions that support it: 'Et ainsi s'est confirmé, dans toute sa profondeur et sa vérité, le mot de Thucydide: "C'est l'homme qui possède la terre, et non pas la terre qui possède l'homme"'.¹⁰⁴ Those final words are loosely quoted from a speech in which Thucydides presents Pericles urging the Athenians to reject the Spartans' ultimatum in 432 BC: οὐ γὰρ τάδε τοὺς ἀνδρας, ἀλλ' οἱ ἀνδρες τὰυτα κτῶνται (1.143.5: 'for these things do not possess men, men possess them'). Vidal extracts a broad Thucydidean generalisation about the priority of humans over environment from what is in context a political appeal to the Athenians to

¹⁰⁰ Vidal de la Blache (1908: 17), (1922: 291–292). For other allusions see 158 (1.10); 170, 229 (1.7); and 220 (1.12).

¹⁰¹ Andrews (1986b: 61). See next paragraph for further references.

¹⁰² Vidal de la Blache (1922: 5), alluding to Buckle (1857–1861: 1.36–137).

¹⁰³ Vidal de la Blache (1922: 15).

¹⁰⁴ Vidal de la Blache (1873: 224).

surrender their houses and land outside the city-walls to Spartan ravaging.¹⁰⁵

The sentence that closes Vidal's inaugural lecture is cited by Zimmern in both the 'Politics' and the 'Economics' sections of *The Greek Commonwealth*: first in a chapter on the development of the Athenian empire, where he distorts the maxim to 'money does not own men, but men money' and makes it the hallmark of fifth-century Athens' emancipation from the 'reverential awe' felt the previous century before the wealth of the Eastern empires; second as epigraph to a chapter on 'Population', where he gives the rendering 'for these things are made for men, not men for them'.¹⁰⁶ Zimmern is not as overt as Vidal in drawing from Pericles' rhetoric a single Thucydidean insight into the limits of environmental determinism. But the repeated citation does cohere with the lesson Zimmern takes from Thucydides in 'Political Thought', namely that 'man is not the creature of environment alone'.

The discussion above has illustrated just a few of the ways in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century geographers related to Thucydides as well as some of the complexity of their positions on environmental determinism. If this complexity was largely ignored in Zimmern's brief praise of Thucydides at their expense, then that neglect can in part be attributed to the encomiastic purposes of Livingstone's *Legacy of Greece*. Zimmern's discussion can also be read, however, as endorsing his own approach to the effects of environment in *The Greek Commonwealth*. Zimmern stresses throughout his section on 'Geography' some of the constraints imposed by their Mediterranean environment on the Greeks. But he notes their limits, too, especially when he passes from 'the material foundations on which Greek institutions were built up' to the subject of the 'Politics' section, 'the characters': 'what did they make of the rough country in which they came to live?'¹⁰⁷ And even though the opening chapter of the new section continues to explore the impact of climate (how outdoors life shaped Greek institutions), Zimmern repeats his insistence that 'environment will not explain more than a small part of a nation's history'.¹⁰⁸ That lesson is then reinforced by the subsequent citations of Thucydides' Pericles noted above.

¹⁰⁵ Vidal's formulation can perhaps be detected behind the formulation of the German historian and nationalist Heinrich von Treitschke (1922: 1.207): 'Perikles sagt bei Thukydidēs: "Nicht das Land hat den Menschen, der Mensch hat das Land"' — a statement that von Treitschke found to be 'idealistisch', but preferable to the materialism of Buckle.

¹⁰⁶ Zimmern (1961: 181, 325). The second version echoes Mark 2:27.

¹⁰⁷ Zimmern (1961: 58).

¹⁰⁸ Zimmern (1961: 69).

Zimmern's citations of Thucydidean geography in *The Greek Commonwealth* can themselves be read as underscoring the institutional relationships and hierarchies to which his own geographical conceptions were indebted. At Oxford, Zimmern was particularly influenced by Myres, who, besides *Anthropology* (p. 45), also worked to include Geography within the curriculum as a discipline in its own right and for the contribution it could make to the study of history.¹⁰⁹ When he left Oxford for Liverpool in 1907, Myres was pleased that Zimmern thought of taking over his Geography lectures ('There is no one I would rather see carrying forward this part of my Oxford work than yourself'¹¹⁰) and offered him his materials. Zimmern (already planning his own exit from Oxford) let the matter rest then. But the book he wrote when he left Oxford is in part a continuation of Myres' work by other means.

Zimmern's debt to Myres' geographical thought is signalled at key moments in *The Greek Commonwealth*. At the start, he praises *Greek Lands and the Greek People*, Myres' inaugural lecture on his return to Oxford in 1910, as marking 'a new era for English classical teaching'.¹¹¹ Later, in an exuberant footnote attached to his first citation of the Periclean maxim, he cites a section of Myres' lecture in the *Anthropology and the Classics* series: 'The treatment of Hellenic civilization by Herodotus stands in marked contrast with his treatment of the civilizations of Egypt and Outland. [...] Only in Greece is there mastery of man over nature, and that not because nature is less strong, but because Greek man is strong enough to dominate it.'¹¹² While that last sentence purports to summarise Herodotus' viewpoint, the idea it expresses is similar to the content of Myres' inaugural two years later. Myres did admittedly see a 'large compulsion of geographical control' at work in *early* Greece, and argue that the problems of that period were for that reason 'quite as well worth attack as many which lie [...] in the glamour of Thucydides' — a pointed plea for an extension of the temporal boundaries of Ancient History as studied at Oxford.¹¹³ But he stressed, too, that 'there have yet been centuries in which Man has been able to shake himself so far free of Nature's limitations, as to create masterpieces of society and speculation, as well as of craftsmanship, which the world accepts as standards. [...] The culture of the Greek city states in their prime is one of these

¹⁰⁹ See Steel (1987: 60); Murray (2000: 357); Myres was in due course the first Chair of Examiners when an Honour School in Geography was finally examined in 1933.

¹¹⁰ MSS Zimmern 11.185–186.

¹¹¹ Zimmern (1961: 17 n. 1).

¹¹² Zimmern (1961: 181 n. 1), citing Myres (1908: 151).

¹¹³ Myres (1953: 8).

masterpieces.’¹¹⁴ Myres thus extended to the creation of the *polis* the aesthetic appreciation traditionally bestowed on Greek art and poetry at the same time as he applied modern anthropological and geographical thought to the Greeks’ social organisation.

Zimmern’s assessment of Thucydidean geography is marked by similar tensions. It is not just that he draws on Thucydides to bring out both geographical constraints and the possibility of human control realised particularly by Pericles, thereby remaining tied to the type of exemplary thinking that found in the Greek *polis* a transcendent moment of freedom. It is also that, as with Myres, the authority bestowed by Classics supports new disciplinary approaches even as those approaches accentuate Greek exceptionalism.

6. Thucydides, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology

When Zimmern alludes to psychoanalysts of his own day finding in Thucydides anticipations of their own thought, he was striking a distinctly modern note: the word ‘psychoanalysis’ was coined by Freud in 1896 and first attested in English in 1906. The comparison with psychoanalysis was also boldly dismissive of the hostility which that continental and Jewish practice had faced in many quarters in Britain — though its use in treatment of shell-shock had started to improve its reputation by the early 1920s.¹¹⁵

What might psychoanalysts expect to find in Thucydides? For one answer, we can look forward forty years to an introductory work to psychoanalysis by a practising Austrian psychoanalyst, Robert Waelder. Waelder referred to Thucydides as Freud’s ‘ancestor in spirit’, quoting the Thucydidean scholar A.W. Gomme’s description of the historian as ‘passionate’ for ‘self-control’ and ‘truth’. He further justified his daring label on the grounds that ‘Thucydides analyzed the great tragedy of Hellas in his time as an outgrowth of human nature, with the hope that the very understanding of the patterns will weaken their automatic grip on men and will provide men with a degree of emancipation from them’.¹¹⁶ Waelder was right to note that Thucydides grounds his presentation of Greek conflict in an understanding of human nature (3.82.2; cf. 1.22.4). But he also attributes to him a motivation for writing — a partial emancipation from the destructive grip of human nature — that Thucydides

¹¹⁴ Myres (1953: 7).

¹¹⁵ Rapp (1988) suggests that the attention paid to psychoanalysis in popular magazines in Britain peaked in 1921.

¹¹⁶ Waelder (1960: xii), citing Gomme (1954: 161).

nowhere makes explicit. Not all critics had so positive an image of Thucydides' aspirations — or of psychoanalysis: the historian Lewis Namier, a former colleague of Zimmern's in the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department, suggested that history 'resembles psychoanalysis in being better able to diagnose than to cure'.¹¹⁷

What Zimmern thought psychoanalysts would get from Thucydides is unfortunately left unclear. His comments on Thucydides elsewhere, however, suggest that he was thinking not so much of any foreshadowings of Freudian theory in Thucydides as of his concern for psychology — a term with which psychoanalysis was sometimes conflated in the 1920s.¹¹⁸ An interest in psychology pervades Zimmern's writings and gives his engagement with Thucydides a distinctive shape. In 'Political Thought', besides calling Thucydides a forerunner of new-fangled psychoanalysis, he presents Thucydides' psychology as part of his universality and modernity: the universal Thucydides, he writes, is 'the scientific historian and psychologist', not 'the disillusioned Athenian patriot', and Thucydides, along with Plato and Aristotle, anticipated the efforts of recent thinkers to apply 'the psychological method to political problems'.¹¹⁹ Zimmern discusses Thucydidean psychology in other writings too, seeing his methods at times as typical of his age (in an early lecture he suggested that the sophists taught Thucydides 'to explain politics by psychology'), at other times as ahead of it ('Thucydides [...] began indeed as a historian, but he ended as a psychologist. He began with his contemporaries, but he far outran them').¹²⁰

Zimmern's concern with Thucydidean psychology was by no means uncommon. Psychology was the focus of an 1893 article by the American Paul Shorey which unsympathetically analysed Thucydides' assumption that 'the nature and conduct of man are strictly determined by his physical and social environment and by a few elementary appetites and desires'; Shorey identified this 'ethical positivism' above all in the '*résumé* of Thucydidean psychology' allegedly offered by the Athenian speaker Diodotus at 3.45.¹²¹ That same 'theory of human nature' was central to

¹¹⁷ Namier (1952: 5).

¹¹⁸ Richards (2000: 215). Graham Wallas (a mentor of Zimmern's: see below) speaks of 'the new school of psychologists founded on Freud's "Psycho-analysis"' (1914: 147 n. 1); he and Zimmern talked about Freud in 1913 (MSS Facs. c. 118.67 (Bodleian)).

¹¹⁹ Zimmern (1921: 325, 337). Cf. Zimmern (1908: 11) on the necessity of psychology — 'a science, depending on experiment and verification like other sciences' — for the politician (with 12 n. 1 for acknowledgement of Graham Wallas).

¹²⁰ Zimmern (1928: 93) (see n. 76 for the lecture's original context); (1929: 9).

¹²¹ Shorey (1893: 66, 75, 70 n. 1).

the Cambridge scholar F.M. Cornford's famous 1907 monograph *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, which argued that historical events as presented by Thucydides were transfigured by traditional literary models, and in particular by the psychology of Attic tragedy.¹²² Nor did Oxford scholars neglect this aspect of Thucydides' thought: his qualifications for 'the work of psychological analysis' were praised in an 1860s edition by a young Charles Bigg (later Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History);¹²³ his focus on 'psychology' rather than 'physiology' was seen by J.L. Myres as the basis of his anthropological advance;¹²⁴ and he was memorably called 'the father of psychological history' by the philosopher and archaeologist R.G. Collingwood — a claim founded above all on the speeches, which Collingwood saw as 'not history but Thucydidean comments upon the acts of the speakers, Thucydidean reconstructions of their motives and intentions'.¹²⁵

These psychological readings of Thucydides coincided with the emergence of Psychology as a discipline. Shorey's article was published in the same year that his university, Chicago, opened its first Psychology laboratory (the experimental approach had been introduced by William James at Harvard during Shorey's undergraduate years there in the 1870s). Within Britain, the development of the experimental science (as of other new disciplines) was slower, but Psychology was available in *Literae Humaniores* both as a Special Subject and within the Logic paper, where it was (according to the 1906 Handbook) 'in the position of an incidental subject, but [...] likely to become more prominent'.¹²⁶ While Classics' institutional links with Psychology were weak, individual psychologists did influence the study of the ancient world: the empirical,

¹²² Cornford (1907: esp. 121–123, 221–222; quote from 123). Shorey noted the similar reading of 3.45 in his review of Cornford while repudiating Cornford's talk of 'a new mythology' (1907: 203).

¹²³ Bigg (1868: xxviii).

¹²⁴ Myres (1908: 152). Buckle (1872: 1.162) similarly saw the triumph of the psychological over the descriptive as the hallmark of Thucydides' advance on Herodotus (with a historicising comparison with the relation of Commines to Froissart and of Machiavelli to Italian chroniclers; cf. Murray (1897: 196) on Thucydides as 'living in a psychological age').

¹²⁵ Collingwood (1946: 29–30), from a 1940 manuscript based on lectures delivered in Oxford in 1936; for his interest in psychoanalysis and psychology see Connelly and Costall (2000). Scarlett Kingsley suggests to me that Zimmern's comment on psychoanalysis is defending Thucydides against the attacks on his 'fictitious speeches' mentioned in the previous paragraph (1921: 340).

¹²⁶ Anon. (1906: 156). Hearnshaw (1964) sketches the development of the subject in Britain. It had to wait until 1936 for its own Diploma and until after the Second World War for inclusion as a core part of an Honour School.

pluralist, anti-intellectualist model of the stream of consciousness developed by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* was applied, for instance, by Jane Harrison to the study of 'the savage'.¹²⁷

James was acknowledged as the inspiration for the work that moulded Zimmern's thoughts on Thucydidean psychology, Graham Wallas' *Human Nature in Politics*.¹²⁸ Zimmern's own contacts with Wallas had begun much earlier, when Wallas taught him Thucydides at prep school. They stayed in touch with each other afterwards, and Zimmern was among those who read *Human Nature in Politics* prior to publication.¹²⁹ That work was soon hailed as a classic in the emerging sub-field of Social Psychology.¹³⁰ Building on James, Wallas sought to develop a progressive democracy in which 'the conception of a harmony of thought and passion may take the place [...] of our present dreary confusion and barren conflicts'.¹³¹ The way to achieve this vision, Wallas thought, lay not in intellectualising abstractions but in recognising human nature for what it was, that is, in understanding the force of habituation and of embodied emotional reflexes. Wallas illustrates his thinking with the example of the conscript who 'has lived in a stream of sensations [...] which go to make up the infinity of facts from which he might abstract an idea of his country' — and who is moved to fight by the memory of specific attachments or by personifications of his country, not by the abstract language of patriotism.¹³² As he explains in a golden passage that was picked up in *The Greek Commonwealth*:

Once in a thousand years a man may stand in a funeral crowd after the fighting is over, and his heart may stir within him as he hears Pericles

¹²⁷ Harrison (1912: 87 n. 1). Cf. Stocking (2005: 165) for James' influence on Marett.

¹²⁸ Wallas (1908: v). G. Wallas (1858–1932): Shrewsbury School; Lit. Hum., Corpus Christi College, 1881 (second class); member of Fabian Society, 1886–1904; co-founder, LSE, 1894; Progressive member of the London School Board, 1894–1907; Dunkin Lecturer in Sociology, Manchester College, Oxford, 1907; Chair of Political Science, University of London, 1914–1923. Turner (1981: 259–262) discusses Wallas' influence on Zimmern.

¹²⁹ Wallas (1908: v).

¹³⁰ *Human Nature in Politics* is grouped under 'Social Psychology' by the Oxford psychologist William McDougall (1912: 256); Wallas received just before the book went to press two new books entitled *Social Psychology* (1908: vi: by McDougall and a Wisconsin professor, E.A. Ross), and he gave that title to the second chapter in his next book (1914: 21–34). Zimmern, standing in for Wallas at a lecture in 1917, joked that he could 'never remember what [Wallas] is supposed to be Professor of, but if it is not Social Psychology it ought to be' (1918: 88); see n. 128 for his actual title.

¹³¹ Wallas (1908: 198).

¹³² Wallas (1908: 72). The 'stream' image echoes William James.

abstract from the million qualities of individual Athenians in the present and the past just those that make the meaning of Athens to the world. But afterwards all that he will remember may be the cadence of Pericles' voice, the movement of his hand, or the sobbing of some mother of the dead.¹³³

Some of the tensions of the exemplarity of fifth-century Athens that we observed above recur here. Wallas implies that Thucydides — as the man who did recall and report Pericles' words — must be separated from the masses who forgot those words,¹³⁴ and he gives those words paradigmatic force in the same breath as he downplays the power of abstractions.

When he came to apply Wallas' psychology to ancient Greece, Zimmern presented Wallas himself as a modern Thucydides. In *The Greek Commonwealth* he praises *Human Nature in Politics* as 'the first practical attempt to do for modern politics what Socrates did for Greek, to explain to our political craftsmen the nature and use of their tools' — that is, the human nature with which they have to work.¹³⁵ This formulation coincides with Zimmern's earlier emphasis on 'Thucydides' continual insistence on psychology and on the necessity of statesmen understanding human nature'.¹³⁶ Both Thucydides and Wallas, that is, apply psychology to political problems. Zimmern's coupling of the two writers was picked up in turn by R.W. Livingstone in his 1912 monograph *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to Us*, where he first wrote that Thucydides' speakers 'deal with the psychology of human nature, and in particular of human nature in politics', and then a couple of pages later picked up that hint by comparing the *stasis* passage with Wallas' writings.¹³⁷ And Zimmern himself returned to the same theme in his contribution to Livingstone's *Legacy of Greece* volume, in which he singled out Wallas among those 'patient inquirers' whose systematic labours in both fields have ensured that 'politics and psychology have

¹³³ Wallas (1908: 73).

¹³⁴ Zimmern's (1961: 199) re-use of the passage seems to pick up this implication.

¹³⁵ Zimmern (1961: 268 n. 1). See also p. 199 for another allusion to the book, and also the inclusion in later editions of references to Wallas' 1914 *The Great Society* (1961: 224 n. 1, 260 n. 1), as well as the citation from Wallas at Zimmern (1928: 64–65), from a chapter originally intended for *The Greek Commonwealth*.

¹³⁶ Zimmern (1961: 183 n. 1).

¹³⁷ Livingstone (1912: 214, 216).

once more been drawn together' — 'once more' implying a return to Greek thinkers such as Thucydides.¹³⁸

While his engagement with Wallas points to a close comparison between ancient and modern thought, elsewhere in *The Greek Commonwealth* Zimmern focuses on psychological development within antiquity. He illustrates Thucydides' insistence on psychology by pointing to a number of passages drawn from speeches, above all Diodotus' psychological generalisations at 3.45, 'where, as Cornford has shown in his *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, mythology is transformed into psychology'.¹³⁹ The interesting thing here is that Zimmern has twisted Cornford's presentation of Thucydides' psychology. For Cornford, Diodotus' psychological model was a survival of pre-theological thought: it is 'an instance of rationalizing', with 'the accretion of theological belief' removed — 'but what is left is a mythical construction which contains and carries with it conceptions still more primitive'.¹⁴⁰ Zimmern, by contrast, changes Cornford's Thucydides into the proponent of a modern discipline.

Zimmern's twisting of Cornford points to a bigger contrast in their conceptions of disciplinary history. While Zimmern connects Thucydides with the incipient human and natural sciences, Cornford overtly highlights the differences between ancient and modern mentalities. Following on from criticism of Gomperz' application to Thucydides of phrases such as 'political factors' and 'relations of forces', he writes:

we are protesting against the attribution to Thucydides of the whole class of categories and conceptions and modes of thought of which these and similar phrases are the expression. It is precisely in respect of these conceptions that modern history differs from ancient. They have been imported, but yesterday, from Darwinian biology and from branches of mathematical and physical science which in fifth-century Athens were undiscovered, and which, if they had been discovered, no one would have dreamed of bringing into connexion with human history. [...] Not only has History proper been invaded by these abstract sciences, but also — and partly as a consequence — a number of ancillary sciences, fast growing up round the old method of narrating human actions, are parcelling out the field occupied by the ancient descriptive science of Politics. Collectively, they may be called

¹³⁸ Zimmern (1921: 337). Cf. Zimmern (1928: 64), where Wallas' words are applied to Greece, with the words 'once more' added so as to root in the Hellenic past the future that he and Wallas wish to secure.

¹³⁹ Zimmern (1961: 183 n. 1).

¹⁴⁰ Cornford (1907: 221–243, esp. 242); cf. x on the 'traditional psychology which Thucydides seems to me to have learnt from Aeschylus'.

Sociology. The best established of them is Economics, which studies the phenomenon known to the Greeks by the moral term, *πλεονεξία*, ‘covetousness’, that vice of human character which makes a man want to ‘have more’ than his neighbour.¹⁴¹

Where Zimmern sees a shift from mythology to psychology, then, Cornford opposes the modern scientific to the ancient moral or psychological approach. The difference in their approaches is confirmed by the fact that Zimmern, as we have seen, presents the *Archaeology* as an evolution,¹⁴² whereas Cornford contrasts the way a modern historian might be subconsciously influenced by Darwinian biology with the way in which Thucydides (on his own reading) was affected by Aeschylean psychology.¹⁴³

7. Conclusions

I have explored in this chapter through the writings of Alfred Zimmern various ways in which the reception of Thucydides was connected in the years immediately before and after the First World War with disciplinary formation in the academy. Some modern scholars, as I noted earlier, have focussed on the classical research conducted in this period by thinkers such as Weber who subsequently came to be celebrated as founding figures in the Social Sciences. This chapter has pointed to the diverse ways in which the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography were defined by their practitioners against History and the study of Greco-Roman antiquity, and shown how Thucydides’ intellectual prestige in these older disciplines made him useful both for those seeking to defend the boundaries of new disciplines and for scholars of antiquity seeking to boost their claims against the threat of obsolescence. Psychoanalysis and the broader field of Psychology, by contrast, tended to be involved in different border disputes (in particular with Philosophy), but even here Zimmern could see threads connecting the modes of analysis practised by Thucydides with new approaches such as Social Psychology. Such disciplinary interrogation was very much in the air at the time Zimmern

¹⁴¹ Cornford (1907: 70–71).

¹⁴² Zimmern (1921: 341).

¹⁴³ Cornford (1907: viii). It is telling that Cornford pays scarcely any attention to the *Archaeology*: it is mentioned only on p. 35 (on 1.13 — placed after an allusion to the same point in Strabo) and p. 241 (a broad-brush comparison with Hdt. 1.1–4).

wrote up his thoughts on ‘Political Thought’,¹⁴⁴ and we have watched him engaging with these debates on a vast canvas where (in the words of one reviewer) ‘against a background of contorted personifications a baroque Thucydides is submitted to apotheosis’.¹⁴⁵

Lurking beneath the surface throughout the discussion have been some related oppositions and tensions: the general and the specific, exemplarity and historicisation, harmony and disharmony. Zimmern, as we saw, finds in Thucydides anticipations of modern disciplines — but he finds them ‘blended into a unity’ in Thucydides.¹⁴⁶ In keeping with this vision, Zimmern holds up the lives of the Greeks as ‘happy and harmonious’ because they were ‘not professional men’ and ‘did not live in compartments’¹⁴⁷ — and yet he himself uses the tools of specialisation to dissect their exemplarity.

These various oppositions play out in many related areas too. They can be felt, for instance, in contemporary responses to Livingstone’s *Legacy of Greece* which felt that the very diversity of contributors detracted from the ideal Hellenic harmony.¹⁴⁸ They have numerous echoes, too, in contemporary debates in Britain on specialisation in education and on the continuing role of Greek and Latin, as well as in earlier manifestations of those debates in Germany.¹⁴⁹ Most to the point for our theme, however, is the fact that these oppositions call to be read against Zimmern’s own attempt in *The Greek Commonwealth* to give a sense of what ancient Athens was really like. An evolution that Thucydides presents as a unity Zimmern treats in that book from two different perspectives, Politics and Economics — while re-deploying Thucydidean ironies as he does so. But that is a story for another time.

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¹⁴⁴ E.g. the Sociological Society’s 1922 Oxford conference on the Correlation of the Social Sciences, abstracts from which were published in the *Sociological Review* 15 (1923) 48–64. The difficulty of separating many of the new disciplines was often noted (Kuklick (2002: 129)); Wallas (1914: 201) as easily calls Hobbes ‘the father of modern social psychology’ as others claimed him for Sociology.

¹⁴⁵ *JHS* 42 (1922) 132 (J.D.B[eazley]).

¹⁴⁶ Zimmern (1921: 341).

¹⁴⁷ Zimmern (1928: 64); cf. e.g. (1961: 119 n. 1, 346 n. 1, 395) for related epigrams.

¹⁴⁸ *Isis* 5 (1923) 163 (G.S.). Cf. *Classical Weekly* 16 (1922) 39 (P.A. Shorey, comparing the contributors’ approach with Cyclopean individualism).

¹⁴⁹ For the Oxford context see Engel (1983: esp. 217–245); for broader university debates Anderson (2004: esp. 51–67, 103–118).

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THUCYDIDES, SCIENCE, AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE
THOUGHT OF CHARLES COCHRANE

— BENJAMIN EARLEY —

ABSTRACT

*Charles Norris Cochrane is often seen today as the originator of the idea of Thucydides as a ‘scientific’ historian in his groundbreaking study *Thucydides and the Science of History* (1929). This chapter explores the implications of this scientific view of Thucydides in Cochrane’s wider thought. It argues that Cochrane presented a nuanced and insightful critique of Thucydides’ political project, while attempting to identify methodologies and insights that could be employed by modern scholars of politics. Moreover, it will analyse the place of Thucydides in Cochrane’s later book *Christianity and Classical Culture* (1940), where the limits of Thucydides’ approach are placed in dialogue with the thought of St Augustine. This chapter will argue that Cochrane’s Thucydides provided an important (if overlooked) contribution to the emergence of the Athenian thinker as a key text in *International Relations* and political theory in the interwar years.*

KEYWORDS

*Charles N. Cochrane, Thucydides,
International Relations, St. Augustine, Canada*

1. Introduction

Charles Norris Cochrane is most famous among Thucydides scholars for his 1929 Oxford University Press monograph *Thucydides and the Science of History*. In that work Cochrane argued against Francis Cornford’s claim that Thucydides was a *mythistoricus*, a thinker whose work was best understood in the context of Greek tragedy.¹ Cochrane instead posited a deep connection between the Hippocratic corpus and the *History of the Peloponnesian War* to present Thucydides as a ‘scientist’, a rational figure whose interpretations of events was based on a careful empirical compilation and analysis of facts. From these facts, Cochrane believed, Thucydides could draw general conclusions about the

¹ Cornford (1907).

causes of events and the structures of political life. For Cochrane, Thucydides' scientific approach to historiography marked him out as one of the ancient world's most original thinkers who could stand shoulder to shoulder with the modern world's scientific historians.²

However, from the earliest reviews until today the view that Thucydides was a scientist has proved contentious. Despite some initial support, many early readers were critical of Cochrane's conclusions.³ After the Second World War, however, certain scholars, such as de Ste. Croix, Sears, and Palmer,⁴ began to reassess Cochrane's vision of the 'scientific' side of Thucydides' thought to the extent that in 1977 Connor saw the position as an orthodoxy: 'The older and more familiar Thucydides, the scientist, the rationalist, the pupil of the Sophists and the Hippocratics who had grasped and applied the principles of scientific method with such success that his work constitutes a standard presentation is still to be seen, most commonly in the company of scholars of the older generation'.⁵ Balot, similarly,⁶ cites Cochrane when he attacks the 'old' view of Thucydides' historical objectivity, which he maintains is untenable following the work of Connor (1984) and others on the literary and emotional character of the Athenian historian's work. Cochrane is still routinely cited today as the summation of the old nineteenth-century view of Thucydides as the first objective and scientific historian with little further comment.⁷ While many scholars now acknowledge Thucydides' engagement with the Hippocratic corpus,⁸ few would subscribe to Cochrane's overarching thesis. That said, new interest in Cochrane has recently emerged in the field of political science. For example, Arieti⁹ reminds us that we can still accept, or at least engage with, Cochrane's nuanced reading of Thucydides without having to accept his view of the historian as a scientist and David Beer has pointed to Cochrane's significant contribution to Canadian intellectual life and the value of his thoughts on power and religion.¹⁰ The latter argues that: 'Cochrane is best understood as a Canadian political theorist who was motivated to

² Cochrane (1965: 3).

³ See *e.g.* Grant (1929), Gomme (1930), Shorey (1930).

⁴ De Ste. Croix (1972: 29–33), Sears (1977), Palmer (1992: 2–3).

⁵ Connor (1977: 289).

⁶ Balot (2001: 137).

⁷ Cf. *e.g.* Orwin (1994: 33), Crane (1996: 27), Thomas (2006: 92–93), Zumbrennen (2010: 72).

⁸ *E.g.* Hornblower (2009).

⁹ Arieti (2005).

¹⁰ Beer (2020).

consider the whole sweep of Western civilisation by his proximity to the problems of modernity and the spiritual and political crises of the twentieth century'.¹¹ For Beer, Cochrane deserves to rank alongside Leo Strauss and Eric Voeglin as an important twentieth-century thinker whose particular contribution was to explain the value of Augustine as a theorist of power to the contemporary moment's crisis of liberalism.

My goal in this paper is not to defend Cochrane's scientific interpretation of Thucydides. I certainly do not believe that Thucydides was as rationalistic or even as systematic as Cochrane argues. However, I do feel that the general scholarly dismissal of Cochrane's arguments has obscured the Canadian scholar's significant contribution to the discovery of the value of Thucydides' thoughts on political order, war, and the breakdown of society in the interwar years. A period which I have previously referred to as the *Thucydidean turn*, because it marks the moment(s) when scholars once again turned to Thucydides as a text of contemporary political relevance.¹² It is certainly true, as Shorey and others have pointed out, that Cochrane's vision of the scientific Thucydides was a reaction to Cornford's presentation of the Athenian as a *mythohistoricus*. However, following Beer, I wish to point to the broader interpretive problems that Cochrane also had in mind. He wished to understand how the Athenian historian understood the causes of the breakdown of both domestic and international political orders in the Greek world. In doing so Cochrane felt that he could both present a novel interpretation of Thucydides' place in intellectual history but also, and more importantly, recognise the limits of this understanding of the 'science' of history, particularly as it relates to the role of 'justice' in politics.¹³ In that sense, *Science of History* is an important book not just for its scientific interpretation of Thucydides' thought but also for its insights into Cochrane's own political project. Many of the arguments of *Science of History* set up the main theme of Cochrane's next and most significant book *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, first published in 1940 and revised in 1944, in which he explained how and why Christian concerns with justice and morality had displaced a pagan focus on order, warfare, and power.

Cochrane occupies a unique position in the period of the *Thucydidean Turn* because of his focus on both the strengths and limits of Thucydides' intellectual project. In the *Thucydidean Turn*, I argue, there was an intellectual tendency among first classicists and then social scientists to

¹¹ Beer (2020).

¹² Earley (2020).

¹³ Cochrane (1965: 176).

encapsulate (one might also say to categorise) Thucydides' thought under certain terms, such as scientist, realist, or realpolitik, which explained how the Athenian historian might prove relevant to a world deeply divided by war and ideology in the first half of the twentieth century. Cochrane, however, took a slightly different tack by not only (re)interpreting Thucydides for a modern audience but also placing him in a broader narrative of intellectual history, which explored both the limits of the Thucydidean view of the world and by asking how and why the scientific approach to history and politics was overshadowed by Christian thought, particularly that of St. Augustine, in later antiquity.

2. Thucydides and Science

Before we continue, it will be useful to say a few words on Cochrane's life and career. Cochrane was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1889. He went up to the University of Toronto where he graduated in Classics in 1911 before securing his degree at the University of Oxford. Upon his return to Canada he was appointed to the faculty of Ancient History at Toronto in 1913. Despite his close connection with Oxford, Cochrane's origins as a Canadian marked him out as something of an outsider in the scholarly landscape of the time. He served in France in the 1st Tank Battalion during the Great War before returning to Toronto to continue his career. He began his new post with a study of Roman history that was soon abandoned in favour of Thucydides. Throughout his time in Toronto Cochrane was developing an interest in the philosophy of history that would come to dominate his career. In the view of his obituarist, Cochrane's life work 'traced the problem of weaving the major strands of Greco-Roman civilization, namely order and progress'.¹⁴ *Christianity and Classical Culture* represents an in-depth analysis of the influence of classical thought on the early church fathers and how 'Augustine avoided the classical dilemma which attributed human imperfection either to opinion or to nature by emphasizing personality and will. Rome and Greece had suffered from the vice of false doctrine, namely perfection through political action. Christian realism meant an emancipation from the moral and intellectual difficulties of classical antiquity.'¹⁵ *Christianity and Classical Culture* was praised by Auden¹⁶ and lauded by Innis as 'the first major Canadian contribution to the intellectual history of the

¹⁴ Innis (1945: 97).

¹⁵ Innis (1945: 96).

¹⁶ Bowersock (2009: 195); Beer, in Cochrane & Beer (2017: 1).

West'.¹⁷ We shall return to *Christianity and Classical Culture* later in this paper. First, however, we shall turn our attention to *Thucydides and the Science of History*, a work which I will argue was a spirited attempt to define the nature of Thucydides' intellectual project and assess its value to a contemporary world torn apart by the Great War and confronted with the seeming impotence of liberalism in the face of rising totalitarianism across the globe.

The main contention of the *Science of History* is that Thucydides was a 'scientist' in the sense that he took his main intellectual and methodological cue from early Greek atomists and most of all from the Hippocratic writers who were revolutionising medicine at the end of the fifth century BC.¹⁸ Cochrane imagines that Thucydides drew from the atomists a material view of the cosmos from which he concerned himself with the 'concrete particulars of the phenomenal world'.¹⁹ Cochrane's 'scientific' argument therefore extended beyond Thucydides' removal of the mythological from his work or his rationalism to encompass an interest in the material realities of the universe. In addition, in the first chapter of the book, Cochrane outlines how Thucydides took from the Hippocratics an interest in understanding causes and recording facts, which are then used to define types of phenomenon. Just as a doctor looks for both a cause of a disease and its symptoms, in order to recognise similar illnesses in the future. Thucydides attempted to do the same for politics.²⁰

Cochrane maintains that Thucydides took from the Hippocratics an interest in human nature as one of the defining elements of life. Thucydides depicted an unchanging human *physis* (nature) that essentially remained the same from the first primordial beings, on through all Greek history, and into the future. At the same time, Cochrane also saw Thucydides as describing in detail how different political structures, cultural norms, and identities both influenced and were, in turn, influenced by human nature. These political structures, however, changed over time as human nature drove individuals and groups to better secure the material conditions of life, by improving food supply, security, and eventually gaining money and power over other peoples. In other words, Cochrane saw in Thucydides an analysis of both the sameness of human

¹⁷ Innis (1945: 96).

¹⁸ Workman (2015: 513–515).

¹⁹ Cochrane (1965: 5).

²⁰ Thomas (2006: 92) notes that 'Scholars are not now so ready as Cochrane (in 1929) to see Thucydides as a close affiliate of Hippocratic school of medicine, and a scientific historian'.

nature and the role of the material realities of life in causing historical change. As Workman notes: 'Cochrane argued that the ancient historian discovered that the divisiveness that undermined *nomos* and pitted Greeks against Greeks could be traced back to a fixed human nature, and more generally to the manner in which humanity interacts with the natural world'.²¹ In this interpretation the state (or *polis*) is simply the system of laws that allows the unification of a divergent set of interests into a common interest. Similarly, interstate relations are the laws and institutions designed to reconcile divergent individual and state interests. Both political orders are the product of human nature but are not immune to historical change. Thucydides' history becomes a meditation on the effect of war, *stasis*, and plague on these delicate systems and balances.

Cochrane's vision of Thucydides was intended not only to offer a scholarly interpretation of the Athenian historian's intellectual milieu but also a reinterpretation of his value as a moral and didactic thinker to the contemporary world. Thucydides' attempt to apply contemporary medical thought to the study of politics is hailed in the introduction as 'an exact parallel to the attempts of modern scientific historians to apply evolutionary canons derived from Darwinian science'.²² In the second chapter Cochrane offers his thoughts on Thucydides as a writer and historian. There it is argued that Thucydides' true innovation is to bring all human action into the purview of scientific explanation through the concept of historical causation or *prophasis*. It is through *prophasis* that Thucydides can explain how historical change comes about and political orders develop and evolve. Cochrane explained that Thucydides explored the interplay between the spirit of a place like Athens, her political, cultural, and social makeup, and the personality of her great men. These different factors are continually changing, driving forward events. Morality in Thucydidean politics therefore becomes dependent on its context.²³ Thucydides recorded accurately how these political orders functioned and is therefore writing 'political science'. So the narrative of the plague is accompanied by an account of the *metabolai*, or changes, that it wrought on the bodies of the Athenians and to their society. By emphasising the varieties of political society and the contingency of morality he is suggesting that events, politics, and orders are subject to continuous change. Later Cochrane will adopt the vocabulary of evolution, although it is only in the historian's purview to measure change in observable ways through, for example, an account of the rise and decline

²¹ Workman (2015: 515).

²² Cochrane (1965: 3).

²³ Cochrane (1965: 33).

of freedom, or the vagaries of power. Thucydides, for Cochrane, is a political scientist who modern readers can learn methodologically from. But Thucydides does not directly explain contemporary politics. Analogies between the ancient and modern world may be interesting, but they can also distract from the methodological insights that Thucydides offers.

The remainder of the book is dedicated to an account of how Thucydides' empirical method categorised the evolution of political orders in Greece from the *polis*, through to interstate relations, before outlining how these orders broke down in the violence, revolution, and suffering brought about by the Peloponnesian War, *stasis*, and the plague. Chapter four, on *The State*, opens with the observation that there is a distinction between philosophy and science. Philosophy looks to the general well-being by passing from specific observations to general observations. This methodology is invalid for science. Scientific ethics simply focus on the utility of observations.

To Thucydides, therefore, must be credited the first suggestion of a classification of states along the lines of rational empiricism. According to this method, it is sought in each case to relate the form of the state to its function; the form being the type of government, or the particular relationship existing in any community between rules and ruled; while the function or functions consist of the interests which public authority seeks to realize in view of the 'physical constitution' or, in other words, the general conditions, social and economic, prevalent within the given community. Farther than this the scientist may not go.²⁴

So Thucydides' readers find in his work empirical descriptions of the patriarchal monarchy, the Venetian oligarchy of Corinth, in Sparta the ascendancy of landholders over their neighbours, as well as the democracy of Athens. Thucydides explained not only the form of these orders, but the spirit that animates them. For example, Pericles described the practice of toleration in the Funeral Oration, years before John Stuart Mill, suggesting how Athens attempted to balance the form and function of the state²⁵ or a commonwealth founded on individualistic and liberal principles.²⁶ In other words, Thucydides showed how a scientific historian must be alive to how human beings shape the nature of the state and form its peculiar characteristics. From such empirical observations a general typology of states can be produced.

²⁴ Cochrane (1965: 46–7).

²⁵ Cochrane (1965: 52).

²⁶ Cochrane (1965: 54).

Chapter five turns to interstate relations. There it is argued that Thucydides, alone among ancient commentators, realised that the *polis* was not the final stage of Greek political development. Rather the forces that existed on the outskirts of the Greek world would make further organisations of power inevitable. Herodotus had described how Greeks were willing to sell out their countrymen and how ultimately it was only fortune that saved Greece:²⁷ ‘to the realist, as has been said, such an answer must have been anything but reassuring’. Thucydides saw clearly that the Persian threat had not receded and, indeed, that other threats were looming: particularly, the Macedonians and the Thracians to the north.²⁸ Thucydides offered a far more accurate account of the causes, and extent, of power in the north and its relationship to the Greek settlers there. Therefore, for Cochrane, Thucydides’ prowess as an historian of interstate relations rests on his ability to see beyond the *polis* as the unit of politics and to delineate exactly the power and relationships between the Greeks and their neighbours.²⁹

Among the Greeks themselves, Cochrane claimed that the Thirty Years Peace marks ‘the triumph of humanistic principles in international law’. The Peace signalled the death of the autarkic city state, cooperation was now at last appreciated, and the individual *poleis* gravitated towards either the Peloponnesian League or the Athenian Empire. This expansion meant that, as Cochrane saw it, the Peloponnesian War was a world war.³⁰ The settlement of 446/5 BC allowed for arbitration through an appeal to a court acceptable to both parties. Sparta ignored this clause (1.88) and Athens appealed to it (1.140). Therefore, Thucydides’ account of the outbreak of the war focused on conflicting interpretations of the treaty, but behind these negotiations lay the subterranean forces, economic, moral, and spiritual either for or against Hellenism.³¹ No matter the strength of their international institutions and laws the Greeks never found a way of escaping their individual natures and interests.

In the peculiar conditions of the Hellenic world, it had become obvious to leaders of thought and action that a certain degree of socialization was the price of survival, and this had not without toil and stress been achieved. It had expressed itself in two ways, partly through the evolution of individual city states, partly also through the inter-state

²⁷ Cochrane (1965: 57–59).

²⁸ Cochrane (1965: 60–63).

²⁹ Cochrane (1965: 65).

³⁰ Cochrane (1965: 71).

³¹ Cochrane (1965: 115).

relations which had been developed mainly as the result of contacts which Hellas had established with the surrounding barbarism, and the consequent pressure which the barbarians had exerted upon Hellenism. Scientifically, therefore, law, whether that of the city or that which governs relations between cities, is, so to speak, the institutional clothing of interests.³²

The inability of the Greek system of international law to accommodate these various interests would prove disastrous. Under the pressure of the war, interests reverted back to the pursuit of power and profit. Athens, in particular, fell prey to this reversion to the baser instincts of human nature. Democracy, Cochrane noted, was founded by Cleisthenes on the notion of consent. The empire, similarly, was, initially at least, based on the notion of consent because it 'had implied a real reconciliation of interests between rulers and ruled, while the predominant position which Athens occupied in the confederacy was merely the reflection of her predominant power to promote the welfare of the whole (i.75)'.³³ Yet by 415 BC, after the Athenians had invaded Melos, they had abandoned all appeals to consent and all attempts to unify diverse interests in their empire. Instead they revert to the theory that might is right as laid out in the Melian Dialogue. 'The appeal of the Melians, whether to expediency or to justice, was pathetically ineffectual.'³⁴ At this point, Cochrane despairs of the Athenian attitude and imagines Thucydides doing the same. The Athenian position failed to assert any authority beyond that of the spear and the trireme. Therefore, 'while it expressed correctly enough the formal character of law, namely, that to exist in any real sense it must be enforceable, it nevertheless ignored the equally important consideration that the mere possibility of enforcement does not exhaust, or even touch, the real significance of law'.³⁵ In other words, Athens had forgotten the truth, built into the foundations of their democracy, that for law to be valid it must incorporate consent. In recognising the weakness of the Athenian position Thucydides emerged a keen observer of the realities of political order and power.

With regard to the contention that might is right it is not legitimate to assume that Thucydides accepted the validity of the Athenian position any more than that, when he described the subsequent fate of the

³² Cochrane (1965: 112).

³³ Cochrane (1965: 114).

³⁴ Cochrane (1965: 113).

³⁵ Cochrane (1965: 114).

Melians, he meant to imply that he regarded their fate as just. In the long run, indeed, it was the Melian position which was finally vindicated by events. All that Athenian policy was able to achieve at Melos was to make a desert and call it a peace.

Here we come to Cochrane's notion of the limits and the weaknesses of Thucydides' scientific inquiry with a quotation taken from the speech of Calgacus before the battle of Mons Graupius from Tacitus' *Agricola* (30.6). Cochrane had described the great strengths of Thucydides' empirical project in describing the evolution of Greek political orders, the causes of the Peloponnesian War, and the effect of that on the decline of those orders. But Thucydides could offer no solution to the insoluble problems of Greek politics. Namely their failure to reconcile the interests of great men and individual *poleis* on the international plane. Athens, and many other Greek states, had resorted simply to the enforceability of international law (and their particular interests) to the detriments of justice and stability. Sparta, by ignoring the Peace of 446/5 BC, had done much the same. Thucydides had no clear notion of how (or even if) justice could be firmly established among the Greek *poleis*.

In this essay we have endeavoured to discover what is meant by the expression *science of history*, and also to elucidate the scope and limitations of the scientific point of view. In so doing, while we have claimed a definite field as coming within the purview of science, we have at the same time recognized that there are certain considerations with which science cannot deal, and which therefore belong to religion and philosophy.³⁶

The limitations Cochrane eluded to here are not Thucydides' humanity. As we saw above, Thucydides may describe a world of Realpolitik and power but he was not immune to the suffering of his fellow Greeks. Rather, it was Thucydides' inability to offer any solution or answer to the ills that afflicted Greece. For sure, in Cochrane's interpretation, Thucydides had taken from the Hippocratica a methodology that (quite brilliantly) described the evolution of Greece, her political structures, and the causes of the war that tore her world apart. But, unlike Hippocrates the doctor, Thucydides could offer no cure or medicine. All he could do was describe the symptoms in the hope that his readers might be able to do the same for their own society's breakdown.

³⁶ Cochrane (1965: 176).

The war, by disrupting those conditions [of life], swept away the norms or standards of conduct painfully erected by men to meet the conditions of peace, and so gave rise to a problem of suffering which science can merely note, but which it is the task of philosophy to explain.³⁷

Cochrane echoed this thought in a personal letter written to a fellow Canadian classicist, Maurice Hutton, soon after the publication of *Science and History*.

If I am right in connecting [Thucydides] with the Hippocratics, then his real achievement was the discovery of a method which may for our purpose be called scientific [...] I did not mean to set [Thucydides] on a pedestal further than in crediting him with the application of this idea to the study of society and the net result is to show the very definite limitation of the scope of science and widen immensely the field which belongs to faith. I have been greatly troubled for example by a good deal of modern science, and I think the source of the confusion in my mind and in the mind of many others is that what is merely a way of looking at the world is by many scientists taken to be the way of looking at the world, all others being ruled out.³⁸

In this letter we see that Cochrane's motivation to write about Thucydides is rooted in his concern with the contemporary world. This concern is not explicitly to do with his experience of the Great War or even of the British Empire. Rather Cochrane is worried that the modern scientific way of thinking is crowding out all other patterns of thought. Beer explained that after he had written about Thucydides, Cochrane similarly tried to argue that Machiavelli's approach was 'scientific' in a paper that was not published at the time, similarly suggesting that the Machiavellian world view was limited and needed to admit philosophy or faith to answer society's ills. His aim in probing this question of science in the philosophy of history is to refute contemporary thinkers who tried to extract from history a 'general law of progress' that was then used as the basis for social reform. Cochrane here mentions the 'petty' prohibition of alcohol in the USA. The study of Thucydides and Machiavelli is far removed from this practical goal, but it lays the groundwork in the sense that Cochrane explored how 'scientific' thinkers thought of politics and history before modern laws of evolution and progress had become current. The study of these thinkers was crucial but insufficient on its own. Cochrane turned to

³⁷ Cochrane 1965: 137.

³⁸ Quoted by Beer in Cochrane & Beer (2017: 6).

Christianity and particularly Augustine, as we shall see below, for an alternative to the ‘scientific’ view.

3. Thucydides and Christianity

In *Christianity and Classical Culture* Cochrane examined what he terms the ‘problem of power’. Taking the Augustan peace as the summation of the Greco-Roman political project, he argued that despite the diversity among classical thinkers they all shared in an ‘overarching desire’ to find a permanent and final philosophy of politics that would ensure order and peace: ‘The effort of Classicism was [...] an effort to rescue mankind from the life and mentality of the jungle, and to secure for him the possibility of a good life. That is to say it was envisaged as a struggle for civilization against barbarism and superstition.’³⁹ Augustus’ solution to the chaos of the Roman civil wars was to turn to a ‘creative politics’ in which his vision of *Romanitas* came to stabilise the culture and politics of the empire. In short, if successful, Augustus would have (and for three centuries succeeded) in rescuing mankind from the ‘mentality of the jungle’ and secured ‘the possibility of a good life’.⁴⁰ The difficulty for Cochrane was (in his words) that:

It is an exaggeration to describe [the political programme of the Caesars] as one of regeneration for [their] deeply decayed country. What Julius accomplished was rather a task of social and political reconstruction, and this was inspired by ideas, all of which fell within the ambit of Greco-Roman thinking, which hardly contemplated, even in a metaphorical sense, the notion of rebirth.⁴¹

Cochrane went on to explain that Augustan (and indeed classical) statecraft could only (re)construct, it could not regenerate, since the ‘material with which it deals consists of native moral and spiritual forces which are presupposed in all forms of activity’.⁴² The Augustan political programme was simply one of social mechanics; ‘to describe it as one of regeneration is to subscribe to one of the most dangerous fallacies of the political mind’.⁴³ Classical thought, including Thucydides, had therefore sought peace and stability but had not been able to articulate how to achieve the

³⁹ Cochrane (1957: 160), quoted in Beer (2020).

⁴⁰ Cochrane (1957: 160), quoted in Beer (2020).

⁴¹ Cochrane (1957: 7).

⁴² Cochrane (2017: 264).

⁴³ Cochrane (1957: 7).

regeneration of political orders and structures. Cochrane condemned classical politics for its pretension to claims of political salvation, which, he believed, it could never achieve as Greco-Roman thinkers were solely focused on achieving the good life in this world. It was not until the coming of Christianity and, in particular, Augustine that new possibilities emerged. Classical thought remained important but deficient.

As the Christians (somewhat ungenerously) put it, the best approach to truth is through a study of error. And from this standpoint it cannot be denied that the great classics were one and all splendid sinners. Their work thus constitutes a 'possession for ever', if not quite in the sense they imagined, at any rate as an imperishable record of thought and aspiration in what must always be regarded as a chapter of unique importance in human experience.⁴⁴

Cochrane's fullest discussion of the strengths of Thucydides' thought in *Christianity and Classical Culture* is in chapter 12 on *Divine Necessity and Human History*. There Cochrane explored the differences between the classical approach to historiography, typified by Herodotus and particularly Thucydides, and the Christian, typified by Augustine. He wrote that: 'the divergence between Christianity and Classicism was in no respect more conspicuously or emphatically displayed than with regard to history; in a very real sense indeed it marked the crux of the issue between the two'.⁴⁵ Before we consider Cochrane's thoughts on Thucydides in *Christianity and Classical Culture* we should first note his depiction of Herodotus, as these two authors formed the two poles which, in Cochrane's presentation, encompassed most of the Graeco-Roman historical tradition. Cochrane imagined that Herodotus' world view was shaped by Ionian science, and in particular Heraclitus. From these thinkers, Herodotus took the view that nature is defined by matter, made up of the constituent elements of air, water, fire, and earth. These elements are in constant motion in time and space, creating a *kosmos* that is in eternal flux. Bodies in nature represent a balance (harmony) of these different elements, but also undergo strife among themselves, as for example in the antithesis between day and night, winter and summer, black and white, cold and hot.⁴⁶ Heraclitean notions of matter even give Herodotus a sense that time is a thing and therefore is itself a cause of motion. Herodotus, therefore, viewed all history through an Ionian

⁴⁴ Cochrane (1957: vii).

⁴⁵ Cochrane (1957: 457).

⁴⁶ Cochrane (1957: 459–460).

materialistic lens, which explained the causes and course of events. 'Seen in the light of Heraclitean principles, the characteristic features of Herodotus' cosmology assume fresh significance. In the first place it may be noted that his cosmos is spatial. It thus includes the whole extent of the habitable world together with its natural divisions considered both in relation to one another and to a general scheme of orientation, for the issue to be discussed is envisaged as merely the culminating phase of a perpetual conflict between "East" and "West".'⁴⁷

Thucydides took his philosophical inspiration, so Cochrane supposes, from the Hippocratics, giving him a very different view of motion and necessity in human affairs. Cochrane argued that Thucydides adopted from the Hippocratics the idea that human nature is organic and possesses a real if but limited capacity for 'creative thought and activity'.⁴⁸ Humans, in Cochrane's reading of Thucydides, therefore, may possess both intellectual (*synesis*, *gnome*) and moral (*andreia*) prowess. Understanding these qualities allowed Thucydides to categorise the 'reactions' (Cochrane names fear, dread of poverty, weakness, and distress), which define an unchanging human nature and drive man's desire to either dominate his fellows or submit to enslavement in order to preserve the material necessities of life. The conjunction of this analysis of the nature of man with a firm empirical grasp of the environment in which history unfolds, led Thucydides to uncover an unending struggle in human affairs:

To the historian this life presents itself as a continuous and unending struggle. For man, as a cause, is confronted always by circumstances or the environment. This environment is partly physical, partly psychical and moral. It thus includes geographical elements such as land and sea, the varied possibilities of which he must learn to exploit. But it is also customary and institutional, the 'atmosphere', *e.g.*, of Athens or Sparta created and maintained by their respective ways of life; the 'conditions' produced whether by peace or war. In this connection we may recall the observation that 'war is a harsh master which, by withdrawing the easy provision of daily wants, assimilates the disposition of men to their necessities'. Accordingly, the movement of human life consists of doing and suffering, of response to stimuli which it seeks to understand and control. And, since the probability is that men will respond to similar stimuli in a similar way, there arise uniformities or sequences of behaviour which may be discerned alike in individuals and in groups.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cochrane (1957: 460).

⁴⁸ Cochrane (1957: 471).

⁴⁹ Cochrane (1957: 471).

Cochrane's Thucydides, therefore, envisages society as in a sustained political endeavour to secure the moral and economic basics of life. However, this society is at all times liable to outside shocks, which throw it off balance and may come close to destroying society itself. Cochrane pointed at the plague, which ravaged Athens, *stasis*, the demagogy of Cleon, and the propensity of the war itself to create and worsen shocks to the body politic. The view of Thucydides in *Christianity and Classical Culture* is broadly speaking the same, if a little darker, than that found in *Science of History*. No doubt Cochrane had come to see his intellectual task as all the more urgent as the rise of Fascism and Nazism led to the outbreak of the Second World War. The story Thucydides has to tell becomes the tale of 'human reason defeated by the forces of irrationality'.⁵⁰

These forces manifest themselves in war-time Athens when the democracy, freed from control by its natural leaders, oscillates to the wildest impulses of pity and terror, hatred and greed, and plunges from the excesses of blind hope to those of equally blind despair. They are evident also in states like Corcyra where, with the dissolution of communal spirit, they vent themselves in class-conflict and internecine strife. And, in either case, they find their chief embodiment in individuals who, inspired by no motives higher than those of self-aggrandizement, avarice, and ambition, set themselves to lead the dance of death.⁵¹

Cochrane here came close to an idea of Thucydides that shares much common ground, rather surprisingly, with that of Cornford, who had similarly drawn attention to the role of irrationality (or chance) in Thucydides to blindness as one of the steps in Thucydides' 'tragic' vision of politics.⁵² However, Cochrane's deeper point is that Thucydides, for all his scientific acumen, had no real explanation for the role of the 'incalculable' in human affairs. Harnessed to a scientific rationality Thucydides could only describe incalculable events as contingent or accidental. This dependency on the contingent left the path clear for Polybius to claim that the role of the incalculable in history was in fact the work of providence (*Tyche*).

⁵⁰ Cochrane (1957: 473).

⁵¹ Cochrane (1957: 473).

⁵² Earley (2020: 23–52).

It is but a short step from the worship of ‘fortune’ to that of ‘fortune’s favourites’, and the identification of the two is a mere matter of empirical judgement, depending upon the association of ideas. Once rehabilitated as a positive force in human affairs, the concept served to account for the most stupendous development of the centuries, the rise of Rome to world-power. Having thus been identified with the ‘manifest destiny’ of the Eternal City, it was by an easy process transferred to that of the Caesars and, with this dismal conclusion, the quest for a principle of historical intelligibility came to an ignominious end.⁵³

In other words, what had begun with Thucydides’ inability to understand properly the intelligible in human affairs ended with the Greco-Roman worship of *Tyche/Fortuna*. It fell to Augustine to dispense with the Thucydidean and Graeco-Roman concern with fortune in history. In its place, he emphasised a Christian divine providence.⁵⁴ Cochrane allowed that Augustine saw many historical events as seemingly the product of chance, but the North African churchman went on to explain that the apparent independence of the accidental or contingent merely reflected the historian’s inability to comprehend the connections involved. This does not mean, however, that events need be ascribed an arbitrary or erratic cosmic force. ‘Indeed, as a manifestation of divine providence it [fortune] constitutes an essential part of the necessity of things (*necessitas rerum*).’⁵⁵ The reduction of fortune as a guiding historical force allows Augustine, in Cochrane’s reading, to accept the holy Trinity and the *logos* of Christ as the principle of time, order, and motion in human history.⁵⁶ Time, space, and matter are not gods, but gifts from God, through (or with) which he created everything and shaped the progressive nature of history.

Augustine’s dismissal of Thucydidean notions of fortune did not mean that there was no value in Thucydides’ outlook to the Christian view. Cochrane explained that Augustine saw human history as divided between two cities: the city of Christ and the city of the Devil. This division comprehended the entire human race and the whole of human history. It rested on the difference between the two cities in their respective desires. The city of the Devil, secular society, aimed at the love of self even to the point of contempt for God. The city of Christ, the divine society, aimed at the love of God to the point of contempt for the self.

⁵³ Cochrane (1957: 474).

⁵⁴ Cochrane (1957: 479).

⁵⁵ Cochrane (1957: 479–480).

⁵⁶ Cochrane (1957: 482).

Thucydides, and all other Greco-Roman thinkers, had erred in believing that they could make the city of the Devil secure using only worldly means. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in seeking to understand the former Augustine fell back on a vision of human history that seemingly owed much to Thucydides, since it focused on ‘associations of mortals’, associations which are often divided against themselves and in which the strong oppress the weaker. As Cochrane noted in his own translation of Augustine: ‘The vanquished submits to the victor, because he prefers peace and safety on whatever terms to mastery or even to freedom, so that those who have chosen to die rather than be slaves have always excited the greatest wonder’.⁵⁷ Cochrane did not say explicitly at this moment that this line recalls the Melian Dialogue, but he then continues in his own voice:

By thus rewriting Thucydides in a no less realistic spirit, Augustine denies the pretensions of philosophic idealism as enunciated by the Ciceronian Scipio who, in the *De re publica*, had defined the commonwealth ‘as the interest of the people, the people being a group (*coetus multitudinis*) associated together by the tie of common advantage (*utilitatis communione*) and by a common sense of right (*iuris consensu*)’. ‘For how’, he asks, ‘can there be right where there is no justice?’⁵⁸

The Greeks and Romans therefore saw no distinction between justice and the justice of the *polis*. But this is problematic. Cochrane elaborated on this point with a discussion of Alexander the Great’s treatment of groups of pirates who he defeated in the Eastern Mediterranean. He pointed out that there was no difference between the justice Alexander the Great claimed when he defeated the pirates and the justice those pirates themselves pursued. Both sought simply to acquire property, wealth, and power, albeit on very different scales. Alexander the Great here represented the *polis* and the pirates a group simply bound together by common advantage. Yet despite the difference in political scale and legitimacy both groups share a similar view of justice. Augustine’s view of the limits of the *polis*, that it could only ever provide for what Cochrane calls ‘exterior man’, demonstrated the inability of the classical state to provide salvation to humanity. In acknowledging Thucydides’ value, therefore, Cochrane subtly hinted at the greater value of the Augustinian or Christian view of human affairs. There can be no justice in Thucydides’

⁵⁷ Cochrane (1957: 490–491).

⁵⁸ Cochrane (1957: 491).

Greece, torn apart as it was by the Peloponnesian War, except that of the strong pitted against the weak. Augustine's realism leads to the recognition that no city or political order could ever provide a true refuge for man, instead true salvation and 'power cometh from on high'. The powerful, therefore, would in Cochrane's interpretation do well to put aside the Thucydidean vision of politics and instead adopt Augustine's 'realistic' ideas of the role of the divine in reconstituting order.

In the final chapter of *Christianity and Classical Culture* Cochrane argued that while regeneration is not a function of the state, Augustine still urged Christians to engage with politics at all levels. This is because Augustine was a Christian realist, who recognised that there could be no safety or refuge in the earthly realm. Nor could politics ever protect people from the effects of change and novelty. Instead, Augustine accepted that man must undertake a pilgrimage, a *peregrinatio*, through the wilderness until, in Cochrane's phrase, 'the consummation of all things' comes about through religious revelation.

4. Conclusion

There is little doubt that Cochrane saw Thucydides' work as constituting 'a monumental chapter in the ideology of *Machtpolitik*'.⁵⁹ In this sense Cochrane is little different from many other Thucydidean critics from the first half of the twentieth century, such as George F. Abbott, Arnold Toynbee, and J. Enoch Powell who similarly had drawn attention to Thucydides' realism and Realpolitik.⁶⁰ Thucydides' description of power politics had obvious attractions to scholars living in a world torn apart by the Great War and now facing the rise of Fascism, Stalinism, and Nazism. However, Cochrane stands apart from many of the other commentators of his day. First of all he does not force parallels between Thucydides' depiction of the Peloponnesian War and the politics of the 1920s and 30s. Cochrane was no doubt alive to the parallels between a world divided by Athens and Sparta, democracy and oligarchy, and the contest between liberalism and authoritarianism that characterised his own historical moment. Yet he had a much more ambitious aim in mind. He wished to elucidate a Thucydidean vision of politics in his 1929 monograph to explain to readers how the Athenian's approach might be used to critique the weak response of liberalism to contemporary political challenges. At the same time, Cochrane also pointed to the deficiencies in Thucydides'

⁵⁹ Cochrane (1957: 472).

⁶⁰ I have argued for the importance of realism in the ideas of Abbott and Toynbee and Realpolitik in Powell in Earley (2020).

scientific approach to history; namely its inability to reimagine society and play any role in the regeneration of the political world, a task that was ultimately left to Augustine.

This chapter opened by noting that many scholars have been less than convinced by Cochrane's claim that Thucydides was a scientist. I have sought neither to support nor refute this contention. However, I have attempted to understand the implications of why Cochrane was making such a claim in his broader intellectual project. The key implications of Cochrane's reading of Thucydides are important in assessments of the Athenian historian's place in the development of Greco-Roman thought and the emerging approaches to history and statecraft in antiquity. However, by pitting Thucydides (and classical thought in general) alongside and against later Christian thought Cochrane could more precisely assess the value of the former to the contemporary world as a scientist and historian.

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JOHN ENOCH POWELL, THUCYDIDES,
AND HISTORICAL ANALOGY*

— IVAN MATIJAŠIĆ —

ABSTRACT

At the Annual General Meeting of the Classical Association in 1936, the young classical scholar and future politician John Enoch Powell (1912–1998) read a paper titled ‘The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies’. A typewritten version of the paper is preserved at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge. It is now published for the first time in the appendix to this chapter, which discusses Powell’s paper and sets it within the wider intellectual and historical context of the 1930s. Powell makes some insightful analogies between the present political situation and the composition of Thucydides’ History, inspired by Schwartz’ Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides (1919), but also by his awareness of the situation in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. He also considers the moral interpretations of some important Thucydidean passages (esp. the Melian Dialogue: Thuc. 5.84–114) and shows a ‘realist’ approach to Thucydides. Powell’s paper displays his interest in contemporary politics, a strong historical diachronic perspective, and an analysis of scholarly works on Thucydides through the lenses of twentieth-century ideologies.

KEYWORDS

*John Enoch Powell, Paul Maas, Giorgio Pasquali,
Eduard Schwartz, Melian dialogue*

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1. Introduction

On a Saturday morning in early January 1936 at Westminster School in London, the members of the Classical Association gathered for the last day of the Annual General Meeting. At 11 am, a young man of 23 took the stage and delivered a paper titled ‘The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies’. The young man was John Enoch Powell, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and one of the rising stars of British classical scholarship. In this chapter I will discuss Powell’s unpublished paper setting it against the background of Powell’s academic and political career and exploring its significance for Thucydidean scholarship.

But before tackling Powell’s paper, a brief introduction to our main character. John Enoch Powell was born in Birmingham in 1912. He was educated at King Edward VI School for Boys in Birmingham and obtained a scholarship to attend Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1930. He was a brilliant, if somewhat eccentric, student, and collected several important academic prizes. He was elected Fellow under Title A at Trinity in 1934 — a fixed-term, very competitive, and prestigious position. He obtained the Chair of Greek at the University of Sydney in early 1938 at the age of 25, and was designated Professor of Greek at Durham University from January 1940. However, when war broke out on 1 September 1939, Powell handed in his resignation, took the first flight back to England, and enlisted in the army. He concluded the war as a Brigadier in the Intelligence Corps, an extraordinary feat for someone who entered the war as a private soldier. However, after his hopes to become viceroy of India were shattered by the announcement of the appointment of Lord Mountbatten on 20 February 1947, Powell opted for a career in politics in the Conservative Party. He was elected MP for Wolverhampton South-West in the 1950 general election and remained continuously at Westminster until 1987. His political career has been controversial and divisive to say the least: his 1968 Rivers of Blood speech is still one of the best known and discussed political speeches of post-WW2 British politics.¹ Powell’s glaring eyes, thrilling voice, and villain’s moustache made his physical presence both hypnotic and sinister. It has been reported that Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1963, could not stand having Powell opposite him in cabinet looking ‘like Savonarola eyeing one of the more disreputable popes’.²

¹ The most comprehensive biography of Powell is to be found in Heffer (1998). For his academic career: Todd (1995), Todd (2000), Matijašić (2020a), Matijašić (2020b).

² The phrase is quoted by Ferdinand Mount (2019: 3). I wish to thank Rowland Smith for this reference.

2. Powell's Published and Unpublished Papers on Thucydides

This paper is not about Powell's political career, which has been studied in recent years, not least thanks to the documents collected in the Churchill Archives Centre.³ Instead, it will focus on his academic career, and especially the years 1930 to 1939, which is when war broke out and he abandoned academia for good, even though he continued to do some occasional academic work until the early 1950s.⁴ He published his first article, in German, in 1931 and by 1940 he had published 48 articles in various international journals. He was also the author of several books: *The Rendel Harris Papyri of Woodbrooke College, Birmingham* (Cambridge, 1936); *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938); an edition of *Herodotus VIII* (Cambridge, 1939); *The History of Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1939). He also translated Herodotus' Ionic Greek into the English of the King James Bible: two volumes were published by Oxford Clarendon Press in 1949.

As evidently displayed by this list of books and editions, the young Powell devoted much of his initial academic attention to Herodotus, but he also managed to revise H.S. Jones' text and *apparatus criticus* of Thucydides for an Oxford Classical Texts edition that eventually appeared in 1942. Between 1934 and 1939 he published seven articles on Thucydidean textual criticism and manuscript tradition and five book reviews on books related to Thucydides.⁵

What he managed to publish is only a little portion of his Thucydidean studies. Both the Wren Library of Trinity College, Cambridge and the

³ See Cosgrave (1989), Schofield (2013), and Corthorn (2019).

⁴ Cf. Matijašić (2020a).

⁵ Powell's published articles on Thucydides: 'Studies on the Greek Reflexive — Thucydides', *CQ* 28 (1934), 159–174; 'The Aldine Scholia to Thucydides', *CQ* 30 (1936), 146–150; 'The A Manuscript of Thucydides', *CR* 50 (1936), 117–118; 'The Bâle and Leyden Scholia to Thucydides', *CQ* 30 (1936), 80–93; 'A Byzantine Critic', *CR* 52 (1938), 2–4; 'The Archetype of Thucydides', *CQ* 32 (1938), 75–79; 'The Cretan Manuscripts of Thucydides', *CQ* 32 (1938), 103–108. Moreover, he published a short abstract of his 'The Papyri and the Text of Thucydides' in the *Actes du V Congrès International de Papyrologie* (Brussels, 1938), 344, and the summary of 'The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies', *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 33 (1936), 41–42, which will be discussed in detail below. Powell's reviews of books on Thucydides: R. Zahn, *Die erste Periklesrede* (Leipzig, 1934) in *CR* 48 (1934), 238; A. Grossinsky, *Das Programm des Thukydides* (Berlin, 1936) in *CR* 50 (1936), 174–175; H. Patzer, *Das Problem der Geschichtsschreibung des Thukydides* (Berlin, 1937) in *CR* 51 (1937), 173–174; J. Ros, *Die ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ (variatio) als Stilprinzip des Thukydides* (Paderborn, 1938) in *CR* 53 (1939), 13; V. Bartoletti, *Per la storia del testo di Tucidide* (Florence, 1937) in *Gnomon* 15 (1939), 281–282 (in German).

Churchill Archives Centre of Churchill College, Cambridge preserve several unpublished papers that Powell donated to these two institutions. Among the boxes at the Wren Library there are lecture notes on Thucydides, a ‘Proposal for an Edition of Thucydides’ dated 5 June 1937, translations of passages from the Athenian historian, photographic reproductions, and collations of Thucydides manuscripts.

The Churchill Archives Centre preserves the following unpublished papers on Thucydides by Powell:

1. ‘The Moral and Historical Principles of Thucydides and their Influence in Later Antiquity’, Fellowship dissertation, POLL 1/6/24: 162 typed pages;⁶
2. ‘The Moral and Political Ideas of Thucydides’, POLL 1/6/21: 17 typed pages;
3. ‘The Papyri and the Text of Thucydides’, POLL 1/6/19: 9 typed pages, which was presented at the papyrological congress in Oxford in 1937;
4. ‘The Manuscripts of Thucydides at Venice and Cambridge’, POLL 1/6/24: 62 typed pages;
5. ‘The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies’, POLL 1/6/19: 18 typed pages.⁷

These are all typewritten texts that Powell diligently transcribed from his own notes and left in tidy order in his personal archive, which he bequeathed to the Churchill Archives Centre. He never published these works not because they were not valuable pieces of scholarship, but rather because of personal reasons: the war changed his life for good. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he interacted with young scholars working on Herodotus and Thucydides — such as Bertrand Hemmerdinger, Mortimer Chambers, Jacqueline de Romilly, Haim B. Rosén⁸ — and published the translation of Herodotus for OUP in 1949 after a thorough revision of the text and frequent exchanges with Paul Maas. But he never went back to working full-time on Thucydides. For this reason, it seems important to make these unpublished papers available: they are valuable documents related to Powell’s biography and career, as well as for the history of classical scholarship and Thucydidean scholarship more broadly.

⁶ Powell (1934).

⁷ Powell (1936d).

⁸ Several letters by these scholars are preserved among Powell’s papers. For a study of his correspondence with Hemmerdinger: Matijašić (2020a).

3. The Italian Sojourns

His work on Thucydides and Thucydidean manuscripts allowed him to visit Italy in the early 1930s. Between 1933 and 1936 — before and during his Fellowship at Trinity — Powell repeatedly visited libraries in Venice, Florence, Parma, Rome, Turin, and Naples.⁹ ‘He became fluent in the language [Italian]. [...] He saw the realities of Fascism, which further confirmed his view of the likelihood of war.’¹⁰

In May 1935 Powell attended the International Congress of Papyrology in Florence where he read a paper on the papyri of the Rendel Harris Collection at Woodbrooke College in Birmingham. He published a short article in the congress’ proceedings and his edition of the Rendel Harris Papyri in the same year.¹¹ Powell recalled his experience in Florence many years later when asked about his acquaintance and relation with the German textual critic Paul Maas. In a letter dated 10 October 1984 to Eckart Mensching, the author of Maas’ biography, Powell wrote:

I attended the biennial International Congress of Papyrology in Florence in May 1935, and after reading a paper to the Congress in Italian was taken off by Prof. Pasquali along with other scholars attending the Congress to a restaurant, where we conversed in Italian. On being complimented on my Italian, I replied that my German was better, whereupon we switched to German, and I remarked that the company might be surprised to know that my first German reading book was Wagner’s libretti. Thereupon a slight figure at the end of the table, thitherto silent and immobile, started into energetic interest. Paul Maas and I immediately discovered a common interest in Wagner [...] and in textual criticism. [...] We adopted *Du und Dich*, and our acquaintance had ripened into the greatest intellectual romance of my life, the intercourse with a mind whose judgment I was willing to accept as superior to my own.¹²

Powell’s friendship with Maas continued in the years prior to the outbreak of the war, and it was Powell who obtained a visa for the Jewish scholar to enable him to expatriate in late August 1939.¹³ Maas spent the

⁹ The Wren Library preserves several letters from the directors of Italian libraries granting Powell access to their manuscripts.

¹⁰ Heffer (1998: 21).

¹¹ Powell (1936b), (1936c).

¹² Mensching (1987: 121); cf. also Mensching (1987: 43–44). The transcription of the correspondence with Mensching is preserved in the Churchill Archives Centre.

¹³ For more details on the journey see Mensching (1987: 71–73). Cf. Heffer (1998: 48), even though there are some inaccuracies in his account.

rest of his life in the UK and died in Oxford in 1964. He was a fundamental figure for classical scholarship and for Oxford University Press in the post-war period, and collaborated with Powell on his translation of Herodotus, published by OUP in 1949.

Going back to those spring days in 1935 in Florence, we have an exceptional witness that recorded Powell's participation in the social events on the fringes of the papyrological conference. Giorgio Pasquali — the eminent Italian classicist and author of the *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (1934)¹⁴ — wrote an account of the conference for the literary magazine *Pan*, directed by the Fascist art critic and journalist Ugo Ojetti:¹⁵

But in other respects too, the greatest benefit of this, as of every other conference, is not to be found in the communications. Even those who remained silent during the sessions were able to discuss problems privately with highly competent colleagues whom they had known until then only by letter or name. I found very useful a conversation on the methods of textual criticism held with the most competent judge in this field (who is both the best living metricist and a great connoisseur of Greek poetry and a man, even though he was a professor, especially benevolent), Paul Maas: our friends Castiglioni and Terzaghi were present and participating, as well as a big Welsh boy who has already demonstrated his critical ingenuity, both acute and balanced, Enoch Powell; the memory of those two morning hours will not soon be erased from my memory.¹⁶

It is telling that Pasquali referred obliquely to the fact that Maas, being Jewish, was expelled from university by the Nazis, 'even though he was a

¹⁴ Martin L. West, in the bibliographical note to his *Textual Criticism and Editorial Techniques*, mentioned Pasquali's *Storia della tradizione* alongside Havet's *Manuel de critique verbale* (1911) and Fränkel's *Einleitung zur kritischen Ausgabe der Argonautika des Apollonios* (1964), and wrote: 'Any of these may be read with considerable profit, especially Pasquali's wise opus' (West (1973: 6)).

¹⁵ For Ojetti's biography: Cerasi (2013).

¹⁶ Pasquali (1935: 292): 'Ma anche per altri aspetti il profitto maggiore di questo, come di ogni altro congresso, non si assomma nelle comunicazioni. Anche chi nelle sedute tacque, poté discutere privatamente problemi con colleghi competentissimi, che conosceva sino allora di lettera o di nome. A me è riuscita molto utile una conversazione sui metodi della critica testuale tenuta con il giudice più competente in tale materia (che è insieme il miglior metrico vivente e un grande conoscitore di poesia greca e un uomo, benché sia stato professore, singolarmente benevolo), Paul Maas: erano presenti e partecipò gli amici Castiglioni e Terzaghi e un ragazzone gallese che ha già dato prova di ingegno critico acuto insieme ed equilibrato, Enoch Powell; il ricordo di quelle due ore mattutine non si cancellerà presto dalla mia memoria.'

professor' ('benché sia stato professore'), which also ironically implies that university professors are not usually benevolent nor kind.¹⁷ The expression gives us a glimpse of how some Italian scholars in the 1930s coped with the discriminations of the Jews by totalitarian regimes: in this case, by offering oblique references to personal tragedies. Maas was deposed from his Professorship in Königsberg in April 1934 at the age of 53, following the Nazi government's 'Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums' from 7 April 1933.¹⁸

The early 1930s were the years of Mussolini's greatest popularity. In October 1935 Italy declared war on Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and at the end of the conflict, on 9 May 1936, the Italian dictator proclaimed the empire.¹⁹ In an interview conducted by the staff of the Imperial War Museum in 1987, Powell recalled that in 1935 'he asked a senior fellow at Trinity whether his fellowship could be suspended if he chose to go to Abyssinia to fight against the invading Italians'.²⁰ This of course never occurred, but it shows his romantic willingness to take part in a war. His wish would be fulfilled in September 1939.

Powell's Italian sojourns were evidently not only a chance to inspect manuscripts of Thucydides and meet fellow classicists, including Jewish scholars. His reflection on Thucydides was informed by his first-hand experience of Fascism and Nazism, his developing interest for international politics, and his preoccupation for the looming conflict.

4. Powell, Eduard Schwartz, and Thucydides

The focus of this chapter is the paper that Powell presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Classical Association on 4 January 1936 titled 'The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies': the text is printed in the Appendix to the present chapter. A summary was published in the *Proceedings of the Classical Association* in the same year (number 33, pages 41–42) and a report of Powell's most compelling references to Fascism and Nazism was printed on p. 8 of *The Times* on 6 January 1936 ('Thucydides in the Trenches'). However, in scholarly

¹⁷ It reminds me of Gian Biagio Conte's dedication of a book to Adriano Prosperi and Michael D. Reeve, 'friends, even if colleagues'.

¹⁸ See Mensching (1987: 27–32).

¹⁹ De Felice (1974). Cf. Del Boca (1979), Labanca (2002).

²⁰ Quoted in Heffer (1998: 29). The interview is preserved at the Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 1/6/26: see esp. p. 11 of the transcript.

circles it went almost unnoticed, except for a brief mention in Heffer's biography of Powell and in Earley's book *The Thucydidean Turn*.²¹

Let us now turn to Powell's own words at the Classical Association in 1936:

Ladies and Gentlemen, the effect of the late war upon classical scholarship has not in general been a beneficent one. The almost total cessation of work during the war itself, the removal of a rising generation of scholars, the impoverishment of the defeated powers, and latterly, the economic and financial difficulties, which have greatly hindered the free circulation of literature and ideas: all these have been prejudicial to healthy research. [...] Nevertheless, the study of Thucydides has not been among the branches of classical research which have suffered by the war. It may be claimed that on the contrary it has rather profited by it. In mere bulk the Thucydidean literature of the past seventeen years is probably superior to that of any preceding period of equal length, not even excepting the last third of the nineteenth century, the heyday of German scholarship.²²

In the following pages Powell offered a very informed review of the publications that followed the Great War starting with a masterpiece of Thucydidean scholarship: Edward Schwartz' *Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (1919). The book was dedicated to the memory of Schwartz' oldest son, Dr. Phil. Gerhard Schwartz. Born in Rostock on 29 October 1889, where his father was Professor of Greek, Gerhard Schwartz died on 2 November 1914 near the Alsatian town of Markirch (today Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in France), not far from Strasburg where his father had moved since 1913.²³ Schwartz' work on Thucydides was fuelled by the events of the Great War and his son's death. He assumed that Thucydides was compelled to change his views of the war after Athens' defeat in 404 BC. This had great consequences for the composition of Thucydides' *History*: the role of Pericles was re-evaluated, his policy praised in the Funeral oration; the Sicilian episode was written not long after 413, while the Melian Dialogue that precedes it in the latest part of Book 5 was written after the defeat of 404. Thucydides died before he could finish his work. Schwartz believed that the documents included in Book 8 would have been incorporated in the narrative if the author had had the time to revise his text. The book was published in 1919, after Strasburg passed into French hands and Schwartz was forced to leave in haste. But he duly

²¹ See Heffer (1998: 28) and Earley (2020: 131–135).

²² Powell (1936d: 1).

²³ On Schwartz' biography see Momigliano (1979: 999–1005).

noted at the very end of the book: ‘Das Manuskript dieses Buches wurde im September 1917 abgeschlossen und ist im wesentlichen unverändert abgedruckt’ (‘The manuscript of this book was finished in September 1917 and is printed essentially unchanged’).²⁴

Powell was an enthusiast of Schwartz’ work on Thucydides. He expressed his admiration both in his Fellowship dissertation and in the preface to his *The History of Herodotus*.²⁵ He also sent the book to Schwartz in March 1939, less than a year before his death: the enclosed letter, in German, survives.²⁶ In this letter, Powell mentioned his attitude towards the German nation and culture, ‘ein seltsames Gemisch von Liebe und Hass’ (‘a strange mix of love and hate’), and expressed the hope to visit Germany during Fall 1939 ‘falls der Krieg worauf ich hoffe nicht dazwischenkommt’ (‘if war does not come in the way, as I hope it will not’).²⁷ It turned out, war did in fact prevent him travelling to Germany in late 1939.

Powell’s *hate* for Germany is connected to contemporary events and Hitler’s regime (see below), while his *love* for German culture was stimulated by his passion for Nietzsche. He reported to *The Times* on 27 September 1962 (p. 15): ‘In my early twenties I read all Nietzsche — not just the main works but the minor works as well, all of them, and every scrap of published correspondence’. This familiarity with the writings of the great philosopher led him to believe that he had come to understand the German mind: for this reason, he was convinced that in the late 1930s war between the British empire and Germany was inevitable. In January 1936 he wrote:

Let us suppose that in 1925, say, a young Englishman addresses himself to a history of the Great War. It is to be a tragic whole, tracing German imperialism from its roots in the Napoleonic period to the final dissolution in 1918. He has made some progress with this scheme, when events in Europe apprise him that the war of 1914–1918 was only

²⁴ Schwartz (1919: 364). See also the autobiographical text ‘Wissenschaftlicher Lebenslauf’ in Schwartz (1938: 17–18).

²⁵ Powell (1934: 63): ‘But that streak of German war-time feeling which, never obtrusive but present always as an undertone, makes Schwartz’ book the most powerful piece of writing upon Thucydides that exists’; Powell (1939: vii): ‘That in spite of this restriction of my subject I have chosen to entitle this study “The History of Herodotus”, arises from a wish to indicate that I am here trying to do for Herodotus what Eduard Schwartz did for another Greek historian in his brilliant *Geschichtswerk des Thukydides*’.

²⁶ It was published by Mensching (1999).

²⁷ Mensching (1999: 77).

part of a larger contest still undecided. In 1935 and 1936 he occupies himself by recording provisionally the isolated conflicts which verge towards a greater. After which, he becomes a passive spectator, or an active participant, in the final struggle, until, as an elderly man in 1950, he can sit down to depict this greater and now finished whole, conceived as the historically inevitable self-defence and fall of the British Empire, and justifying to the world that humane and consistent policy which nevertheless might appear to have been the cause of the disaster. How much would the original draft require to be manipulated and altered before he admitted it into his finished work! And how great would be the contrast of tone between one stratum and another. This is not a very different situation from that with which we meet in the history of Thucydides, particularly in its first two books.²⁸

These lines can be read from two different yet intertwined perspectives. On the one hand, Powell used Thucydides' historical work to strengthen his own ideas on the inevitability of an impending war that would just be a continuation of the first great conflict of 1914–1918. On the other, he exploited the present situation to support Schwartz' claim that the composition of Thucydides' *History* was radically changed after its author saw the final outcome of the conflict. Readings of Thucydides could also help to imagine future scenarios. There was indeed an Englishman who wrote a book on European history between 1914 and 1949. Ian Kershaw's *To Hell and Back. Europe 1914–1949* deals with the two world wars and the interwar period in a single historical narrative.²⁹ However, Kershaw wrote the book decades after the facts and was not a direct witness to the events of the war, which displays once again the uniqueness of Thucydides the historian: he realised at the outset that the conflict would be a great one and set off to describe its causes, depict its principal protagonists, and narrate the main events. Moses Finley lucidly wrote: 'That war [the Peloponnesian War] lives on not so much for anything that happened or because of any of the participants, but because of the man who wrote its history, Thucydides the Athenian'.³⁰

Thucydides defined the Peloponnesian War as the war between Athens and Sparta and their allies that lasted for 27 years between 431

²⁸ Powell (1936d: 5).

²⁹ Kershaw (2015). It is interesting to recall that Kershaw's initial plan was to end his history with 1945, but then realised that 'the fateful course of the years 1945–9 was so plainly determined by the war itself, and reactions to it, that I thought it justifiable to look beyond the moment when peace officially returned to the continent' (Kershaw (2015: xx)).

³⁰ M.I. Finley in Finley & Warner (1972: 9).

and 404 BC. He identified three distinct phases: the Archidamian War from 431 to the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC; the years of ‘uneasy peace’ with smaller conflicts taking place in various parts of the Greek world,³¹ including the famous siege and destruction of Melos in 416 BC (see below) and the Athenian expedition to Sicily (415–413 BC); finally, the so-called Decelean, or Ionian War, from 413 to the fall of Athens and the destruction of the Long Walls in 404 BC, even though he covered only the events up to 411 and left the work unfinished.³² Whatever Thucydides might have written before 404 regarding the conflict had to be reworked when he realised its true proportions and consequences. ‘Der Krieg hat ihn [Thukydides] zum Historiker gemacht’ (‘It was the war that made Thucydides a historian’), wrote Werner Jaeger.³³ But if the Peloponnesian War made Thucydides a historian, it was Thucydides who created, so to speak, the Peloponnesian War.

5. Imperialism and the Melian Dialogue

Powell argued that the Great War changed scholarly approaches to Thucydides’ work. There was a ‘theoretical detachment’ in pre-war publications such as F.M. Cornford’s *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (1907),³⁴ but the conflict and its moral and political consequences made readers more tolerant towards some of Thucydides’ most harsh judgements. This is especially true for Thucydides’ considerations on the nature of Athenian imperialism, international politics, and the author’s own morality.

³¹ Cf. Thuc. 5.25.3: καὶ ἐπὶ ἕξ ἔτη μὲν καὶ δέκα μῆνας ἀπέσχοντο μὴ ἐπὶ τὴν ἑκατέρων γῆν στρατεῦσαι, ἕξωθεν δὲ μετ’ ἀνοκωχῆς οὐ βεβαίον ἔβλαπτον ἀλλήλους τὰ μάλιστα· ἔπειτα μέντοι καὶ ἀναγκασθέντες λῦσαι τὰς μετὰ τὰ δέκα ἔτη σπονδὰς αὐθις ἐς πόλεμον φανερόν κατέστησαν (‘For six years and ten months the two sides refrained from military operations against each other’s territory, but elsewhere the truce had only tenuous effect and they continued to inflict as much damage on each other as they could. And later on they were compelled to abandon the treaty made after those ten years and resort once more to open war’). The expression ‘uneasy peace’ is used in an important work by Westlake (1971).

³² Cf. Rhodes (2006: 101–154) and Fantasia (2012), two reference works on the history of the Peloponnesian War that rely on Thucydides’ periodisation. See also the chapters included in Section 1 of Balot, Forsdyke & Foster (2017): they follow the schematical division of Thucydides.

³³ Jaeger (1934: 482).

³⁴ Powell (1936d: 8). Cornford’s name does not feature in Powell’s paper, but his audience surely knew who the author of *Thucydides Mythistoricus* was. For Cornford’s biography: Hackforth (2004). For Cornford and Thucydides: Earley (2020: 23–51).

The central point on which any moral estimate of Thucydides must always turn is the Melian Dialogue. And in the opinions expressed about the purpose of this dialogue the change of attitude since the War has been most marked.³⁵

In the summer of 416 BC, the Athenians sent a fleet of 38 ships and 3,000 soldiers to force the inhabitants of the island of Melos, a Dorian settlement, to become a tribute-paying member of their Athenian empire. Before setting up the siege, Thucydides reports that the generals sent delegates to start negotiations with the Melians, and they met the Melian magistrates and oligarchs behind closed doors: the ensuing dialogue, known since antiquity as the Melian Dialogue,³⁶ is one of the most discussed passages in Thucydides' work (Thuc. 5.84–114). It is normally assumed that the dialogue is a Thucydidean invention, but the historical substance of the episode remains open to debate.³⁷ In the dialogue the Athenians urged the Melians to submit or suffer a 'terrible fate' (τὰ δεινότατα παθεῖν),³⁸ while the Melians resisted the Athenians' ultimatum and resorted to justice, divine intervention, and their kinship with the Spartans. The result was that the Athenians set up a siege and in winter 416–415 BC the Melians were forced to surrender: the male population was exterminated, women and children were sold into slavery, and the Melian territory was given to 500 Athenian colonists.

In the pre-war period, most scholars agreed that the Melian Dialogue was a sheer condemnation of Athenian imperialism. There were notable exceptions. One of these exceptions – in addition to the famous remarks on the Melian Dialogue made by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*³⁹ – was the Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge since 1902, J.B. Bury, in the chapters on Thucydides in his

³⁵ Powell (1936d: 9).

³⁶ Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 37–41.

³⁷ See the classic work of de Romilly (1947: esp. 230–259); Woodhead (1970: 3–11); Bosworth (1993); Hornblower (2008: 244). Previous references can be easily gathered from these works. According to Canfora (1992) (cf. also Canfora (2011: 166–192)) Thucydides consciously omitted the fact that Melos was a member of the Athenian empire before defecting, which he assumes from Isoc. *Paneg.* 100–102. Without citing Canfora, Seaman (1997: 409) states: '[...] there is no reliable evidence which refutes Thucydides' version of the Athenian expedition to Melos in 416. No ancient source, epigraphic or literary, shows that before 416 Melos was either allied to Sparta or subject to Athens; that she was not in fact both independent and neutral, just as Thucydides tells us.'

³⁸ Thuc. 5.93.

³⁹ Nietzsche (1886: nr. 92). On Nietzsche's readings of Thucydides, and esp. the Melian Dialogue: Zumbrunnen (2002: 246–251); cf. also Jenkins (2011).

lectures at Harvard in 1908, published under the title *Ancient Greek Historians*.⁴⁰ Bury noticed that the dialogue consisted in ‘the elimination of justice from the discussion’ and that, alongside the speech of Diodotus in the Mytilenean debate, it represented a ruthlessly realistic approach to state politics.⁴¹ In Bury there is no condemnation of Athenian imperialism; on the contrary, he saw it as a display of political action and realism.

If Bury’s views were minoritarian before 1914, after that date opinions shifted dramatically. Powell reports, probably from personal knowledge, that Henry Montagu Butler (1833–1918), then Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, ‘wrote to his son in 1915, telling him to “re-read the Melian Dialogue, with Prussia and Belgium as protagonists”’.⁴² Powell, too, indulged in providing some modern parallels:

But if Belgium, or Poland or Ireland (shall I add — Abyssinia?) have been teaching now one people, now another, the lesson of tolerance and an open mind towards Athenian action at Melos and its precipitate in Thucydides — a lesson which English scholars, at any rate, should hardly have needed after the Boer War — that is not the only change in our approach to Thucydides which contemporary events of the last twenty years have produced.⁴³

He continues by examining the importance of sea-power in ancient and modern imperialism: ‘an insular power will be invincible despite all defeats on land so long — but so long only — as it retains undisputed command of the sea’.⁴⁴ In this domain Thucydides was indeed an outstanding teacher, especially in the so-called *Archaiologia*, the *Pentekontaetia*, and Pericles’ first speech. According to Powell, the everlasting Thucydidean law, expressed in many speeches by Athenian politicians, but nonetheless the voice of Thucydides himself, is that ‘an empire once formed is obliged by the inexorable necessity of self-preservation to pursue an imperial policy’.⁴⁵ This was a lesson that the British Empire was compelled to learn during the Great War and especially in the upcoming conflict with Nazi Germany.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Bury (1909: 138–140). For Bury’s biography: Whitby (2004).

⁴¹ Bury (1909: 138).

⁴² Powell (1936d: 9).

⁴³ Powell (1936d: 10).

⁴⁴ Powell (1936d: 10–11). Cf. Momigliano (1944).

⁴⁵ Powell (1936d: 12).

⁴⁶ On sea-power in Thucydides: Kallet-Marx (1993) and Kopp (2017). See also various contributions in Kopp & Wendt (2018).

The problems posed by the Melian Dialogue are also considered in Powell's unpublished Fellowship dissertation 'The Moral and Historical Principles of Thucydides and their Influence in Later Antiquity'.⁴⁷ Here Powell argues, against the opinion of most previous scholars, that an unprejudiced reading of the dialogue shows that both the Athenians' and Melians' standpoints are rational and in line with eternal human nature: the Athenians were compelled to preserve their empire by showing their military superiority; the Melians resisted the Athenians' demands — obstinately but rightly — expecting the aid of the gods and of the Spartans. Schwartz assumed that the Melian Dialogue was conceived after the end of the war and was intended to show the Athenians' arrogance (*ὑβρις*) as a prelude to the Sicilian disaster. Powell went against this opinion and supposed that there is no moral judgement in the depiction of the Athenians' actions at Melos: they acted according to necessity (*ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας*).

The moral issues raised by the Melian Dialogue have intrigued both ancient and modern readers. After discussing the Melian Dialogue and the Mytilenean debate, Powell summed up his opinion on national morality — or lack thereof — in Thucydides' work:

If, now, Thucydides represents nations in any moment of action as but following out logically the consequences of their positions, and that position itself as brought about by the natural forces of human nature, it follows that he believed moral rules inapplicable to the conduct of nations or communities. Often we hear that Thucydides suppresses moral judgments; rather is moral judgment absent from the outset: for his standpoint is Realpolitik, which considers what is, not what ought to be, and views morality and sentiment themselves as but a single force among the many whose interplay makes up the grand, un-moral, or indeed super-moral, sweep of history.⁴⁸

In those same years — from a completely different perspective — Edward H. Carr was considering morality as a concept in the developing field of International Relations. In the famous book *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939*, written just before the outbreak of the war and published in autumn 1939, 'still widely read worldwide and still somewhat shocking to untutored minds',⁴⁹ he questioned the very idea of morality in political sciences. As a former diplomat in the Foreign Office and participant at the

⁴⁷ Powell (1934: 60–68).

⁴⁸ Powell (1934: 75).

⁴⁹ Haslam (2004).

meetings that led to the Versailles treaties in 1919, Carr was convinced that Germany was treated unfairly and did not recognise that Hitler and Nazi Germany represented a menace to world peace.⁵⁰ At the same time he was also a proponent of *Realpolitik*. He considered national and international morality fictitious: the only morality is that of the individual, not of states. ‘Realists’, wrote Carr, ‘... hold that relations between states are governed solely by power and that morality plays no part in them’.⁵¹ This is also Powell’s standpoint when analysing morality in Thucydides. He was not shocked by the lack of moral considerations in the conduct of the Athenian delegates in the Melian Dialogue, and instead viewed their requests as natural and even necessary in the context of imperialism. ‘The whole dialogue’, Powell concludes, ‘is the most elaborately finished piece of work which is to be found in the whole history’.⁵²

6. Thucydides in Italy and Germany

Since Powell was a proponent of a realist reading of Thucydides, he could not but despise pacifist readings, especially Cochrane’s *Thucydides and the Science of History* (1929),⁵³ since he believed that these readings ignored ‘Thucydides’ ceaseless insistence on the changeless trends of human nature and the essential bi-polarity of Greece’.⁵⁴ It is significant that Powell employs the term ‘bi-polarity’: the concept was later discussed by Hans Morgenthau in *American Foreign Policy* in a section that is believed to be largely inspired by Thucydides.⁵⁵

According to Powell, in contemporary Thucydidean studies there is something worse than pacifism, and that is ‘the national creed of modern Germany’. However, before focusing on Nazism, Powell discussed Fascism and the Italians’ attitude towards the study of antiquity after the march on Rome in 1922. In fact, he deemed worthy of explicit mention only Momigliano’s 1929 dissertation on the composition of Thucydides’ *History* (published in 1930) and explained this lack of publications on Athenian classical history with the political climate. During Fascism, Italian scholars tended to focus on the Roman imperial age rather than the Roman republic or the history of the Greek *poleis*, and hence studies

⁵⁰ Cf. Deutscher (1982: 79).

⁵¹ Carr (1939: 153). Woodhead (1970), in his lectures on *Thucydides and the Nature of Power*, similarly claimed that power in Thucydides is neutral and thus amoral.

⁵² Powell (1934: 65).

⁵³ See Earley in this volume, pp. 67–87.

⁵⁴ Powell (1936d: 12–13).

⁵⁵ Morgenthau (1951: 34, 45–52). Cf. Bloxham (2018: 176).

on Thucydides languished. As Momigliano wrote in 1945, ‘il vero male fatto dal Fascismo agli studi di storia antica non sta nelle sciocchezze che si dissero, ma nei pensieri che non furono più pensati’ (‘The real evil done by Fascism to the study of ancient history does not lie in the nonsense that was said, but in the thoughts that were no longer thought out’).⁵⁶ Powell also finds time and space to praise Gaetano De Sanctis whose name must be given ‘the honourable mention of a courageous exception’.⁵⁷ Powell, as well as his audience at Westminster School in London, knew that in 1931 De Sanctis, Professor of Ancient History in Rome, refused to sign the oath of allegiance to Fascism and was consequently ousted from his chair.⁵⁸ Like Paul Maas, albeit in a different context, De Sanctis was the victim of a totalitarian regime.

Powell was a profound connoisseur of German culture: at his own admission, he learned German from Wagner’s libretti and read all of Nietzsche (see above, § 4). He employed his knowledge of German literature combined with his hate for Nazism to formulate a strong opinion on Thucydidean studies under the Nazis:

A peculiar kinship has been detected between the ancient Greeks and modern Germans, the two purest and greatest examples of Aryan humanity. Not only the Greek civilization in general, but Thucydides in particular, has proved exceptionally congenial. The intensely political outlook of Thucydides may be made serviceable to a doctrine which asserts the absolute dominion of the state over every phase of individual existence; and, as the more striking figures of Caesar and Augustus had already been captured as prototypes of Mussolini, Hitler might still be made to look very like Pericles, — or Pericles, rather, too look like Hitler.⁵⁹

Nazi Germany, with its ideological refusal to accept Rome as the centre of civilisation, relied on the romantic and nationalistic idea of a link between the German nation and the ancient Greeks. Political readings of Thucydides in post-war Germany were widespread and indeed encouraged, as shown by the works of Helmut Berve in his *Griechische Geschichte*,

⁵⁶ Momigliano (1950: 105–106). The work was published in a Festschrift for Benedetto Croce, but written between July and November 1945 in Oxford, as recorded in the preliminary footnote to the article itself and in a letter by Momigliano to De Sanctis on 1 July 1945: see Polverini (2006: 30–31).

⁵⁷ Powell (1936d: 13).

⁵⁸ He recalled this episode in his autobiographical writings published posthumously: De Sanctis (1970: 143–157).

⁵⁹ Powell (1936d: 14).

Werner Jaeger in the last chapter of his book *Paideia* (vol. 1), Felix Wassermann's 'Neues Thukydidesbild', and Heinrich Weinstock's essay 'Polis, der griechische Beitrag zu einer deutschen Bildung heute, an Thukydides erläutert', all quoted in Powell's 'The War and Its Aftermath'.⁶⁰

'Great stress', Powell remarks, 'is naturally laid on the famous description of Periclean Athens in II 65 [Thuc. 2.65.9]: ἐγίγνετό τε λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή'.⁶¹ In this synthetic verdict, Thucydides exposes the pitfalls of Athenian democratic government in the age of Pericles, when 'it was a democracy by name, but in fact it was the rule of the leading man'. It follows Pericles' Funeral oration (2.35–46), the description of the plague of 430 BC (2.47–54), the initial difficulties of the Athenians in the war (2.55–59), and Pericles' speech to the enraged Athenians (2.60–64). Pericles' leadership had led the Athenians into an inevitable war with Sparta, but Thucydides' judgement was still largely positive, especially in the light of his successors. The statement that Pericles was the leading man (πρῶτος ἀνὴρ) of the Athenian state has had several readings throughout history, from Thomas Hobbes and the Jansenist Charles Rollin to nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations of democratic Athens.⁶² It has been equated with the *princeps*, a category created centuries later by Augustus.⁶³ But Augustus and imperial Rome were already the prerogative of Mussolini and Fascism, while the kinship between the ancient Greeks and modern Germans, established already in the nineteenth century, allowed Nazi ideologists to connect the Thucydidean Pericles with Adolf Hitler.

7. Analogy as an Historical Tool

Analogy is a powerful tool in historical analysis. Thucydides' text has often been employed to construct analogies between past events that he described and present situations.⁶⁴ We have seen this mechanism taking place in Powell's reasoning regarding Thucydidean studies. Thucydides realised that the conflict between Athens and Sparta lasted for 27 years from 431 to 404 BC, eventually creating what is known to us as the

⁶⁰ Powell (1936d: 14–15). See Berve (1931–1933), Jaeger (1934), Wassermann (1931), and Weinstock (1934).

⁶¹ Powell (1936d: 15).

⁶² Cf. Iori (2021: 160–175); Payen (2021: 179–186).

⁶³ Canfora (2006: 13–14).

⁶⁴ A fitting example is represented by the considerations of German historians and classicists on the eve of defeat in the First World War: see Butti de Lima (2010).

Peloponnesian War. Powell used Thucydides' model to offer a reading of the contemporary international situation, where a rising Germany led by Hitler would soon come to a clash with its neighbours and the British Empire.

The same mechanisms of historical analogy applied to Thucydides are also employed in fields outside the Classics. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins famously compared Thucydides' Peloponnesian War with the war between the kingdoms of Bau and Rewa in the Fiji Islands between 1843 and 1855. More broadly, he stressed the significance of culture for historical analysis and its usefulness for both classical Athens and nineteenth-century conflicts in the South Pacific.⁶⁵ Even more significant is Thucydides' use in the field of International Relations since the end of WW2, and especially after the end of the Cold War. The international relation theorist and founder of the North American realist school Hans Morgenthau considered Thucydides' history only tangentially, but it was through the works of classical scholars such as Donald Kagan and Victor Davis Hanson that neoconservative circles have privileged Thucydides as an authoritative foreign policy guide.⁶⁶

The most recent exploitation of Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian War for present political purposes was carried out by the Harvard Professor of Government Graham Allison in the book *Destined for War*. He claimed that a rapidly ascending China threatens America's supremacy and is thus set on a collision course that he labelled the Thucydides' trap: a rising power challenging an established one brings often to war, just like Athens and Sparta at the outset of the Peloponnesian War.⁶⁷ Similar perspectives are also encouraged in non-scholarly publications. The neoconservative writer Robert D. Kaplan, in a seemingly harmless travel book titled *Mediterranean Winter*, connects the disastrous Athenian expedition to Sicily in 415–413 BC described by Thucydides in Books 6 and 7 with the Vietnam War: 'The differences between the Athenian misadventure in Sicily and America's in Vietnam — which came to an inglorious end six months before I set out for the Mediterranean — seemed less interesting than the similarities'.⁶⁸

Examples could be multiplied exponentially, but it suffices to say that these readings of Thucydides are often simplistic, and they certainly tell us more about contemporary concerns than the Athenian historian.

⁶⁵ Sahlins (2004), with the observations in Hornblower & Stewart (2005).

⁶⁶ See Lebow (2012); Keene (2015); Bloxham (2018: 174–177, 193–203, 224–231).

⁶⁷ Allison (2017: vii). See the introduction to this volume, pp. 1–2, for further details on Allison's controversial book.

⁶⁸ Kaplan (2005: 101).

Equating Pericles with Hitler, as some German scholars did in the 1930s, is just another case of historical analogy, even though considered controversial then and now. Powell was very much aware of the risks of studying ‘the pitfalls into which contemporaries have fallen’ since the most recent publications he considered in his paper show a very high degree of partisanship that end up being a caricature rather than serious studies of the historian.⁶⁹ He then added in pencil an interlinear remark: ‘Perhaps this paper itself has been yet another, though an unintentional, illustration of that’.⁷⁰

8. Conclusions

Why is a paper delivered by a 23-year-old Cambridge scholar in January 1936 important to twenty-first-century readers? And why does it matter for Thucydidean reception in academia and politics in the past hundred years? Powell used Thucydides’ analysis of the Peloponnesian War to define the Great War and the upcoming Second World War as a sole great war: when he delivered his speech at the General Meeting of the Classical Association, he was aware that the conflict did not end with the Paris peace conference of 1919 — whose terms for the defeated nations were heavily criticised by Edward H. Carr — and used Thucydides to reinforce his ideas. He also exploited Thucydidean scholarship to consider the current political situation across various European countries: the attitude towards the historian tells us a great deal about how contemporary events shaped the readings of some significant passages in Thucydides’ *History*. Pre- and post-war evaluations of the Melian Dialogue are the most evident case of this phenomenon. We are faced here with an interaction between ancient author and present needs in politics and war.

Powell was a proponent of textual criticism as the highest product of intellectual labour. In one of his unpublished texts preserved in the Wren Library (‘The Textual Criticism of Thucydides’), he called textual criticism ‘the ideal education and the queen of the human sciences’.⁷¹ So far, Powell’s methods and academic outputs have always been considered as strictly philological.⁷² The paper ‘The War and Its Aftermath’ shows instead a great interest in contemporary politics, a strong historical diachronic perspective, and an analysis of scholarly works on Thucydides through the lenses of twentieth-century ideologies. In my opinion, the

⁶⁹ Powell (1936d: 17).

⁷⁰ Powell (1936d: 17).

⁷¹ Powell (1936a: 5).

⁷² The only exception being Earley (2020: 131–135).

unpublished paper delivered in 1936 shows the first traces of the future politician. Perhaps Powell's views of international relations can be traced back to his deep acquaintance with Thucydides' analysis of the great conflict between Athens and Sparta. As Camilla Schofield remarked in *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*: 'Powell's understanding of international relations was at least in part touched by his work on Thucydides, now read by students of international relations as one of the first proponents of a "realist" approach'.⁷³ In fact, we have seen that Powell, in his unpublished Fellowship dissertation, considered Thucydides' work from the perspective of Realpolitik.⁷⁴

In 1936 Powell was certainly not alone in claiming that another great war was imminent. After the horrors of the Great War, perhaps not everybody in Britain was ready for another devastating conflict.

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⁷³ Schofield (2013: 30).

⁷⁴ Powell (1934: 75), see above p. 102.

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APPENDIX

‘THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THEIR
INFLUENCE UPON THUCYDIDEAN STUDIES’ (1936)

I publish here the transcription of Powell’s paper discussed in this chapter. The text is entirely typewritten, except for the Greek text which is handwritten by pen, the heading ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ (handwritten in pencil), and a sentence on p. 17. The transcription faithfully reproduces the original text: I have only added a few references and explanatory notes in the footnotes and reported the original page-number in brackets.

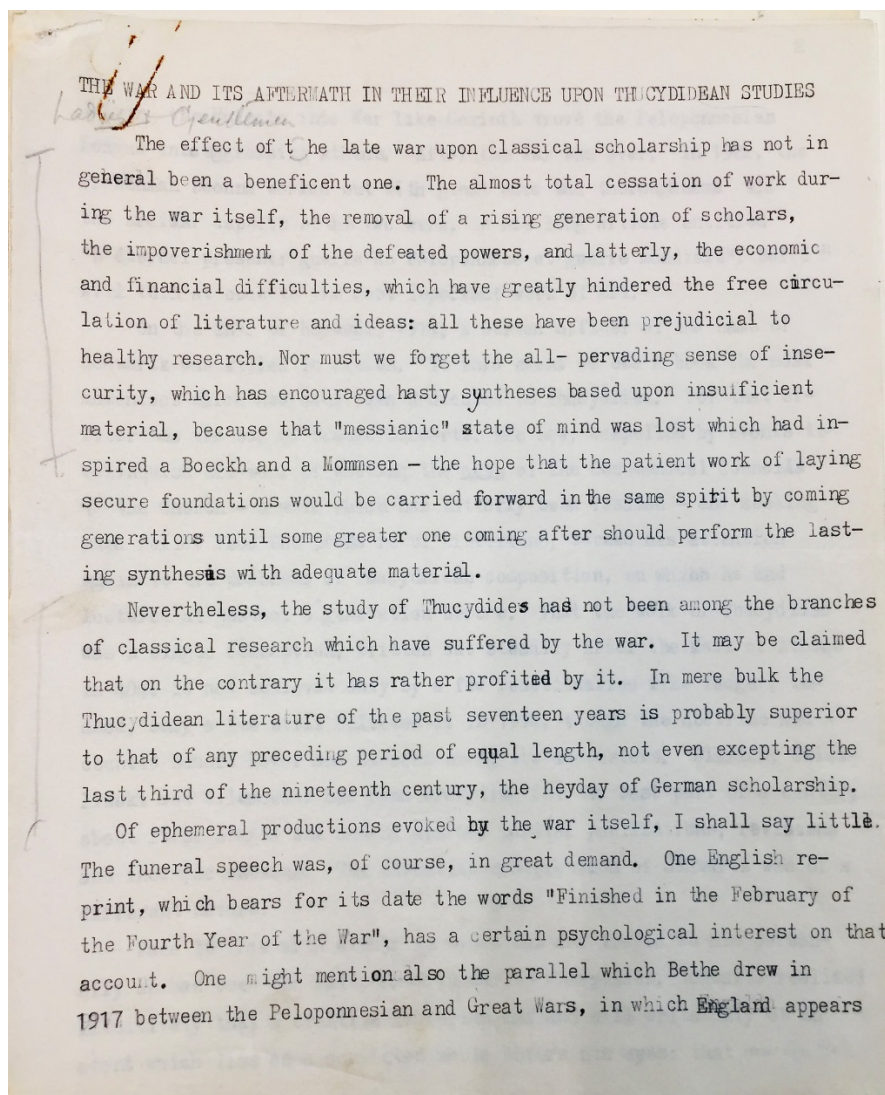


Fig. 1 John Enoch Powell (1936), ‘The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies’, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, POLL 1/6/19, p. 1.

TRANSCRIPTION

[p. 1]

THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH IN
THEIR INFLUENCE UPON THUCYDIDEAN STUDIES

Ladies and Gentlemen,⁷⁵

The effect of the late war upon classical scholarship has not in general been a beneficent one. The almost total cessation of work during the war itself, the removal of a rising generation of scholars, the impoverishment of the defeated powers, and latterly, the economic and financial difficulties, which have greatly hindered the free circulation of literature and ideas: all these have been prejudicial to healthy research. Nor must we forget the all-pervading sense of insecurity, which has encouraged hasty syntheses based upon insufficient material, because that “messianic” state of mind was lost which had inspired a Boeckh and a Mommsen — the hope that the patient work of laying secure foundations would be carried forward in the same spirit by coming generations until some greater one coming after should perform the lasting synthesis with adequate material.

Nevertheless, the study of Thucydides has not been among the branches of classical research which have suffered by the war. It may be claimed that on the contrary it has rather profited by it. In mere bulk the Thucydidean literature of the past seventeen years is probably superior to that of any preceding period of equal length, not even excepting the last third of the nineteenth century, the heyday of German scholarship.

Of ephemeral productions evoked by the war itself, I shall say little. The funeral speech was, of course, in great demand. One English reprint, which bears for its date the words “Finished in the February of the Fourth Year of the War”, has a certain psychological interest on that account. One might mention also the parallel which Bethe draw in 1917 between the Peloponnesian and Great Wars, in which England appears [p. 2] driving the Entente into War like Corinth drove the Peloponnesian League into aggressing Athens. After the war was over, in 1922, the Frenchman Deonna worked out with great care and thoroughness all the similar aspects of the two wars, in his long article entitled “L'éternel present: guerre du Péloponnèse et guerre mondiale”. But I will turn at once to the most important work of all.

On the 2nd of November 1914, a German officer of the name of Schwartz was killed in action. To this event we owe a book the most momentous which has ever been dedicated to Thucydides. For that officer was the son of Eduard Schwartz, who now, compelled by events to relinquish his work of editing the acta of the Oecumenical Councils of the Church — a work which has latterly been resumed — and seeking some relief from the pressure of misfortune,

⁷⁵ Added by pencil.

turned his attention again to the problems of Thucydidean composition, on which he had lectured at Rostock a generation before. That the work of Thucydides was a single conception, written out steadily after the fall of Athens in 404, is now believed only by a few reactionaries like Taeger; indeed, only a few still believed it in 1914, though the doctrine had counted Eduard Meyer and Classen among its supporters. Ullrich, Cwicklinski and Wilamowitz had been wrangling for the best part of a century about first drafts and second drafts, partial publications, revisions and incompletenesses. The essential contribution of Schwartz was of a different nature.

Face to face with events as momentous and tragic to him personally as had been the Peloponnesian war to Thucydides, Schwartz realised intuitively that a creative historian can and will write only of an event which lies as a completed whole before his eyes: that *σκοπέειν τὴν [p. 3] τελευτήν*,⁷⁶ true or not in ethics, is in history-writing an absolute law. From this realization followed a theory of Thucydidean composition which has been accepted ever since in its main lines, though its details are incessantly being tested, disputed and altered.

When the Archidamian war came to an end in 421, Thucydides, supposing like the rest of his contemporaries that the crisis was over and that Athens had won moral victory at least, set to work upon this unity, the Ten Years War. But within a few years the march of events taught him that the war must be resumed and fought to a finish. He therefore laid down his pen until the issue — this time, the final issue — should permit him to resume it. By this time he had reached a point in his first draft somewhere about the end of Book III. The Sicilian Expedition came and went, ending in disaster. Here at any rate was a perfect, if subordinate, unit. The restless mind of Thucydides seized upon it and shaped it into the only finished episode which he was destined ever to accomplish. As the Ionian war proceeded, there came a period in which a successful issue seemed not far off: we all remember Thucydides' enthusiastic praise of the restored moderate democracy of 411, which was followed by a series of victories. The historian felt himself able to resume work; and to this misjudgment we owe the existence of Book VIII. But the war continued, and Book VIII tails off in the middle of a sentence. Thenceforward Thucydides occupied himself in provisionally completing the Archidamian war from the point at which he had left off years before; until at last in 404 the final catastrophe presented him with that unity for which he had waited so long and which, when it came, was so different from the one he had originally expected.

Schwartz' second intuition was a vivid apprehension of the state of [p. 4] mind in which the historian, returned to his broken city after long exile, threw himself into the final phase of his work. By 1917 large sections of the German public were beginning to despair of the policy and the principles which had led them into the war. The rise could already be foreseen of a new generation, to which the German empire of the nineteenth century would seem anything but the glorious reality that it had been to the contemporaries of a Wilamowitz and

⁷⁶ A reference to Hdt. 1.32.9.

a Schwartz. Thucydides had stood in much the same relation to the epigoni of the Periclean age. And from this standpoint Schwartz won a vivid sympathy for ruthlessness — the ferocity, almost — with which Thucydides dismembered his previous work and set himself to rebuild it.

The central pillar of the new edifice was a belief in the inevitable nature of the struggle as the collision between two state-systems spiritually as well as physically opposed and concentrated around Sparta and Athens as about two poles. From this central idea grew out, on the one hand, the Archaeology and the Pentecontaetia, dominated as they are by the same characteristic dualism; on the other hand, that defiant panegyric of Periclean policy as the only rational and statesmanlike attitude towards the inevitable despite its tragic issue. For us, the Funeral Speech and the Apology of Pericles are the culminating points in that fragment of his final plan which was all that Thucydides was destined to achieve. They are sufficient to give us an inkling of what we might have possessed had the historian lived a few years more.

And here, before I pass to the development of Schwartz's work by his successors, may illustrate by a hypothetical case the way in which [p. 5] contemporary events can help us to understand the processes of a creative historian like Thucydides. Let us suppose that in 1925, say, a young Englishman addresses himself to a history of the Great War. It is to be a tragic whole, tracing German imperialism from its roots in the Napoleonic period to the final dissolution in 1918. He has made some progress with this scheme, when events in Europe apprise him that the war of 1914–1918 was only part of a larger contest still undecided. In 1935 and 1936 he occupies himself by recording provisionally the isolated conflicts which verge towards a greater. After which, he becomes a passive spectator, or an active participant, in the final struggle, until, as an elderly man in 1950, he can sit down to depict this greater and now finished whole, conceived as the historically inevitable self-defence and fall of the British Empire, and justifying to the world that humane and consistent policy which nevertheless might appear to have been the cause of the disaster. How much would the original draft require to be manipulated and altered before he admitted it into his finished work! And how great would be the contrast of tone between one stratum and another. This is not a very different situation from that with which we meet in the history of Thucydides, particularly in its first two books.

From this rather grim hypothesis we will turn back to those two scholars who have made the most notable additions to Schwartz's work: Pohlenz and Schadewaldt. Of these, Max Pohlenz, in a series of papers before the Göttingen society, overhauled the proofs of details on which rests the attribution of this or that section to a given stratum: in many points he succeeded in improving upon Schwartz. Of these I will mention only that the four speeches at Sparta in Book I, which Schwartz [p. 6] had split into two couples, the Corinthians and Archidamus belonging to the first draft, and the Athenians and Sthenelaidas to the second, were shown by Pohlenz — to me, at any rate, his proofs are convincing — to be a unity, written as a whole after 404.

More important than this, Pohlenz proposed a new criterion by which a speech might be attributed to the earlier or later strata. In I 22 Thucydides says that he will make his speakers say whatever is appropriate to the occasion, and will keep as nearly as possible to the gist of the original speeches. Now there are speeches, such as the Melian dialogue, which indisputably flout these conditions, just as there are other, such as the Corcyrean and Corinthian appeals to Athens in Book I, of which it may be claimed that they fulfil the promise. Pohlenz therefore proposed that the promise itself and the speeches which conform to it are early, while the speeches which violate dramatic probability in pursuit of a higher order of truth belong to the historian's later work.

This conception of a growing independence in Thucydides' attitude towards his material — a conception which had been implicit already in the work of Schwartz — forms the essence of Wolfgang Schadewalt's contribution. In 1928, in an address given at Weimar, he attacked the problem from a new side. Everyone has been struck by the novellistic [*sic*] prolixity of those episodes in which Thucydides deals with Themistocles, both in his diplomacy at Sparta and in his banishment, with Pausanias, and with the Pisistratids. This prolixity, so much in contrast with the terseness of the surrounding Pentecontaetia or the grim relevance of the Sicilian expedition, called and still calls for an explanation.

Schadewaldt dubbed these episodes "paradeigmata", and elucidated [p. 7] them thus. He has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the Sicilian Expedition was written up not, as Schwartz proposed, in 412 and subsequent years, but only in 404 after the fall of Athens. In the Sicilian disaster he proceeded to find the turning point in Thucydides' evolution as a historian, in that it first brought him face to face with the active operation of two powers — personality and chance — which in his earlier, "sophistic" days he had tended to scout. The history of the fifth century now began to present itself to him in a sequence of personalities: Pausanias and Themistocles, the types of Sparta and Athens, — Pericles, the spiritual heir of Themistocles, — Alcibiades, with all his faults, the brilliant heir of Pericles. The fatality of Athens had been her inability to tolerate just those persons who alone could have led her to success. Hence the ominous intrusion of the Pisistratid episode in the Sicilian Expedition at the moment of Alcibiades recall; hence the prolix and intensely personal episodes of Book I; and hence the notorious prominence of Pericles in the later strata. Schadewaldt, to put the matter in the nut-shell, made Thucydides develop [*sic*] from a historical scientist into a historical artist.

Although there have been indications of late that Professor Jacoby of Kiel contemplates a new attempt upon the stratification of Thucydides, it may, I think, safely be said that the lode which Schwartz opened in the days of the War is now well nigh worked out. Our conception of Thucydides as a personality has been immeasurably enriched by the work of Schwartz and his successors: for final consensus upon matters of detail, we shall have to wait till the controversies have died down and, to some extent, been forgotten.

[p. 8] Meanwhile you have perhaps been wondering whether it is only in Germany that the War had its influence on the study of Thucydides. It is natural that the influence should be most strongly marked in the country which has

hitherto produced the most literature on classical subjects, and which, as the defeated party, was most intimately touched by the war. Nevertheless, we are not without material from elsewhere. Many a pocket-edition of Thucydides, as I can testify from personal information, went into the trenches on both sides of the line. A highly gifted French journalist and critic, of the name Thibaudet, composed while on active service a study of the historian entitled “La campagne avec Thucydide”, which proved so popular that by 1922 it had attained to its seventh edition. In English the book of G.F. Abbott, “Thucydides, a Study in historical Reality”, was avowedly an offspring of the War, though not published until 1925. The two works may well be coupled together; for both writers were inspired by a belief in the spiritual similarity of the Peloponnesian and the Great Wars, and had re-read their Thucydides from that point of view. Widely though they differ in the particular conclusions at which they arrive, — the Frenchman is much the more alive to political realities — both exhibit characteristic features of the change which the War has wrought in our moral attitude to Thucydides, as opposed to the higher criticism of his text. To put the matter in a word, we have become more tolerant. To appreciate the gulf which separates pre- and post-war in this respect, one should for example turn from the priggish superiority of some of Arnold’s appendices, or the theoretical detachment of pre-war books like “Thucydides Mythistoricus”, to the ardent sense of kinship which animates a Thibaudet or an Abbott.

[p. 9] The central point on which any moral estimate of Thucydides must always turn is the Melian dialogue. And in the opinions expressed about the purpose of this dialogue the change of attitude since the War has been most marked. Amongst pre-war writers, I know of only one dissentient from the otherwise universal belief that the dialogue is a condemnation of Athenian imperialism. The dissentient is the late Prof. J.B. Bury, the “rationalist”, in those two chapters of his “Ancient Greek Historians” which are devoted to Thucydides. He ventured there to express the opinion that Thucydides took neither side, but developed both with an inexorable logic from the situation of either party. During the war, the Dialogue was much in men’s mind. Montague Butler, for instance, the then Master of Trinity, wrote to his son in 1915, telling him to “re-read the Melian dialogue, with Prussia and Belgium as protagonists”. Deonna, in the essay already referred to, is inclined to make a similar application. But meanwhile, on the German side, the Dialogue was beginning to take on a very different aspect.

Those signs of Thucydides’ moral disapprobation of Athenian policy, which before had been so evident to everyone, could now no longer be found. Instead, the student now saw the two irreconcilable principles of imperialism and nationalism expounded, without *hybris* on either side, in a language of striking power and beauty. And it was noticed that when Thucydides came to tot up the account, there was a distinct balance in favour of Athens.

[section added on an unnumbered page following p. 9] In a paper on “Politics and Morality in the Ancient World” contributed by Wilhelm Nestle to

Neue Jahrbücher for 1918, the Melian dialogue is interpreted, after Nietzsche,⁷⁷ as an essay on the irrelevance of morality to politics where the Athenians express the historian's own convictions. Nestle concludes with a significant sentence: "The manifestoes of our enemies reek of morality, humanity and liberality, of love and service for humanity, while their actions are those of the most ruthless policy; and when they attempt to lame our determination by their moral outcry against militarism and Machtpolitik — an attempt which unhappily appears to be successful with no small section of the German public — then we possess no better antidote against this dangerous suggestion than to study deeply the reality of politics, as Thucydides and Machiavelli after him have taught us to apprehend it".

[p. 9 continued] From Schwartz onwards, the *communis opinio* has everywhere been, that either Thucydides is absolutely impartial or else he sides with the Athenians. So generally are these views diffused, that in 1930 Momigliano at Turin could go [p. 10] a step further. Maintaining that the Melian dialogue belongs to the very earliest phase of Thucydidean composition, he actually claimed it as having been intended by Thucydides for the triumphal *finis* of the History of the Ten Years War as originally planned. Few will be able, I think, to accept this theory of Momigliano; yet many must agree with the summing-up of Schwartz, which I should like to quote: "Because the Melians refuse to comprehend that by the unalterable laws of politics a petty state has no *right* to independence, and that the Athenian demands do not exceed reasonable limits; because they would rather entrust themselves to vague hopes than coolly and calmly weigh up the distribution of forces, therefore a mind politically schooled must withdraw from their recalcitrant obstinacy the sympathy which a simple narrative of their hard lot would have produced if prefaced by no argumentation. The historian had good reason for leaving the last word with the Athenians".

But if Belgium, or Poland or Ireland (shall I add — Abyssinia?) have been teaching now one people, now another, the lesson of tolerance and an open mind towards Athenian action at Melos and its precipitate in Thucydides — a lesson which English scholars, at any rate, should hardly have needed after the Boer War — that is not the only change in our approach to Thucydides which contemporary events of the last twenty years have produced. Two of Thibaudet's chapters are entitled "L'impérialisme" and "La mer" — Imperialism, and the command of the sea, two problems which the war rendered particularly actual. It demonstrated to Germany the truth which similar bitter experience had taught Napoleon a century earlier: that an insular power will be invincible despite all defeats on land so long — but so long only — [p. 11] as it retains undisputed command of the sea. From this point of view, also, Thucydides began to be re-read: and the result repaid the effort. The Archaeology, the first Themistocles-episode (his rebuilding of the Walls and embassy

⁷⁷ Powell means the remarks in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* in Nietzsche (1886: nr. 92).

to Sparta), and the Pentecontaetia — all were found to be strongly bound to one another and to the main history by the thread of “sea-power”. An analysis of the Archaeology from this standpoint has been most thoroughly and successfully conducted by Eugen Täubler in his “Archäologie des Thukydides” 1927. It has been put beyond doubt that Thucydides had grasped the fundamental importance of sea-power as a determining factor in Greek history from prehistorical times to the Peloponnesian War; and that from Minos who *παλαιότατος ὦν ἀκοῆ ἴσμεν ναυτικὸν ἐκτίσατο*⁷⁸ to the open exposition of naval policy in the first speech of Pericles, he is always quietly working to bring out the contrast of a land-power system and a sea-power system, and to emphasise the superior strength and flexibility of the latter.

Philosophic theory of the closing fifth century was already aware that with Athenian sea-power, Athenian imperialism was indissolubly connected:⁷⁹ nor has any question of Thucydidean criticism been more hotly agitated of late years than that which concerns the historian’s attitude to the Athenian *ἀρχή*. In the chapter on Thucydides in Dr. Glover’s “From Pericles to Philip”, which came out in 1917, we still read that “Thucydides makes it clear to those who can feel — not of course to others, for there is no evidence that he looked for a Thracian public — that he did not approve of the imperialism of Cleon and Alcibiades — nor of Pericles, after all”. But in the last twenty years students have realised more clearly than ever before that nowhere in the [p. 12] historian’s page is *ἀνάγκη* more dominant, nor morality more conspicuous by its absence, than where he treats of empire. Whether Pericles or Cleon or Alcibiades or Euphemus or some nameless Athenian spokesman has the floor, we hear the same argument, that an empire once formed is obliged by the inexorably necessity of self-preservation to pursue an imperial policy. It is the voice of Thucydides himself. And what has latterly sharpened understanding of this law, has been above all the predicament of the British Empire since the War, particularly in that aspect of it which may be labelled “Egypt”. I might give many illustrations: but Thibaudet will suffice; and I may add, that anyone who wishes for a clear and unbiassed exposition of British imperial aims will find it in an appendix to the Frenchman’s book.

It is unpleasant, but necessary, to turn from the illumination to the perversion which contemporary currents of thought have produced in the interpretation of Thucydides. The worst offender, as you will imagine, is National Socialism in Germany. But we will deal first with the effect of a milder complaint restricted almost entirely to Anglo-Saxon countries. I mean pacifism. It might be thought impossible to read the optimistic outlook of modern pacifism into a historian whose whole first book, in its final form, amounts to a

⁷⁸ Thuc. 1.4.1. Critical editions of Thucydides, including Alberti’s and the OCT (edited by H.S. Jones and revised by Powell himself), has *παλαίτατος* instead of *παλαιότατος*: this is a simple slip, not a variant reading.

⁷⁹ In May 1944, Arnaldo Momigliano published a remarkably synthetic, yet significant, piece on sea-power in ancient Greece where he discussed, among other things, the Athenian empire and thalassocracy: Momigliano (1944).

regular proof that, given the previous course of Greek history, the Peloponnesian war was logically inevitable. Yet the impossible has been achieved in C.N. Cochrane's "Thucydides and the Science of History" 1929 — a book which I am sorely tempted to designate as the worst on Thucydides since the War. By dint of selecting suitable passages from speeches and narrative, and ignoring Thucydides' ceaseless insistence on the changeless trends of human [p. 13] nature and the essential bi-polarity of Greece, Cochrane is able to reach the conclusion that the history of Thucydides "constitutes one of the most devastating indictments of war ever penned".

Yet though he is probably the worst, Cochrane is not the only offender. For instance, at our General Meeting three years ago, a celebrated English scholar linked Thucydides with Aristophanes and Euripides as a man after his own heart and an exponent of pacifist ideals. It is this misconception against which Abbott had not without eloquence argued in his chapter on "Detachment". Nevertheless the harm to be apprehended for Thucydidean studies from the now waning pacifism is not a tenth of that which threatens it from the national creed of modern Germany.

The effect of dictatorship on classical studies in Italy and Germany has been curiously different — in consonance with the divergent ideologies of Fascism and National Socialism. I am aware of no more than one single discursive Italian publication on Thucydides since the revolution of 1922; and in general there has been a marked decline in study of the free Greek and Roman republics, as against the Hellenistic monarchies and above all the Roman principate, upon which Italian scholars have tended to concentrate. For when every sentence is liable to be scanned for traces of anti-Fascist sentiment, it is obviously safer to begin by choosing a more congenial subject than a free Athens or a free Rome. But the name of G. de Sanctis [*sic*] must be given the honourable mention of a courageous exception.

In Germany, the effect of National Socialism has been the opposite. Racial doctrines, and political antipathy to the Holy Roman Empire and its cognate ideas, have had the result of discouraging study [p. 14] of the Italic peoples, and of Rome the mistress of the world. On the other hand, a peculiar kinship has been detected between the ancient Greeks and modern Germans, the two purest and greatest examples of Aryan humanity. Not only the Greek civilization in general, but Thucydides in particular, has proved exceptionally congenial. The intensely political outlook of Thucydides may be made serviceable to a doctrine which asserts the absolute dominion of the state over every phase of individual existence; and, as the more striking figures of Caesar and Augustus had already been captured as prototypes of Mussolini, Hitler might still be made to look very like Pericles, — or Pericles, rather, to look like Hitler.

There had been signs of the coming storm before it broke. Racial politics loomed ominously large in Helmut Berve's Greek History of 1932/3.⁸⁰ In Felix

⁸⁰ A typo: Berve's two-volume *Griechische Geschichte* was published in 1931 (vol. 1) and 1933 (vol. 2).

Wassermann's "Neues Thukydidesbild" of 1931, the claim was advanced that the Apology of Pericles and the Funeral Speech exemplified respectively the prime necessities of true democracy — absolute subordination of the individual to the state (Einfügung) and the existence of a leader (Führer). The three years of Nazidom have each seen a work entitled "Thukydides als politischer Denker", Thucydides the political thinker. Regenbogen, the author of the first, is still restrained, and discourages the hasty drawing of parallels without careful analysis of the original. But Jaeger, in devoting to Thucydides the last chapter of his first volume on "Paideia", is not ashamed to give the Thucydidean Pericles a number of touches reminiscent of someone else.

Finally, the dissertation of Dietzfelbinger published last year is a frank analysis of Thucydides as the early but unmistakable exponent of National Socialist ideology.

[p. 15] To anyone who desires a rapid insight into the pseudo-philosophy which present-day Germany is churning out to justify its régime, together with a synopsis of the probable effects of that philosophy in the classical field, I cannot do better than recommend a curious work published in 1934 by Heinrich Weinstock⁸¹ and entitled "Polis, der griechische Beitrag zu einer deutschen Bildung heute, an Thukydides erläutert", "the Greek contribution to German education to-day, illustrated from Thucydides". The argument runs as follows. The old humanism of the nineteenth century was hopelessly involved with the fatal phenomena of individualism and liberalism. Now that the latter have happily been swept away, there must arise a new "third" humanism, worthy of the "third Reich". Hitler has taught us, that the individual can realize himself only in complete absorption in the state: Germany therefore must turn again to the Greek people, which never conceived of man except as a political animal, whose every activity is directed towards the state; it must turn above all to Thucydides, as to the essentially political historian of the Greek city-state.

The methods by which Thucydides is made to look National Socialist form a curious study. Using as his chief material the Funeral Speech, the Apology of Pericles and the Civil Troubles in Corcyra, (translations of which are appended,) Weinstock sets to work in the following manner. The reference to autochthony in the Funeral speech shows Thucydides to be conscious of the truth that only a racial state can be a true state — Blut und Boden. The sections of that speech which treat of παιδεία, declare Athens the School of Greece for the reason that she gives her citizens an education politically orientated. Great stress is naturally laid on the famous description of Periclean Athens in II 65: ἐγγίνεται τε λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή.⁸²

[p. 16] Thucydides knew that there can be no true democracy without a Führer. And when he makes Pericles say of Athens, that the citizen οὐκ ἀπὸ

⁸¹ He translated Thucydides in German into 1938.

⁸² Thuc. 2.65.9.

μέρους τὸ πλεόν ἐς τὰ κοινὰ ἢ ἀπ' ἀρετῆς προτιμᾶται,⁸³ he repudiates the numerical democracy beloved of liberals in favour of the organised hierarchy of a corporate state. Indeed, does not the whole second book emphasize the truth that upon matters of policy, the people are not capable of decision: their only natural function is to empower and approve the leader.

Two special curious features may be noticed. Nietzsche was notoriously a passionate admirer of Thucydides: he is also a deity in the Nazi Pantheon, along with Arminius and Wagner. He should therefore be particularly apt to Weinstock's thesis. Yet not only is National Socialism the evident negation of all the great atheist's ideals, but Nietzsche expressly admired Thucydides as the culmination of the sophistic movement, of which, as anti-political, individualist and liberal, Weinstock is obliged to make Thucydides the deadly foe. Unlike Italian fascism, which is atheist and anti-clerical, National Socialism hankers after religious justification, and represents the totalitarian state as the fulfilment of divine purpose, of the göttlicher Weltwille. Thucydides therefore appears as deeply convinced of the religious basis on which rest the state and human relationships generally. The Funeral speech and the Apology of Pericles — I quote Weinstock's actual words, to avoid the charge of misrepresentation — 'clearly, though with a manly restraint, point out the religious origin of all political existence, which can only stand on sure foundations when filled with the conviction that the norms of the racial com-[p. 17]munity are from God'. More clearly still, in his analysis of the Corcyrean revolution, Thucydides deplores the failures of religious restraint — *εὐσβεία μὲν οὐδέτεροι ἐνόμιζον*,⁸⁴ and the immoral abuse of the divine gift of speech — *τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοῦσει*.⁸⁵ By such means is it, that in the present-day Germany one of the chief monuments of the liberation of the human mind which is the deepest significance of Greek civilization for us, is being pressed into service as an additional justification for taking men's freedom away.

I have traced as best I could the reaction of Thucydidean studies to their environment in the course of two eventful decades. And if, towards the end, the country through which we travelled grew less attractive, or even, in some of its features, repulsive, I hope you will not have been thinking that I ought on that account to have turned aside or stopped short. Study of the pitfalls into which contemporaries have fallen, of the blind alleys up which they have been led, may have a very real value for ourselves. It seems only too clear that the genuine and beneficial impulse which the Great War itself imparted to the general comprehension of Thucydides has for some years been at an end. It has been succeeded by a period in which various kinds of partisanship run so high that any critical and discursive study of the historian, from whatever quarter emanating, can hardly escape the infection and must turn out to be not a

⁸³ Thuc. 2.37.1.

⁸⁴ Thuc. 3.82.8.

⁸⁵ Thuc. 3.82.4.

portrait but a caricature [*sic*]. Perhaps this paper itself has been yet another, though an unintentional, illustration of that.⁸⁶ In these circumstances, I conceive that our duty is one of ἐποχή — but by no means of idle ἐποχή. The text, the interpretation, the analysis, the historical and archaeological illustration of the historian all offer opportunities for the employment of abundant scholarly energy. Pro-[p. 18]gress in these ancillary but necessary studies cannot fail to mean that when at a more propitious season, synthesis can again be ventured, it will prove as superior to that of the last decades as this itself has been superior to the attempts of an Ullrich or a Roscher in the middle of the nineteenth century.

⁸⁶ The latter sentence (‘Perhaps — illustration of that’) is a hand-written interlinear addition.

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READING THUCYDIDES IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY ITALY*

— DINO PIOVAN —

ABSTRACT

The most important debate about Athenian liberty and democracy in 20th-century Italy took place during the Fascist era (1922–1943), when the cult of ancient Rome was an essential part of the official ideology, whereas the cultural legacy of ancient Greece was often underestimated. Some outstanding scholars took part in this dispute, among them Gaetano De Sanctis and some of his most talented pupils: Aldo Ferrabino, Arnaldo Momigliano, and Piero Treves. In their works, the interpretation of Thucydides played a crucial role, especially in relation to some recurring themes, such as the meditation on the nature of power, the relation between force and justice, ethics and politics, public rhetoric and its manipulations. The paper aims at presenting the different ways in which Thucydides had been interpreted in early twentieth-century Italy, focusing on three different scholars: Gaetano De Sanctis, Aldo Ferrabino and Arnaldo Momigliano.

KEYWORDS

*fascism, Benedetto Croce, Gaetano De Sanctis,
Aldo Ferrabino, Arnaldo Momigliano*

1. Ancient History and Italian Fascism

The twenty years of Italian history dominated by Fascism (1922–1943) were an age of heavy interference in historiography, and especially of detrimental cultural autarchy. As Arnaldo Momigliano said many years later, ‘oxygen was missing. The cultural contacts [...] were very difficult.’¹ Fascism favoured the studies on Roman history.² It

* Thanks to Luca Iori, Ivan Matijašić, and Peter J. Rhodes for helping me to improve the English text and for their suggestions on points of content.

¹ Momigliano (1971: 12): ‘mancava l’ossigeno. I contatti culturali [...] si fecero molto difficili’.

² On the Fascist cult of Rome see Giardina (2000: 212–296); Belardelli (2005: 206–236); Nelis (2013); Nelis (2018). On Greek history studies during the Fascist age see Piovan (2018a) with more bibliography. About the Italian intellectuals in the face of

presented itself as the heir of ancient Rome, of its civilisation, its state and its empire. The cult of Rome really formed a constitutive part of the Fascist ideology. It was quite typical ‘to oppose Greece and Rome, depreciate the former compared to the latter, [...] to devalue democracy (considered a negative value of the Greek world)’.³ In short, ancient history as a discipline institutionalised divisions between Roman and Greek history, the former infested by rhetoric and propaganda, the latter depressed and marginalised especially when it came to the appointment of university chairs.

It is in this context that the debate about ancient Greece and ancient Greek historiography too arises.⁴ It has its core in the school of Gaetano De Sanctis (1870–1957), the greatest Italian ancient historian of that period, and one of the very few university professors who refused to take the oath of loyalty to Fascism in 1931. The protagonists of this discussion were De Sanctis himself and two of his students: Aldo Ferrabino (1892–1972), professor at the university of Padua, and Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987).

2. De Sanctis’ Thucydides as a Critic of Empire

When Fascism came to power, De Sanctis was the most eminent representative of ancient historical studies in Italy.⁵ He had been a student of Karl Julius Beloch, the German scholar who had introduced the modern study of Greek history to Italy and united the traditional, philological quest for sources with substantial use of new disciplines such as economics, statistics and demography.⁶ De Sanctis accepted basic methodological principles from Beloch, such as the *Quellenkunde*; however, these were filtered by his own personality, which was pervaded by Catholic spirituality and commitment to the values of political freedom. He was naturally open to Benedetto Croce’s lesson that true history is always

Fascism and anti-Fascism see the very keen and well-balanced essays by Angelo Ventura, now collected in Ventura (2017).

³ Canfora (1980: 82): ‘la contrapposizione Grecia-Roma, la svalutazione del primo di questi due poli, [...] la svalutazione della democrazia (volentieri relegata tra i disvalori tipici del mondo greco)’.

⁴ On the debate about Greek liberty among ancient historians in early twentieth-century Italy see Ampolo (1997: 79–106); Ampolo (2021), with extensive bibliography.

⁵ For De Sanctis’ life and works see Gabba (1971); Treves (1991); Polverini (2011); Mazza (2013); specifically about his concept of Thucydides and Greek history see Fantasia (2018); Piovan (2018b: 49–75).

⁶ For a general introduction to Beloch’s life and work see Momigliano (1966); Polverini (1990).

contemporary,⁷ and during Fascism he had many intellectual and personal contacts with Croce, even though he was never one of his disciples. After working for some years on the ancient Romans and producing a monumental *Storia dei Romani* (1907–1923), at the end of the 1920s De Sanctis returned to Greek history; at this point the Fascist regime, which had experienced a short time of uncertainty after the assassination of the socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, had already enacted the so-called Exceptional Laws between 1925 and 1926 that, among other things, banned all political parties and associations and strongly limited the liberty of the press. Fascism had taken the road to totalitarianism.⁸ Therefore the coincidence between De Sanctis' choice and the stabilization of the authoritarian regime seems to be significant rather than accidental.

With this new interest in Greek history De Sanctis began to study Greek historiography — for the first time in his career — not just as a source of events regarding the Greek world, but as a self-standing topic.⁹ His favourite author was certainly Thucydides, to whom he devoted various essays.¹⁰ The most important of them is the chapter in his *Storia dei Greci* (1939), one of the most inspired of the whole work.¹¹ Thucydides' *History* is considered on the one hand 'the first true historical narration of the West';¹² from the beginning, it is clear that De Sanctis shares the same tendency of most European historians of the nineteenth century: he sees Thucydides as the founding father of historiography.¹³ But on the other hand, some limitations of his work are immediately visible.

⁷ That all history is contemporary history is perhaps the most famous maxim of Croce's theory of history and historiography; see Croce (1917).

⁸ The thesis that Italian Fascism was totalitarian has been advanced by some scholars, notably by Emilio Gentile; see e.g. Gentile (2018). However, the support that this interpretation has received is far from unanimous.

⁹ Cf. De Sanctis (1951), a volume that collects his essays on ancient Greek historiography published in the previous decades.

¹⁰ De Sanctis (1927) and De Sanctis (1929); De Sanctis (1930); De Sanctis (1937).

¹¹ De Sanctis (1939: 409–436).

¹² De Sanctis (1939: 411): 'la prima vera narrazione storica dell'Occidente'. Cf. the close similarities with the remarks of David Hume: 'The first page of Thucydides is, in my opinion, the commencement of real history' (*Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations*, 1752), and of Immanuel Kant: 'Das erste Blatt des Thukydides ist der einzige Anfang aller wahren Geschichte' (*Ideen zu einer allgemeine Geschichte in weltbürgerliche Absicht*, 1784).

¹³ On the Thucydidean cult in modern historiography see Murari Pires (2006); Morley (2014); and some of the essays collected in Fromentin, Gotteland & Payen (2010) and in Lee & Morley (2015), this latter especially part II.

One of them is the fact that Thucydides writes only contemporary history because a history of the past was impossible: in the classical age there was no scientific collection of monuments and documents, in contrast to the modern age. As mentioned above, De Sanctis was the student of Beloch, a master of the positivist school of history, according to which scientific history is only possible if based on documents. Another limitation is found in the biased dislike Thucydides harbours against Cleon, the democratic leader of the post-Periclean age, whom the historian presented as a very bad demagogue: ‘Thucydides, exiled for the bad outcome of his campaign in Thrace in 424–423 BC by, as one has to believe, that majority that Cleon headed, was too much entangled in the political passions that tore apart his fatherland to be able to see the action of the men hated by him in the right light’.¹⁴ That comment could be a suggestion due to Grote’s *History of Greece*, which has a very different ideological orientation from Beloch’s *Griechische Geschichte* (1877–1927) and is the first Greek history book to rehabilitate Cleon,¹⁵ but it is also due to De Sanctis’ negative evaluation of Nicias, whose defeatist pacifism would have prevented the possible unification of Greece under the leadership of Athens in 421 BC, as he had argued some years before in a slender but meaningful article;¹⁶ on the contrary De Sanctis praised Cleon’s competence and foresight in political and financial fields.

It is not possible here to analyse in detail how Thucydides represents Nicias and Cleon; suffice it here to observe that De Sanctis’ judgments on Cleon and Nicias are in sharp opposition to those expressed by Thucydides and are clearly related to his standpoint on Greek history. That had been and still was, at least partly, conditioned by the nineteenth-century national perspective of Beloch that considered the problem of Greek unity as central and saw it as accomplished only with Philip II of Macedon at the expense of the traditional *poleis*. This perspective, however, was too harsh to accept for someone, like De Sanctis, who assessed positively the communal liberties associated to those *poleis*.¹⁷

Here, as well as in other places, one may rightly feel that there is a contradiction in De Sanctis’ interpretation of Thucydides, who is on the one hand highly praised and on the other sharply criticised within a few

¹⁴ De Sanctis (1939: 415): ‘Tucidide, esiliato pel mal esito della sua campagna di Tracia nel 424–423 ad opera, come deve ritenersi, di quella maggioranza che faceva capo a Cleone, troppo era impigliato nelle passioni politiche che straziavano la sua patria perché l’azione degli uomini da lui odiati potesse apparirgli in piena luce’.

¹⁵ For a general introduction to Grote see Momigliano (1952); for Grote’s concept of fifth-century Athenian democracy see Kierstead (2021).

¹⁶ Cf. De Sanctis (1927).

¹⁷ More on De Sanctis and the problem of Greek liberty in Piovan (2021: 313–316).

lines; it is the same contradiction that Ugo Fantasia has poignantly observed at work in the writings of another great scholar contemporary to De Sanctis, Felix Jacoby.¹⁸ This contradiction seems to arise from the double nature of historiography according to many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians such as B.G. Niebuhr, Wilhelm Roscher and Eduard Meyer: as art and as science, at the same time subjective and objective, narrative and critical.¹⁹ Thucydides became a model from the early nineteenth century because he was apparently able to merge the account of events and their interpretation; the acknowledgement of a subjective element could legitimise new interpretations by modern scholars without toppling the founding father off the pedestal. In the same way De Sanctis could also continue to consider Thucydides as a model and at once correct him or even attribute to him meaningful alterations in reporting events. This is the case in the Athenian debate on the naval expedition to Sicily, where De Sanctis goes so far as to present Nicias as the true sponsor of the undertaking, whereas for Thucydides Nicias was from the beginning a fierce opponent of the expedition, but failed to achieve his aims and paradoxically ended up making things worse, requesting more ships and more resources than initially proposed.²⁰

However, De Sanctis' greatest innovation consists of reconsidering the traditional question on the composition of Thucydides' work. That had been a field where many excellent philologists had written reams without arriving at a sound conclusion. De Sanctis transforms what was a philological question into a different issue; what matters for him is how Thucydides changes his mind over the years, how his historiography develops in his lifetime. One can find here, beyond the influence of contemporary German classical scholarship,²¹ that of Croce's theory of history and historiography, i.e. a kind of historicism.²² According to De Sanctis there is a close relationship between *res gestae* and *historia*

¹⁸ See Fantasia (2018: 167–169).

¹⁹ See Murari Pires (2006); Morley (2014); Piovan (2018b: 23–47).

²⁰ On Thucydides' alleged alterations about the expedition to Sicily see De Sanctis (1929) with the analysis of Fantasia (2018: 164–167).

²¹ About German classical scholarship on Thucydides see Piovan (2018b: 23–47), in which the approaches of Ranke, Ullrich, Meyer and Schwartz are analysed; the influence of the book by Eduard Schwartz (1919) on De Sanctis seems likely.

²² Croce's fundamental works on theory of history are Croce (1917) and Croce (1938). About Croce's theory and practice of history see Sasso (1986); Roberts (1999); Viti Cavaliere (1999); Sasso (2017). For a general profile of Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) see Galasso (1990); for a concise introduction in English see Trafton & Verdicchio (1999).

rerum gestarum, events and the account of events; the first part of Thucydides' work would be mainly narrative and lacking a guiding-thought that, on the contrary, can be perceived in the Sicilian books (the narration of the Athenian expedition against Syracuse) and still more in the so-called dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians, considered as the keystone of the whole work. For De Sanctis the dialogue was written after the end of the war between Athens and Sparta and expresses the author's opinion. Thucydides would appear there to be dispassionately objective in recording the Athenians' brutal proclamation of the right of force, but his objectivity should be interpreted as a categorical, passionate condemnation of that right, not as a sign of consent as other scholars maintain.²³ A clue that this interpretation is right is found where the Melians invoke the *Tyche ek tou theiou*, that is 'the fate that comes from the gods'; this plea must be considered as accepted given that at the end of the war the surviving Melians came back to their island and the Athenian settlers were sent away. Therefore the *Tyche ek tou theiou* operates against injustice to protect the pious Melians; it means that to Thucydides *Tyche* is not an empty name. That highlights his art and thought in a special way; the Italian scholar reaches the point of defining this factor with a truly Christian name: Providence, glimpsing a kind of religious sentiment in an author who was very often believed to be a sceptic and sometimes an atheist: 'Therefore in a passage that, as we said, had to mark almost the cornerstone of his work, when he undertook the overall elaboration [...] Thucydides can be said to glimpse the divine in history'.²⁴

It is not possible, here, to analyse in more depth De Sanctis' interpretation of Thucydides; there is a feeling of a kind of overlap between the Greek and the Italian historian. De Sanctis is a fervent Catholic and believes in Providence's action in history, but he thinks that human events must be investigated through scientific methods, underlining the freedom and responsibility of human beings. Another principle of his idea of history is anti-imperialism: he condemns imperialistic policies both in ancient and in modern history because they provoke a destruction of freedom that has heavy, negative repercussions on the imperial powers

²³ De Sanctis (1939: 421): 'la fredda, gelida anzi, obietività apparente dello storico, che attraverso le battute del dialogo registra senza commento la proclamazione più brutale del diritto della forza, si trasfigura nella recisa appassionata condanna di quel diritto'.

²⁴ De Sanctis (1939: 434): 'E però, in un tratto che, come dicemmo, doveva segnare quasi la chiave di volta della sua opera, quando si accinse alla elaborazione complessiva [...] può dirsi che Tucidide abbia intraveduto nella storia il divino'. Cf. also De Sanctis (1930: 307–308).

themselves, as in the cases of classical Athens and ancient Rome. In conclusion, De Sanctis' Thucydides is an intellectual who unites critical boldness and religious piety, a love of freedom and an abhorrence of imperialism.

3. Back to Thucydides: Aldo Ferrabino

Aldo Ferrabino had been one of De Sanctis' and Beloch's most promising students, and had acquired a grounded competence in historical-philological methods.²⁵ He was not insensitive to the idealistic philosophy of Croce and Gentile either; on the contrary, he felt ever more strongly the need for a philosophy of history which could give meaning to his own scholarship and provide certainties in place of learned conjectures. His essays on Greek history were accompanied by many articles on historical theory during the 1920s, in which he gradually distances himself from Croce and approaches Gentile more closely; on the one hand, he adopts an idealistic identification of philosophy and history; on the other hand, he introduces a radical dualism between true and false, concrete and abstract, and good and evil, and contrasts civil history, centred on the force organised in armies, with eternal history, the union of the soul with God; that is, an opposition between historical pessimism and moral and religious metahistory.²⁶

Ferrabino did not find any meaning in mainstream interpretations of history, and especially in Greek history, as becomes clear from his book on the Athenian empire, in which he condemns both the Athenian Empire and Athenian politicians as unable to achieve the unification of the Greek people. He shows only sarcasm and contempt for Athenian democracy: the Athenian populace seem to him to be a 'restless and unstable mass', 'unfit to understand the real substance of what they applauded' in their assemblies, a mob that 'soon forgets, often changes, sacrifices old idols to new ones'.²⁷ His criticisms of ancient democracy are in tune with the Fascist critique of modern democracy; in particular, when he assumes that force is the supreme state law, we may recognise the direct influence of Giovanni Gentile's political thought, which supported the ethical state without any distinction between state, family and civil society and

²⁵ General introduction to Ferrabino: Treves (1996).

²⁶ Ferrabino's essays on historical theory are collected in Ferrabino (1962).

²⁷ Ferrabino (1927: 45, 57, 410): 'una massa inquieta e mutevole'; 'ben lungi dal capire e valutare la consistenza effettuale di ciò che applaudiva'; 'la democrazia [...] dimenticava presto, mutava spesso, sacrificava agli idoli nuovi gli idoli vecchi'.

suggested an identification between authority and law (by the way, Gentile's theory was later judged as totalitarian).²⁸

What about Ferrabino's Thucydides? In *L'impero atheniese* (1927) Ferrabino conforms his dissertation to Thucydides so closely that the book gives the impression of being a commentary much more than a monograph. The ancient text is sometimes corrected or discussed, but on the whole it is considered completely credible and worth following, even against other available sources. Thucydides is the source *par excellence* that on the one hand narrates the events of the Peloponnesian War, and on the other hand highlights them through speeches, the most remarkable of which is the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians. That dialogue, Ferrabino maintains, discloses the core of Athenian imperialism, as De Sanctis too claims; but at the same time for Ferrabino the Athenians are right, because they represent more numerous and larger interests than the Melians, who are spokespeople of selfish Greek parochialism. The image of Thucydides offered by this scholar, in contrast to that of De Sanctis, is that of an apologist of ancient imperialism. As Ferrabino made clear in a university course devoted to Alcibiades in Thucydides' work only a few years later, the Greek historian is a model of pure, historical and objective thought, notable above all for his intelligence that permits him to understand events deeply and does not need the philological method, based on documents and interpretative hypotheses.²⁹ In the already quoted dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians a new concept would be stated: morality and politics are two separate fields, autonomous from each other. This Thucydides is the historian able to reveal the true nature of international relations based on force and not on law. He is the ancient master of political realism, an opinion shared by some today, a kind of forerunner of Machiavelli who goes to the core truth of the matter rather than the imagination of it (to use a Machiavellian expression), someone averse to any insane utopia. But Thucydides is not viewed as an amoral or immoral thinker, as he is

²⁸ Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944) held a lot of relevant offices during Fascism: among many others, he was Minister of Education from 1922 to 1924, Director of the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa and Scientific Director of the *Enciclopedia Italiana*; his most significant philo-Fascist writings are collected in Gentile (1990–1991). A very good introduction to Gentile's life and works is provided by Sasso (1999). It was the liberal philosopher Norberto Bobbio who judged Gentile's theory as totalitarian: see Bobbio (1990: 155–160).

²⁹ Cf. Ferrabino (1931: 5, 43–44): Thucydides is defined 'a model of pure historical thought, [...] objective', 'distinguished for intelligence, an essentially historical quality: henceforth the ability of making use of only his own thinking' ('modello di puro pensiero storico, [...] oggettivo', 'insigne per la intelligenza, qualità essenzialmente storica: quindi la capacità di giovare solo del proprio pensiero').

evoked by Nietzsche in his work *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889);³⁰ Ferrabino's image is a pessimistic one, permeated by bitterness; the Greek historian is the greatest peak of human rationality, but he cannot reach Socrates' ethics, which created the premise for Greek unification.³¹

4. Momigliano and the Historicised Thucydides

Arnaldo Momigliano, born into an old Jewish family in Piedmont, obtained his university degree ('laurea') in Turin with De Sanctis in June 1929, when he was only 21.³² His dissertation focused on Thucydides,³³ fusing De Sanctis' teaching on source criticism, some suggestions from Ferrabino's *Impero atheniese*, and Croce's different methods of conceptualising the history of historiography. What is most striking in Momigliano's interpretation of Thucydides is that the Greek historian is being historicised not as he was by Ferrabino and much more than he was by De Sanctis. The young scholar converts the philological question of how his work was elaborated upon into the question of how his historical thought developed. Momigliano tries to insert Thucydides in a line of development of Greek historiography that begins with Hecataeus and continues with Herodotus, whom Thucydides partly recovers and partly surpasses. We can recognise in Momigliano's expressions Croce's historicist conception, whereby every author surpasses his predecessor and at the same time preserves him.³⁴ Momigliano still identifies two differences between

³⁰ Cf. Nietzsche (1997: 88): 'Thucydides as the great summation, the final appearance of that strong, strict, hard factuality that was a matter of instinct for the older Hellenes. *Courage* in the face of reality is, in the final analysis, the point of difference between natures such as Thucydides and Plato. Plato is a coward in the face of reality – *consequently* he flees into the ideal; Thucydides has control over *himself* – consequently he also has control over things.'

³¹ For a detailed analysis of Ferrabino's Thucydides see Piovan (2018b: 77–97).

³² For a general introduction to Momigliano's life and work see Di Donato (2011); for an extensive discussion see the essays by many scholars collected in Polverini (2006); Cornell & Murray (2014).

³³ See Momigliano (1930a); for an in-depth analysis see Piovan (2018b: 99–107).

³⁴ It is true that the idea of a development of Greek historiography since Hecataeus can go back to the famous essay by Felix Jacoby published twenty years before Momigliano's thesis: see Jacoby (1909); however Jacoby's influence seems to me to be stronger after Momigliano distanced himself from Croce after World War II (see below n. 52). Jacoby indeed considered Thucydides as the peak of this development whereas Momigliano thought that the fourth-century historian Theopompus achieved substantial progress, as he maintained in the 1931 essay on him: see above, the following lines. Significantly, Jacoby's 1909 essay and Croce's *Teoria e storia della storiografia* are quoted together in Momigliano's thesis among the key reference points on the history

ancient and modern historiography: the first is the relationship with documents, the second is the ability to pose to oneself a historical problem. The first observation he has in common with De Sanctis, and it originates from the proposal to consider history as a science, which is very strong in Beloch's students. The second comes from Croce's assumption that historiography is not just an account of events but a critical handling of a problem. There is also another point influenced by Croce's vision of historiography: Momigliano indeed wants to put Thucydides in his own cultural context by trying to track down his connections with the so-called sophists; it is just in this period that Momigliano wrote his only essays about ancient philosophy.³⁵ It was Croce who had charted the bounds between historiography and philosophy for every age since antiquity in his *Teoria e storia della storiografia*: its first edition was published in German in 1915, while the Italian edition appeared in 1917.

Momigliano stresses his differences from Thucydides and does not consider him to be a role model for the present time, even if he recognises his greatness. At some point one may feel that Momigliano's Thucydides is a precursor of positivist historiography, at least in the alleged first phase of his thought, when he would see the Peloponnesian war as unavoidable, as if it had arisen from the mechanical accumulation of force; one should remember that Croce had long argued with the so-called 'causalism', i.e. the search for mechanical causes of events, which he attributed to the positivist historians and thinkers.

In comparison with De Sanctis and Ferrabino there is in Momigliano a distancing from Thucydides, which was further enhanced shortly afterwards when, in 1931, Momigliano published an essay devoted to Theopompus, the fourth-century BC historian. There he acknowledges Thucydides' merit in having led Greek history towards a unitary development consisting of the increasing of forces around two cores and their resulting rivalry; however, this development has to be seen as illusory because 'the reason of that development was not reached, and the accumulation of forces was a *fact* that explained in a causal way the other *fact*, the Peloponnesian war'.³⁶ The preceding historical moment was devalued and neglected in all the aspects that were not directly related to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Momigliano attributes to

of historiography: cf. Momigliano (1930a: 3 n. 1); cf. in opposition to it the appendix to Momigliano (1975a: 41–42), where an important place is given to Jacoby's studies and Croce is barely named.

³⁵ Cf. Momigliano (1930b), Momigliano (1930c), and Momigliano (1930d).

³⁶ Momigliano (1931b: 230–231): 'non era raggiunto il motivo di questo svolgimento, e l'accumularsi delle forze era un *fatto*, che causalisticamente spiegava l'altro *fatto*, la guerra del Peloponneso' (original italics).

Thucydides the ability to organise his historical work around a political problem but ‘he lacks any interest to capture human personalities, to fix features of cities and peoples, so to insert the war in a rich and lively knowledge of the Hellenic world’.³⁷ Thucydides’ narrow view of human personality leads to a narrow view of Greek history, which is such an evident weakness that already the following generation of Greek historians, including Xenophon and Theopompus, tried to find new paths to writing history while continuing Thucydides’ interrupted work. It is Theopompus who discovers the importance of human psychology and at the same time overcomes the narrow view of Greek history to a wider Panhellenic one. He understands the rise of Philip, King of Macedon and what it means for his own age: ‘new forces acting in the Greek history and personalities not underlying but overlying to these; Panhellenism and expansion in the east and west’.³⁸ Philip’s Panhellenism is different from that of the Persian wars because it is not a defence of the *poleis*, but of Greek civilisation. ‘Theopompus is the historian of and apologist for such a pan-Hellenism, which has its roots in the value not anymore of the city but of the civilised *i.e.* Greek man.’³⁹

On the one hand, in the Theopompus essay Momigliano distanced himself from both Thucydides and those modern historians who consider Thucydides’ work a model for contemporary historiography, such as Eduard Meyer and Aldo Ferrabino.⁴⁰ As the sentence quoted above makes clear, Momigliano’s standpoint seems to be once again influenced by Croce’s historicism, which had argued that ancient historians had no concept of spirit.⁴¹ Croce’s imprint is also perceivable in the idea that

³⁷ Momigliano (1931b: 232): ‘nella narrazione di Tucidide manca ogni interesse a cogliere personalità umane, a fissare caratteristiche di città e popoli, in guisa da inserire la vicenda della guerra in una ricca, viva conoscenza del mondo ellenico’.

³⁸ Momigliano (1931b: 235): ‘nuove forze entrate nella storia greca e personalità non soggiacenti, ma sovrastanti a queste; panellenismo ed espansione a Oriente e ad Occidente’.

³⁹ Momigliano (1931b: 352): ‘Teopompo è lo storico e l’apologeta di tale panellenismo, che affonda le sue radici nel valore, non più della città, ma dell’uomo civile, cioè greco’.

⁴⁰ Both Meyer and Ferrabino are here explicitly named as ‘in the footsteps of Ranke’ (‘sulle orme di Ranke’); the juxtaposition between these two very different scholars sounds bizarre but Momigliano probably has in mind the fact that Ferrabino had been, directly and indirectly via De Sanctis, a student of Julius Beloch, one of the greatest German ancient historians of his generation and a friend of Meyer. However, the link between Ranke and Meyer regarding Thucydides’ reception is much less bizarre: see Piovan (2018b: 23–47).

⁴¹ Croce (1917: 174). On the teleological perspective with which Croce considered ancient historiography see Cambiano (2016: 138).

understanding Thucydides' limits does not demean his value but instead determines it, giving him a specific role in the history of thought.⁴²

On the other hand, the revaluation of Theopompus is a step in the comprehensive review of Greek history that Momigliano was just then beginning; in the same year (1931) he published his essay on Demosthenes, who is acknowledged as the defender of Greek liberty who at the same time was not able to overcome the limits of this liberty, characterised as 'selfish liberty, liberty to overthrowing the others, liberty to which imperialism is intrinsic'.⁴³ In contrast with such a depiction of Demosthenes, the figure that is enhanced by Momigliano is, once again, Philip II, King of Macedon, interpreted not as the destroyer of Greek civilisation but as one who overcomes its limits and proposes new values such as peace, harmony and the end of mutual oppression.⁴⁴ This interpretation of fourth-century BC Greek history passes through the reconsideration of Droysen's discovery of Hellenism as a religious-cultural unity⁴⁵ and of Hegel's philosophy of history in which the Roman empire is the intermediary between Hellenism and Christianity.⁴⁶

In conclusion, in Momigliano the study and account of Greek historiography goes hand in hand with the study and account of Greek history; Thucydides is perceived as too deeply imbedded within the age of the *polis* and the conflict among the *poleis* while Theopompus represents the spokesman of a new Panhellenic age. This vision cannot be separated from Croce's rational-positive theory of history; it is significant that Momigliano uses the expression 'the rationality of the rhythm of that history'⁴⁷ in the book on Philip. Nothing comparable will be written by him after World War II, after the dramatic years of the persecution, his exile in England and the tragic deaths of most of his family in the Nazi camps. All this draws a substantial rupture with Momigliano's youthful

⁴² Momigliano (1931b: 231): 'i limiti, che, allontanando Tuciddide da noi, non ne sminuiscono già il valore, ma anzi lo determinano, permettendogli di adempire a una precisa funzione nella storia del pensiero'.

⁴³ Momigliano (1931a: 744). A very different interpretation of Demosthenes was advanced in those same years by Piero Treves, another student of De Sanctis: cf. Treves (1933). For a general introduction to Treves see Franco (2011) and Pertici (2021); on Treves' Demosthenes see Clemente (2021) and Canevaro (2021); on the complex relationship between Momigliano and Treves see Ampolo (2021).

⁴⁴ See also Momigliano (1934), the monograph on Philip that he was reprinted in the year of the author's death.

⁴⁵ Momigliano (1933).

⁴⁶ Momigliano (1935).

⁴⁷ Momigliano (1934: 179): 'la razionalità del ritmo di quella storia'.

years that is beyond the limits of this essay.⁴⁸ Here it suffices to say that he stops using Crocean concepts such as overcoming and development while dealing with the Greek historians; therefore, Thucydides is no longer considered to be one who perfected what Herodotus had barely sketched, but it is Herodotus who seemed to him ‘a revolutionary personality, the real, subtle and mysterious creator of historiography’,⁴⁹ one too long depreciated because of Thucydides’ criticism.⁵⁰ What characterises Momigliano’s studies on Greek historiography after 1945 is the rehabilitation of Herodotus and his way of writing history in opposition to the Thucydidean model, which is exclusively focused on political and military history.⁵¹ It must not escape our attention that this turn on Greek historiography is parallel to another turn: the rehabilitation of antiquarianism,⁵² which Croce did not consider as historiography but as pseudohistory.⁵³

5. Conclusions

The discussion of Thucydides among the Italian ancient historians in the first half of twentieth century is thus part of a more general debate about, on the one hand, the meaning of Greek history and, on the other, the status of ancient and modern historiography. In our own time, when

⁴⁸ For a synthetic account of Momigliano’s studies on Greek historiography after World War II see Piovan (2018b: 117–122). Iori (2020: 223–233) precisely reconstructs how complicated and difficult Momigliano’s return to the Italian university was after 1945.

⁴⁹ Momigliano (1960b: 342); cf. also Momigliano (1957), Momigliano (1958), and Momigliano (1990), of which the latter, posthumously published, really dates to 1961–1962.

⁵⁰ Here is not the right place to debate whether it is really Herodotus that Thucydides criticised without ever explicitly naming him; however, it seems to me to be beyond doubt that Herodotus is one of Thucydides’ targets, and likely the main one, in the methodological chapters, especially at 1.20.3, 1.22.4 and 1.23; for a fuller discussion see Porciani (2017: 552–554).

⁵¹ Momigliano’s view, maintained many times through the decades, that Thucydides reduced history to only contemporary and political history (decisively influencing all Greek and Roman historiography), appears to be conditioned by Jacoby’s essay already quoted: see Jacoby (1909); however, it now seems outdated, as remarked especially by Guido Schepens: see Schepens (2010).

⁵² See especially Momigliano (1950); on this argument see the essays collected in Miller (2007), especially that by Ingo Herklotz that raises some critical objections to Momigliano’s notion of ancient and early modern antiquarianism: Herklotz (2007).

⁵³ For the Crocean view that the antiquarian histories are ‘pseudostoria’ see Croce (1917: 19–40).

over-specialisation seems to be predominant, it is noteworthy to highlight the interactions between classical scholars and philosophers, especially Croce as a theoretician of history. Another common thread is represented by the reaction to the political climate of the 1920s and 1930s, that is the crisis of Liberalism and the rise of Fascism, that finds its reflection especially in the interpretation of the dialogue of the Melians. Therefore, it is not out of place to define this scholarly discussion in the terms used by Giuseppe Galasso about Italian historiography:

The Italian call, tenaciously upheld, although expressed in various ways, to avoid seeing historiography as a dialogue, as an exchange just between historians and the learned. Historiography should also, and perhaps predominantly, be perceived as the answer of historians and scholars to what in contemporary social and civil, moral and cultural life become urgent problems for the people confronting them.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ Galasso (2017: 234–235): ‘vocazione italiana, tenacemente confermata, benché variamente modulata e rimodulata, a non concepire la storiografia come un colloquiare e interloquire soltanto tra storici e studiosi ma anche, se non addirittura soprattutto, come una risposta di storici e studiosi a ciò che nella vita sociale e civile, morale e culturale urge e preme come problema del presente dei soggetti implicati e interessati da tale urgenza e pressione’. I used the English translation of Marianne Pade, with some slight changes: see Pade (2021: 2).

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CLASSICS AGAINST THE REGIME.
THUCYDIDES, PIERO GOBETTI, AND FASCIST ITALY*

— LUCA IORI —

ABSTRACT

On 18 November 1924, one of the most important twentieth-century Italian journals, La Rivoluzione Liberale, directed by Piero Gobetti, published a brief and surprising article entitled ‘Tucidide e il fascismo’ (‘Thucydides and Fascism’). It consists of a series of twelve Thucydidean excerpts in Italian translation taken out of the third and the eighth books of the History. The cento was part of a broader editorial strategy by which Rivoluzione Liberale made use of ancient and modern classics to escape Fascist censorship and arouse opposition against the nascent dictatorship. The paper aims at describing this provocative anti-regime campaign, defining the theoretical bases that made possible a liberally oriented interpretation of Thucydides within Gobetti’s circle.

KEYWORDS

Piero Gobetti, Fascism, Aesopian language, Gaetano De Sanctis

On 18 November 1924, one of the most important twentieth-century Italian journals, *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, directed by the twenty-three-year-old Turinese *Wunderkind* Piero Gobetti,¹ published a brief and surprising article entitled ‘Tucidide e il fascismo’

* The present chapter is an augmented and revised version of Iori (2018). I wish to thank Ersilia Alessandrone Perona, Antonella Amico, Ivan Matijašić, and Peter J. Rhodes for their valuable comments which helped to improve my text. Special thanks are due to Andrea Giardina for facilitating my access to and consultation of the archival collections held at the Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica (Rome). Warm thanks also to the staff of the Istituto for assistance with De Sanctis’ papers. In the text I have used the following bibliographical abbreviations: CSPG for Centro Studi Piero Gobetti (Turin); GU for Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d’Italia; IISA for Archivio storico dell’Istituto Italiano per la Storia Antica (Rome); RDL for Regio Decreto Legge (Royal Decree Law); *RL* for *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. The page numbering of *RL* follows the anastatic reproduction of *La Rivoluzione Liberale. Rivista storica settimanale di politica* (1 (1922), nr. 1–4 (1925), nr. 40), Parma, 1967. All English translations of Italian quotations are mine.

¹ For a succinct biographical profile of Piero Gobetti, cf. Malandrino (2001).

(‘Thucydides and Fascism’). Printed on the front page, this article collected a series of twelve Thucydidean excerpts in Italian translation taken out of the third and eighth books of the *History*; more precisely, from Thucydides’ most famous analysis of the effects of civil war in Corcyra (Thuc. 3.82–83) and from the narrative of the early stages of the oligarchic coup d’état that put an end to the Athenian democracy in 411 BC (Thuc. 8.63–66). All these excerpts were introduced by clever and provocative titles (‘The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland’; ‘The murderers’; and so on), inviting the reader to silently juxtapose past and present and polemically reinterpret contemporary events – from the October 1922 March on Rome, which cleared the way for Benito Mussolini’s seizure of power, to the assassination of the Socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924, an event that accelerated the shift to overt dictatorship.² As we will see, Thucydides’ words were mobilised with the specific goal of circumventing Fascist censorship after Mussolini’s government had passed a range of measures that strongly restricted press freedom in early July 1924. But there was more: this cento was also part of a broader cultural strategy, aimed at establishing a small canon of classical authors perceived as *serving the cause of liberty*. And among them was Thucydides.

From this information alone, it is not difficult to point out various possible reasons why this small collection of passages, despite its apparent compilatory nature, can be regarded as one of the most challenging reuses of Thucydides’ work in early twentieth-century Italy: on the one hand, we have the intellectual stature of its publisher, Piero Gobetti; on the other, the inflamed political context in which the article was set and its very ambitious objectives. However, quite surprisingly, this ingenious Thucydidean cento has so far been substantially ignored by scholars³ and still awaits full analysis. The present article aims to fill this gap and is divided into four main sections: the first will better illustrate the editorial strategy by which, in 1924, *Rivoluzione Liberale* made use of ancient and modern classics to escape Fascist censorship; the second will scrutinise the body of the anthology by clarifying how Thucydides’ text was translated, manipulated, and even reshaped to denounce obliquely Mussolini’s regime. I will then explore the theoretical bases that made a liberal-oriented interpretation of Thucydides within Gobetti’s circle possible and, finally, I will clarify the several lines of discontinuity that separated

² A full transcription of the article is republished in the *Appendix*.

³ Very brief and sporadic mentions of the article can be found in Spriano (1960: 800); Brioschi (1974: 150–151); Spriano (1977: 128); Festa (1980: 125); Meaglia (1982: 410); Mitarotondo (2016: 74–82).

Gobetti's classicism from the coeval reappropriation of the Roman past promoted by Fascism.

1. 'The Reader Must Read between the Lines':

Piero Gobetti and the Political Struggle in 1924 Italy

Gobetti's *Rivoluzione Liberale* was an extremely dynamic political magazine, published in Turin from February 1922 to October 1925, when it was shut down by the Fascist regime. As its name suggests, the journal belonged to the large family of Italian liberal periodicals, but it distinguished itself because of its active dialogue with Marxism and more specifically with the Communist intellectual circle centred around Antonio Gramsci and its journal *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Gobetti's journal regularly published articles by influential liberal personalities such as Luigi Einaudi (the future President of the Italian Republic from 1948 to 1955) and charismatic democrat leaders like Gaetano Salvemini, fuelling lively political and cultural debates animated by Piero's many talented and often very young collaborators: Carlo Levi, Augusto Monti, Carlo Rosselli, and Natalino Sapegno. Given these premises, the journal stood out for its clear opposition to Fascism and had become a favourite target of the regime since its establishment in November 1922.⁴

Some telegrams from Benito Mussolini to the Prefect of Turin, Enrico Palmieri, clearly illustrate this situation. On 6 February 1923, the Duce, who had been Prime Minister for only three months, ordered Palmieri to carry out a search of the headquarters of *Rivoluzione Liberale* and arrest Gobetti for 'accord with subversive communists':

I order you to immediately search newsroom and administration of journal 'RIVOLUZIONE LIBERALE' seizing lists of subscribers, correspondence, administrative books — stop At the same time you will arrest above-mentioned Pietro Gobetti and editors, reporting him to judicial authority for accord with subversive communists — stop I await the result of the operation telegraphically maximum energy and harshness.⁵

⁴ On the cultural and political orientations of Gobetti's magazine and its relationship with the Turinese context, cf. at least Asor Rosa (1975: 1448–1456), d'Orsi (1998: 499–622), d'Orsi (2000b), Martin (2008).

⁵ 'Ordinole perquisire immediatamente redazione amministrazione giornale 'RIVOLUZIONE LIBERALE' sequestrando schedari abbonati corrispondenza libri amministrativi — stop Contemporaneamente procederà arresto nominato Pietro Gobetti e redattori provvedendo a denunciarlo autorità giudiziaria per intelligenza coi comunisti sovversivi — stop Attendo risultato operazione telegraficamente massima energia e

Two days later, on 8 February, another telegram to Palmieri showed the purely intimidating reasons for the measure:

Journal ‘RIVOLUZIONE LIBERALE’ has been one of the most perfidious enemies of the current Government stop All the rogues that have been expelled from Italian political life have gathered there Last issue hoped for rise of Trotzky stop Five days after the regulatory detention You — unless something else is found — can go ahead and release Gobetti stop Will make copies of letters and documents that might be of political interest to me.⁶

In the following months, Gobetti was imprisoned again in May 1923, this time on the laughable charge of having collaborated as a theatre critic with the Communist newspaper *L’Ordine Nuovo*.⁷ On 22 February 1924, during a confidential meeting at Palazzo Chigi with some exponents of the Fascist militia, the Duce himself demanded a violent physical attack on the ‘annoying’ Gobetti (a ‘severe Fascist lesson’, in Mussolini’s words), which was then postponed for a few months due to some divisions that had arisen within the Turin squads.⁸

The growing aggression towards the young Turinese intellectual stemmed from the considerable visibility assumed by Gobetti’s initiatives against Mussolini’s government: not only from the columns of *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, but also through the issues of his publishing house, the Piero Gobetti Editore, which in view of the political elections of 6 April 1924 had published important writings with a clear anti-Fascist commitment, such as *Una battaglia liberale* by Giovanni Amendola, who would die in Nice in April 1926 as a result of a Fascist attack, and *Popolarismo e fascismo* by Don Luigi Sturzo, exiled in London since

durezza’, quoted in Alessandrone Perona (2017: xxxv); cf. also De Felice (1985: 252). Here and below, for the most significant passages, I accompany my English translation with the Italian original.

⁶ ‘Giornale “RIVOLUZIONE LIBERALE” è stato uno dei nemici più perfidi attuale Governo stop Tutte le canaglie espulse vita politica italiana vi si sono date convegno ultimo numero auspicava avvento Trotzky stop Trascorsi cinque giorni dal fermo regolamentare Ella — qualora altro non risulti — può provvedere scarcerazione Gobetti stop Farà copia lettere documenti che possono interessarmi punto di vista politico Mussolini’, quoted in Alessandrone Perona (2017: xxxv); cf. also De Felice (1985: 253). On the whole story of Gobetti’s arrest in February 1923, cf. Alessandrone Perona (2017: xxxv–xlv).

⁷ Alessandrone Perona (2017: lvii–lxiii).

⁸ The episode is described by Guido Narbona, a lieutenant in the Fascist Militia, in a letter dated 24 November 1924, cf. Rossini (1966: 264–266).

October 1924.⁹ Also in 1924, together with the Bolognese publisher Cappelli, Gobetti himself had issued a successful collection of his own editorials outlining a programme of political struggle: *La Rivoluzione Liberale. Saggio sulla lotta politica in Italia*.

Not even Mussolini's sweeping victory in the polls in April 1924, favoured by electoral fraud, was able to halt Gobetti's initiatives. In May of that year, in order to relaunch the action of the anti-Fascist groups, the young intellectual undertook a series of trips to Paris and Sicily. These travels attracted the attention of Mussolini, who, in a telegram of 1 June to the prefect Palmieri, demanded once again an intervention against him: 'I have been told that the notorious Gobetti has recently been to Paris and today is in Sicily. Please keep me informed and be vigilant to make sure that the life of this insipid opposer to the Government and Fascism is once again made difficult.'¹⁰ The order was executed at 9.30 a.m. on 9 June, when a handful of agents without proper warrants burst into Gobetti's home-editorial office, subjecting him to a violent physical attack and seizing all his political correspondence.

This umpteenth reprisal, together with the arrests of 1923, illustrates the oppressive climate in which Gobetti and *Rivoluzione Liberale* found themselves operating immediately after Mussolini's rise to power in the autumn of 1922. Nevertheless, at least until June 1924, the open hostility of the regime did not prevent Gobetti's journal from coming out regularly and, above all, with complete freedom as to the content published. Indeed, the Italian legal system did not offer Mussolini strong enough grounds to systematically gag opposition newspapers and magazines. Censorship regulations, still regulated by the *Editto albertino* on the press of 26 March 1848, kept in force — at least formally — a system of guarantees that protected freedom of expression.¹¹ Therefore, in the absence of more restrictive laws, the Fascist government acted against hostile magazines in a rather irregular manner, relying on squad violence and preventive arrests, as in the case of Gobetti.¹² This situation began to

⁹ On Gobetti's publishing strategies in 1924, cf. Frabotta (1988: 109–140), Alessandrone Perona (1976: 33–51), Accame Lanzillotta (1980), Alessandrone Perona (2015: 20ff.).

¹⁰ 'Mi si riferisce che noto Gobetti sia stato recentemente Parigi e che oggi sia Sicilia. Prego informarmi e vigilare per rendere nuovamente difficile vita questo insulso oppositore Governo e fascismo' — quoted in De Felice (1985: 250).

¹¹ On the *editto* promulgated by Charles Albert of Savoy in March 1848, cf. Lazzaro (1969: 7–30).

¹² Cf. Castronovo (1970: 342 ff.), Cesari (1978: 11–14). For a general overview of the history of the press and censorship in the Fascist era, cf. at least Carcano (1973), Cesari

change dramatically on 10 June 1924, when Giacomo Matteotti was assassinated in Rome.

As is well known, twenty days earlier, on 30 May 1924, in one of the first sessions of the Chamber of Deputies of the new legislature, Matteotti, secretary of the United Socialist Party, had publicly denounced the fraudulent way in which the political elections of April 1924 had been conducted. That denunciation cost him his life: on the afternoon of 10 June, around 4.15 p.m., while he was walking along the Lungotevere Arnaldo da Brescia in Rome, the MP was accosted by a car, from which five agents of the Fascist secret political police got out and kidnapped him. He was killed shortly afterwards. His body, hidden in woodland 25 km from the capital, was accidentally discovered two months later, on 16 August. In the weeks following the kidnapping, however, even in the absence of Matteotti's body, no one had any doubts as to what had really happened, and many newspapers set up vibrant denunciation campaigns against the government. And so did *Rivoluzione Liberale*, dedicating an entire issue to the socialist deputy (1 July 1924), in which a long essay by Gobetti — later republished with resounding success in the form of a small volume — retraced Matteotti's public career in hagiographic tones.¹³ At the same time, the magazine came to national attention as a political entity: on 18 June, in Turin, the 'Rivoluzione Liberale group' took part in a programmatic assembly of anti-Fascist formations and on 8 July, in the columns of his newspaper, Gobetti launched a vigorous appeal for the constitution of other 'Groups' throughout the peninsula, with good results in Rome, Milan and Naples.¹⁴ On the parliamentary side, on 27 June, the opposition parties (Popular, Socialists, Communists, Republicans) joined ranks and decided to abstain from work until those responsible for the attempt on Matteotti's life had been tried — the initiative was called the 'Aventine secession', in continuity with that taken by the plebeians against the patricians in 494 BC.¹⁵

Faced with such a massive wave of protest, Mussolini decided to react by repressing dissent and significantly tightening censorship laws. On 8 July 1924, a decree that had already been drafted and submitted to the king for his assent the previous summer (RDL 15 July 1923, no. 3288)

(1978), Tranfaglia, Murialdi & Legnani (1980); Fabre (1998), Forno (2005), Forno (2012: 83–134).

¹³ Gobetti (1924a: 105–107).

¹⁴ *RL* 3, 8 July 1924, nr. 28, 110; *RL* 3, 29 July 1924, nr. 31, 128.

¹⁵ On the Italian political situation in the months following the Matteotti murder, cf. spec. Canali (2004) and Borgognone (2012).

appeared in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, introducing a series of highly restrictive rules for newspapers and magazines, undoing the system of liberal protections defined by the 1848 edict. The new decree gave prefects broad powers to warn, seize and declare debarred the managers of all newspapers that ‘with false or tendentious news [...] damaged the national credit [...], caused unjustified alarm among the population or [...] gave grounds for disturbing public order’, incited ‘to commit crimes or class hatred or disobedience to the laws’, or vilified ‘the Fatherland, the King, the Royal Family, the Supreme Pontiff, Religion [...], the Institutions and the powers of the State’.¹⁶ Just a few hours later, on 10 July 1924, another decree, no. 1801, laid down special rules allowing newspapers to be seized even without a formal warning.¹⁷ The aim of these measures, which were so strict and yet so general in their definition of offences, was to provide the government with effective legal instruments to initiate systematic repression against anti-Fascist magazines.¹⁸ And it is no coincidence that in the second half of 1924, the prefects’ initiatives against non-aligned periodicals multiplied, and their publication was repeatedly blocked,¹⁹ only to be suspended altogether in 1925/6 following the promulgation of new and more stringent legislation.²⁰

In this new context, *La Rivoluzione Liberale* was faced with the real possibility of stopping publication and had to adapt to the new rules. The journal, however, decided not to abdicate its editorial line and adopted new and more ingenious strategies of political struggle that would allow it to circumvent censorship. It was precisely at this time that the idea of relaunching the anti-Fascist battle through the re-use of the classics took shape. While editorials and news articles risked being widely restricted, it would have been more difficult for the authorities to condemn the words of authors such as Thucydides, Sallust, Machiavelli or Massimo d’Azeglio, who were studied daily in the schools and universities of the kingdom. Similarly, re-proposing vivid historical frescos or profiles of great personalities of the past such as Julius Caesar or Lorenzino de’ Medici in a critical key, made it possible to comment, in an oblique but highly effective manner, on contemporary reality by exploiting the evocative power of historical analogy.²¹

¹⁶ RDL 15 July 1923, nr. 3288, (cf. GU 8 July 1924, nr. 159, 2543).

¹⁷ RDL 10 July 1924, nr. 1801 (cf. GU 11 July 1924, nr. 162, 2570).

¹⁸ On the limitations to the freedom of the press introduced by the regime after the Matteotti assassination, cf. Tranfaglia (1980: 18–29).

¹⁹ Cf. Castronovo (1970: 352ff.).

²⁰ Cf. Murialdi (1980: 33–73).

²¹ On this anti-censorship strategy, cf. Iori (2019).

To make this strategy effective, however, it was necessary to inform readers, who were repeatedly invited from the columns of *Rivoluzione Liberale* not to stop at the literal meaning of the published articles, but — so to speak — to fill the silences. Thus, in the issues of 15, 22 and 29 July 1924, the periodical printed the following bolded notice on its masthead: ‘In a gagged press the real writer is the reader: he must read between the lines’.²² And in the 22 July issue, an editorial by Gobetti detailed the terms of the issue:

Running a free periodical in risky times means relying on the intelligence of the public, forgoing a simple, superficial readership. We have the good fortune, which no other journal has, that we are speaking to a small but select public. We can count on resonance, comments, and on a sort of understanding of the premises. [...] It would be rather easy to create a beautiful halo for us and to be suppressed with it. In all likelihood, the gentlemen of the new regime are waiting for the opportunity. Doing everything above board, we won’t make them wait more than fifteen days. [...] We rejected this solution because of more realistic reasons and a precise duty. Living and speaking is a more difficult task: this is therefore what we want to propose, as long as we are able, as a pledge of honour. *We therefore commit the reader to an individual competition: and the winner will be the person who finds the sharpest meanings in the implications, reads and writes the most scathingly between the lines, embroiders malice in the most innocent things, interprets ancient history as a good modern man.* Sarcasm, irony, and malice should thus serve, since such are the times, as a profession of faith.²³

²² *RL* 3, 15–29 July 1924, nrr. 29–31.

²³ Gobetti (1924a: 121): ‘Mantenere un periodico libero in tempi avventurosi deve significare affidarsi all’intelligenza del pubblico, rinunciare al pubblico facile e superficiale. Noi abbiamo la fortuna, che non ha nessun altro giornale, di parlare a un pubblico piccolo ma scelto. Possiamo contare sulle risonanze, sul commento, su una specie di intesa nelle premesse. [...] Ci sarebbe assai facile crearci una bella aureola col farci sopprimere. È probabile che i signori del nuovo regime non ne attendano che l’occasione. Giocando allo scoperto non li faremmo attendere più di quindici giorni. [...] Abbiamo respinto questa soluzione per cedere a ragioni più realistiche e a un dovere preciso. Vivere e parlare è un compito più difficile: dunque ce lo vogliamo proporre, finché riusciremo, come un impegno d’onore. *Impegniamo dunque il lettore alla gara singolare: e il premio sia per chi saprà trovar significati più arguti ai sottintesi, leggere e scrivere più pungentemente tra le righe, ricamare malignità nelle cose più innocenti, interpretare da buoni moderni la storia antica.* Sarcasmi, ironie, malizie valgano dunque, poiché tali sono i tempi, in luogo di una professione di fede’; italics mine.

Even from these brief remarks, it is clear that the anti-censorship experiment animated by Gobetti falls squarely within that special type of allegorical communication that goes by the name of ‘Aesopian language’. This mode of expression, studied and theorised especially in the Slavic field, was widely used by Russian writers and journalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to escape the Tsarist and later Soviet gag, but it was also widely used outside the Slavic-speaking area.²⁴ As extensively explained by the Russian critic Lev Loseff, ‘Aesopian texts — like Aesop’s fables — conceal their true polemical targets beyond the screen of fairy-tale elements or remote historical settings in order to bypass censorship strictures’.²⁵ The mechanism is in many ways similar to that of riddles: the Aesopian text requires a coherent system of ‘markers’ that point to hidden referents, as well as a series of ‘screens’ (for example, a historical setting) that conceal the true targets. Above all, in order for it to work, a high level of awareness among the audience is indispensable: readers must be warned of the subtle game of interpretation to which they are called. This is exactly what *Rivoluzione Liberale* did in July 1924.²⁶

In fact, this kind of retrospective game was not entirely new to Gobetti’s journal: already in November 1922, immediately after the March on Rome, a free translation of Archilochus fr. 115 West² had mocked Mussolini by superimposing the figure of the Duce on that of the tyrant Leophilus, transfigured, for the occasion, into the features of an enterprising Figaro (‘Now Leophilus commands, above and below Leophilus acts — everyone hangs on Leophilus’ lips — Leophilus is the Factotum in the city’).²⁷ A year later, in October 1923, an anthology of

²⁴ The most extensive treatment of the ‘Aesopian language’ — investigated in its historical, socio-linguistic and literary aspects — is due to Losev (1984). On the Aesopian strand of nineteenth to twentieth-century Russian literature, cf. Losev (1984: 1–21). In this regard, one can also reread a famous passage from Lenin’s *What is to be done?* on the Aesopian production of revolutionary orientation in Tsarist Russia: ‘In a country ruled by an autocracy, with a completely enslaved press, in a period of desperate political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is persecuted, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the *censored literature* and, *though expounded in Aesopian language, is understood by all the “interested”*’ (Lenin (1977: 361)); italics mine.

²⁵ Losev (1984: 23–52).

²⁶ On the Aesopian nature of Gobetti’s strategy, cf. Iori (2019: 897–899). It remains to be understood whether and to what extent the use of Aesopian techniques adopted by Gobetti’s circle derived, at least in part, from the profound and direct knowledge of Russian literature and culture possessed by the young Turinese intellectual.

²⁷ *RL* 1, 2 November 1922, nr. 32, 119: ‘*Or Leòfilo comanda, alto e basso Leofilo fa | tutti pendon dalla bocca di Leofilo | è Leofilo il factotum in città*’ [transl. Ettore

Machiavelli's passages (*Art of War*, Book 1) denounced the violence of the Fascist militias;²⁸ in May 1924 a second Machiavellian cento — this time taken from the *Discorsi* — celebrated the 'faith in the popular forces' and their progressive role in the life of the state.²⁹ However, it was with the introduction of the new press law in July 1924 that recourse to such expedients became systematic.

Thus, between the summer and autumn of that year — before the regime launched new and stricter controls on anti-Fascist publications — the columns of *Rivoluzione Liberale* hosted numerous centos of Greek, Latin, Italian and French authors together with short historical proses, which, thanks to the use of mischievous titles, suggested irreverent juxtapositions between past and present. To have an idea of the breadth of Gobetti's initiative, one need only flick through the titles of these articles, which range — chronologically speaking — from the Peloponnesian War to nineteenth-century Italy, interspersing passages from Greek and Latin historians, excerpts from Machiavelli and Tocqueville, quotations from Risorgimento historiography, as well as pages by anti-Fascist intellectuals and the magazine's regular contributors. Below is the complete list of articles in order of appearance:

1. F.S. Nitti, 'The coup d'état', *RL* 3, 8 July 1924, nr. 28, 111–112 [excerpts from F.S. Nitti, *Sui moti di Napoli del 1820*, Florence, 1897];
2. 'Lessons for Mussolinians. The Ministerial Deputy', *RL* 3, 8 July 1924, nr. 28, 112 [letter from Alexis de Tocqueville to Louis-Mathieu Molé (12 December 1837); with an introduction by M. Fubini];
3. P.L. Courier, 'Pamphlet des Pamphlets', *RL* 3, 15 July 1924, nr. 29, 113 [excerpts from P.L. Courier, *Pamphlet des Pamphlets*, Paris, 1824];
4. G. Ansaldo, 'The dissident Fascists', *RL* 3, 15 July 1924, nr. 29, 113 [comparison of the lives of Lorenzino de' Medici and the dissident Fascist Cesare Forni];
5. G. Ansaldo, 'A vile libellist', *RL* 3, 22 July 1924, nr. 30, 121–122 [commentary on P.L. Courier, *Pamphlet des Pamphlets*, cf. *supra* nr. 3];

Romagnoli]. The Greek original is: *νῦν δὲ Λεώφιλος μὲν ἄρχει, Λεωφίλου δ' ἐπικρατεῖν, ἢ Λεωφίλωι δὲ πάντα κεῖται, Λεώφιλον δ' ἄκουε.*

²⁸ Machiavelli (1923: 127).

²⁹ Machiavelli (1924a: 77). The article came out in response to the 'Prelude to Machiavelli' published by Mussolini in *Gerarchia* on 30 April 1924. On Mussolini's prose — anticipating in many respects the doctrine of the Fascist state — and the prompt replies of Gobetti (in *La Rivoluzione Liberale*) and Matteotti (in *English Life*), cf. Mitarotondo (2016).

6. V. Cuoco, 'Portrait', *RL* 3, 22 July 1924, nr. 30, 122 [excerpt from V. Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla Rivoluzione napoletana del 1799*, Milan, 1801];
7. L.C. Farini, 'Normalisation', *RL* 3, 29 July 1924, nr. 31, 125 [excerpts from L.C. Farini, *Manifesto di Rimini*, Rimini, 1845 and L.C. Farini, *Lo Stato Romano dall'anno 1815 all'anno 1850*, Florence, 1850];
8. N. Machiavelli, 'The Duke of Athens', *RL* 3, 29 July 1924, nr. 31, 125 [excerpt from N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, 2.36.5];
9. 'A defence of Mussolini', *RL* 3, 29 July 1924, nr. 31, 127 [imaginary conversation with the reactionary MP Clemente Solaro della Margarita (1792–1869)];
10. G. Ferrero, 'Caesar's dictatorship', *RL* 3, 2 September 1924, nr. 32, 132 [excerpts from G. Ferrero, *Grandezza e decadenza di Roma*, vol. 2, *Giulio Cesare*, Milan, 1902; with an editorial introductory note];
11. E. Renan, 'Parallels', *RL* 3, 16 September 1924, nr. 34, 137 [excerpts from E. Renan, *Feuilles détachées*, Paris, 1891];
12. Sallust, 'Against Catiline', *RL* 3, 14 October 1924, nr. 38, 153 [excerpts from Sallust, *De coniuratione Catilinae* (5.1–2, 4–6; 14.1–3; 21.1–2, 4; 25.1–5; 37.4–7; 52.5–6)];
13. G. Fortunato, 'Liberty in Italy', *RL* 3, 14 October 1924, nr. 38, 153 [excerpts from G. Fortunato, *Il Mezzogiorno e lo Stato Italiano*, Bari, 1911];
14. T.R. Castiglione, 'The lapsi', *RL* 3, 14 October 1924, nr. 38, 156 [historical prose on the anti-Christian persecutions begun under the Emperor Decius (250 AD)];
15. A. France, 'Portraits of Italian affairs', *RL* 3, 21 October 1924, nr. 39, 157 [excerpts from A. France, *L'Île des Pingouins*, Paris, 1908 and A. France, *Les dieux ont soif*, Paris, 1912];
16. A. Bartoli, 'A 'Mussolineid' by Sem Benelli', *RL* 3, 21 October 1924, nr. 39, 157 [excerpt from A. Bartoli, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. 1, Florence, 1878];
17. [S. Giua,] 'Oath of volunteers', *RL* 3, 21 October 1924, nr. 39, 160 [quotation of the oath of allegiance imposed by the brigand Pasquale Romano on his militia];
18. [C. Levi,] 'The manager, the donkey, and the monkey', *RL* 3, 4 November 1924, nr. 41, 165 [commentary on a fable by La Fontaine (*Le Charlatan*) and on tale 88 by Bonaventure des Périers (*Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis* [Lyon, 1558])];
19. M. D'Azeglio, 'On the latest events in... Romagna', *RL* 3, 11 November 1924, nr. 42, 171 [excerpts from M. D'Azeglio, *Degli ultimi casi di Romagna*, 1846];

20. 'Thucydides and Fascism', *RL* 3, 18 November 1924, nr. 43, 173 [excerpts from Thucydides, *History* (3.82–83; 8.63, 8.65–66)];
21. A. Monti, 'Conspiracies in daylight', *RL* 3, 18 November 1924, nr. 43, 173–174 [commentary on M. D'Azeglio, *Degli ultimi casi di Romagna*, cf. *supra* nr. 19];
22. A. Cavalli, 'Anticipated commemoration of the Duce', *RL* 3, 25 November 1924, nr. 44, 179 [comparison of the lives of the soldier of fortune Muzio Attendolo Sforza (1369–1424) and Mussolini];
23. K. Suckert,³⁰ 'The perfect tyrant. Letter from Lorenzo Vecchio De' Medici to Benito Mussolini', *RL* 3, 25 November 1924, nr. 44, 179 [*epistola ficta* from Lorenzo de' Medici to Mussolini; with an editorial introductory note]

For reasons of space, we cannot go through all these pieces, but we can nonetheless note that the attention of Gobetti and his collaborators was focused on three periods that are traditionally considered decisive in the process of the formation of Italian national consciousness: Republican Rome, the history of the Florentine state from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and the Risorgimento uprisings that led to national unification and to the founding of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. Moving along these privileged axes, and alternating between authors' anthologies and pungent editorials, the columnists exploited the aura of exemplarity commonly attributed to these historical events of a more or less distant past to comment the turbulent eve of the March on Rome and the Fascist takeover of the Italian government. Mussolini was thus described through the 'parallel lives' of Catiline and Caesar — 'not a great statesman, but the greatest demagogue in history';³¹ the *squadristi* were identified with the Catilinarians or the Sanfedists of Romagna, anti-liberal and anti-unitary militias that had risen to defend the Papal State during the Risorgimento movements of 1831;³² the Duce's economic policies were likened to Caesar's demagogic donations or the Duke of Athens' gifts to the Florentine plebs;³³ and so on. On the side of the Antifascists, it is significant to find a passage from the patriot Massimo d'Azeglio, who, commenting on the 1845 Romagna uprisings, criticised the use of clandestine struggle and celebrated political initiatives conducted in the light

³⁰ The text is mockingly attributed to Kurz Suckerth (Curzio Malaparte), then a fervent supporter of Fascism. The article is actually the work of Gobetti's friend and collaborator, Edmondo Rho: cf. Alessandrone Perona (2017: 551).

³¹ Sallustio (1924: 153); Ferrero (1924: 132).

³² Sallustio (1924: 153); Farini (1924: 125).

³³ Machiavelli (1924b: 125).

of day — a clear stance taken by Gobetti's journal on the strategies to be adopted after the assassination of Matteotti.³⁴

'Thucydides and Fascism', published on 18 November 1924, appeared at the end of this long sequence of articles and borrowed, as we shall see, its main themes. The article fitted perfectly into the frenetic political context of the autumn of 1924, marked by the extreme attempt of the oppositions to inflict the decisive blow on the Mussolini government. On 12 November, the Chamber of Deputies had reopened its doors after more than four months of inactivity; the Aventinians had immediately relaunched the idea of a transitional government that would take the country to new elections, in the obvious hope that the Fascist front would be defeated. On 15 November, even the Liberals broke away from the majority and voted against Mussolini. Two weeks later, on 30 November, the Aventinians organised a huge protest rally in Milan and shortly afterwards, on 5 December, the Senate, while still voting in favour of Mussolini's executive, saw a further increase in the number of abstainers and those opposed to the Duce.

In the midst of this escalation, which really threatened the stability of the Fascist government, 'Thucydides and Fascism' thus became part of a vigorous anti-regime campaign aimed at alienating parliamentary and popular consensus from the executive. As is well known, the development of events was very different from the expectations of the Aventinians: on 3 January 1925 Mussolini publicly took responsibility for the Matteotti murder, giving a decisive turn towards dictatorship, which became concrete in the following two years through a series of laws and special decrees that dismantled what remained of the liberal framework of the state. However, a few weeks earlier, when the prospect of an authoritarian stranglehold seemed avoidable, Gobetti and his collaborators had turned to Thucydides to denounce the illegitimacy and abuses of Fascist authority, calling for a clear and uncompromising stance against the regime. But what were the Thucydidean passages that were mobilised against the Fascist regime? And how were they adapted to the needs of the political struggle? Only a close examination of the anthology can provide answers to these questions.

2. Anatomy of an Anthology: Thucydides between the March on Rome and the Matteotti Affair

As mentioned above, 'Thucydides and Fascism' collects twelve excerpts from two different sections of the *History*: the first one deals with the

³⁴ D'Azeglio (1924: 171).

cruellest phase of the *stasis* of Corcyra (427 BC); the other one provides a detailed account of the first stages of the Athenian oligarchic *putsch* of 411 BC. All those passages in Italian translation were also preceded by a provocative title, suggesting inflammatory comparisons between the facts of the Peloponnesian War and some dramatic events that occurred in the first years of Mussolini's regime (**Fig. 1**). Moreover, the architecture of the cento was such that the twelve excerpts were not arranged in the order in which they appear in Thucydides' work, but in a new, unprecedented sequence, building up a specific line of reasoning, which deserves to be closely analysed in order to fully grasp the polemical objectives of the article.

The first excerpt, entitled 'The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland', fuses together three passages taken from Thuc. 8.63–66, thus associating the oligarchic *putsch* that abated Athenian democracy with the coup that installed Mussolini's first government, the March on Rome (28–29 October 1922).

It was around that time that democracy was abolished in Athens...
[Thuc. 8.63.3]

The oligarchs had long since spread the rumour that all rights uniquely belonged to men of war and citizens capable of serving the city with their bodies and belongings. This was nothing but a trap set for the multitude, because it was clear that only the supporters of the coup d'état would take advantage of the power. [Thuc. 8.65.3–8.66.1]³⁵

The second excerpt ('The murderers'), taken from Thuc. 8.65, alluded to Matteotti's assassination, with the Socialist leader hidden behind the 'mask' of the democrat Androcles, killed in cold blood by the oligarchic conspirators.

It started with the assassination of Androcles, one of the foremost chiefs of democracy. Then, the whole popular party was assaulted with a crescendo of systematic killing. [Thuc. 8.65.2]³⁶

³⁵ 'Fu verso quell'epoca che la democrazia venne abolita in Atene... Da più tempo gli oligarchi avevano fatto circolare la voce che tutti i diritti spettavano unicamente agli uomini di guerra ed ai soli cittadini capaci di servire la città con la persona e con gli averi. Non si trattava in realtà che di un tranello teso alla moltitudine, poiché era chiaro che soltanto i fautori del colpo di Stato si sarebbero avvantaggiati del potere' ('La Marcia su Roma e i salvatori della Patria').

³⁶ 'Si principiò con l'assassinio di Androclo, uno dei capi più in vista della democrazia. Quindi tutta la parte popolare fu presa d'assalto con un crescendo di uccisioni sistematiche' ('Gli assassini').



Fig. 1 'Tucidide e il fascismo', La Rivoluzione Liberale 3, 18 November 1924, nr. 43, 173.

The following four passages ('Fear'; 'The impunity of murderers'; 'The silence'; 'The traitors') were all derived from Thuc. 8.66, and hinted at immediate reactions to Matteotti's murder: the insolence of the oligarchic-Fascist faction; the disinterest of the institutions; people's fear; the helplessness of the democrats.

The oligarchic faction had become so crowded and insolent that no man could dare to speak out against it. If, perchance, a braver man attempted it, the bloodiest vengeance was ready to strike. [Thuc. 8.66.2]³⁷

The State did not care to find culprits for so many crimes. Full immunity was granted to murderers: even though they were well-known, they were permitted to continue circulating freely... [Thuc. 8.66.2]³⁸

People did not dare to protest. They were in such a state of fear that they considered themselves happy to manage to escape impending extermination by being silent. [Thuc. 8.66.2]³⁹

So, despite outrage having inflamed everyone, no one took a step forward in order to organise a defence. All courage was prostrate. An aura of terror trumped all. The oligarchs were also thought to be more numerous and powerful than they actually were. And add the fact that no one trusted anyone, since persons whom no one would have ever suspected of being capable of betraying the people sided with the oligarchy, whose principal force resides in these traitors. [Thuc. 8.66.4 + Thuc. 8.66.3 + Thuc. 8.66.5]⁴⁰

³⁷ 'Così numerosa ed insolente era divenuta la fazione oligarchica, che non si trovava alcuno che osasse alzare la voce contro di essa. Se, per caso, qualche temerario l'avesse tentato, le più sanguinose vendette erano pronte a colpirlo' ('La paura').

³⁸ 'Lo Stato non si curava di ricercare i colpevoli di tanti misfatti. Piena impunità era accordata agli assassini, che, anche se conosciuti, potevano circolare liberamente...' ('L'impunità degli assassini').

³⁹ 'Il popolo non osava protestare. Egli viveva in tale stato di spavento, che si riputava già felice di poter sfuggire con il silenzio allo sterminio che lo minacciava' ('Il silenzio').

⁴⁰ 'Così, malgrado lo sdegno del quale tutti erano accesi, non si faceva un passo per organizzare una difesa. Ogni coraggio era prostrato. Un'aura di terrore travolgeva ogni cosa. Si credevano anche gli oligarchi in maggior quantità o più potenti di quello che, in realtà, non lo fossero. Aggiungi che non si era sicuri di nessuno, dappoichè uomini che non si sarebbero mai sospettati capaci di tradire il popolo, erano passati alla oligarchia, la cui forza principale riposava appunto su questi traditori' ('I traditori').

A second group of four excerpts ('The lesson of the war'; 'The new language'; 'The olive branch'; 'Inflexibly'), this time extrapolated from the Corcyra narrative (Thuc. 3.82–83), described the civil and moral degradation that followed, consisting of roaring specious propaganda, the collapse of mutual trust and several signs of impending violence. 'The cause of all these evils – it was noted through Thuc. 3.82.8 – was the thirst for leadership', which 'overtook the spirits [*i.e.*, of the oligarchs–Fascists] and excited them to commit all sorts of wickedness'.

In times of peace and prosperity, city and individuals alike show themselves better and wiser, because they are not subjected to harsh necessities; but war, while destroying all well-being, constantly teaches violent lessons and shapes the character of citizens adapting it to the hardness of the times. Civil war flared up across cities and the ones that took arms last tried to outdo the others in devising new ways of assaulting and unusual torments. [Thuc. 3.82.2–3]⁴¹

The usual meaning of the words had changed. Reckless audacity was called courage, cautious hesitation timidity, moderation cowardice. Only the violent man was considered safe, suspicion surrounded illustrious men. [Thuc. 3.82.4–5]⁴²

Mutual trust was not founded on religion, but on complicity in the crimes; honest offers from the opposing side were not accepted in good faith, but only if someone realised that he was in a position of superiority in accepting them. [Thuc. 3.82.6–7]

Simplicity, the foremost quality of a noble soul, was laughed to scorn and vanished; a drive towards competition in mutual distrust prevailed; there was no longer a safe word, nor fear of an oath; so that, men found stronger reasons not to have confidence in other people, thinking

⁴¹ 'Nella pace e nella prosperità, la città ed i privati sono meglio e più saggiamente inclinati, perché non conoscono le dure necessità; ma la guerra, distruggendo ogni benessere, porge continue lezioni di violenza e rende l'indole dei cittadini conforme all'asprezza dei tempi. Ardeva la guerra civile nelle città, e quelle ultime che sorgevano in armi si studiavano di sorpassare le prime nel trovare nuovi modi di aggressione ed inusitati supplizi' ('L'insegnamento della guerra').

⁴² 'Era cambiato il consueto significato dei vocaboli. La sconsigliata audacia si chiamava coraggio, il cauto indugio timidezza, la moderazione viltà. Sicuro era considerato solo l'uomo violento, il sospetto circondava gli egregi cittadini' ('La lingua nuova').

about how not to be offended, rather than how to trust anyone. [Thuc. 3.83.1–2]⁴³

The cause of all these evils was the thirst for leadership, that derived from ambition and covetousness. These passions overtook their spirits and spurred them on to commit all sorts of wickedness. [Thuc. 3.82.8]⁴⁴

Finally, the anthology culminated with a couple of Corcyrean excerpts from Thuc. 3.82.8, titled ‘The “Ras” and the administration’ and ‘Discord among the “Ras”’. Both passages illustrate the wildness of the oligarchical chiefs, who were explicitly identified with Mussolini’s right-hand men (the *Ras*),⁴⁵ abandoning themselves to a savage struggle for power.

In the cities, faction leaders — some under the pretext of a perfect equality, some other foreseeing a moderate government by a few — served the public interest only by words, but in fact led to state collapse. Therefore, trying to drive each other out, they dared to do the most horrible things, stiffening penalties not in accordance with justice or public benefit, but at their whim. [Thuc. 3.82.8]⁴⁶

They did not hesitate to satisfy their greed by unjustly condemning other people and gaining advantage by using weapons, so that both factions had no regard for morality; but those who managed to make one good score relying on specious arguments enjoyed the better

⁴³ ‘La fiducia scambievolmente non si fondava sulla religione, ma sulla complicità dei misfatti; le oneste profferte della parte contraria non si accettavano in buona fede, bensì quando si scorgesse che si resterebbe superiori ad accettarle. La semplicità, dote principale di un’anima nobile, derisa, sparì; prevalse il ridurre le menti in reciproca gara di diffidenza; non più sicurezza di parole, non più timore di giuramento; sicché trovando ovunque più forti ragioni di non aver fiducia, l’uomo meditava piuttosto il modo di non essere offeso, che indursi a fidarsi di chicchessia’ (‘Il ramoscello d’ulivo’).

⁴⁴ ‘Di tutti questi mali era cagione la sete del comando, che da ambizione e da cupidigia procede. Queste passioni travolgevano gli spiriti e li eccitavano a osare qualunque scelleratezza’ (‘Inflexibilmente’).

⁴⁵ In this case, the manipulation of the original is blatant, with the titles attributing to Mussolini’s loyalists (the *Ras*) — identified with the oligarchs — a series of criminal actions that Thucydides actually referred to the democratic faction too.

⁴⁶ ‘Nelle città i capi delle fazioni, con il pretesto di un regime di perfetta uguaglianza gli uni, e un discreto reggimento di pochi gli altri, aiutavano la cosa pubblica di nome, e in fatto la riducevano in isfacelo. Perciò, studiando a scalzarsi l’un l’altro, osavano e compivano le più orribili cose, aggravando le pene, non secondo la giustizia e il vantaggio della repubblica, ma secondo che le determinava il loro capriccio’ (‘I “Ras” e l’amministrazione’).

reputation, while the citizens who were in the middle of the two parties were persecuted, either for not taking sides or because of the envy of those who saw them out of the fray. [Thuc. 3.82.8]⁴⁷

So, read in sequence, one after the other, the twelve excerpts of ‘Thucydides and Fascism’ denounced the violent rise to power of Fascism, the criminal logic on which Mussolini’s regime was based, and its traumatic impact on Italian society. The brutal effectiveness with which the article described the civil life of the Italian peninsula translated itself into a concrete call for action against the regime, preaching a firm and uncompromising opposition. It is no coincidence that a few days after the publication of ‘Thucydides and Fascism’, casting an eye over the impressive rally in Milan organised by the Aventinians on 30 November 1924, Gobetti himself described in these terms the hoped-for convergence of all the opponents of the Mussolini executive: ‘The thesis of *Rivoluzione Liberale* is now accepted by the oppositions, the speeches of Amendola and Turati in Milan spoke at least as clearly as our articles on the theme of intransigence’.⁴⁸

If, therefore, it is legitimate to identify in the double register of *denunciation* and *organisation of dissent* the ultimate aims of ‘Thucydides and Fascism’, the criteria that oriented the re-functionalisation of the ancient material in a contemporary key remain to be further explored. In particular, the remarkable quality of the translation published by Gobetti deserves to be considered. This translation was essentially independent of the other versions of the *History* then circulating – except for some limited overlaps with a translation of Thuc. 3.82–83 published by the philosopher Giuseppe Zuccante in 1909.⁴⁹ The version printed by Gobetti

⁴⁷ ‘Non esitavano a soddisfare le rispettive cupidigie, sia con il condannare altrui con ingiusto suffragio, sia col procacciarsi armata mano superiorità, di maniera che ambedue le fazioni non avevano alcun riguardo alla morale; ma quelli cui accadesse, con speciosità di parole, di fare un bel colpo, erano i più reputati; dove i cittadini che tenevano la via di mezzo fra entrambe le parti, venivano nondimeno perseguitati, o per non aver dato mano ad una, o per invidia di vederli fuori del tafferuglio’ (‘Discordie tra i “Ras”’).

⁴⁸ Gobetti (1924b: 185).

⁴⁹ Giuseppe Zuccante, historian of philosophy and professor at the Accademia scientifico-letteraria in Milan, published his translation of Thuc. 3.82–83 in a very successful monograph on *Socrate: fonti, ambiente, vita, dottrina* (Zuccante (1909: 97–99)), which won the Royal Prize for Philosophy of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in 1911. The version, which reworked the translation by Francesco Boni (Florence, 1835), enjoyed a discreet fortune in sectorial publications (cf. e.g. Beccari (1930: 152)) and was certainly circulated within Gobettian circle: Gobetti himself had a personal copy of *Socrate* (bearing handwritten notes and dates of his reading:

was notable for the absence of any misinterpretation of the letter, thus demonstrating that the person who assembled the article — probably Augusto Monti, the reference point for Gobetti’s circle in the field of classical studies (see *infra*) — must have had a good command of Greek and was versed in the harshness of Thucydides’ prose. However, noting the lack of specific grammatical errors is not the same as admitting that the versions collected in the cento were an example of faithful rendering. On the contrary, at several levels they showed a deliberate manipulation of the source text.

A first aspect concerns the omission of details related to the historical specificity of the ancient world, for example, some technicalities of the Athenian institutional system. If translated, those ‘details’ would have risked loosening the analogic bonds between past and present; and were obliterated precisely for this reason. A relevant case occurs in the first excerpt (‘The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland’), which is partly extrapolated from Thuc. 8.65.3. Here Thucydides is summarising the cornerstones of the new oligarchical order established in 411 BC, and, if we rapidly compare the Greek text and Italian version, we immediately realise that the translator replaced Thucydides’ reference to state salaries (*misthoi*) with a vague and generic mention of political rights (‘all rights’), and expunged any reference to the project of granting citizenship to no more than 5,000 Athenians.

λόγος τε ἐκ τοῦ φανεροῦ προείργαστο αὐτοῖς ὡς οὔτε μισθοφορητέον εἶη ἄλλους ἢ τοὺς στρατευομένους οὔτε μεθεκτέον τῶν πραγμάτων πλέοσι ἢ πεντακισχιλίοις, καὶ τούτοις οἱ ἂν μάλιστα τοῖς τε χρήμασι καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ὠφελεῖν οἰοί τε ὦσιν (They had openly promulgated a proposal that *no one should receive public pay*, except for those on active military service, and that *no more than 5,000 people should participate in the management of affairs*, those being the ones with the most to contribute both materially and personally.⁵⁰) [Thuc. 8.65.3]

‘2 febbraio 1920’, ‘1–4 aprile 1920’; cf. CSPG GFb.68), while Augusto Monti recommended its adoption in ‘Attempt at a catalogue of a school library for the teaching of Latin and Greek in an Italian Liceo-Ginnasio’ (Monti (1923: 204)). It is not possible to give an account here of specific formal coincidences between the Thucydidean cento and Zuccante’s translation: suffice it to say that these, which are few in number, are mainly concentrated in three *excerpta* (‘The olive branch’, ‘The “Ras” and the administration’, ‘Discord among the “Ras”’).

⁵⁰ Here and below, the Greek text reproduces the edition of Alberti (1972–2000), while the English translations quoted — excluding, of course, those in the cento — are by Mynott (2013).

The oligarchs had long since spread the rumour that all rights uniquely belonged to men of war and citizens capable of serving the city with their bodies and belongings. [‘The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland’]⁵¹

A further category of infidelity — more stylistically related — is the systematic elimination of words, syntagms and turns of phrase considered pleonastic or repetitive. These omissions, which punctuated the Italian version, were motivated by the clear intention of promoting a more incisive rendering that conformed to the canons of journalistic language.⁵²

A last kind of infidelity, perhaps the most common one, is the marked tendency towards emphatic renderings. Indeed, to raise polemical tones, the translator systematically amplified the Greek text with a series of additions and expansions, which emphasise the atrocities committed by oligarchic conspirators and exaggerate feelings and emotions. Among the many examples that could be given, we can mention the following passages, in which it is not difficult to see how much the translator expanded the original:

*καὶ ἄλλους τινας ἀνεπιτηδείους τῶ
αὐτῷ τρόπῳ κρύφα ἀνήλωσαν*
(They secretly did away with
some other inconvenient people
in the same manner). [Thuc.
8.65.2]

Then, the whole popular party
was assaulted with a crescendo of
systematic killings. [‘The murder-
ers’]⁵³

*καὶ τῶν δρασάντων οὔτε ζήτησις
οὔτ’ εἰ ὑποπτεύουτο δικαίωσις
ἐγίγνετο* (Here was neither any
search for the perpetrators of the
deed nor any legal action taken
against suspects). [Thuc. 8.66.2]

The State did not care to find
culprits for so many crimes. Full
immunity was granted to murder-
ers: even though they were well-
known, they were permitted to

⁵¹ ‘Da più tempo gli oligarchi avevano fatto circolare la voce che tutti i diritti spettavano unicamente agli uomini di guerra ed ai soli cittadini capaci di servire la città con la persona e con gli averi.’

⁵² Thus, one can explain the recurring omissions of adverbs, attributes, and periphrases in almost all the excerpts. By way of example, consider, in the first two passages alone, the lack of translations of *καὶ ἔτι πρότερον* ‘and even before’ (‘The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland’, from Thuc. 8.63.3), *τινὲς τῶν νεωτέρων* ‘some young people’, and *κρύφα* ‘secretely’ (‘The murderers’, from Thuc. 8.65.2).

⁵³ ‘Quindi tutta la parte popolare fu presa d’assalto con un crescendo di uccisioni sistematiche.’

	continue circulating freely... [‘The impunity of murderers’] ⁵⁴
ἡσσω̄ντο ταῖς γνώμαις (They felt beaten in spirit). [Thuc. 8.66.3]	All courage was prostrated. An aura of terror trumped all. [‘The traitors’] ⁵⁵
ἐκ δ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐς τὸ φιλονικεῖν καθισταμένων τὸ πρόθυμον (The consequent fanaticism of those competing for control). [Thuc. 3.82.8]	These passions overtook their spirits and spurred them on to commit all sorts of wickedness. [‘Inflexibly’] ⁵⁶

Thus, the anthology revealed a complex reworking of the source that involved both the *dispositio* and the *elocutio*. The passages taken from the *History* were not only redistributed in an original sequence, but also reformulated through a series of free renditions that enhanced — and in part altered — Thucydides’ prose. The latter, pruned of inessential information, was amplified with the intention of conveying, with greater incisiveness, precise political messages regarding contemporary events. As anticipated, the result was an energetic indictment against Mussolini’s authority, supporting the initiatives of the Aventine. This incitement was invoked by Gobetti once again, just three weeks later, on 10 December 1924, when he published a new editorial titled ‘The succession’, in which he called for ‘the overthrow of the *oligarchy* that controls the government’, thus echoing tones and motives that characterised ‘Thucydides and Fascism’.⁵⁷

3. ‘Classics of Freedom’: Thucydides, Gobetti and the Liberal Interpretation of Tradition

It is precisely this close relationship between the reuse of the ancient source and Gobetti’s political agenda that raises the question of whether a deeper dialogue between Thucydides and Gobetti’s liberalism might exist; more precisely, of whether the decision to reuse Thucydides in the inflamed political context of November 1924 depended merely on

⁵⁴ ‘Lo Stato non si curava di ricercare i colpevoli di tanti misfatti. Piena impunità era accordata agli assassini, che, anche se conosciuti, potevano circolare liberamente...’

⁵⁵ ‘Ogni coraggio era prostrato. Un’aura di terrore travolgeva ogni cosa.’

⁵⁶ ‘Queste passioni travolgevano gli spiriti e li eccitavano a osare qualunque scelleratezza.’

⁵⁷ Gobetti (1924b: 185).

Gobetti's pressing need to circumvent Fascist censorship, or whether it *also* lay in a specific ideological affinity that led the Gobettian circle to consider Thucydides as an author that was sympathetic to their liberal views. It is precisely this latter hypothesis that is strongly supported by the fact that the small centos issued by *Rivoluzione Liberale* in 1924/5, as well as a number of volumes published by Piero Gobetti Editore, also aimed at proposing a sort of *ideal library*, that is to say a collection — if not a true canon — of 'Classics of Freedom' promoting key-values of Gobetti's political project: free thinking, democratic individualism, anti-despotism, confidence in popular forces.

An early manifestation of this inclination was the degree thesis that Gobetti dedicated to Vittorio Alfieri's political philosophy (*La filosofia politica di Vittorio Alfieri*). The thesis was defended at the Faculty of Law of the University of Turin in July 1922 and was printed the following year by Piero Gobetti Editore. The essay explored the libertarian and anti-dogmatic attitude of Alfieri (1749–1803) through the tragedies and theoretical writings of the Piedmontese poet, notably *Della Tirannide* and *Del Principe e delle Lettere*. But there was more. In his essay, Gobetti did not limit himself to celebrating Alfieri's 'religion of freedom',⁵⁸ but he also ended up looking for his own thought in the Piedmontese poet, offering 'more than a faithful reading of the writer [...], a new political proposal; precisely the project of the liberal revolution'.⁵⁹ Such an attitude did not remain the prerogative of Gobetti alone, but involved the entire network of his collaborators, influencing, among others, Augusto Monti himself. The latter, under the impetus of Gobetti's thesis, wanted to experiment with a new pedagogical approach based on reading 'our classics as "classics of freedom"'.⁶⁰

Another publication relevant to our discussion is the Italian translation of John Stuart Mill's treatise *On Liberty* (1859), which appeared in the Piero Gobetti Editore catalogue in 1925, but was begun in the autumn of 1923.⁶¹ The edition, whose political value was difficult to doubt, was greeted as follows in the preface by Luigi Einaudi:

When the spirit is being mortified, when, in order to weaken the voices of rebels, the unanimity of internal consensus is asserted by the rulers as it is necessary in order for the homeland to flourish and to be respected by foreigners, it is beneficial to reread the great books about

⁵⁸ Gobetti (1923: 97).

⁵⁹ Fabrizi (2012: 146).

⁶⁰ Monti (1956: 205). On the relationship between Monti and Gobetti, cf. *infra* § 4.

⁶¹ Cf. Urbinati (2011: 186), and Pedio (2011: 195–198).

freedom. [...] Mill's essay opposes [...] these mortifying propositions with the logical justification of the right to dissent and the demonstration of the social and spiritual utility of the fight.⁶²

Thus, returning to the centos published in *Rivoluzione Liberale* between 1924 and 1925, it is no wonder to find among them the names of some champions of nineteenth-century liberalism, such as Paul Louis Courier, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, or some radical anti-Fascists, like the economist and former Italian prime minister Francesco Saverio Nitti or the sociologist Guglielmo Ferrero. Alongside them were Massimo d'Azeglio and Luigi Carlo Farini, patriots and prominent members of the Piedmontese ruling elite that, together with the Count of Cavour, launched a process of modernisation of nineteenth-century Italy presented by Gobetti himself in the terms of a 'liberal revolution' *ante litteram*.⁶³ The incorporation of Machiavelli and Sallust into this field may actually be more problematic, but some well-known Gobettian interpretations of their works confirm that he and his collaborators ascribed liberal-leaning beliefs to these authors too.

Machiavelli, in particular, was often celebrated by Gobetti as a precursor of modern democracy: 'Machiavelli had a faith in the popular forces, an awareness of what the people are, which cannot only be explained with the Florentine birth and the Republican passion of the Savonarola years'.⁶⁴ And again: 'Modern democracy presupposes the Protestant revolution [...]. Our Reform was Machiavelli [...]: he is a modern man because he instils a conception of the state contrary to transcendence [...] and professes a civil religiosity fostering the spontaneity of initiatives and economy.'⁶⁵ As for Sallust, it is likely that the Roman historian's gloomy portrayal of Catiline, considered — not only by

⁶² Einaudi (1925: i, iv): 'In tempi di mortificazione dello spirito, quando, per fiaccare le voci dei ribelli, si assevera dai dominatori la unanimità del consenso interno, necessaria affinché la patria vigoreggi e sia rispettata dallo straniero, giova rileggere i grandi libri sulla libertà. [...] A queste proposizioni mortificatrici [...] il saggio del Mill oppone la giustificazione logica del diritto al dissenso e la dimostrazione della utilità sociale e spirituale della lotta.'

⁶³ Gobetti (2008: 23).

⁶⁴ Gobetti (1924a: 77): 'Vi è in Machiavelli una fede nelle forze popolari, una coscienza del popolo, che non si spiega soltanto con la nascita fiorentina e con la passione repubblicana degli anni savonaroliani'.

⁶⁵ 'La democrazia moderna presuppone la rivoluzione protestante [...]. La nostra Riforma fu Machiavelli: [...] è uomo moderno perché istaura una concezione dello stato ribelle alla trascendenza [...] e professa una religiosità civile come spontaneità di iniziative e di economia', cf. Gobetti (2008: 12). For a recent synthesis of Gobetti's interpretation of Machiavelli, cf. Bagnoli (2006) and Mitarotondo (2016: 55–82).

Gobetti — a perfect allotrope of the ‘gang leader’ Mussolini, played an important role in attributing a ‘liberal spirit’ to the Latin writer.⁶⁶ Nor should we underestimate the fact that Sallust was an author who was much loved by Alfieri, who not only translated his works for more than twenty years, but also acknowledged him as an anti-tyrannical writer, quoting a famous sentence from the *Bellum Iugurthinum* in the epigraph of his treatise *Della Tirannide* (1789): *impune quaelibet facere, id est regem esse*, ‘being a king means doing whatever you want with impunity’ (Sall. *Iug.* 31.26).⁶⁷

Against this backdrop, it is natural to wonder on what basis Gobetti’s group could have included Thucydides among the ‘classics of freedom’, overlooking, for example, the Greek historian’s severe criticism of Athenian democracy or his predilection for Pericles’ apparently monocratic power (Thuc. 2.65.9).⁶⁸ A first motivation could certainly lie in the negative judgement that Thucydides seemed to express, through his narration, on the oligarchic *putsch* of 411 and on the subversive results of the *stasis* of Corcyra. In fact, the severe tone in which Thucydides presented the violence of the oligarchs during the Athenian coup and the horrors of the civil war in Corcyra most likely led Gobetti’s group to recognise, within Thucydides’ pages, *a clear statement against an illiberal conception of political strife based upon the systematic use of violence*. Precisely the same conception that had characterised Mussolini’s seizure of power, at least since the March on Rome, an event significantly defined by Gobetti himself, as early as 1922, as ‘*a coup d’état made by an oligarchic faction*’.⁶⁹

But these are not the only theoretical bases on which it was possible for Gobetti’s group to conceive a juxtaposition between Thucydides and

⁶⁶ On the complex reception of the figure of Catiline in Post-unification and Fascist Italian culture, cf. Criniti (1968a), Criniti (1968b), Criniti (1979) and Schiano (2018).

⁶⁷ On Sallust’s contribution to the definition of Alfieri’s anti-tyrannical thought, cf. Casini (2004: 253ff.) and Pellizzari (2010: 154ff.). The inscription taken from Sallust, absent from the first edition of the work (1777), was included in Kehl’s *editio princeps* (1789–1790), cf. Pellizzari (2010: 155–156). The link between Sallust’s work and Alfieri’s political thought was undoubtedly the subject of a lively debate within Gobetti’s circle; see, for example, Umberto Calosso’s observations on the subject, dating back to 1924: ‘the translated *Catilinaria* is Alfieri’s first political work, not only chronologically; almost a preface to the others’ (Calosso (1949: 40)).

⁶⁸ It should be remembered, purely by way of example, that in post-Versailles Germany the autocratic inspiration of the Periclean government adumbrated in Thuc. 2.65.9 was often emphasised in order to stigmatise — *e contrario* — the limits of Weimar democracy, cf. Butti de Lima (2008: 260ff.), Andurand (2010: 578ff.), Azoulay (2017: 213ff.).

⁶⁹ Cf. Gobetti (1922: 123); italics mine.

the ideological universe of *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. Other important indications came from the judgements formulated regarding the Athenian historian by some voices of certain importance in the intellectual and civil formation of Gobetti and his associates. Among these voices was that of Gaetano De Sanctis, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Turin from 1900 to 1929. He was endowed — according to Gobetti — with ‘a certain intonation of a true master’.⁷⁰ An ‘enthusiastic friend’ of Gobetti’s initiatives since 1918, despite his fervent Catholicism De Sanctis confirmed himself as a point of reference for the Gobettian circle, obtaining, in issue no. 7 of *La Rivoluzione Liberale* (2 April 1922), an extensive article by Natalino Sapegno, who celebrated his historiographic production.⁷¹ This recognition is explained by the fact that for Gobetti’s generation De Sanctis was not only one of the most authoritative Italian scholars, but also a model of an uncompromising and respected anti-Fascist.⁷² His own activity as a historian, matured in the positivistic school of Karl Julius Beloch, had been able to combine methodological rigour with a convinced openness towards the historiographic thought of Benedetto Croce and in particular to that conception of history as the ‘history of freedom’ De Sanctis condensed in the famous dedication of the fourth volume of *History of the Romans*, written just before October 1922: ‘To those very few who are equally disdainful of being oppressed and becoming oppressors’.⁷³

⁷⁰ ‘In this wicked university of Turin [...] (in Literature and Philosophy) there are two intelligent people: De Sanctis of ancient history, [...] serious, aristocratic (in a good sense) and with a certain intonation of a true master, and the very likeable Farinelli, good, enthusiastic, poet, fervent soul of a teacher’ — letter from Gobetti to Santino Caramella, 8 January 1919; cf. Gobetti (2003: 20). For a biographical and intellectual profile of Gaetano De Sanctis, cf. Momigliano (1957), Gabba (1971), Treves (1991), Amico (2007), Polverini (2011), Mazza (2013), with the bibliography reported in Piovan (2018: 49–50).

⁷¹ Sapegno (1922) inaugurated a column dedicated to the protagonists of Italian historical research; the second medallion was devoted to Gaetano Salvemini (*RL* 1, 27 August 1922, nr. 25, 93).

⁷² On De Sanctis’s militancy in the ranks of the Italian Popular Party and in some Piedmontese Catholic associations, cf. Accame (1975: 223–266) and Amico (2007: 70–102).

⁷³ ‘A quei pochissimi che hanno parimente a sdegno d’essere oppressi e di farsi oppressori.’ On the theme of political freedom in De Sanctis’ works, cf. Clemente (2014), Piovan (2014: 27–31), Clemente (2016), Piovan (2017: 84–91), Piovan (2018: 54–61), Ampolo (2021), Clemente (2021); for De Sanctis’ complex relationship with Croce, cf. Momigliano (1957: 190–194), Sasso (1985: 193–202), Gabba (1995: 246, 250–256), Santangelo (2013: *passim*). Finally, on the exact chronology of *Storia dei Romani*, vol. 4.1, cf. Polverini (2011: 400).

As for Thucydides, it is worth remembering that the Athenian author always exerted a profound influence on De Sanctis' historical thought: 'If there's one aspect — Massimiliano Pavan rightly noted — that De Sanctis [...] borrows [from Thucydides] without reservation it is the conception of Greek history that is not only Hellenocentric but Athenocentric, in the light of a primacy [of Athens] that is first and foremost moral and civil, and then political'.⁷⁴ For De Sanctis, the primacy of Athens was identified with the ideals of social justice and protection of individual freedoms that Periclean democracy had been able to establish as the basis of its own system and that it had had the historical task of spreading in the Mediterranean through its political and military hegemony. This civilising vocation, later betrayed by the predatory development of Attic imperialism, retained a universal value for De Sanctis and found its highest formulation in the Epitaph of Pericles reported by Thucydides.⁷⁵ In De Sanctis' view, the oration coincided with the last pages written by the historian and constituted not only Thucydides' spiritual testament,⁷⁶ but also a perennial legacy that 'always moves all friends of freedom'.⁷⁷

These ideas — expressed in their most complete form in De Sanctis' old-age diptych: *Storia dei Greci* (vol. 2, 1939) and *Pericle e l'età sua* (1944) — were significantly anticipated in the writings and seminars of the Turin period, which Piero and some of his collaborators read and attended. Thus, the history of democratic Athens was reconstructed by De Sanctis — with important parallels with the essays of the 1930s and 1940s — in the final chapters of the second edition of *Atthis. Storia della Repubblica Ateniese dalle origini alla età di Pericle* (Turin, 1912), a text annotated by Gobetti in April 1920 (**Fig. 2**) and studied by Sapegno in

⁷⁴ Cf. Pavan (1983: 25).

⁷⁵ For De Sanctis' richly articulated judgement about Periclean democracy (in part undoubtedly negative), cf. Pavan (1983: 17–29). On De Sanctis' interpretation of Thucydides as a critic of the Athenian empire, see esp. Piovan (2018: 49–75) and Piovan's article in this volume.

⁷⁶ De Santis (1939: 429). For a synthesis of De Sanctis' positions on the problem of the compositional history of Thucydides' work and, more generally, on the so-called *Thukydideische Frage*, cf. Lanzillotta & Costa (2010: 558–562) and Piovan (2018: 69–72).

⁷⁷ De Sanctis (1932: 185). On the same page, the canonisation of the epitaph of Pericles among the 'ideal precursors of Mazzini, who was in their line, albeit with infinitely greater awareness, when his ideal of free Italy [...] got brighter and acquired universal value in the ideal of free Europe and free humanity', is remarkable.

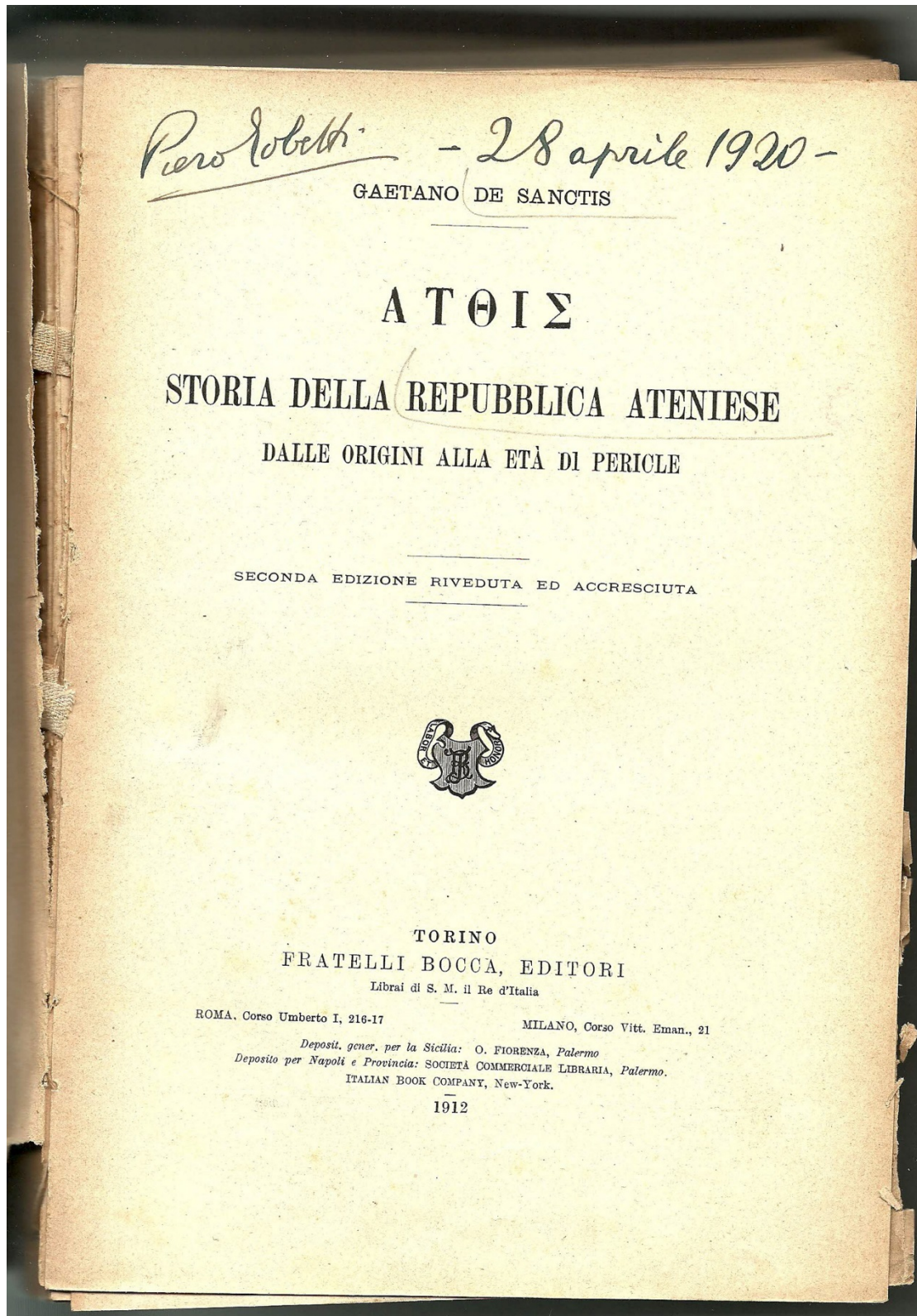


Fig. 2 Gaetano De Sanctis (1912), *Atthis. Storia della Repubblica Ateniese dalle origini alla età di Pericle* (Turin) (2nd edn). Frontispiece, with Piero Gobetti's ownership inscription. Turin, Centro Studi Piero Gobetti.

the summer of 1921 for his Ancient History exam.⁷⁸ And it is precisely from a series of lecture notes of 1921–1922 that we learn that in the same academic year De Sanctis devoted an entire course to fifth-century Greek history, ‘with particular regard to the events that took place between the Persian wars and Peloponnesian war’, which was illustrated from a large selection of passages taken from Thucydides’ *Pentekontaetia* (Thuc. 1.89–118).⁷⁹ Once again, the favourite themes included Athenian imperialism, but considerable space was also devoted to the intricate compositional history of Thucydides’ work, on which De Sanctis developed positions similar to those he would later support in his subsequent contributions, which recognised Thucydides’ spiritual testament in the *logos epitaphios*.⁸⁰ While Sapegno was not among the students of that course, two of Gobetti’s other associates, Franco Antonicelli and Mario Attilio Levi, attended the lectures:⁸¹ especially Levi, a direct pupil of De Sanctis, had been a contributor to *La Rivoluzione Liberale* and, despite his Fascist sympathies, until 1922 he was a convinced supporter of Gobetti’s initiatives and animated, together with another brilliant pupil of De Sanctis, Elena Valla, the debates that were held daily in Gobetti’s apartment.⁸²

⁷⁸ ‘I am also studying my notes on ancient history, and I will soon begin to read the books of De Sanctis: I will try, if possible, to do the work that you made me promise for the journal [*i.e.*, Sapegno (1922), where *Atthis* is discussed]’ – letter from Sapegno to Gobetti, 13 September 1921; cf. Gobetti (2003: 229).

⁷⁹ IISA GDS 2 1 8, ‘Prof. Gaetano De Sanctis. Lectures on Ancient History collected by Mr. Vittorio Ostraccione 1921–1922’, cf. Lanzillotta & Costa (2010: 563, 568–569).

⁸⁰ IISA GDS 2 1 8, ‘Prof. Gaetano De Sanctis. Lectures on Ancient History collected by Mr. Vittorio Ostraccione 1921–1922’, 70, 74–76. This text developed remarks contained in another series of lecture notes dating from 1901–1902, cf. Lanzillotta & Costa (2010: 563–568). It is significant that a copy of the 1901–1902 lecture notes is now held at the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti as part of the legacy of Franco Antonicelli (CSPG ANT.Coll.F.250), who was also a close friend of Gobetti – cf. Alessandrone Perona in Gobetti (2003: 243).

⁸¹ The names of Franco Antonicelli and Mario Attilio Levi appear in the list of the students enrolled in the Ancient History course taught by De Sanctis in 1921–1922 (cf. IISA GDS 2 1 2, ‘List of students enrolled in the Ancient History course in the school year 1921–1922’).

⁸² ‘In Turin, I have about ten friends (Fubini, M. Marchesini, A. Marchesini, A. Prospero, E. Valla, M. A. Levi, N. Sapegno, G. Stolfi, and a few less active ones) who [...] come to my house, talk, discuss, think’ – letter from Gobetti to Santino Caramella, 18 February 1920; cf. Gobetti (2003: 99). On the relationship between Levi, Valla and Gobetti, cf. Alessandrone Perona in Gobetti (2003: 495–496, 520–521); on Levi’s discipleship with De Sanctis, see Levi (1989), Cracco Ruggini (2001: 57–58) and d’Orsi (2008: 395ff.).

If, therefore, it seems likely that De Sanctis' teachings were decisive in the formulation of an image of Thucydides that was organic to the ideological programme of *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, another undisputed *auctoritas* in Gobetti's intellectual landscape — Vittorio Alfieri — supported this judgement. As said earlier, Alfieri was not only Gobetti's favourite writer, but also a model intellectual with whom the young Turinese publisher always wanted to compare himself, 'going so far [...] as to continue [Alfieri's] discourse, and integrating, even transfiguring at times, his thinking'.⁸³ In the light of these premises and of a more general 'Alfierism' of the entire Gobettian circle,⁸⁴ it therefore seems relevant to draw attention to the celebration of Thucydides contained in some famous chapters of Alfieri's treatise *Del Principe e delle Lettere* (1789), a work widely quoted by Gobetti in his degree thesis and considered essential for the reconstruction of the theoretical coordinates of Alfierian libertarianism.

As is well known, Alfieri judged Thucydides in the context of a broader political classification of writers, which tended to pit two distinct categories of authors against each other: on the one hand, those 'of the prince', whose works cared 'much more for the elegance of speech, than for the sublimity and strength of thought'; on the other, the writers who lived in a regime of freedom, 'who [...] being more virile, more truthful, pressing, and fierce, [...] are never sympathetic with the princes'.⁸⁵ Belonging to the latter group constituted an indispensable premise for the development of the 'four ingredients that made up the sublime writer' ('high spirit, free circumstances, strong feeling, and sharp wit'), which in turn were decisive in making every literary work 'a powerful stimulus [...] to practice, love, and defend freedom'.⁸⁶ From this point of view, Thucydides, who lived in democratic Athens and was not conditioned by any ties of political dependence, should certainly be counted among the 'sons of freedom and virtue', and his name could stand out among the

⁸³ Cf. Fubini (1967: 255–256), with Bobbio (1986: 51).

⁸⁴ Just to mention some of Gobetti's closest collaborators, in 1921 Umberto Calosso published four articles on Alfieri in *L'Ordine Nuovo* and, in 1924, the important monograph *L'anarchia di Vittorio Alfieri* (cf. *supra* note 67). Mario Fubini's first works on Alfieri began to appear around 1923, while those by Natalino Sapegno date from the 1940s, but already in August 1920 Sapegno himself declared his passion for the Piedmontese poet, cf. Gobetti (2003: 144). Also in 1923, Augusto Monti derived from a letter of Alfieri to Tommaso Valperga di Caluso (28 March 1801) the motto later adopted by Gobetti's publishing house: *τί μοι σὺν δούλοις;* ('What have I to do with slaves?'). On the 'Alfierism' of Gobetti's circle, see Fabrizi (2007) and Fabrizi (2012).

⁸⁵ *Del Principe e delle lettere* 1.3; cf. Alfieri (2011: 204–205).

⁸⁶ *Del Principe e delle lettere* 3.2, 3.4; Alfieri (2011: 301, 317).

‘many other writers of truth, who, if not all born free, at least lived independently, and not protected by anyone’: Demosthenes, Thucydides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Cicero, Lucretius, Sallust, Tacitus, Juvenal, Dante, Machiavelli, Bayle, Montesquieu, Milton, Locke, Robertson, Hume.⁸⁷

This classification, albeit certainly mechanical and hasty, was further confirmed in other passages of the treatise, which — starting from the same assumptions — discussed more circumscribed themes. Thus, outlining a canon of the ‘supreme historians’, Alfieri’s attention was once again focused on the ‘free-spirited’ Thucydides, whose ‘robustly concise thinking and feeling’ was magnified as a manifestation of Greek genius, ‘inventor of everything because [...] free’.⁸⁸ The historian was also recalled in the final part of the work among the ‘sublime’ sons of Athens, ‘mother of every effort of political virtue and of such a beautiful, free and civilised life’.⁸⁹ Without further hesitation, it is easy to imagine the extent to which judgements such as these — combined with *De Sanctis*’ considerations and Thucydides’ stern gaze on the events of 411 — could favour the consecration of the Athenian historian among the ‘classics of freedom’, fuelling the re-use of Thucydides’ text within an editorial strategy that proposed a model of re-appropriation of the past that was completely antipodal to the anti-democratic classicism cultivated by Fascism and based on the cult of Romanity. And it is precisely this difference between Gobettian classicism and Fascist ‘Romanolatry’ that deserves to be further explored, starting with a final, thorny question raised by the Thucydides centio: who actually compiled ‘Thucydides and Fascism’?

4. Classicism and Modernity: Under the Sign of Augusto Monti

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to imagine that it was Gobetti himself who produced the Thucydidean centio. If we can be sure that the young Turinese intellectual was a convinced supporter of a liberal and politically oriented reading of Thucydides, it seems unlikely, however, that he was directly involved in the drafting of the anthology. Certainly, Gobetti had a good knowledge of Greek language, but after graduating from high school he only sporadically tried his hand at translating Greek texts;⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *Del Principe e delle lettere* 1.3; Alfieri (2011: 205–206).

⁸⁸ *Del Principe e delle lettere* 2.9; Alfieri (2011: 279–284).

⁸⁹ *Del Principe e delle lettere* 3.4; cf. Alfieri (2011: p. 317).

⁹⁰ The correspondence with Giovanni Papini and Santino Caramella in June–November 1920 documents Gobetti’s will to translate the lives and fragments of the

moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that in Gobetti's impressive production — about two thousand five hundred pages in the three-volume edition by Paolo Spriano — there is no reference to Thucydides,⁹¹ and no copy of the *History* is preserved in his vast library.⁹² In the light of these premises, it seems inevitable to identify in another person, and in particular in the profile of a close collaborator of Gobetti, Augusto Monti, the probable author of 'Thucydides and Fascism'.

A teacher of Italian and Latin at the Massimo d'Azeglio high school in Turin, Monti not only possessed the necessary skills to produce an original and accurate translation of the Thucydides *excerpta*, but he was also the point of reference for the whole Gobettian circle on classical matters: in November 1924, he was appointed as head of the 'Classical Literature' section of the newly-founded journal *Il Baretto*,⁹³ on whose editorial board he played a leading role until 1928, the year in which the periodical was closed down by the Fascist authorities. Moreover, he was the author of more than forty articles for *La Rivoluzione Liberale*, including the one flanked by the Thucydidean cento,⁹⁴ and was most probably responsible for the provocative choice of printing an irreverent epigram by Archilochus on the front page of *Rivoluzione Liberale* the day after the March on Rome.⁹⁵

If, in short, all the evidence points to Monti as the author of 'Thucydides and Fascism', it should be noted that the article, although the

Stoics transmitted by Diogenes Laertius, cf. Alessandrone Perona in Gobetti (2003: 126–128, 130–131, 174). As far as I know, this work, which was never completed, remains the only evidence of Gobetti's involvement in translating classical texts.

⁹¹ Cf. Spriano (1960–1974). Among other published Gobettian papers, it has been possible to find a single, cursory reference to the work of Thucydides in a thesis outline dating from 1920–1921, entitled 'Political Philosophy in the Classical World', later abandoned in favour of the project on Alfieri. The table of contents of the outline included a section on 'The historians: Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon', cf. Gobetti (2003: 452–453).

⁹² In early 1926, Gobetti's library counted about 3,120 titles; the Greek section contained many works of philosophy (including Plato, Aristotle, the pre-Socratics, Epicurus and Diogenes Laertius); archaic epic and lyric poetry, theatre — both comic and tragic — and historiography (especially Herodotus and Xenophon) were also well represented. The catalogue is available at the following link: <https://www.centrogobetti.it/biblioteca.html> (last accessed 10 February 2022).

⁹³ Cf. the publication announcement in *RL* 3, 25 November 1924, nr. 44, 178.

⁹⁴ Monti (1924: 173).

⁹⁵ Cf. *RL* 1, 2 November 1922, nr. 32, with Alessandrone Perona in Gobetti (2003: 371) and *supra* § 1. In the light of these considerations, it is not far-fetched to attribute to Monti the drafting of the Sallustian cento ('Against Catilina') published in *RL* 3, 14 October 1924, nr. 38, 153.

result of the philological expertise of the individual, expressed the view point of the entire Gobettian group, with which Monti himself shared not only the historical interpretation of the political framework, but also the general approach to literary tradition.⁹⁶ Thus, it is precisely from this relationship of mutual collaboration between Monti and Gobetti that it is possible to define more precisely the ideological assumptions that animated the classicism of the Gobettian circle.

In this regard, it has already been recalled how Monti — by his own admission — had developed the idea of ‘reading [...] the classics as “classics of freedom”’ after having appreciated Gobetti’s thesis on Vittorio Alfieri published in 1923. And yet, if we reconsider the positions expressed by Monti in an important pedagogical essay completed in the summer of 1921, *Scuola classica e vita moderna*, it is clear that the theoretical premises of this politically oriented reading of the Greek–Latin texts were already implicit in his previous reflection.⁹⁷ Indeed, in this essay Monti not only presented classical culture as an essential part of the spiritual heritage of the Italian nation, but also celebrated it as an inexhaustible source of lessons *for the present*:

What we want to teach is [...] not only how the ancients *spoke*, but also and even more importantly how they *thought* and *acted*, [...] with the intention of no longer transferring us to the ancients and antiquity, but through the ancients, to discover ourselves, the present through the past.⁹⁸

In Monti’s view, ‘there is no problem of contemporary life that did not present itself to the ancients in much the same way as it does to us’. This is why the motto ‘reading the Latin and Greek classic as Italians and for Italians’ was to be interpreted in a two-way sense: on the one hand, modern and contemporary history could offer a valuable key to understanding the past (‘there is nothing that helps better to understand the history of Greece, from the Doric Middle Ages to Alexander, than the study of certain periods of Italian history’); on the other hand, the pages of the classics illuminated the dramas of the present with unprecedented

⁹⁶ For the relationship between Gobetti and Monti, cf. Bobbio (1986: 135–155) and Tesio (1980: 99–139).

⁹⁷ For an overview of Monti’s pedagogical positions in the early 1920s, cf. Tomasi (1982), d’Orsi (2000a), Benedetto (2013: 83–87), and Tognon (2016).

⁹⁸ Monti (1923: 20–21): ‘A noi preme di insegnare [...] non solo come *parlassero* gli antichi, ma anche e più come *pensassero* e come *agissero*, [...] con il proposito, non più di trasferirci negli antichi e nell’antico, ma di scoprire, attraverso gli antichi, noi stessi, attraverso l’antico il presente’.

freshness ('I have never felt so deeply the Epitaph of Pericles in Thucydides as in 1915 and 1916, when the first of my pupils died in the war').⁹⁹

These considerations, elaborated when Monti and Gobetti did not yet know each other, perfectly summarise that ideal of close 'intimacy between our daily life and the thought of the ancients' which would later guide the polemical reuse of the classics in *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. It is therefore not surprising that it was Gobetti himself, who came into contact with Monti in 1921, who published *Scuola classica e vita moderna*, enthusiastically launching the volume on 19 October 1922 among the forthcoming releases of Piero Gobetti Editore:

This is the spiritual testament of a teacher who devoted twenty years' work to experiencing the classical school *as a modern factor*. It is a book that will make many regret they never learnt Greek and Latin with A. Monti. Furthermore, it is superfluous to speak of the talents of such a sharp, refined writer to the readers of *Rivoluzione Liberale* since they know them all too well.¹⁰⁰

Gobetti's words are also important in another respect. Emphasising classical education as a 'factor of modernity' meant in fact functionalising the model of reading the ancient texts suggested by Monti — and then adopted by *La Rivoluzione Liberale* — to one of the cardinal objectives of Gobetti's political proposal: the 'modernisation' of Italy, understood as the harmonious development of liberal-democratic institutions. In Gobetti's interpretation, this development would have led Italy to achieve political and social standards worthy of advanced European states like France and England, whose institutional structures were based on strict respect for individual freedom, on the prominence of the popular classes and on the rejection of all authoritarianism.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Cf. Monti (1923: 21–22, 59, 65–67).

¹⁰⁰ 'È il testamento spirituale di un professore che ha dedicato venti anni di lavoro a vivere la scuola classica come *fattore di modernità*. Un libro che farà rimpiangere a molti di non essere stati a imparare greco e latino con A. Monti. Parlare poi delle doti di scrittore arguto e fine che vi si manifestano è superfluo per i lettori della *Rivoluzione Liberale* che bene le conoscono' — publication announcement in *RL* 1, 19 October 1922, nr. 30, 114; italics mine. Monti proposed the book to his friend on 2 October 1922 and a few days later Gobetti started the publication process; the volume came out in March 1923, cf. Alessandrone Perona in Gobetti (2003: 339–340), Tognon (2016: 205–208), Gobetti (2017: *passim*).

¹⁰¹ See the 'ideal government' sketched in Gobetti (1924b: 185): 'Le opposizioni devono superare il punto morto dell'attuale vita italiana dichiarandosi pronte alla successione. [...] Un governo così composto [...] sarà un *governo di partiti responsabili*

Thus, in the common interpretation of Gobetti and Monti, the words of the classics ended up nourishing a programmatic horizon that was the exact opposite to the one proposed by Fascist classicism. The latter, as Luciano Canfora has made clear, celebrated Mussolini's Italy as the legitimate heir to the Roman Empire in open polemic with the 'modern world', which was identified with any form of political order favourable to an evolution in a liberal or socialist direction.¹⁰² But that is not all. On the basis of this contrasting evaluation of the process of 'modernisation' of society, Gobetti's classicism and Fascism put forward two clearly antithetical visions of Italian history. On the one hand, Mussolini's propaganda sought in the Italian past a political model to be revived in the twentieth century, thus expressing a *continuist* approach, which identified imperial Rome as a virtuous state paradigm, valid for the present.¹⁰³ Gobetti's classicism, on the other hand, preached a clear discontinuity with previous historical experiences, considering them totally inadequate for contemporary Italy. Instead, the valorisation of the classical tradition was to take the form of a careful selection of *auctoritates* — 'the classics of liberty' — whose task was to stimulate Italians to repudiate the historical vices of their past (courtly servility; Catholic reactionaryism; economic parasitism), directing them towards *an entirely new model of statehood*.

Therefore, if we try to reconsider 'Thucydides and Fascism' from this perspective, we realise that behind an experiment of political struggle designed to circumvent Fascist censorship, there was a much more complex approach to tradition, which expressed on several levels — historical, moral and anthropological — a form of radical dissent from the Fascist *Weltanschauung*. As one might expect, this perspective was progressively stifled by the regime along with Gobetti's initiatives, which were abruptly interrupted by the young Turinese intellectual's untimely death in Paris in February 1926: *La Rivoluzione Liberale* closed in the autumn of 1925;

e non di avventurieri e di dittatori; sarà il primo governo che potrà conservare l'ordine, perché *parlerà col prestigio della democrazia, del consenso e di una parte delle classi proletarie*; invece che da un blocco di interessi personali, nascerà da una *collaborazione leale e aperta di forze e di programmi diversi*, ma non contraddittori, *controllati dagli istituti democratici moderni*; invece di essere uno Stato balcanico o sud-americano *l'Italia si metterà sulla via di diventare uno Stato europeo moderno*' (italics mine).

¹⁰² Cf. Canfora (1989: 257–270) and, more generally, on the Fascist cult of Romanity, Cagnetta (1979), Giardina (2000: 212–296), Scuccimarra (2003), Belardelli (2005: 206–236); Nelis (2013); Salvatori (2014), Tarquini (2017), Nelis (2017).

¹⁰³ Vd. Canfora (1980: 76–132) and Canfora (1989: 244–277).

Il Baretto in 1928. And yet, despite these setbacks, Gobetti's line of interpretation of the classics did not die out, and instead resurfaced in the writings and recollections of many associates of Gobetti: Mario Fubini's work on Alfieri, for example, was always mindful of the Gobettian lesson,¹⁰⁴ while Augusto Monti reserved the last pages of his pedagogical testament — *I miei conti con la scuola* (1965) — for an appendix that was significantly entitled 'The liberal revolution and tomorrow's school'.¹⁰⁵

In this context, the voice of Thucydides also returned to the fore in the reflections of another associate of Gobetti, Luigi Salvatorelli, who on 10 December 1944, a few months before the end of the Second World War, published a long article in *La Nuova Europa* on the 'Present and Future of Europe'. Here Salvatorelli described the 'overturning of all values' that had characterised the Fascist regime with tones and concepts clearly taken from the section of Thucydides' *History* dedicated to the civil war of Corcyra (Thuc. 3.82.4–5) and anthologised by *La Rivoluzione Liberale* exactly twenty years earlier:

Appearances replaced reality, evil was proclaimed good: delinquent cowardice was called heroism, endless abuse was law, police tyranny real freedom, greedy and fraudulent enrichment disinterest and sacrifice, betrayal of one's homeland became ingenious patriotism. All criteria, all values were overturned.¹⁰⁶

This precise literary reminiscence confirmed once again the integrability of Thucydides within the horizon of Gobetti's liberalism and did not go unnoticed by an attentive classicist such as Alfredo Rizzo, who, in an article published in the journal *Studium* in 1945, noted that Salvatorelli's words gave 'a clear and acute analysis of the evil that oppressed us', expressing 'the echo of an ancient voice that resounded with such a modern tone [...] and which spoke eloquently of Thucydides' relevance'.¹⁰⁷

Even many years later, in short, the classicism cultivated in Gobetti's circle was the bearer of a wide-ranging vision of the Greek tradition, which aimed to steer Italian society towards fully liberal and democratic structures. And it was precisely this organic fusion of political militancy

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Fabrizi (2007: 7–13).

¹⁰⁵ Monti (1965: 361ff.).

¹⁰⁶ Salvatorelli (1944: 1): 'La parvenza fu messa al posto della realtà, il male fu proclamato bene: la codardia delinquente si disse eroismo, l'illimitato arbitrio diritto, la tirannide poliziesca libertà vera, il cupido e fraudolento arricchimento disinteresse e sacrificio, il tradimento della patria patriottismo geniale. Fu il capovolgimento di tutti i criteri, di tutti i valori'.

¹⁰⁷ Rizzo (1981: 161–162).

and cultural activity that was at the origin of the special bond between Gobetti and his circle, which lasted well beyond the years of the dictatorship.¹⁰⁸ This was a legacy which Monti himself, in 1956, in a moving remembrance of his young friend, described with another classical reference, comparing the ‘treasure trove of thoughts and norms’ inherited by Gobetti to the perfect constitution that the lawgiver Lycurgus had entrusted to the Spartans before leaving on a long journey from which he would never return:

One month after Piero’s death, all the Turinese followers gathered in the small neighbourhood of Via Fabro, where his presence could still be felt: I was the one who had to say a few words, but the Latin and Greek I had taught elsewhere for years was still fresh in my mind and what came to mind were the classical reminiscences: I remembered the lawgiver of Sparta, the nomothete who, after establishing the constitution of his homeland, set out on ‘a long journey’ recommending that nothing in the statute should be changed until his return; and he never returned. We had not seen Piero Gobetti die: for us, he had simply left, leaving behind a treasure trove of thoughts, of regulations, a ‘statute’, which we had to preserve until the ‘nomothete’ returned. [...] For some time now, I sometimes like to think that the nomothete has returned to check, to see how his ‘followers’ have preserved it. And that all in all he’s satisfied. His ‘statute’ has been well guarded and despite everything, it is still ruling the best of public Italian life.¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁸ Bobbio (1986: 123–124, 130–131).

¹⁰⁹ Monti (1956: 208): ‘Quando era stata [...] la trigesima della morte del loro Piero, si eran trovati i fedelissimi torinesi nel quartierino di via Fabro caldo ancora della sua presenza: era toccato a me dir due parole, ero fresco tuttavia del latino e del greco insegnato altrove per tanti anni, mi scapparono fuori le reminiscenze classiche: ricordai il legislatore di Sparta, il nomoteta che, fissata la costituzione della sua patria, era partito per “un lungo viaggio” raccomandando di nulla mutare di quello statuto finché lui non fosse tornato; e non era tornato più. Noi non avevamo visto morire Piero Gobetti: per noi era solamente partito lasciandoci un tesoro di pensieri, di norme, uno “statuto”, che a noi toccava serbar intatto finché il “nomoteta” non fosse tornato. [...] Da un pezzo in qua io amo figurarmi a volte il nomoteta ritornato fra noi a far ispezione, come i “fedeli” abbian tenuto consegna. E che sia soddisfatto, tuttassieme. È stata montata bene la guardia al suo “statuto”, ed è esso ancora, nonostante tutto, che governa il meglio della vita pubblica italiana.’

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APPENDIX

Below is the transcript of the article ‘Tucidide e il fascismo’, published in *RL* 3, 18 November 1924, nr. 43, 173, followed by an English translation. For each excerpt the chapter of Thucydides’ work from which the passage is taken is given in square brackets.

TUCIDIDE E IL FASCISMO

La Marcia su Roma e i salvatori della Patria

‘Fu verso quell’epoca che la democrazia venne abolita in Atene...’ [Thuc. 8.63.3]
 ‘Da più tempo gli oligarchi avevano fatto circolare la voce che tutti i diritti spettavano unicamente agli uomini di guerra ed ai soli cittadini capaci di servire la città con la persona e con gli averi. Non si trattava in realtà che di un tranello teso alla moltitudine, poiché era chiaro che soltanto i fautori del colpo di Stato si sarebbero avvantaggiati del potere.’ [Thuc. 8.65.3–8.66.1]

Gli assassini

‘Si principiò con l’assassinio di Androclo, uno dei capi più in vista della democrazia. Quindi tutta la parte popolare fu presa d’assalto con un crescendo di uccisioni sistematiche.’ [Thuc. 8.65.2]

La paura

‘Così numerosa ed insolente era divenuta la fazione oligarchica, che non si trovava alcuno che osasse alzare la voce contro di essa. Se, per caso, qualche temerario l’avesse tentato, le più sanguinose vendette erano pronte a colpirlo.’ [Thuc. 8.66.2]

L’impunità degli assassini

‘Lo Stato non si curava di ricercare i colpevoli di tanti misfatti. Piena impunità era accordata agli assassini, che, anche se conosciuti, potevano circolare liberamente...’ [Thuc. 8.66.2]

Il silenzio

‘Il popolo non osava protestare. Egli vivea in tale stato di spavento, che si riputava già felice di poter sfuggire con il silenzio allo sterminio che lo minacciava.’ [Thuc. 8.66.2]

I traditori

‘Così, malgrado lo sdegno del quale tutti erano accesi, non si faceva un passo per organizzare una difesa. Ogni coraggio era prostrato. Un’aura di terrore travolgeva ogni cosa. Si credevano anche gli oligarchi in maggior quantità o più potenti di quello che, in realtà, non lo fossero. Aggiungì che non si era sicuri di nessuno, dappoiché uomini che non si sarebbero mai sospettati capaci di tradire il popolo, erano passati alla oligarchia, la cui forza principale riposava appunto su questi traditori.’ [Thuc. 8.66.4 + Thuc. 8.66.3 + Thuc. 8.66.5]

L’insegnamento della guerra

‘Nella pace e nella prosperità, la città ed i privati sono meglio e più saggiamente inclinati, perché non conoscono le dure necessità; ma la guerra, distruggendo ogni benessere, porge continue lezioni di violenza e rende l’indole dei cittadini conforme all’asprezza dei tempi. Ardeva la guerra civile nelle città, e quelle

ultime che sorgevano in armi si studiavano di sorpassare le prime nel trovare nuovi modi di aggressione ed inusitati supplizi.’ [Thuc. 3.82.2–3]

La lingua nuova

‘Era cambiato il consueto significato dei vocaboli. La scongiata audacia si chiamava coraggio, il cauto indugio timidezza, la moderazione viltà. Sicuro era considerato solo l’uomo violento, il sospetto circondava gli egregi cittadini.’ [Thuc. 3.82.4–5]

Il ramoscello di ulivo

‘La fiducia scambievolmente non si fondava sulla religione, ma sulla complicità dei misfatti; le oneste profferte della parte contraria non si accettavano in buona fede, bensì quando si scorgeva che si resterebbe superiori ad accettarle.’ [Thuc. 3.82.6–7]

‘La semplicità, dote principale di un’anima nobile, derisa, sparì; prevalse il ridurre le menti in reciproca gara di diffidenza; non più sicurezza di parole, non più timore di giuramento; sicché trovando ovunque più forti ragioni di non aver fiducia, l’uomo meditava piuttosto il modo di non essere offeso, che indursi a fidarsi di chicchessia.’ [Thuc. 3.83.1–2]

Inflexibilmente

‘Di tutti questi mali era cagione la sete del comando, che da ambizione e da cupidigia procede. Queste passioni travolgevano gli spiriti e li eccitavano a osare qualunque scelleratezza.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

I ‘Ras’ e l’amministrazione

‘Nelle città i capi delle fazioni, con il pretesto di un regime di perfetta uguaglianza gli uni, e un discreto reggimento di pochi gli altri, aiutavano la cosa pubblica di nome, e in fatto la riducevano in isfacelo. Perciò, studiando a scalzarsi l’un l’altro, osavano e compivano le più orribili cose, aggravando le pene, non secondo la giustizia e il vantaggio della repubblica, ma secondo che le determinava il loro capriccio.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

Discordie tra i ‘Ras’

‘Non esitavano a soddisfare le rispettive cupidigie, sia con il condannare altrui con ingiusto suffragio, sia col procacciarsi armata mano superiorità, di maniera che ambedue le fazioni non avevano alcun riguardo alla morale; ma quelli cui accadesse, con speciosità di parole, di fare un bel colpo, erano i più reputati; dove i cittadini che tenevano la via di mezzo fra entrambe le parti, venivano nondimeno perseguitati, o per non aver dato mano ad una, o per invidia di vederli fuori del tafferuglio.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

Tucidide : lib. VIII, 43, 45, 46 [l. 63, 65, 66]; lib. III, 82–83.

THUCYDIDES AND FASCISM

The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland

'It was around that time that democracy was abolished in Athens...' [Thuc. 8.63.3]

'The oligarchs had long since spread the rumour that all rights uniquely belonged to men of war and citizens capable of serving the city with their bodies and belongings. This was nothing but a trap set for the multitude, because it was clear that only the supporters of the coup d'état would take advantage of the power.' [Thuc. 8.65.3–8.66.1]

The murderers

'It started with the assassination of Androcles, one of the foremost chiefs of democracy. Then, the whole popular party was assaulted with a crescendo of systematic killing.' [Thuc. 8.65.2]

Fear

'The oligarchic faction had become so crowded and insolent that no man could dare to speak out against it. If, perchance, a braver man attempted it, the bloodiest vengeance was ready to strike.' [Thuc. 8.66.2]

The impunity of murderers

'The State did not care to find culprits for so many crimes. Full immunity was granted to murderers: even though they were well-known, they were permitted to continue circulating freely...' [Thuc. 8.66.2]

Silence

'People did not dare to protest. They were in such a state of fear that they considered themselves happy to manage to escape impending extermination by being silent.' [Thuc. 8.66.2]

The traitors

'So, despite outrage having inflamed everyone, no one took a step forward in order to organise a defence. All courage was prostrate. An aura of terror trumped all. The oligarchs were also thought to be more numerous and powerful than they actually were. And add the fact that no one trusted anyone, since persons whom no one would have ever suspected of being capable of betraying the people sided with the oligarchy, whose principal force resides in these traitors.' [Thuc. 8.66.4 + Thuc. 8.66.3 + Thuc. 8.66.5]

The lesson of the war

'In times of peace and prosperity, city and individuals alike show themselves better and wiser, because they are not subjected to harsh necessities; but war, while destroying all well-being, constantly teaches violent lessons and shapes the character of citizens adapting it to the hardness of the times. Civil war flared

up across cities and the ones that took arms last tried to outdo the others in devising new ways of assaulting and unusual torments.’ [Thuc. 3.82.2–3]

The new language

‘The usual meaning of the words had changed. Reckless audacity was called courage, cautious hesitation timidity, moderation cowardice. Only the violent man was considered safe, suspicion surrounded illustrious men.’ [Thuc. 3.82.4–5]

The olive branch

‘Mutual trust was not founded on religion, but on complicity in the crimes; honest offers from the opposing side were not accepted in good faith, but only if someone realised that he was in a position of superiority in accepting them.’ [Thuc. 3.82.6–7]

‘Simplicity, the foremost quality of a noble soul, was laughed to scorn and vanished; a drive towards competition in mutual distrust prevailed; there was no longer a safe word, nor fear of an oath; so that, men found stronger reasons not to have confidence in other people, thinking about how not to be offended, rather than how to trust anyone.’ [Thuc. 3.83.1–2]

Inflexibly

‘The cause of all these evils was the thirst for leadership, that derived from ambition and covetousness. These passions overtook their spirits and spurred them on to commit all sorts of wickedness.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

The ‘Ras’ and the administration

‘In the cities, faction leaders — some under the pretext of a perfect equality, some other foreseeing a moderate government by a few — served the public interest only by words, but in fact led to state collapse. Therefore, trying to drive each other out, they dared to do the most horrible things, stiffening penalties not in accordance with justice or public benefit, but at their whim.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

Discord among the ‘Ras’

‘They did not hesitate to satisfy their greed by unjustly condemning other people and gaining advantage by using weapons, so that both factions had no regard for morality; but those who managed to make one good score relying on specious arguments enjoyed the better reputation, while the citizens who were in the middle of the two parties were persecuted, either for not taking sides or because of the envy of those who saw them out of the fray.’ [Thuc. 3.82.8]

Thucydides : book VIII, 43, 45, 46 [l. 63, 65, 66]; book III, 82–83.

EIN ANTIKER MARXIST UND GEOPOLITIKER?
 HARTVIG FRISCHS AUSEINANDERSETZUNG MIT THUKYDIDES
 VOR DEM HINTERGRUND DES SOWJETISCH-FINNISCHEN
 WINTERKRIEGES 1939/40

— HANS KOPP —

ABSTRACT

Der Däne Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950) war nicht nur Lehrer, sozialdemokratischer Politiker, Mitglied des Folketing, Professor der Klassischen Philologie und Bildungsminister seines Landes, sondern auch ein großer Bewunderer des Thukydides. In mehreren Aufsätzen und Vorträgen setzte er sich Ende der 1930er, Anfang der 1940er Jahre mit dem Nutzen des thukydideischen Geschichtswerkes für die Analyse gegenwärtiger politischer Probleme auseinander. Diese Beiträge waren nicht allein an ein akademisches Fachpublikum gerichtet, sondern sollten Gelehrte, Parteikollegen, Studenten und sozialistische Arbeiter gleichermaßen erreichen. In einem dieser Beiträge, erschienen zu Beginn des Jahres 1940, präsentiert Frisch Thukydides als einen Vorläufer marxistischer und geopolitischer Denker. Durch diese Bezugnahme auf Thukydides und dessen ‚realistischen‘ Blick auf die Welt wollte er erklären, weshalb die Sowjetunion im November 1939 das benachbarte Finnland überfallen hatte, ein Ereignis, das Frisch zufolge das Potential hatte, dem wissenschaftlichen Marxismus den Boden zu entziehen. Die Einsicht in die ‚Lehren‘ des Thukydides könne jedoch helfen, so Frisch, die hinter solchen Ereignissen wirksamen Kräfte und Motive genauer zu erkennen.

The Dane Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950) was not only a teacher, a Social Democratic politician, a member of the Folketing, a professor of Classical Philology, and his country's Minister of Education, but also a great admirer of Thucydides. In several essays and lectures of the late 1930s and early 1940s he dealt with the usefulness of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War for the analysis of contemporary political problems. These contributions were not solely addressed to an audience of academic specialists, but were intended to reach other scholars, party colleagues, students, and socialist workers alike. In one of these contributions, published in early 1940, Frisch presents Thucydides as a precursor of Marxist and geopolitical thinkers. Through this reference to Thucydides and his 'realistic' view of the world, Frisch sought to explain why the Soviet Union had invaded its neighbour Finland in November 1939, an event that, according to Frisch, had the potential to shatter the very foundations of scientific Marxism. However, insight into the 'lessons' of Thucydides could help,

Frisch argued, to recognise more precisely the forces and motives at work behind such events.

KEYWORDS

*Hartvig Frisch, Thucydides, Winter War (1939/40), Marxism, geopolitics /
Hartvig Frisch, Thukydides, Winterkrieg (1939/40), Marxismus, Geopolitik*

Thukydides wurde und wird häufig als ‚Urvater‘ moderner akademischer Disziplinen und Denkrichtungen begriffen, sei es der modernen Geschichtswissenschaft, wie sie sich seit dem 19. Jahrhundert entwickelt hat, der Politikwissenschaft oder auch der realistischen Schule der Erforschung der internationalen Beziehungen.¹ In diesem Beitrag werde ich einer Deutung des Thukydides nachgehen, die im Gegensatz zu den soeben Genannten nur recht selten in den Blick genommen wird, der Deutung des Thukydides als eines materialistischen Historikers, als eines Proto-Marxisten und geopolitischen Denkers *avant la lettre*. Vertreten hat diese Sichtweise auf das Wesen thukydideischer Geschichtsauffassung Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950), ein dänischer Lehrer, sozialdemokratischer Politiker und Professor der Klassischen Philologie, der von 1947 bis zu seinem Tod Bildungsminister seines Landes war. Frisch war einer der facettenreichsten modernen Rezipienten des Thukydides, was weniger mit seiner Lesart des thukydideischen Textes selbst, sondern vielmehr mit seinem unbedingten Willen, den Text und dessen ‚Lehren‘ populär und nutzbar zu machen, sowie mit seinem spezifischen biographischen Hintergrund zu tun hat. Frisch verband die *personae* des aktiven Politikers (auf nationaler und internationaler Ebene), des politischen Theoretikers, des akademischen Erziehers und des philosophisch versierten Intellektuellen wie wenige andere. Unmittelbar vor, dann aber vor allem während des Zweiten Weltkrieges befasste sich Frisch in Aufsätzen und (teils später publizierten) Vorträgen mehrfach mit Thukydides, inspiriert von den tages- und weltpolitischen Gegebenheiten; diese Beiträge waren jedoch nicht allein an ein (altertumswissenschaftliches) Fachpublikum, sondern stets an eine breitere Öffentlichkeit – an Gelehrte verschiedener disziplinärer Herkunft, an Studenten und sogar an sozialdemokratische Parteikollegen und Arbeiter – adressiert. Im Folgenden möchte ich einen dieser Beiträge Frischs, publiziert zu Beginn des Jahres 1940 in der Zeitschrift *Socialisten*, näher

¹ Siehe dazu für die Geschichtswissenschaft Morley (2013: Kap. 1), für die Politikwissenschaft Ober (2006), für die internationalen Beziehungen Lebow (2012); Keene (2015).

vorstellen, nutzt Frisch doch darin Thukydides, um ein ganz konkretes ‚Problem‘ der damaligen Weltpolitik zu erklären.

1. Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950)

Zunächst jedoch einige knappe biographische Informationen: Hartvig Frisch, geboren 1893 als Sohn eines Schuldirektors und der Tochter eines Schuldirektors in Hillerød auf der dänischen Insel Seeland, war durch familiäre Prägung von Jugend an mit dem Erbe der klassischen Antike vertraut.² Er studierte in Kopenhagen Geschichte, Deutsch und die klassischen Sprachen, bevor er eine Laufbahn als Lehrer antrat, sich zugleich jedoch auch der Politik zuwandte. In der Jugend war Frisch stammer Marxist, und nachdem er bereits 1926 Parlamentsabgeordneter der dänischen Sozialdemokraten geworden war, wurde er 1935 Fraktionsvorsitzender seiner Partei. Eine weitere politische Karriere Frischs schien vorgezeichnet, doch fünf Jahre später änderte sich die Lage grundlegend. In den frühen Morgenstunden des 9. April 1940 marschierte die deutsche Wehrmacht in Dänemark ein; das Land war fortan unter deutscher Besatzung, und Frisch, der ein prominenter Gegner des Faschismus war, wurde noch im November 1940 dringend der Rückzug aus seinen Ämtern nahegelegt, nicht zuletzt, um nicht den Interessen seiner eigenen Partei zu schaden; er fügte sich, blieb aber weiterhin Mitglied des Parlaments. Fortan wandte sich Frisch ganz seiner wissenschaftlichen Karriere zu. Binnen weniger Monate vollendete er im Frühjahr 1941 seine Dissertation, einen philologisch-historischen Kommentar zu Pseudo-Xenophons *Athenaion politeia*. Kaum war die Dissertation erfolgreich verteidigt, wurde Frisch zum Professor der Klassischen Philologie an der Universität Kopenhagen ernannt; die Vakanz der Professur hatte Frischs Arbeit an der Dissertation gewiss beschleunigt. Während der Zeit der deutschen Besatzung widmete sich der Wissenschaftler und Hochschullehrer Frisch vor allem Themen, die merklich von der politischen Situation geprägt waren: Ciceros Kampf um den Bestand der römischen Republik einerseits, der konfliktreichen Beziehung zwischen Macht und Recht im Denken der Antike andererseits. Nach der Befreiung Dänemarks im Mai 1945 konnte Frisch seine politische Karriere fortsetzen, auch wenn es durchaus kritische Stimmen hinsichtlich seiner Rolle während der Besatzungszeit gab. Von Mai bis Juni 1945 nahm er als einer der Delegierten Dänemarks an der Gründungsversammlung der Vereinten Nationen in San Francisco teil,

² Zu Frischs Biographie siehe generell Christiansen (1993) sowie die englische Zusammenfassung bei Christiansen (1999: 76–86).

und 1947 wurde er schließlich zum Bildungsminister Dänemarks ernannt. Nach Monaten der Krankheit verstarb Hartvig Frisch am 11. Februar 1950, im Alter von 57 Jahren.

2. Der sowjetisch-finnische Winterkrieg als ideologisches und wissenschaftliches Problem

Der Beitrag, den Frisch zu Beginn des Jahres 1940 in *Socialisten*, der Zeitschrift der dänischen „sozialdemokratischen Debattierclubs“ (*socialdemokratiske diskussionsklubber*), veröffentlichte, trägt den Titel „Et stykke klassisk geopolitik“ („Ein Stück klassischer Geopolitik“).³ Ein Jahr zuvor hatte Frisch in einer Festschrift für den dänischen Autor, Übersetzer und Bewunderer des Thukydides Niels Møller (1859–1941) eine umfangreiche Darstellung der wesentlichen Themen des thukydideischen Geschichtswerkes publiziert,⁴ in der er insbesondere den Konflikt von Macht und Recht als bestimmendes Problemfeld des Textes herausgestellt hatte. Den Herausgebern von *Socialisten* erschien die Beschäftigung ihres prominenten Parteigenossen mit den Lehren des antiken Historikers über das Verhältnis von Macht und Recht offenkundig bemerkenswert, baten sie ihn doch, zu diesem Thema etwas in ihrer Zeitschrift zu veröffentlichen.⁵ Diesem Wunsch kam Frisch nach, doch hat der Beitrag in *Socialisten*, auch wenn er etliche Passagen des früheren Textes wörtlich übernimmt, nur wenig mit dem des Jahres 1939 zu tun: Während letzterer bis auf die einleitende Bemerkung Frischs, die „Begebenheiten der letzten Monate“ hätten „den Wert der Lektüre dieses Griechen“ gewiss „nicht gemindert“,⁶ frei von direkten (jedoch keineswegs von indirekten) tagespolitischen Bezügen ist, ist der Aufsatz von 1940 explizit als ein Beitrag zur Klärung und Erklärung eines ganz aktuellen Problems gedacht. Der unterschiedliche Zuschnitt beider Texte hängt dabei gewiss auch mit dem jeweiligen Publikum zusammen: Der Festschrift-Aufsatz war an ein Gelehrtenpublikum adressiert, der von

³ Frisch (1940).

⁴ Frisch (1939).

⁵ Anmerkung der Herausgeber in Frisch (1940: 3).

⁶ Frisch (1939: 89); hier und im Folgenden gebe ich den dänischen Originaltext in deutscher Übersetzung wieder. Da Frisch den Festschrift-Aufsatz wohl Ende 1938 oder in den ersten beiden Dritteln des Jahres 1939 verfasste (der Geburtstag des 1939 durch die Festschrift Geehrten war der 11. Dezember), kommen grundsätzlich mehrere Ereignisse als „Begebenheiten der letzten Monate“ in Frage: der ‚Anschluss‘ Österreichs im März 1938, das Münchner Abkommen vom September 1938, die Zerschlagung der Tschechoslowakei im März 1939 oder auch, auf Dänemark bezogen, der deutsch-dänische Nichtangriffspakt vom Mai 1939.

1940 primär an Frischs sozialdemokratische Parteikollegen, die – so darf man wohl mutmaßen – höhere Ansprüche an den ‚Nutzen‘ der Beschäftigung mit dem antiken Autor gestellt haben als Frischs literarisch interessiertes, akademisch-gelehrtes Umfeld.

Das aktuelle Problem, das Frisch mithilfe des Thukydides in diesem Beitrag lösen will, ist der Überfall der Sowjetunion auf Finnland vom 30. November 1939, der Beginn des sogenannten Winterkrieges. Am frühen Morgen dieses Tages hatten sowjetische Truppen die finnische Grenze überschritten, nachdem vorherige Versuche, Finnland auf diplomatischem Weg und unter Verweis auf die strategische Sicherheit des nur ca. 30 km von der finnischen Grenze entfernt gelegenen Leningrad zu Gebietsabtretungen zu bewegen, gescheitert waren.⁷ Für Frisch ist im Beitrag von 1940 der sowjetische Angriff auf Finnland weniger ein politisch-militärisches als vielmehr ein ideologisches und letztlich auch ein wissenschaftliches Problem, werde dadurch doch, so Frisch, letztlich die gesamte marxistische Geschichtsdeutung in Frage gestellt. Durch den Angriff auf Finnland war das Verhältnis zwischen den Sozialisten Westeuropas und Sowjetrussland, das am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges ohnehin bereits an einem Tiefpunkt angekommen war, zusätzlich erschüttert worden. Mehrere Faktoren und Entwicklungen hatten zu dieser Entfremdung beigetragen: der deutsch-sowjetische Nichtangriffspakt vom August 1939, der dem Bild vom Sowjetkommunismus als eines Bollwerks gegen den Faschismus irreparablen Schaden zugefügt hatte; der Terror der ‚Säuberungen‘ unter Stalin; schließlich die generelle doktrinäre Rigidität Moskaus, die für individuelle Ausprägungen sozialistischer Denk- und Aktionsformen keinen Platz mehr ließ. Der Überfall auf Finnland tat dann nur noch sein Übriges, um das Verhältnis weiter zu belasten;⁸ in Dänemark führte er etwa zu einem merklichen Mitgliederschwund und weiterem Popularitätsverlust der ohnehin nicht besonders einflussreichen Kommunistischen Partei.⁹ Zwar betraf diese Entfremdung Marxisten, ehemalige Kommunisten und nonkonformistische linke Denker und Aktivisten gleichermaßen, die strikteste Trennlinie bestand jedoch zur Sozialdemokratie, deren Kurs einer Verwirklichung sozialistischer Reformpläne über den Weg des demokratischen Parlamentarismus in schärfstem Kontrast zum revolutionären Kommunismus sowjetischer Prägung

⁷ Salmon (1997: 350–356) zur diplomatischen Vorgeschichte.

⁸ Pons (2015: 68, 72).

⁹ Lund (2017: 242–243).

stand.¹⁰ In Dänemark waren die Sozialdemokraten seit 1929 Regierungspartei, und für Frisch war die ideologische wie politisch-pragmatische Abgrenzung seiner Partei zur radikalen Linken eine zentrale Aufgabe.¹¹ Der Wandel der dänischen Sozialdemokratie hin zu einer weithin akzeptierten und als Regierungspartei erfolgreichen Kraft innerhalb des politischen Spektrums beförderte diese Haltung gewiss, ebenso wie die Radikalisierung der dänischen Kommunisten: „In combination with the Danish communist party’s growth and its increasingly confrontational attitude, this led Frisch to make a definitive choice of social democracy and parliamentary democracy over communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.“¹² Frischs bis heute wohl bekanntestes Buch, *Pest over Europa* von 1933, ist eine engagierte Abrechnung mit und Warnung vor den totalitären Tendenzen und Regimen des damaligen Europas, rechten und linken gleichermaßen. Er propagierte darin einen Sonderweg des Sozialismus ‚nordischer‘ Prägung zwischen den Extremformen des Politischen in Europa, der für die folgende Generation dänischer Sozialdemokraten sowohl ideologisch-theoretisch als auch politisch-praktisch prägend werden sollte.¹³

Angesichts seiner von kaum verhohlener Antipathie geprägten Haltung dem Sowjetkommunismus gegenüber verwundert es folglich nicht, dass Frisch den Angriff Russlands auf Finnland aufs Schärfste kritisierte. Das Schicksal Finnlands hatte ohnehin eine Welle der internationalen Solidarität und Empathie hervorgerufen, was sich nicht nur im Ausschluss der Sowjetunion aus dem Völkerbund am 14. Dezember 1939, sondern auch in der Teilnahme etlicher Freiwilligenkontingente (darunter auch knapp über 1000 Dänen) im Kampf gegen die Sowjetunion zeigte. Im Beitrag für *Socialisten* präsentiert Frisch den sowjetischen Angriff jedoch nicht so sehr als ein politisches oder militärisches, sondern als ein wissenschaftlich-theoretisches Problem. Es geht ihm, kurz gesagt, um die Tragfähigkeit des marxistischen Geschichtsmodells. Der Marxismus, so beginnt Frisch den Beitrag, habe seit jeher die Erklärung historischer Prozesse aller „ideologischer Gewänder“ entkleidet und auf „die nackte Wahrheit hinter den schönen Worten“ hingewiesen. Der Marxismus habe dem Wissenschaftler damit einen „Kompass“ zur Verfügung gestellt, der es ihm gestatte, zwischen „allen widerstreitenden Ideologien“ sicher hindurchzusteuern und zu erkennen, was hinter jedem historischen Prozess, sei es

¹⁰ Eley (2002: 225–229, 235–248).

¹¹ Christiansen (1993: Kap. 11–12).

¹² Gram-Skjoldager & Olesen (2012: 198).

¹³ Gram-Skjoldager & Olesen (2012: 198).

im Kampf der Nationen oder im Kampf der Klassen, als eigentliches Movens liege — ökonomische Interessen.¹⁴ Die marxistische Geschichtsauffassung habe auch eine Theorie geliefert, die historische Prozesse adäquat erklären könne: Die Arbeiter stünden stets in Opposition zur herrschenden Klasse und ihren Machtinteressen, folglich könne es auch keinen Widerspruch zwischen den Interessen der Arbeiterschaft und einer am Machtgewinn orientierten Politik geben. Schließlich sei spätestens mit dem Aufstieg der Nationalsozialisten in Deutschland die Frontstellung klar gewesen: hier die internationale, friedliebende Arbeiterschaft (deren pazifistische Leitsätze in der Institution des Völkerbundes eine dauerhafte, supranationale Vertretung gefunden hätten), dort aggressive und vor keiner Gewaltanwendung zurückschreckende Machtpolitik faschistisch-totalitärer Prägung.¹⁵

Auf dem Papier mochte diese Theorie zwar stimmen, doch sei sie von der historischen Wirklichkeit längst überholt worden, kommentiert Frisch weiter: „Aus politischer Sicht ist gegen diese Ideologie nichts einzuwenden, außer dass sie sich nun als falsch erwiesen hat. Die Machtfaktoren in der Welt sind anders verteilt, als man es angesichts der Ideologien erwartet hatte. Also müssen die Parolen geändert werden!“¹⁶ Damit kommt Frisch zum eigentlichen Thema seines Beitrags, dem Angriff der Sowjetunion auf Finnland. Dieser habe nämlich nicht allein die Erklärungskraft politischer Ideologien, sondern — scheinbar zumindest — auch die wissenschaftliche marxistische Geschichtsauffassung als nicht länger adäquat erwiesen. Frisch formuliert die Problemstellung wie folgt:

Ist die Sowjetregierung ein wahrer Ausdruck der russischen Arbeiter- und Bauernbevölkerung? — Wenn dies bejaht wird, lautet die nächste Frage: Ist die Arbeiterklasse, wenn sie an der Macht ist, genauso anfällig für den Imperialismus wie jede andere herrschende Klasse, die die Erde bisher gekannt hat?¹⁷

Falls auch diese bejaht werden müsse, wie es der Angriff auf Finnland ja nahelege, so habe der Marxismus ein ernstes, seine Glaubwürdigkeit gefährdendes Problem, denn:

¹⁴ Frisch (1940: 3).

¹⁵ Frisch (1940: 3).

¹⁶ Frisch (1940: 3).

¹⁷ Frisch (1940: 4).

Eine wissenschaftliche Aussage ist entweder richtig oder falsch und kann nicht beides gleichzeitig sein. Daher muss der sowjetische Angriff auf Finnland die gesamte marxistische Forschung mit einem wissenschaftlichen Problem konfrontieren, das, wenn es verdrängt wird, den wissenschaftlichen Marxismus untergraben wird.¹⁸

Es gebe jedoch, so Frisch, eine wissenschaftliche Theorie, die imstande sei, den Marxismus vor dieser ‚Untergrabung‘ zu bewahren: die Geopolitik. Vor allem in der Zwischenkriegszeit war geopolitisches Denken ein florierendes Instrument zur Erklärung politisch-historischer Vorgänge durch den Verweis auf geographisch-naturräumliche Faktoren, balancierend im Grenzbereich zwischen Geographie, Soziologie, Geschichts- und Staatswissenschaft.¹⁹ Ihre Blütezeit hatte die Geopolitik zwar in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren, doch war sie Frisch zufolge keineswegs eine völlig neuartige geistige Erfindung, sondern letztlich nichts anderes als eine Fortführung der wesentlichen Gedanken des Marxismus. Er schreibt: „Diese Lehre [die Geopolitik] hat viele Merkmale mit dem Marxismus gemeinsam“, ja mehr noch, sie sei letztlich nur „ein geistiges Kind“ des Marxismus, da auch sie das Augenmerk auf die rein materiellen Grundbedingungen historischer Entwicklung lenke; einzig das Fehlen des internationalistischen Gedankens unterscheide sie daher vom ‚echten‘ Marxismus.²⁰

3. Geopolitischer Diskurs und politische Ideologien in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts

Frischs Deutung der Geopolitik als eines „geistigen Kindes“ des Marxismus hatte grundsätzlich das Potential, kontrovers zu sein. Geopolitik, wie sie als Theorie in den ersten Dekaden des 20. Jahrhunderts begriffen und propagiert wurde, und der historische Materialismus marxistischer Prägung standen sich sowohl ideologisch als auch methodologisch zunächst keineswegs nahe.²¹ Geopolitik grenzte sich teils vom Marxismus ab, Marxisten kritisierten geopolitisches Denken,²² und die einflussreiche deutsche Schule der Geopolitik war letztlich nichts anderes als „eine

¹⁸ Frisch (1940: 4).

¹⁹ Teschke (2011).

²⁰ Frisch (1940: 4).

²¹ Zum Verhältnis von Marxismus und Geopolitik siehe Teschke (2001).

²² Teschke (2001: 331), der allerdings auch hervorhebt (ebd.), dass „in den Offizialmarxismen der II. und III. Internationale“ in der Tat eine „Vernachlässigung der territorialen Distribution staatlicher Macht“ beobachtbar sei.

scheinwissenschaftliche Verbrämung des außenpolitischen Revisionismus nach 1918“.²³ Ungeachtet solcher grundlegender ideologischer Differenzen gab es im linken politischen Spektrum in den 1920ern und 1930ern dennoch Versuche, beide Theorien in Einklang zu bringen oder zumindest zu einer Neubestimmung der Bedeutung naturräumlicher Faktoren innerhalb eines marxistisch geprägten Materialismus zu kommen. Hier sticht besonders ein Name hervor: Georg Engelbert Graf (1881–1952), deutscher Sozialdemokrat, Reichstagsabgeordneter, Autor und von 1921 bis 1933 Leiter des Bildungswesens des deutschen Metallarbeiterverbandes. Graf hatte in den späten 1920er Jahren die Ansicht vertreten, der historische Materialismus sei als Lehrgebäude so lange „unvollständig“, wie er den Raum als Faktor des historischen Prozesses nicht gebührend berücksichtige, ein Versäumnis, dessen sowohl Marx als auch Engels schuldig gewesen seien und das es zu berichtigen gelte.²⁴ Es sei „an der Zeit“, schreibt Graf 1924, „die geographischen Forschungsergebnisse und Forschungsmethoden [...] in das sonst unvollständige Gebäude des historischen Materialismus einzubauen“, habe doch „die geographische Wissenschaft einen erheblichen Anteil an der Entstehung der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung“.²⁵ Die Arbeiterschaft dürfe nicht länger in einer „sentimental-nationale[n] Ideologie“ gefangen sein und dabei die „geopolitischen Realitäten außer acht lassen“.²⁶ Für Graf gehen eine staatsbürgerliche Erziehung der Arbeiterschaft und die Kenntnis geopolitischer Theorien und Modelle Hand in Hand:

Gerade das Proletariat als aufsteigende Klasse hat aber ein Interesse an geopolitischem Denken und an geopolitischer Schulung; denn der Aufstieg einer Klasse nimmt den Weg über die Eroberung der politischen Macht. Und diese wird stets vor die Lösung geopolitischer Probleme gestellt sein. *Daher muß eine Erziehung zur Demokratie auch eine Erziehung zu geopolitischem Denken sein.*²⁷

Es ist besonders jener explizit didaktische Anspruch des Sozialdemokraten Graf, kombiniert mit dem klaren Bekenntnis zur parlamentarischen Demokratie als dem einzig vertretbaren Weg der Arbeiterschaft zu politischer Macht, der Kritik in der radikalen Linken hervorrief. Karl

²³ Osterhammel (1998: 374).

²⁴ Graf (1924: 563).

²⁵ Graf (1924: 565).

²⁶ Graf (1924: 587).

²⁷ Graf (1924: 587, Hervorh. im Original).

August Wittfogel — Soziologe, Sinologe, Mitarbeiter des Frankfurter Instituts für Sozialforschung und (damals noch) ein in der Wolle gefärbter Kommunist — bemerkte in seiner umfangreichen Auseinandersetzung mit der Bedeutung geographischer Faktoren innerhalb materialistischer Geschichtsauffassung mit unverhohlener Geringschätzung für den sozialdemokratischen ‚Abtrünnigen‘ (Graf war zunächst Mitglied der USPD gewesen, 1921 aber wieder den Mehrheitssozialdemokraten der SPD beigetreten),²⁸ der „bekannte ‚linke‘ Sozialdemokrat“ Graf sei darum bemüht, der deutschen Arbeiterschaft eine aus dem Geist des Krieges geborene, im Kern bürgerliche und letztlich pseudowissenschaftliche Denkweise zu vermitteln — die Geopolitik.²⁹ „Doppeltes Interesse“, so Wittfogel, gewinne die neue Disziplin dadurch, „daß von sozialdemokratischer Seite der Versuch gemacht wird, unter dem Vorwande einer Vervollständigung des Marxismus, dem deutschen Proletarier zusammen mit der Demokratie auch die Geopolitik [...] aufzunötigen“.³⁰ Gerade diese Bemühungen aber brachten Wittfogel dazu, sowohl die theoretischen und methodologischen Grundlagen geopolitischen Denkens als auch die tatsächliche Bedeutung natürlicher Faktoren innerhalb der marxistisch geprägten materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung genauer in den Blick zu nehmen.

Es fällt dabei auf (und macht die Kontroverse in unserem Kontext bedeutsam), dass der Kommunist Wittfogel die linken Annäherungsversuche an die Gedankenwelt der Geopolitik explizit den von ihm kaum geschätzten Sozialdemokraten attestiert, Vertretern eines parlamentarisch orientierten, reformistischen Sozialismus also, zu denen sowohl Frisch als auch Graf zählten. Beide verband, bei allen biographischen Unterschieden, ein fester Glaube in die progressive Kraft der durch die Sozialdemokratie parlamentarisch vertretenen Arbeiterschaft, die als Bollwerk gegen radikale Strömungen von links und rechts gleichermaßen dienen könne und deren ‚Erziehung‘ und staatsbürgerliche Bildung daher höchste Aufmerksamkeit verdiene.³¹ Für Frisch waren auch die Antike und insbesondere das politische Denken von Autoren wie Thukydides ein unerlässlicher Teil einer humanistisch basierten staatsbürgerlichen ‚Erziehung‘ der Arbeiterschaft. Ein Beispiel mag dies illustrieren: In einem kurzen, im Januar 1944 veröffentlichten Beitrag — verfasst für ein weiteres Publikationsorgan der dänischen Sozialdemokraten (*Social-*

²⁸ Zum von kommunistischer Seite erhobenen Vorwurf, die Sozialdemokraten seien reformistische ‚Verräter‘ an der sozialistischen Idee, siehe Eley (2002: 252).

²⁹ Wittfogel (1929: 17).

³⁰ Wittfogel (1929: 18).

³¹ Zu Frisch siehe Christiansen (1993: Kap. 10).

Demokratens Kronik) und betitelt „Klassische Gedanken in einer harten Zeit“ – beschreibt Frisch, wie ihn die Aussagen eines jungen Arbeiterführers zu diesem Beitrag inspiriert hatten. Carl Petersen, ein Maschinenarbeiter und früherer Kreisvorstand der Sozialdemokratischen Jugend Dänemarks, hatte in einem Interview „auf die natürlichste Weise der Welt“ bekundet, er lese in seiner Freizeit gerne Thukydides. Frisch war davon mehr als angetan: „Es hätte dem alten, strengen Athener gefallen, wenn er das gewusst hätte, und ich mache keinen Hehl daraus, dass es mir gefallen hat, als ich es las.“³² Für Frisch war die Aussage Petersens ein Indiz dafür, dass auch seine eigene „sozialistische Kulturarbeit“ („socialistiske Kulturarbejde“) nicht vergebens gewesen war. In diesem kurzen Beitrag formuliert Frisch eine Art Programm, wie die Kenntnis der Antike auch in der ‚Erziehung‘ der Arbeiterschaft eine Rolle spielen könne:

Der Teil der Arbeiterjugend, der sich gezielt durch Lesen und Denken schult, hat auch entdeckt, dass es eine Welt vor der uns bekannten gab, und dass es gesund ist, hinter die eigene Zeit zu schauen und die menschliche Natur sozusagen aus der Perspektive von Jahrtausenden zu betrachten.³³

Da Thukydides durch den Jungsozialisten Petersen nun auch dort ein Zuhause gefunden habe, wo er als „erster kritischer Historiker der Welt“ („Verdens første kritiske Historiker“) hingehöre, in der sozialdemokratischen Jugendorganisation nämlich, sah sich Frisch ermutigt, durch den dann folgenden Beitrag einen „kleinen Neujahrsgruß aus der Werkstatt“ des Thukydides zu schicken; „ob sie ihn verstehen und von ihm lernen werden“, sei der jungen Leserschaft dann selbst überlassen.³⁴ Inhaltlich handelt es sich dabei um eine knappe Skizze der von Thukydides in Buch 3 geschilderten *stasis* in Kerkyra, der berühmten ‚Pathologie des Krieges‘, ergänzt um einige abschließende Kommentare Frischs zu seiner eigenen Sicht auf den Text vor dem Hintergrund des Krieges.³⁵

Auch wenn es Wittfogels Wille war, die Geopolitik als ‚bürgerliche‘, von Sozialdemokraten willfährig übernommene Pseudowissenschaft möglichst vollständig zu diskreditieren, so wurde seine Auseinandersetzung mit der Bedeutung geographisch-naturräumlicher Faktoren für die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung von der politischen Gegenseite

³² Frisch (1945b: 79).

³³ Frisch (1945b: 79).

³⁴ Frisch (1945b: 79).

³⁵ Frisch (1945b: 80–81).

dennoch durchaus wohlwollend aufgenommen. Die Trennlinien sollte man ohnehin, wie Karl Schlögel hervorgehoben hat, keineswegs zu scharf ziehen: „Der geopolitische Diskurs vereinte Exponenten extrem unterschiedlicher politischer Lager, Konservative gleichermaßen wie Linksradikale. [...] Es gab leichte Nuancierungen der Theorien, einige waren deterministischer als die anderen, aber insgesamt war dies der prägende Denkstil, die Welt in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts konzeptuell zu erfassen.“³⁶ So kam es, dass etwa der konservative Theoretiker der Geopolitik Adolf Grabowsky Wittfogels Beitrag als „eine höchst interessante und wertvolle Abhandlung“ würdigen konnte, die dem Mainstream des geopolitischen Denkens an konzeptioneller Grundlagenforschung weit überlegen sei.³⁷ Es sei gar „charakteristisch für die herrschende geopolitische Schule, daß erst der Marxismus kommen mußte, um sie überhaupt auf das Verhältnis von Raum und Ökonomie aufmerksam zu machen“.³⁸ Sogar der prominenteste und einflussreichste Exponent der Geopolitik in Deutschland, der den Nationalsozialisten teils ideologisch, teils persönlich nahestehende Karl Haushofer, fand lobende Worte für Wittfogels Beitrag. Seine Wertschätzung ging sogar so weit, dass er den ersten Teil von Wittfogels langer Abhandlung in gekürzter Form in der *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, dem von ihm herausgegebenen Publikationsorgan der geopolitischen Schule, veröffentlichte.³⁹ Sie sei, so Haushofers einleitende Bemerkung, „die Arbeit eines deutschen Kommunisten [...], dessen grundsätzliche Stellungnahme wissenschaftlichen Wert besitzt“, und die daher auch den eklatanten Mangel an „systematische[n] Auseinandersetzungen mit der Geopolitik“, wie er in der Geographie und den Staatswissenschaften herrsche, ausgleichen könne.⁴⁰ Haushofer geht sogar so weit, die Geopolitik als diejenige Theorie zu deklarieren, die das aufgrund der ‚Vergottung‘ des wirtschaftlichen Faktors durch und durch lebensferne Gedankengebäude des Marxismus „durch Einfügung der an sich inhomogenen geopolitischen Fragestellung“ überhaupt vor dem Einsturz bewahrt habe.⁴¹ Über alle

³⁶ Schlögel (2015: 50).

³⁷ Grabowsky (1933: 781–782).

³⁸ Grabowsky (1933: 777).

³⁹ Wittfogel (1932).

⁴⁰ Wittfogel (1932: 581). Als Wittfogel 1933 im Zuge der ersten politischen ‚Säuberungen‘ durch die Nationalsozialisten verhaftet wurde, wandte sich seine Frau an Haushofer mit der Bitte, er möge sich für ihren Gatten einsetzen. Haushofer sprach sich in der Tat bei Rudolf Heß, mit dem er persönlich gut bekannt war, für Wittfogel aus, jedoch ohne Erfolg; Bassin (2005: 239).

⁴¹ Wittfogel (1932: 582).

ideologischen Gräben hinweg hatte geopolitisches Denken einen enormen Einfluss auf politische Theoretiker der ersten Jahrhunderthälfte, und zwar sowohl bei Adepten der Theorie als auch – wie das Beispiel Wittfogel zeigt – bei denjenigen, die sich durch den Versuch der Abgrenzung davon zu eigenständigen Neubestimmungen der Rolle des naturräumlichen Faktors im historischen Prozess inspiriert sahen.

Es verwundert dann kaum noch, dass sich Frisch im weiteren Verlauf des Beitrags von 1940 als Bewunderer eines dänischen geopolitischen Denkers erweisen kann, der später mindestens im gleichen Maße als Vertreter einer politisch fragwürdigen Scheinwissenschaft galt wie seine deutschen Geistesverwandten. Die wesentlichen Erkenntnisse der Geopolitik nämlich seien in Dänemark durch die „hervorragenden Vorträge“ von Prof. Gudmund Hatt einer breiteren Öffentlichkeit bekannt gemacht worden. In dessen Rundfunkvorträgen habe man der grundlegenden Elemente geopolitischen Denkens in „klarer und nüchterner Form“ gewahr werden können.⁴² Der Gudmund Hatt, von dem Frisch hier in hohen Tönen spricht, war der Gudmund Hatt, der nach der Befreiung Dänemarks Anfang Mai 1945 wegen seiner Aktivitäten während der Besatzungszeit inhaftiert wurde und der in einem kurz nach seiner Verhaftung verfassten Brief beschreibt, wie er und andere Verdächtige „unter dem Gejohle und dem Gespucke von Tausenden“ durch die Straßen geführt wurden.⁴³ Wie konnte es dazu kommen? Hatt (1884–1960) hatte in Harvard und später in Kopenhagen Ethnographie studiert, war dann zunächst Mitarbeiter beim Dänischen Nationalmuseum, bevor er 1923 zunächst zum Assistenzprofessor für Geographie, 1929 schließlich (nach Aufgabe seiner Tätigkeit am Museum) zum Außerordentlichen Professor für Kulturgeographie an der Universität Kopenhagen ernannt wurde.⁴⁴ Seine Forschungsinteressen bewegten sich stets an den Schnittpunkten von Geographie, Archäologie und Ethnographie, von Wissenschaft und Politik. In den 1930ern wurde Hatt, der bereits nach seiner Rückkehr aus den USA mit Vorträgen über das Schicksal der Indianer Aufsehen erregt hatte, zu einem einer breiteren Öffentlichkeit bekannten Mann. Dies hatte vor allem mit einer Reihe von Rundfunkvorträgen zu tun, auf die sich auch Frisch im Beitrag für *Socialisten* bezieht. Beginnend 1934 mit Vorträgen über Vererbungs- und Rassenlehre sprach er in den folgenden Jahren über Themen wie Kolonialismus und Geopolitik, letzteres inspiriert von den sich zuspitzenden Konflikten auf der

⁴² Frisch (1940: 4).

⁴³ Larsen (2009: 22); (2011: 38, dort auch das Zitat).

⁴⁴ Zu Hatts Biographie und Wirken siehe Larsen (2009), das Folgende 20–24.

weltpolitischen Bühne.⁴⁵ Parallel zu den Rundfunkvorträgen trat Hatt auch publizistisch hervor: Die Vorträge wurden zumeist in Buchform oder als längere Aufsätze publiziert, und auch in der Presse war Hatt äußerst aktiv als Verfasser von Beiträgen zu tagesaktuell inspirierten Themen aus dem Dunstkreis der politischen Geographie. Wie sein Landsmann Frisch oder der deutsche Sozialdemokrat Graf war auch Hatt durch und durch didaktisch orientiert: „Hatt sought to illuminate what he considered to be the geographical foundations of the pressing problems of then troubled times, and he aimed at the widest possible audience.“⁴⁶ Politisch stand Hatt vor allem den Sozialliberalen nahe, hegte aber auch Sympathien für die Sozialdemokraten, zumindest für einzelne ihrer Vertreter. Während der Besatzung war Hatt ein Anhänger jener weitverbreiteten, gerade auch von Frisch und anderen Mitgliedern der politischen Führungsschicht propagierten Haltung, wonach man sich mit den Deutschen tunlichst arrangieren sollte, um nicht durch einen Konfrontationskurs und Widerstand die im europäischen Vergleich zunächst durchaus günstigen Besatzungskonditionen aufs Spiel zu setzen.⁴⁷ Genau wie Frisch (und letztlich eine Mehrheit der dänischen Gesellschaft) sah er es als Form eines vernunftgeprägten Realismus, sich mit den (bei ihm freilich geopolitisch determinierten) Gegebenheiten zu arrangieren.⁴⁸ Im Verlauf des Krieges veröffentlichte Hatt jedoch mehr und mehr in Organen, die den Nationalsozialisten nahestanden; zudem nahmen seine geopolitischen Analysen des Weltgeschehens zunehmend eine Gestalt an, die von Kritikern – während der Besatzung, aber vor allem danach – als versteckt bis offen Nazi-freundlich, als Apologien deutscher Eroberungspolitik gedeutet wurden. Nach Kriegsende wurde Hatt von einem eigens eingesetzten Gerichtshof des „unehrenhaften Verhaltens“ der eigenen Nation gegenüber für schuldig befunden und war gezwungen, seine Professur aufzugeben – allerdings bei vollen Pensionsbezügen; er verstarb am 27. Januar 1960, verbittert und intellektuell weitestgehend isoliert. Ende 1939, als Frisch den Beitrag für *Socialisten* verfasste, war all das jedoch noch nicht abzusehen, und Frisch konnte sich daher noch lobend über Hatts Popularisierung der Geopolitik in Dänemark äußern. Nach Kriegsende gehörte dann auch Frisch zu denjenigen, die Hatts Haltung während der Besatzungszeit als den freiwilligen und deshalb besonders schändlichen „Lustopportunismus“

⁴⁵ Zu Hatts geopolitischem Denken siehe Larsen (2009: 28–31).

⁴⁶ Larsen (2009: 20). Auch Frisch war in den 1930er und 1940er Jahren maßgeblich an Rundfunkbeiträgen der Sozialdemokraten beteiligt; Christiansen (1993: 132–134).

⁴⁷ Dethlefsen (1990); Hitchcock (2015: 413–417); Holbraad (2017: 42–75).

⁴⁸ Larsen (2009: 32–33).

derjenigen, die sich dort herumgetrieben hätten, wo „die Schlinge um Dänemarks Hals“ gelegt wurde, verurteilten.⁴⁹

4. Thukydides, der erste Marxist und geopolitische Denker?

Erst jetzt, nachdem das akute historisch-politische ‚Problem‘ und seine Folgen für den wissenschaftlichen Marxismus ausführlich erörtert worden sind, kommt Frisch auf Thukydides zu sprechen. Der athenische Historiker ist für Frisch ein Wegbereiter und Vordenker sowohl des Marxismus als auch der Geopolitik, habe Thukydides doch in seiner historischen Analyse den Blickwinkel beider Gedankengebäude auf die wesentlichen Triebkräfte hinter historischen Prozessen vorweggenommen:

Aus marxistischer Sicht ist an der Geschichtsschreibung des Thukydides interessant, dass sie völlig frei von jeglichem Glauben an höhere Mächte ist. Er rechnet mit den geographischen und wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen sowie mit den Interessen und Leidenschaften der Menschen als den bestimmenden Faktoren für den Verlauf der Geschichte.⁵⁰

Für Frisch hat Thukydides’ Darstellung und Analyse des Peloponnesischen Krieges im Folgenden dann nur einen Zweck zu erfüllen: Athen, wie es Thukydides beschreibt, ist ihm das Paradebeispiel, wie ein Staat zum gewaltsamen ‚imperialistischen‘ Aggressor werden kann, wenn er ganz der Idee vom ‚Recht des Stärkeren‘ verfallen ist. Als Illustration dieses Sachverhaltes dienen Frisch auf den nächsten Seiten (die den Hauptteil des Aufsatzes ausmachen) frei übersetzte Passagen aus den Reden im Werk des Thukydides sowie vor allem eine längere, zwischen Paraphrase und Übersetzung changierende Wiedergabe des Melierdialoges aus Buch 5; diese Teile wiederum sind fast wörtlich aus dem Festschrift-Beitrag von 1939 übernommen, in dem Frisch das Thema ‚Macht und Recht‘ und die Ideologie vom ‚Recht des Stärkeren‘ zu bestimmenden Kernthemen des thukydideischen Geschichtswerkes erklärt und seine Analyse des Textes um diese Motive herum gestaltet hatte.⁵¹ Das konfliktreiche Verhältnis von Macht und Recht im politisch-

⁴⁹ Frisch (1945a: 103).

⁵⁰ Frisch (1940: 4). Zur Bedeutung materieller Faktoren in Thukydides’ Darstellung siehe Crane (1998: 167).

⁵¹ Zu Frischs Deutung des Thukydides siehe generell Rasmussen (1993: Kap. 4). Zum ‚Recht des Stärkeren‘ bei Thukydides siehe Meister (2011).

philosophischen Denken der Antike war das bestimmende Thema von Frischs akademischem Œuvre. Eine großangelegte Darstellung dieses Gegenstandes, von der Frisch nur den ersten Band, der die Zeit bis zu den Perserkriegen behandelt, vollenden konnte,⁵² wäre wohl sein wissenschaftliches Hauptwerk geworden. Auch im *Socialisten*-Beitrag ist dieses Thema ein Leitmotiv seiner Deutung des Thukydides. Besonders deutlich nämlich werde, so Frisch, der gänzlich ungeschönte, realistische Blick des antiken Historikers

in den Passagen, in denen er seine Meinung zum Problem von ‚Macht und Recht‘ darlegt – nicht in irgendeiner Theorie, sondern in der reinen historischen Praxis; und obwohl Thukydides selbst Athener ist, kann man nicht behaupten, dass er an irgendeiner Stelle versucht, den gewalttätigen Imperialismus des demokratischen Athens zu vertuschen.⁵³

Die folgenden Darlegungen Frischs dienen dann dem Ziel, am Beispiel Athens zu illustrieren, wie anhand der von Thukydides als maßgeblich erkannten Faktoren – des rein materiellen Interesses und der inhärenten Logik des Machtdenkens – das Handeln von Staaten erklärt werden könne, ohne dass man auf ‚idealistische‘ Rechtfertigungen von Politik zurückgreifen müsse.

Der folgende, längste Teil des Beitrags besteht aus der erwähnten Zusammenstellung einschlägiger Passagen aus Thukydides' Werk, die in Frischs Sicht die dort omnipräsente Machtideologie der Athener, ihren ‚Machtnihilismus‘, wie er es später nennen wird,⁵⁴ exemplifizieren. Genau wie im Festschrift-Beitrag des Jahres 1939, dem die Passagen letztlich wortgetreu entnommen sind, wechseln sich hier längere Zitate in freier Übersetzung und Frischs eigene Bemerkungen ab, sodass die gesamte Passage den Charakter eines Kommentars zu den einschlägigen Partien aus den Reden und dem Melierdialog gewinnt. Die wichtigsten Einsichten bzw. ‚Lehren‘, die Frisch der Lektüre des Thukydides entnommen haben will und die für ihn die größte zeitgenössische Relevanz besitzen, stehen am Anfang und am Ende dieses Teils. Gleich zu Beginn formuliert er, wie in einer Art Abstract:

⁵² Frisch (1944).

⁵³ Frisch (1940: 4).

⁵⁴ Frisch (1945c).

In aller Kürze kann Thukydides' Meinung wie folgt ausgedrückt werden: Es ist ein Naturgesetz, dass der Stärkere über den Schwächeren herrscht. Thukydides betrachtet dies als eine Tatsache, die er nicht für diskussionswürdig hält, sondern lediglich konstatiert.⁵⁵

Diesem Thema, diesem Motto ist Frischs gesamte folgende Diskussion wichtiger Passagen aus Thukydides' Werk unterstellt. Die Rede der Athener in Sparta wird zitiert (1.75), die des Archidamos (1.84), Perikles' Gefallenrede (2.53), Kleons Rede während der Mytilene-Debatte (3.37), Alkibiades' „ausführlichste Begründung des athenischen Imperialismus“ in der Debatte über die Sizilienexpedition (6.18),⁵⁶ schließlich der athenische Gesandte Euphemos in Syrakus (6.85). In unterschiedlicher Ausprägung sollen all diese Passagen beweisen, dass Thukydides die Herrschaft der Stärkeren über die Schwächeren als unabwendbares ‚Naturgesetz‘ – ein zentraler Begriff in Frischs Diskussion – erkannt hat und das daran ausgerichtete Handeln weder verurteilt noch billigt, sondern in aller Klarheit und Nüchternheit bloß konstatiert, als eine letztlich fast naturwissenschaftliche Tatsachenbeobachtung. In dem bereits zitierten kurzen Beitrag des Jahres 1944, in dem Frisch die *stasis* in Kerkyra als Lehrstück über die Auflösung von Recht und Gesetz in Kriegszeiten skizziert, bemerkt er abschließend, unter dem Eindruck der beiden Kriege (des Ersten Weltkrieges und des damals aktuellen) habe er begonnen, Thukydides' Darstellung nicht allein als schauerlich-düstere Illustration des moralischen Verfalls, sondern als „ein Stück menschlicher Naturgeschichte“ („et Stykke menneskelige Naturhistorie“) zu betrachten.⁵⁷ Durch den steten Verweis auf die ‚Natürlichkeit‘ aber erhebt Frisch – in dieser Hinsicht wohl noch ganz ein Kind des 19. Jahrhunderts – die vermeintlichen Lehren der Darstellung des Thukydides in den Rang von objektiven, gerade nicht mehr historisch individuellen und von Menschen beeinflussbaren, sondern überzeitlich-statischen Gesetzen. Die Naturgesetzmäßigkeit, mit der sich das ‚Recht des Stärkeren‘ bei Thukydides entfalte, ist für Frisch somit der konzeptionelle Schritt, um dessen ‚Lehren‘ mit der im Vorhergehenden skizzierten Tradition marxistisch-materialistischen Geschichtsdenkens bzw. mit einer geopolitisch geprägten Weltanschauung zu harmonisieren. Thukydides erweise sich in dieser Hinsicht als der Vordenker späterer Materialisten, indem er jede Begründung politisch-militärischen Handelns durch den Verweis auf höhere Ziele und

⁵⁵ Frisch (1940: 5).

⁵⁶ Frisch (1940: 6).

⁵⁷ Frisch (1945b: 81).

Ideale oder gar die ‚Gerechtigkeit‘ als nur vorgeschoben, als reine Äußerlichkeit abtue.⁵⁸

Mit seiner Auffassung, der Verzicht auf ideologische, moralische oder sonstige ‚immateriellen‘ Erklärungen mache Thukydides zu einem Vorläufer modernen geopolitischen Denkens, stand Frisch nicht allein. Zwei Jahre später, 1942, publizierte Henry C. Montgomery (Miami University von 1940 bis 1968) einen kurzen Essay mit dem Titel „Thucydides and Geopolitics“. Montgomerys Argumentation, weshalb Thukydides derjenige Historiker der Antike sei, dessen Analysen „essentially geopolitical“ seien,⁵⁹ hat deutliche Berührungspunkte mit Frischs Beitrag in *Socialisten*. Wie Frisch sieht auch Montgomery in Thukydides einen Denker, der den „callous disregard for the moral and ethical attitudes“ der modernen Geopolitik geteilt habe, verweise doch auch Thukydides den Rückgriff auf derartige Antriebskräfte ins Reich der Propaganda.⁶⁰ Auch für Frisch war Thukydides ein „kritischer Denker und ein Verächter der Propaganda, von welcher Seite sie auch kommt“.⁶¹ Die „Dinge bei ihrem richtigen Namen nennen“ („nævne Tingene ved deres rette Navne“), wie er diese Sichtweise im *Socialisten*-Beitrag bezeichnet,⁶² war für ihn die wichtigste Maxime, die man aus Thukydides’ Darstellung des historischen Geschehens ziehen könne. Wie der moderne Geopolitiker ist auch Montgomerys (und letztlich auch Frischs) Thukydides ein kühler Realist, der hinter politischem Geschehen nicht hehre Motive oder gar Ideologien am Werk sieht, sondern allein reines Machtkalkül und die von den geopolitischen Gegebenheiten diktierte Gesetzmäßigkeit.

Ein knapper Verweis auf die Rede der Mytilenaier zu den Spartanern in Olympia und ihre Bemerkung, ohne annähernde Ebenbürtigkeit der Kräfte würde niemand Widerstand gegen den hegemonialen Partner eines Bündnisses wagen (3.11), dient Frisch als Überleitung zu seiner zweiten, dann vor allem am Melierdialog illustrierten These. Mit Blick auf

⁵⁸ Siehe Crane (1998: 262) zur Selbstdarstellung der Athener bei Thukydides: „The Athenians brush mere verbal constructs aside and base their worldview not on some ludicrous self-serving morality tale, but on the objective reality to which all humans are equally subject. For them, power is neither good nor bad, but an end that they feel compelled to pursue. They do not abandon so much as transcend the morality of the archaic world. In their cool appraisal of the situation, they lay claim to the higher moral position of the nineteenth-century scientist, the neoclassical economist, or the old-fashioned Marxist revolutionary.“

⁵⁹ Montgomery (1942: 94).

⁶⁰ Montgomery (1942: 95).

⁶¹ Frisch (1939: 90).

⁶² Frisch (1940: 11).

die im vorhergehenden Teil zitierten Passagen aus den Reden über das Recht des Stärkeren befindet er:

Wollte man aus diesem extremen Machtgerede schließen, Thukydides erlaube es seinen Akteuren nicht, das Konzept der Gerechtigkeit anzuerkennen, ginge man doch zu weit. Das Konzept hat für ihn nur die ganz wesentliche Einschränkung, dass es in der wirklichen Welt nur zwischen *gleich starken Partnern* gilt.⁶³

Dieser Gedanke sollte für Frisch in den folgenden Jahren zentrale Bedeutung erlangen, versuchte er doch, seine kooperative Haltung während der Besatzungszeit und seine klare Absage an jede Form des aktiven, gar gewaltsamen Widerstandes gegen die Deutschen mit dem Verweis auf diese ‚Lehre‘ des Thukydides zu begründen. Die Debatte zwischen Meliern und Athenern, die er auf den folgenden Seiten wiedergibt, ist ihm ein Paradebeispiel für den mutig-mannhaften, letztlich aber sinnlosen und selbstzerstörerischen Geist des Widerstandes, den er in Dänemark um alles verhindern wollte. Was 1939 bzw. zu Beginn des Jahres 1940 noch eine Andeutung war, ist bei Frisch später dann – nach den Ereignissen des 9. April 1940 – kaum noch zu übersehen: Athen ist Nazideutschland, Melos ist Dänemark – und Sparta, die Kraft von außen, die nicht helfen will, ist Großbritannien.⁶⁴ Das Schicksal der Melier zeige, dass Widerstand ohne Ebenbürtigkeit der Kräfte – und ohne verlässliche internationale Partner, Sparta bzw. implizit Großbritannien – letztlich nur zur völligen Zerstörung der Gemeinschaft führe. Auch wenn Frisch erst später eine fast schon explizite Parallele zwischen beiden historischen Konstellationen ziehen sollte,⁶⁵ so wiederholt er doch auch hier im *Socialisten*-Beitrag eine Bemerkung des Festschrift-Aufsatzes,⁶⁶ die die zeithistorische Standortgebundenheit seiner Lektüre deutlich zu erkennen gibt. Noch bevor er den Inhalt des Dialoges referiert, bemerkt er, Thukydides’ Text eigne sich zwar grundsätzlich kaum als ‚populärer Lesestoff‘, doch sollten „diese Seiten seines Werkes in jeder kleinen Nation zur Pflichtlektüre in den Schulen werden“, komme doch nirgends sonst der „Wille einer Großmacht zugleich zynischer und reiner zum Ausdruck“.⁶⁷ Besonders

⁶³ Frisch (1940: 7, Hervorh. im Original).

⁶⁴ Christiansen (1993: 208, 210); Holbraad (2017: 144–145); Kopp (in Vorb.).

⁶⁵ Frisch (1945c).

⁶⁶ Frisch (1939: 99).

⁶⁷ Frisch (1940: 8): „Thukydid egner sig jo ellers ikke til at være Folkelæsning [...], men i enhver lille Nation burde disse Sider af hans Værk gøres til obligatorisk

bezeichnend ist hier der Verweis auf die *kleinen* Nationen, die von den Lehren des Thukydides besonders profitieren könnten. Dänemark war – im weltpolitischen, aber auch im europäischen Maßstab – eine ‚kleine‘ Nation und hatte seit dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges eine Politik der strikten Neutralität verfolgt,⁶⁸ verbunden mit weitgehender militärischer Abrüstung.⁶⁹ Zugleich war den politischen Führern Dänemarks im Verlauf der 1930er Jahre wiederholt klargemacht worden, dass das Land im Falle einer deutschen Invasion keinerlei Hilfe von außerhalb, von Großbritannien vor allem, erwarten dürfe. Auch wenn Frisch keineswegs ein unbedingter Befürworter des dänischen Kurses der Abrüstung und der – der Erhaltung der Neutralität geschuldeten – Beschwichtigungspolitik Nazideutschland gegenüber war,⁷⁰ so zeigte ihm das Beispiel der Melier doch, welche fatale Konsequenzen der mutige, aber aussichtslose Widerstand einer wehrlosen Nation gegen einen militärisch übermächtigen Gegner haben konnte.

Mit einer kurzen Schilderung des Massakers von Mykalessos von 413, bei dem von den Athenern angeworbene thrakische Söldner die Bewohner dieser Stadt in Boiotien rücksichtslos abschlachteten (7.29), beschließt Frisch diesen Teil des Beitrags. Die exzessive und dabei völlig sinnlose Grausamkeit dieses Ereignisses, so Frisch, habe dem sonst so nüchternen Thukydides doch einmal einen „persönlichen Seufzer“ entlockt.⁷¹

5. Weltpolitik mit Thukydides dechiffrieren

Einen abschließenden Kommentar, wie genau die Lektüre des Thukydides zum Verständnis des finnisch-russischen Konfliktes oder zur Rettung des marxistischen Geschichtsmodells beitragen könne, sucht man letztlich vergebens. Frisch belässt es bei Andeutungen und generellen, nur wenig spezifischen Aussagen. Er habe sich, erklärt er, „so ausführlich für die Leser von ‚Socialisten‘ auf diesen antiken athenischen Historiker bezogen“, weil sich die „Problemstellung“, die dieser in seinem Werk

Skolelæsning. Aldrig er en Stormagts Vilje paa een Gang mere kynisk og mere renligt kommet til Udtryk.“

⁶⁸ Mehrfach betont Frisch, dass auch Melos „strikteste Neutralität“ zu wahren versuchte (1940: 7, 8, 10; siehe auch 1939: 99, 102; 1945c: 46, 48). Zur umstrittenen Frage der Neutralität von Melos während des Peloponnesischen Krieges siehe Bauslaugh (1991: 113–117, 142–146).

⁶⁹ Holbraad (1991: Kap. 3).

⁷⁰ Gram-Skjoldager & Olesen (2012: 206–207).

⁷¹ Frisch (1940: 11).

veranschauliche, „in den kommenden Jahren allen historischen Debatten aufzwingen“ werde.⁷² Was unter „Problemstellung“ zu begreifen sei, nämlich die Gefahr einer Verschleierung machtpolitischer Erwägungen durch den Verweis auf höhere Ideale, illustriert Frisch dann erneut am Beispiel des sowjetischen Angriffs auf Finnland, womit er den Kreis seiner Argumentation schließt. Nicht nur habe der Sowjetkommunismus dadurch den „jahrelangen Kampf der Arbeiterschaft für Frieden und Gerechtigkeit“ gefährdet; es drohe dadurch auch, dass der Marxismus – bisher „eine der schärfsten geistigen Waffen der Arbeiterschaft“ – zu einer „imperialistischen Dialektik im Dienst einer Großmacht“ („imperialistisk Dialektik i en Stormagts Tjeneste“) verkomme. Vor allem aber stehe zu befürchten, dass dem Angriff auf Finnland weitere ‚imperialistische‘ Aggressionen seitens Sowjetrusslands folgen, getarnt unter dem Deckmantel sozialistischer Ideologie, wie Frisch in aller Deutlichkeit zu bedenken gibt:

Es wird in Zukunft kein Akt der Grausamkeit oder Gewalt denkbar sein, der nicht von kommunistischer Seite marxistisch als Akt der sozialistischen Befreiung drapiert werden wird; und es wird kein Verrat denkbar sein, der nicht durch dieselbe Dialektik mit dem Heiligenschein der Weltrevolution geschmückt werden kann. Die Geopolitiker werden diesen Auflösungsprozess, bei dem der Marxismus zu einem Teil des russischen Imperialismus wird, mit Argusaugen betrachten. Für sie ist dies nur eine weitere Bestätigung, dass die Machtkonzentrationen der Staaten stärker sind als jede ‚Ideologie‘.

Während sich der „despotische Sozialismus“ sowjetischer Prägung endgültig in einen „rohen Imperialismus“ verwandelt habe, sei es nunmehr die Aufgabe des „demokratischen Sozialismus“, weiter und stärker denn je für „ein internationales Rechtssystem und soziale Gerechtigkeit“ zu kämpfen. Abschließend wendet sich Frisch mit einem direkten Appell an die Leser von *Socialisten*: „Nutzen wir neben dem politischen Kampf auch die ruhige, geduldige Forschung, um die Lüge in all ihren Verkleidungen zurückzuweisen und die Dinge bei ihrem richtigen Namen zu nennen.“⁷³ An dieser Stelle wird noch einmal deutlich, worin für Frisch der eigentliche Wert der ‚Lehren‘ des Thukydides für die Analyse gegenwärtiger „Problemstellungen“ liegt: in dem aus seiner Sicht unbedingten Willen des Thukydides, hinter den Schein der schönen Worte zu blicken und die tatsächlichen Antriebe

⁷² Frisch (1940: 11).

⁷³ Frisch (1940: 11).

menschlicher Handlungen in aller analytischen Schonungslosigkeit offenzulegen. Mit Thukydides zu denken heie, idealistische Argumentationen als Vorwand und bloe „Propaganda“ beiseitezuschieben.⁷⁴ Wer sich diesen Blick zu eigen mache, so Frischs Resmee und Hoffnung, knne die in der Weltpolitik tatschlich wirksamen Faktoren demaskieren, ganz gleich, ob eine demokratische Polis der Antike eine wehrlose Inselstadt vernichtet oder die vermeintliche Speerspitze der organisierten Arbeiterschaft aus rein geostrategischen Grnden einen vlkerrechtswidrigen Angriff auf eine benachbarte Nation unternimmt. Die „Dinge bei ihrem richtigen Namen zu nennen“ ist in Frischs Deutung die wichtigste Lehre, die aus der Lektre des Thukydides zu ziehen sei, und sie sei es, die den athenischen Historiker zu einem Vorlufer von Marxisten und Geopolitikern gleichermaen mache.

6. Fazit

Wie ist Frischs Auseinandersetzung mit Thukydides im *Socialisten*-Beitrag von 1940 abschlieend zu bewerten? Sowohl hinsichtlich der Deutung des Atheners als eines stets nchtern-objektiven ‚Realisten‘ als auch bezglich der Frage, welche Rolle ethische und rechtliche berlegungen im Werk spielen, ist die Forschung mittlerweile zu differenzierteren Ergebnissen gekommen, die die inneren Spannungen des Textes strker in den Blick nehmen und folglich auch ein komplexeres Bild der Sicht seines Autors auf die hinter historischen Prozessen wirksamen Faktoren entwerfen.⁷⁵ Doch ist, wie bereits zu Beginn angedeutet, der konkrete Gehalt der Lesart Frischs nicht deren eigentlich bemerkenswerter Aspekt. Bemerkenswert ist vielmehr sein – in dieser Form wohl singulrer – Wille, das Werk des Atheners als das zu gebrauchen, was dieser auch selbst explizit als das Ziel seiner Darstellung formuliert hat: als einen „Besitz fr immer“ (*ktma es aiei*), der auch in Zukunft ‚ntzlich‘ sein knne (1.22.4, bers. G. P. Landmann):

Zum Zuhren wird vielleicht diese undichterische Darstellung minder ergtzlich scheinen; wer aber das Gewesene klar erkennen will und damit auch das Knftige, das wieder einmal, nach der menschlichen Natur, gleich oder hnlich sein wird, der mag sie so fr ntzlich halten, und das soll mir genug sein: zum dauernden Besitz, nicht als Prunkstck frs einmalige Hren ist sie verfasst.

⁷⁴ So Frisch in einem Abschnitt des Festschrift-Aufsatzes, betitelt „Ursache und Vorwand“ („Aarsag o Paaskud“) (1939: 91–93).

⁷⁵ Orwin (1994); Shanske (2013); Morley (2018).

Wie genau Thukydides dieses ‚Lernen‘ für die Zukunft angesichts gewisser Konstanten menschlichen Handelns und Verhaltens verstanden wissen wollte, ist in der Forschung nach wie vor ein vieldiskutiertes Thema.⁷⁶ Wie Thukydides ging aber auch Frisch davon aus, dass menschliches (und für ihn insbesondere politisches) Verhalten von konstanten Faktoren geprägt ist, was zwar nicht die Vorhersage künftiger Ereignisse, wohl aber die Einsicht in die Kräfte, die hinter diesen wirken, ermögliche. Frischs persönlicher Hintergrund als führender Politiker seines Landes, Hochschullehrer und engagierter humanistischer ‚Erzieher‘ führte dazu, dass sein Werben um die Relevanz des Thukydides ein außergewöhnlich großes und vielfältiges Publikum adressierte, von sozialistischen Arbeitern über Parteikollegen hin zur gelehrten Fachwelt und zu Studenten. Gerade angesichts derart dramatischer Ereignisse wie denen der Jahre 1939 bis 1945 wollte er es ihnen allen gleichermaßen ermöglichen, hinter die Dinge zu blicken – das *saphes skopein*, von dem Thukydides in 1.22.4 spricht – und dadurch klüger und einsichtiger auf die Herausforderungen der Weltpolitik reagieren zu können. Ob er dabei Thukydides stets adäquat gedeutet hat, mag dahingestellt sein; zweifellos aber hätte es „dem alten, strengen Athener gefallen, wenn er es gewusst hätte“.⁷⁷

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⁷⁶ Zuletzt ausführlich dazu Raaflaub (2013).

⁷⁷ Frisch (1945b: 79). Frischs damaliger Versuch, die Analysen des Thukydides zu nutzen, um die wahren Motive hinter imperialer Machtpolitik aufzuzeigen, hat kaum an Aktualität verloren, denn nur eine Woche nach Fertigstellung dieses Beitrages, am 24. Februar 2022, begann der russische Angriff auf die Ukraine.

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G.E.M. DE STE. CROIX, TUCIDIDE E LA RICERCA DELLA VERITÀ

— CARLO MARCACCINI —

ABSTRACT

De Ste. Croix riaffermò la matrice determinista del materialismo storico di Marx e vide nel conflitto di classe una chiave di lettura importante per comprendere la società antica. Tucidide ebbe una parte fondamentale in questa visione: infatti de Ste. Croix riconobbe nel racconto tucidideo la stessa valenza predittiva che egli attribuiva alla meccanica del conflitto di classe. Sostenendo la validità di un paradigma determinista, egli intendeva preservare l'indagine storica dalla contaminazione con l'antropologia e la sociologia.

Geoffrey de Ste. Croix recognised determinism as the core principle of Marxian historical materialism and considered class conflict as an important key to understanding ancient society. Thucydides played a fundamental part in his vision: de Ste. Croix acknowledged in Thucydides' narrative the same predictive value that he attributed to the mechanics of class conflict. By upholding the validity of that determinist paradigm, the British historian intended to preserve historical research from contamination by anthropology and sociology.

KEYWORDS

*G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, Thucydides, Marxism, determinism /
G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, Tucidide, marxismo, determinismo*

1. Introduzione

A vent'anni dalla scomparsa di de Ste. Croix non si intravedono commemorazioni. Se si eccettuano gli *obituaries* e la pubblicazione di alcuni saggi inediti, in tutto questo tempo non molto è stato scritto su di lui.¹ Ciò è abbastanza sorprendente se si considera la

¹ Harvey (2000); Lewis (2000); Parker (2001). I primi due sono articoli di giornale apparsi sul *Guardian* e sul *New York Times*, il terzo è un vero e proprio saggio, che contiene numerose notizie biografiche e molti riferimenti bibliografici. Sulla vita, la formazione e la carriera di de Ste. Croix è importante anche Harvey & Cartledge (1985). Un bel profilo intellettuale di de Ste. Croix si trova in Anderson (1995: 19–46). Pubblicazioni postume: de Ste. Croix (2004); de Ste. Croix (2006). Quanto agli studi dopo la sua morte, cf. Blackledge (2006: 104–110); Boer (2013); Lazarus (2016) (incentrati prevalentemente sul suo marxismo); Boer (2011) (sulle ricerche relative al

straordinaria attenzione dedicata ad altri studiosi, come Moses Finley e Arnaldo Momigliano.² Tuttavia per un profilo biografico e intellettuale che sia degno degli eccellenti ritratti apparsi subito dopo la sua morte sarebbe indispensabile esaminare almeno una parte della sua corrispondenza, la quale, a quanto mi risulta, non è raccolta e conservata in nessun fondo d'archivio.³ La pubblicazione di lettere e documenti inediti potrebbe essere l'oggetto di un lavoro futuro, ma per il momento mi limiterò a delineare il metodo e la visione generale della storia che emergono nei saggi più importanti, in particolare il lungo articolo sulla popolarità dell'impero marittimo ateniese, il libro sulle origini della guerra del Peloponneso (*OPW*) e quello sulla lotta di classe nel mondo antico (*CSAGW*).⁴

De Ste. Croix fu uno storico marxista, che a partire dagli anni Settanta non celò la matrice ideologica delle sue ricerche, ma anzi la rivendicò con orgoglio, giungendo, come è noto, a formulare una versione personale del marxismo.⁵ Egli cercò di dimostrare come la lotta di classe fra schiavi e possessori di schiavi fosse una categoria esplicativa fondamentale per comprendere i principali fenomeni sociali, economici e politici del mondo greco e romano. Questa proposta teorica, che già allora era minoritaria ed è stata poi superata e abbandonata,⁶ sottende una concezione della

Cristianesimo e alla Bibbia, pubblicate nel 2006). Ringrazio Giorgio Camassa, Paul Cartledge e Dino Piovan per avermi dato importanti consigli sul contenuto e la bibliografia di questo articolo, solo mia però la responsabilità di quanto ho scritto.

² Sulla fortuna di Finley cf. Jew, Osborne & Scott (2016). Quanto a Momigliano, già nel 2006 si contavano ben 335 pubblicazioni su di lui: Granata (2006: xxxv–liii).

³ Si può però ricorrere a fondi d'archivio di altri studiosi. Per esempio, fra le carte di Moses Finley conservate presso la University Library di Cambridge c'è una cartella che raccoglie la corrispondenza fra lo stesso Finley e de Ste. Croix tra gli anni Cinquanta e Settanta (e-mail a me del 3 dicembre 2020 di John Wells, Senior Archivist, Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts, presso la Cambridge University Library). Sui Finley Papers cf. Di Donato (1987–1989).

⁴ De Ste. Croix (1954); de Ste. Croix (1972); de Ste. Croix (1981).

⁵ De Ste. Croix (1977); de Ste. Croix (1981: 31–69). Parker (2001: 469 n. 14) fa notare che il suo approccio teorico al marxismo iniziò nei primi anni Settanta, in occasione delle J.H. Gray Lectures presso l'Università di Cambridge, che de Ste. Croix stesso annuncia in *OPW* (de Ste. Croix (1972: 35): 'I propose to deal with that subject [*i.e.* the class struggle in Greece] in the "J.H. Gray Lectures" which I shall be delivering at Cambridge University early in 1973 and which I hope to publish in the same year'). Negli stessi anni de Ste. Croix rese pubbliche le sue convinzioni politiche: Parker (2001: 468–469); cf. Harvey & Cartledge (1985: xiv–xv).

⁶ Nel volume miscelaneo *Marxismo e società antica* la proposta di de Ste. Croix non viene accolta con grande entusiasmo. Così scrive Vegetti (1977: 47) nell'introduzione: 'L'accento sulle classi e la loro lotta induce [...] de Ste. Croix a sottovalutare il maggior canale di sfruttamento nel mondo antico, che è quello internazionale, e che,

storia che va oltre il marxismo e conferisce un'identità particolare alle sue ricerche. Cruciale è lo studio dell'opera di Tucidide, in quanto la rilettura del materialismo marxiano ha significativi punti di contatto con l'interpretazione del metodo tucidideo. Per de Ste. Croix Tucidide era come uno scienziato, strettamente dipendente dall'arte medica, e per questo era in grado non solo di comprendere il passato, ma anche di fornire consigli pratici per il futuro.⁷ Una posizione anch'essa in via di superamento,⁸ proprio come l'ipotesi che nell'antichità esistessero le classi sociali, che però egli ripropose perché era convinto che il racconto tucidideo avesse la stessa valenza predittiva attribuita alla dinamica del conflitto di classe. Alcune recensioni di *CSAGW* rimarcarono l'eccentricità teorica di de Ste. Croix,⁹ ma in realtà la sua rilettura del marxismo — e di Tucidide — era legata a un paradigma storiografico di stampo positivista.

2. Vecchi e nuovi paradigmi

Prima di proseguire bisogna spiegare l'espressione 'paradigma positivista'. Partiamo dal sostantivo, che uso con lo stesso senso col quale fu impiegato da Thomas Kuhn in un celebre saggio degli anni Sessanta: *La struttura delle rivoluzioni scientifiche*.¹⁰ Per Kuhn il paradigma è un modello di spiegazione composto da un insieme di teorie coerenti, di cui la comunità scientifica riconosce l'assoluta validità. Il paradigma coincide con la vulgata accademica, che Kuhn chiama 'scienza normale', alla quale gli studiosi cercano di uniformare le loro ricerche. I tentativi di adeguarsi alla teoria generano dei problemi, i cosiddetti 'rompicapo', che di solito sono destinati a essere risolti all'interno della teoria stessa, ma, quando diventano troppi, finiscono per mettere in crisi il paradigma. A questo punto, secondo Kuhn, si apre uno spazio di libertà — una sorta di anarchia creativa — che costituisce il terreno adatto per nuove scoperte e

venendo gestito interamente dagli apparati politico-militari, scavalca e interseca le scansioni di classe per modellarsi su quelle di *status*'. Vegetti (1977: 35–43) dedica maggiore spazio alle tesi di Vernant, Austin, Vidal-Naquet e Finley: Vernant (1965) = Vernant (1974: 11–29); Austin & Vidal-Naquet (1972); Finley (1999). Sull'accoglienza di *CSAGW* da parte del mondo accademico: Parker (2001: 470–474); sulle cause dell'isolamento di de Ste. Croix: Boer (2011: 412–414).

⁷ De Ste. Croix (1972: 5–34). Ma si veda già de Ste. Croix (1963), in cui afferma che la storiografia è una branca della scienza. Secondo Parker (2001: 460), la passione per la scienza gli fu instillata da un altro storico marxista, George Thomson.

⁸ Stahl (2003: 13–34). Per una rassegna delle interpretazioni di Tucidide cf. Hesk (2015: 219–224).

⁹ Parker (2001: 471, 473 n. 72) per un elenco delle recensioni.

¹⁰ Kuhn (2009).

invenzioni in grado di imporre un nuovo sistema d'idee. Quando tale processo di crisi e di rigenerazione si è completato, si può dire che è avvenuta una 'rivoluzione scientifica'.

Ora, è ovvio che questo schema non può essere traslato *sic et simpliciter* nell'ambito della ricerca storica, poiché non è stato pensato per essa. La storia non è una scienza esatta e prevede modelli di spiegazione alternativi e ricostruzioni diverse degli stessi eventi. La libertà creativa di cui essa gode è paragonabile alla condizione di crisi che in ambito scientifico precede la ricostituzione di un nuovo paradigma. Tuttavia non si può negare che anche nel mondo degli storici si formino delle vulgate accademiche che riguardano tanto l'interpretazione dei fatti, quanto la lettura di alcune categorie di documenti. La storia greca in particolare può contare su un numero molto più limitato di fonti rispetto alla storia romana, medievale e moderna, il che determina con più facilità il crearsi di paradigmi costruiti con grande coerenza, all'interno dei quali gli studiosi possono trovare le risposte ai loro interrogativi, risolvendo i 'rompicapo' in cui si imbattono nel corso delle loro ricerche.

Faccio alcuni esempi. Sul funzionamento del calendario ateniese è stata seguita per anni la ricostruzione di Benjamin Dean Meritt, che aveva pubblicato i suoi primi studi negli anni Venti.¹¹ La vulgata di Meritt ha influenzato la cronologia relativa di alcuni eventi: penso in particolare alle pagine che Kenneth James Dover dedicò alla datazione della mutilazione delle Erme rispetto alla partenza della spedizione navale contro Siracusa.¹² A partire dagli anni Quaranta William Kendrick Pritchett ha elaborato una visione diversa, che, essendo più semplice, più aderente alle fonti e in grado di risolvere alcune incongruenze della teoria concorrente, sembra ora avvicinarsi — pur dopo decenni di dibattiti — come paradigma vincente.¹³ Un caso più particolare è la questione del 'three-

¹¹ Meritt (1928); Meritt (1961). La questione nasce dal fatto che gli Ateniesi avevano tre calendari diversi: quello lunare, suddiviso in dodici mesi, quello arcontale, che serviva a datare le feste religiose, e quello della *boule*, che divideva l'anno in dieci pritanie. Sia il calendario arcontale sia quello pritanico erano usati nei rendiconti finanziari del V secolo a.C., in cui la *polis* registrava le date dei prestiti ricevuti dal tesoro di Atene, custodito nel Partenone. In sostanza Meritt ipotizzava che i mesi dell'anno arcontale avessero una durata fissa e si potessero individuare delle esatte corrispondenze fra il giorno del mese e quello della pritania sulla base delle indicazioni presenti nei rendiconti.

¹² Dover in Gomme, Andrewes & Dover (1970: 264–288). Nel suo recente commento a Tucidide (6.27–29) Hornblower (2008: 368) scrive che l'*excursus* di Dover 'is a *tour de force* of thoroughness, independence [...] and acumen, and remains fundamental on calendrical, chronological, and prosopographic problems'.

¹³ Pritchett & Neugebauer (1947); Pritchett (1963). Al contrario di Meritt, Pritchett ipotizzò che le pritanie avessero una durata fissa e che i mesi arcontali fossero variabili,

barred sigma'. Secondo la vulgata in vigore fino a pochi anni fa, questo tipo di sigma scomparirebbe dopo il 446 a.C., implicando una datazione più alta per le epigrafi che lo attestano.¹⁴ A partire dagli anni Sessanta Harold Mattingly sostenne l'infondatezza delle argomentazioni paleografiche precedenti e propose datazioni più basse,¹⁵ le quali, nonostante qualche resistenza, hanno finito per imporsi, dopo che negli anni Novanta il pregiudizio del sigma è caduto definitivamente.¹⁶ Allargando lo sguardo a temi più generali, vediamo che della democrazia ateniese ci sono due letture concorrenti, tra le quali non è ancora ben chiaro quale prevarrà: c'è chi ne dà una rappresentazione formale, evidenziando la somiglianza con le democrazie liberali, e chi invece ne esalta il sostanziale egualitarismo, sottolineando la distanza dalla configurazione elitaria degli stati moderni.¹⁷ Uno schieramento analogo si presenta nell'interpretazione dell'economia antica: i 'primitivisti' negano che esistesse un'economia di mercato e ritengono che le attività produttive fossero innanzitutto mirate alla sussistenza e non vi fossero forme di investimento; i 'modernisti', invece, evidenziano la presenza di reti commerciali e ipotizzano strategie di profitto per molti aspetti simili alle nostre. Come vedremo, il tema coinvolge de Ste. Croix, che è più vicino ai modernisti in quanto applica all'antichità le categorie marxiane, pensate per la società moderna.¹⁸

I paradigmi riguardano anche questioni metodologiche. Dall'Ottocento a oggi si sono susseguiti e sovrapposti diversi modi di fare storia, che hanno condizionato intere schiere di studiosi. Nel 1817 uscì la prima edizione di *Die Staatshaushaltung der Athener* di August Boeckh, che

in quanto l'arconte poteva aggiungere o sottrarre giorni al mese. Questo impedirebbe di stabilire corrispondenze fisse fra i giorni del mese arcontale e quelli della pritanìa. Sul modello di Pritchett: Dunn (1998); Samons (2000: 299–304) (che lamenta la persistenza delle tesi di Meritt in alcune prestigiose pubblicazioni, come *IG I³* e il quinto volume della *Cambridge Ancient History*); Hannah (2005: 42–45).

¹⁴ Si veda ad esempio Meiggs (1966). Naturalmente la vulgata è accolta in Meiggs & Lewis (1969) e in *IG I³*, volume edito dallo stesso Lewis.

¹⁵ Alcuni degli interventi più significativi sono raccolti in Mattingly (1996).

¹⁶ Chambers, Gallucci & Spanos (1990); Rhodes (2008).

¹⁷ Per esempio nella prima schiera potremmo inserire Hansen (2010) e Harris (2013); mentre nella seconda Meiksins Wood (1994) e Ober (1989); Ober (1996). Su questa opposizione cf. Marcaccini (2021: 353–357).

¹⁸ Non scendo nel dettaglio del dibattito fra modernisti e primitivisti, anche se va detto che negli ultimi anni il paradigma primitivista — inaugurato da Finley (1999) e poi definito 'the New Orthodoxy' da Hopkins (1983: xi) — ha perso terreno. Qui mi limito a segnalare alcuni testi in cui la questione viene delineata: Burke (1992); Meikle (1996); Nafissi (2004); Nafissi (2005); Amemiya (2007: 57–61); Morris, Saller & Scheidel (2008); Bresson (2016: 2–14); Harris & Lewis (2016: 3–9); O'Halloran (2019: 15–36); Tridimas (2019).

metteva in primo piano le fonti epigrafiche,¹⁹ inaugurando una lunga e importante tradizione di studi. Qualche anno dopo iniziò la pubblicazione della *History of Greece* di George Grote, terminata nel 1856, che si basava su criteri molto diversi, puntando soprattutto sulle fonti storiografiche.²⁰ Fra i due il metodo di Boeckh si è rivelato vincente:²¹ nessuno oggi si sognerebbe di negare l'importanza della filologia e dell'epigrafia nelle indagini sull'antichità classica. Tuttavia sotto il profilo epistemologico i due autori esprimevano la stessa idea di storia, in cui la corrispondenza fonte-evento era garantita dalla quantità delle nozioni e dalla capacità di proporre il maggior numero di confronti tra le informazioni disponibili. L'antichistica tende ancora a muoversi così nei campi in cui sono richieste competenze molto specifiche, come l'epigrafia o la papirologia. Ma laddove il soggetto è un fenomeno più ampio, l'interdisciplinarietà ha preso il posto dell'inferenza: lo studio della politica, della società e dell'economia greco-romana si è arricchito di nuove categorie mutate dalle scienze sociali e dall'antropologia, mentre il post-moderno ha in molti casi stravolto la lettura tradizionale degli storici antichi, per i quali ci si avvale sempre più spesso di un'ermeneutica di tipo narratologico.²² Queste nuove metodologie hanno fatto degli antichi, e in particolare dei Greci, una sorta di 'oggetto culturale', rappresentandoli quasi come una realtà esotica separata dal nostro orizzonte. Tale prospettiva cominciava a delinearsi già negli anni Cinquanta,²³ ma de Ste. Croix le fu decisamente estraneo, se non ostile, perché preferì una storiografia di taglio più tradizionale, in cui la contaminazione interdisciplinare cedeva il passo all'individuazione e alla piena comprensione dei fatti concreti (i *Realien*) e la società antica continuava ad essere una tappa fondamentale nel percorso verso la modernità.

Veniamo così all'attributo, per capire in che senso la sua ricostruzione storica segue un paradigma epistemologico 'positivista'. C'è stato un

¹⁹ Boeckh (1817).

²⁰ Grote (1888) (edizione postuma in dieci volumi).

²¹ Liddel (2009: 20–27), sui limiti della concezione di Grote.

²² Sul rapporto e la contaminazione fra storiografia e sociologia si veda Burke (2005). Sulla crisi del nesso fra documento e realtà e sul post-moderno si veda Evans (2001: 117–151, 279–289); cf. inoltre Aurell (2011: 137–182, 217–244); Romagnani (2019: 383–387). Una splendida riflessione generale sulle teorie narratologiche applicate alla storiografia si trova in Ricoeur (1983). Su narratologia e storiografia antica cf. de Jong (2014); in particolare per un approccio narratologico a Tucidide cf. Rood (1998); Rood (2006); Foster & Lateiner (2012); Tsakmakis & Tamiolaki (2013); Liotsakis (2017).

²³ Non mi riferisco alla narratologia, ma a Polanyi (1957), che inaugura la contaminazione fra antropologia e storia antica. Dello studio di Polanyi de Ste. Croix (1960) scrive una recensione distruttiva.

positivismo erudito, empirico, metodologico, che nel corso dell'Ottocento ha contribuito al processo di specializzazione della ricerca storica; e c'è stato un positivismo filosofico, generalizzante, di stampo determinista, che si ispirava alla speculazione di Comte.²⁴ Il primo si fondava sull'idea che la storia fosse una scienza in possesso di un metodo specifico, che la separava dalla filosofia e dalla letteratura e le permetteva di raggiungere delle verità assolute attraverso una rigorosa analisi documentale. Questa tendenza è ben esemplificata da Leopold von Ranke, che fu la figura più eminente della scuola storicista berlinese insieme a Johann Gustav Droysen e Theodor Mommsen e contribuì in modo decisivo al processo di conversione scientifica della storiografia.²⁵ Benedetto Croce lo incluse fra i positivisti e, in modo piuttosto riduttivo, lo annoverò fra gli storici diplomatici, pur riconoscendone l'equilibrio, il rigore e la finezza.²⁶ Ranke affermava che il passato non poteva essere interpretato sulla base del presente, ma letto nei suoi termini propri attraverso lo studio delle fonti primarie. Per lui i fatti, che avevano una loro singolare identità ed erano irripetibili, si specchiavano nei documenti, purché correttamente interpretati, e gli storici avevano il dovere di essere neutrali e imparziali.²⁷ Ranke riconobbe la lezione di Tucidide, che per lui era lo storico più grande che fosse mai esistito, perché per primo si era posto il problema della verità, prescindendo completamente dalle leggende e approfondendo solo le intenzioni e le attitudini umane, di cui era riuscito a cogliere il profondo valore storico.²⁸ A Tucidide Ranke attribuì soprattutto un primato metodologico, poiché egli aveva dato 'alla sua storia, per il breve periodo che contempla, quei pregi di lucidità e di piena evidenza che ammiriamo',²⁹ aveva cioè conferito alla sua opera un respiro universale dato dall'efficacia dell'analisi, un respiro che pure contrastava col ristretto arco temporale delle vicende narrate. La linea di pensiero di Ranke approda anche nel Novecento, e fra gli storici britannici è rappresentata da John Bury e Geoffrey Elton.³⁰

²⁴ Aurell & Burke (2013: 220–221); Romagnani (2019: 284).

²⁵ Tessitore (1991: 68–79); Evans (2001: 42–49); Aurell & Burke (2013: 221–226, 231–233); Romagnani (2019: 217–222).

²⁶ Croce (2001: 319–321).

²⁷ È rimasta celebre la sua definizione della storia che doveva mostrare solo 'come le cose propriamente fossero andate': Ranke (1885: VII). La traduzione è di Croce (2001: 320). Cf. Imbruglia (1994: 74 n. 5); Koselleck (2007: 154–155); Piovan (2018: 25 n. 11).

²⁸ Imbruglia (1994: 73–81).

²⁹ Cito da Imbruglia (1994: 114).

³⁰ Evans (2001: 25–26, 48–49); Aurell & Burke (2013: 221).

Come vedremo, la fiducia di de Ste. Croix nell'esistenza di un'unica e ineccepibile verità ricostruibile attraverso lo studio dei documenti già lo pone in questa schiera di storici. Eppure il suo 'positivismo' non si esaurisce qui, perché la prospettiva determinista lo avvicina anche al positivismo filosofico. Questo partiva dal presupposto che si potessero ricavare delle leggi e produrre degli schemi sintetici in grado di spiegare i fenomeni, di delinearne in modo esatto le cause e, in una certa misura, anche di prevederli: è quella che Croce chiamava sociologia, 'una scienza speciale, in cui quel moto naturalistico e positivistico esaltava se stesso',³¹ menzionando fra i suoi più importanti esponenti Hippolyte Taine e Henry Thomas Buckle.³² In *Miseria dello storicismo* Karl Popper fornì la stessa definizione, affermando che la sociologia è una disciplina teoretica perché 'deve spiegare e predire gli eventi, con l'aiuto di teorie o di leggi universali (che essa tenta di scoprire)'.³³ Questo approccio coincide con quello di Marx, che postulò meccanismi sociali sulla base di una legge universale (il conflitto di classe) e concepì una successione di fasi temporali lungo una linea di sviluppo coerente (le forme di produzione). Ma coerenza e linearità caratterizzarono anche la sociologia di Max Weber, il quale contestò il determinismo marxista, senza però rinunciare a razionalizzare la storia in una serie di categorie.³⁴ La prospettiva filosofica non è del tutto in conflitto con lo storicismo berlinese: essa non mette in discussione l'unicità temporale dell'evento, ma riscopre la ripetibilità della storia all'interno della sua totalità, nel complesso insieme delle correlazioni e dei processi che legano i fatti fra loro. Solo a tale condizione la storia può rinnovare il suo antico ruolo di *magistra vitae*, mettendo gli studiosi in grado di formulare delle previsioni e di fornire insegnamenti per il futuro.³⁵ Come afferma Popper, 'la profezia storica e l'interpretazione della storia devono così divenire la base di ogni azione sociale meditata'.³⁶ Nella concezione predittiva della storia è implicito un invito all'azione.

Si può dire che de Ste. Croix seguì e difese questo paradigma quando riaffermò l'importanza della categoria della lotta di classe per la comprensione dei fenomeni sociali e politici dell'antichità. Fra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta questa visione venne contestata da alcuni studiosi marxisti i quali misero in dubbio l'applicabilità del concetto di classe al

³¹ Croce (2001: 324).

³² Aurell (2011: 23–33); Aurell & Burke (2013: 230–231); Romagnani (2019: 284–287).

³³ Popper (2019: 51).

³⁴ Aurell (2011: 36–42).

³⁵ Sul rapporto fra evento e struttura cf. Koselleck (2007: 30–54, 123–134).

³⁶ Popper (2019: 63).

mondo greco-romano, compromettendone così la validità generale.³⁷ In altri termini si può dire che nell'ambito marxista entrava in crisi il modo 'normale' di intendere il conflitto sociale, veniva cioè abbandonato un approccio epistemologico di stampo determinista e con esso la pretesa di individuare delle costanti strutturali in grado di spiegare in modo inequivocabile il perché di alcuni fenomeni, come la schiavitù.³⁸ De Ste. Croix si oppose a questo mutamento di prospettiva e scrisse un libro di ben settecento pagine (*CSAGW*) per dimostrare che anche nell'antichità le classi esistevano e che il rapporto sfruttati-sfruttatori era una chiave di lettura valida. Egli confortò la sua proposta con una estesa disamina delle fonti, nel tentativo di rinvenire le tracce di un meccanismo che per l'antichità era stato solo postulato ma non dimostrato dalla speculazione marxista precedente.

Tucidide venne interpretato in modo simile e considerato come uno storico-scienziato che applicava alla ricerca del passato le categorie epistemologiche tipiche della medicina. Secondo de Ste. Croix ciò avrebbe permesso a Tucidide di individuare degli schemi di comportamento che si ripetevano e in una certa misura consentivano di avanzare delle previsioni. Questa interpretazione era già in ribasso a quel tempo, ma egli la ripropose con grande vigore dialettico, nel tentativo di difendere un paradigma in crisi, lo stesso che seguì per rivalutare il concetto di classe nella storia sociale antica. Si può dire che de Ste. Croix abbia sperimentato su Tucidide una lettura che poi ha applicato a Marx, mettendo a fuoco il principio della ripetibilità della storia, senza il quale il meccanismo del conflitto di classe non stava in piedi. Una conseguenza interessante di questa operazione ideologica fu la rivendicazione dell'attualità della storia antica, che assunse quasi una valenza esemplare in quanto sarebbe stata in grado di riflettere, sia pur con modalità diverse, le dinamiche della società moderna. Questo, come vedremo, condusse de

³⁷ Sono gli autori già menzionati nella nota 6; Vernant (1965); Vidal-Naquet (1968); Austin & Vidal-Naquet (1972); Finley (1999). A questi vanno aggiunti altri autori che in quel periodo misero in discussione il concetto di classe *tout court*, assegnandogli una valenza più politica che economica: Dahrendorf (1959); Hobsbawm (1971). De Ste. Croix (1981: 57–69) li passa in rassegna e li confuta.

³⁸ Sulle implicazioni economiche, sociali e ideologiche della schiavitù segnalò in particolare i saggi di Kyrtatas (2002), Cartledge (2002) e Jameson (2002), contenuti nel volume *Money, Labour and Land* (Cartledge, Cohen & Foxhall (2002)). Kyrtatas sottolinea che il rapporto schiavi-padroni viene visto dai Greci come una forma di dominazione e non di sfruttamento (di argomento affine Vlassopoulos (2011)); mentre Cartledge e Jameson cercano di definire la rilevanza economica della schiavitù in termini di convenienza e profitto. Negli ultimi due l'eco degli studi di de Ste. Croix è ben percepibile.

Ste. Croix a una sorprendente celebrazione della democrazia e della civiltà ateniese.

3. L'utilità politica della storia

In *OPW* de Ste. Croix dedica a Tucidide una trentina di pagine, nelle quali gli attribuisce il concetto di utilità della storia.³⁹ L'attenzione si concentra soprattutto su Thuc. 1.22.4,⁴⁰ in cui lo scrittore afferma che il racconto non sarà piacevole ma utile (*ὠφέλιμα*) a chi vorrà esaminare la verità (*τὸ σαφές*) dei fatti passati e di quelli futuri, i quali, in base alla natura umana, saranno uguali o simili. Riporto il passo di Tucidide e la traduzione di de Ste. Croix.

ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφές σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἔξει.

It will be sufficient if my work is judged useful by those who wish to examine the clear truth both about what has been and about what is to be at some time in the future and will, *kata to anthrōpinon*, be the same or similar (*toioutōn kai paraplesiōn*).⁴¹

Il concetto chiave è *κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*, che secondo de Ste. Croix esprime la costanza della natura umana e permette di individuare degli schemi di comportamento (*'kata to anthrōpinon must then be a factor making for constancy'*). Egli è contrario a traduzioni più generiche, secondo cui l'espressione si riferirebbe alle situazioni umane nella loro complessità,

³⁹ De Ste. Croix (1972: 5–34). Per un ritratto di Tucidide si veda già de Ste. Croix (1954: 31–37), in cui non viene affrontato il problema del metodo, ma la visione politica.

⁴⁰ È il passo saliente — e il più controverso — di tutta la riflessione sul metodo. In 1.22 Tucidide prima avvisa il lettore che i discorsi attribuiti ai personaggi non sono riferiti alla lettera, ma riportano il concetto più adatto (*τὰ δέοντα*) alla circostanza in cui furono pronunciati e sono composti in modo da rispecchiare il più fedelmente possibile lo spirito originale (22.1); quanto ai fatti (*τὰ ἔργα*), egli garantisce una maggiore affidabilità, poiché avverte di essersi basato sulla propria esperienza personale e su quella di testimoni credibili (22.2); d'altra parte nelle righe seguenti Tucidide precisa che la sua ricerca è stata difficile perché i testimoni non riferiscono la stessa versione dei fatti (22.3); infine egli conclude con una riflessione sull'utilità della storia (22.4; il passo è citato nel testo). Sui capitoli iniziali dell'opera tucididea (riflessioni sul metodo e *archaiologia*), cf. Connor (1984: 20–32); Hornblower (1987: 73–109); Tsakmakis (1995); Rood (2006); Moles (2010); Forsdyke (2017).

⁴¹ De Ste. Croix (1972: 31–32).

così come contesta l'idea che l'utilità della storia riguardi solo un ambito speculativo.⁴² De Ste. Croix sottolinea invece la tendenza dell'uomo a reagire in maniera costante e talvolta prevedibile in alcune circostanze.⁴³ Questa concezione viene fatta risalire alla scienza medica, in cui la conoscenza della φύσις è finalizzata alla *prognōsis*, come risulta dai casi esposti nei trattati ippocratici (in particolare *Epidemie* 1 e 3).⁴⁴ De Ste. Croix rivaluta gli studi di Charles Norris Cochrane e di Denys Lionel Page, rispettivamente del 1929 e del 1953,⁴⁵ che riconoscevano in Tucidide un'impostazione di stampo medico, e per quanto ritenga eccessivo attribuire allo storico le stesse finalità pratiche della medicina,⁴⁶ tuttavia non rinuncia a questa lettura, anzi cerca di corroborarla con nuovi argomenti. In particolare si sofferma sulle parole che Tucidide premette alla descrizione della peste, in cui dichiara che avrebbe messo i suoi lettori nella condizione di riconoscere la malattia a patto di saperne qualcosa in anticipo (*τι προειδώς μὴ ἀγνοεῖν*, 2.48.3). De Ste. Croix pone l'accento su *προειδώς* poiché nella conoscenza preventiva egli intravede un invito all'azione, non semplicemente un aiuto per la diagnosi: 'we are to suppose that he [Thucydides] would have been satisfied for people to nod their heads and say "Oh yes, of course, this is the plague they had at Athens during the Peloponnesian war"! This is nonsense, and it ignores *proeidōs*.'⁴⁷

De Ste. Croix menziona anche gli esempi di Temistocle e Pericle, ai quali viene riconosciuta la virtù della *πρόνοια*, ovvero la facoltà di prevedere gli eventi futuri sulla base dell'esperienza del passato (Thuc. 1.138.3 su Temistocle; 2.62.5 e 65.6 su Pericle). Questo basterebbe per dimostrare che il futuro può essere pronosticato, anche tenendo conto del fattore imponderabile della *τύχη*, alla quale Tucidide affida un ruolo

⁴² Stahl (2003: 28–29) ritiene che τὸ ἀνθρώπινον indichi la condizione umana in generale; così anche Rood (1998: 4); Hornblower (1991: 61) ('κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον is broader than "according to human nature"'); Hammond (2009: 12) ('human condition'). Connor (1984: 29 e n. 28) si limita a una parafrasi generica del passo e sottolinea l'ambiguità dell'affermazione tucididea; stessa cosa Tsakmakis (2016: 103–104). Vaga anche Forsdyke (2017: 29–30), secondo la quale Tucidide avrebbe voluto delimitare il campo delle cause alla sfera umana. Sull'utilità solo teorica, non pratica, della ricerca tucididea de Ste. Croix (1972: 29) cita de Romilly (1958).

⁴³ Di recente Ober (2006: 132) sembra riprendere la tesi di de Ste. Croix, presentando l'opera tucididea come 'a sort of "political system users' manual"'.
⁴⁴ De Ste. Croix (1972: 31).

⁴⁵ Cochrane (1929); Page (1953).

⁴⁶ De Ste. Croix (1972: 29).

⁴⁷ De Ste. Croix (1972: 30). Questa convinzione dipende da Page (1953: 98–99).

importante (1.78.1–2, 87.2; 3.45.6; 4.18.4; 5.102; 6.23.3).⁴⁸ Naturalmente non è detto che la *πρόνοια* di Temistocle e Pericle possa *ipso facto* essere attribuita anche alla storia tucididea: i piani sembrano diversi e Tucidide non è così esplicito nel dare al suo lavoro una finalità pratica, come lo è nell'assegnare una capacità prognostica a due figure eccezionali del suo tempo. Ma de Ste. Croix sembra superare questa difficoltà considerando che i destinatari dell'opera tucididea erano i cittadini di una *polis* democratica, costantemente chiamati a prendere decisioni in prima persona, senza delegare ad altri il compito di rappresentarli. Il fatto che tanto le cariche elettive quanto quelle sorteggiate fossero accessibili a tutti e il livello di partecipazione politica fosse più elevato nell'Atene del V secolo che in una democrazia rappresentativa moderna, basta a de Ste. Croix per vedere nel racconto tucidideo una valenza formativa, in cui la conoscenza degli eventi passati poteva fornire ai cittadini suggerimenti per un'azione intelligente e consapevole: 'So I believe that Thucydides, like the author of the Hippocratic *Epidemics*, intended the knowledge gained from his case-histories to issue in informed and intelligent action'.⁴⁹

De Ste. Croix si guarda bene dal pensare che per Tucidide 'la storia si ripete': anche per lui vale il principio dell'unicità dei fatti. In compenso però egli sottolinea che, secondo Tucidide, la natura umana non cambia (*ἕως ἄν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ*, 3.82.2) e che a ripresentarsi non sono gli eventi, ma uno schema di comportamenti ('patterns of behaviours').⁵⁰ Individuarli e riconoscerli, tenendo conto del contesto sempre diverso, dovrebbe essere il compito degli storici, i quali, dunque, non fornirebbero soltanto gli strumenti per un'analisi del passato, ma anche una piattaforma di conoscenze utili per compiere scelte assennate nel futuro. È

⁴⁸ Questi e altri passi in de Ste. Croix (1972: 31 n. 57). Secondo lui Tucidide non affida alla fortuna un ruolo strutturale, come invece pensa Hunter (1982: 333–335), sulla scia di Cornford (1907: 105).

⁴⁹ De Ste. Croix (1972: 31).

⁵⁰ De Ste. Croix (1972: 32): 'Thucydides, of course, was not such a fool as to think that "history repeats itself" — although this has been said of him by people who ought to know better. It is above all *patterns of behaviour* which are likely to be repeated, although even then there will always be different factors involved.' In termini simili scriveva Cochrane (1929: 176): 'For this postulate (physical determinism), by recognizing the possibility of calculated action or purpose, offers a way of escape from materialism, which satisfies neither the practice nor the consciousness of mankind. At the same time, because it regards those purposes as limited, it links the constitution of man to the constitution of that greater nature in which he lives and thus makes possible a science of human behaviour. [...] History would then emerge again one and indivisible — a revelation of human nature in relation to its universe, of which economic, cultural, and political life would all be aspects, no single one of them usurping the place of the whole.'

significativo che le pagine dedicate a Tucidide si concludano con una citazione di Hobbes, il quale riconosce che ‘the principal and proper work of history [is] to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future’.⁵¹

È stato detto che il modo in cui de Ste. Croix sostiene il suo punto di vista ricorda quello di un avvocato che argomenta la validità di una tesi difensiva contro le accuse di colpevolezza, cercando di ristabilire su basi ancor più solide l’equilibrio iniziale.⁵² In effetti la sua scrittura è di una rara chiarezza e le argomentazioni sono estremamente dettagliate e rigorose. Tuttavia lo stile forense nasconde un approccio ben più radicale alla ricerca che consiste nella volontà di salvaguardare un paradigma epistemologico in via di superamento. La lettura di Tucidide si può infatti riassumere in tre punti coerenti con una concezione deterministica della storia:

1. l’affinità fra la metodologia tucididea e l’ermeneutica ippocratica, che fa dello storico una specie di scienziato;
2. la convinzione che la natura umana sia immutabile e sia possibile dedurre delle costanti di comportamento, pur nel variare continuo delle circostanze;
3. la possibilità di elaborare una previsione abbastanza accurata del futuro in grado di orientare le scelte politiche.

4. L’ottimismo della ragione

Passiamo a Marx, di cui de Ste. Croix si occupa in *CSAGW* e in alcuni articoli scritti fra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta.⁵³ In quel periodo alcuni studiosi come Vernant, Austin, Vidal-Naquet e Finley misero in discussione la tesi che la categoria della lotta di classe potesse essere applicata allo studio dell’antichità greca e romana, spostando il conflitto dal piano economico a quello politico e culturale e aprendo la strada a contaminazioni con la sociologia e l’antropologia.⁵⁴ Questa nuova prospettiva deriva

⁵¹ De Ste. Croix (1972: 33). Citazione da Hobbes (1843: vii).

⁵² Anderson (1995: 21, 23). Ho chiesto a Paul Cartledge cosa pensasse di questo: il suo parere è che in de Ste. Croix il gusto dell’argomentazione forense dipendesse da un suo modo innato di pensare e ragionare e dalla lettura di Demostene (e-mail del 29 settembre 2020).

⁵³ De Ste. Croix (1977); de Ste. Croix (1981: 31–111); de Ste. Croix (1984); de Ste. Croix (1985).

⁵⁴ Humphreys (1978: 7–8).

da una sostanziale ambiguità nel pensiero di Marx, che non mise mai a fuoco il concetto di ‘classe’ in modo univoco e interruppe il terzo libro del *Capitale* proprio nel punto in cui si apprestava a darne una formulazione teorica. Fino agli anni Cinquanta la vulgata marxista si contentava delle definizioni del *Manifesto*, considerando gli schiavi come il corrispettivo degli operai salariati, ma a partire dagli anni Sessanta con lo studio degli scritti inediti di Marx, in particolare i *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, la questione fu riconsiderata e sorse il dubbio se il conflitto di classe valesse anche per i Greci e i Romani.⁵⁵

Fu soprattutto Finley a diffondere l’idea che le categorie moderne fossero inadeguate per l’interpretazione dell’economia antica. A suo giudizio la mancanza di una specifica terminologia economica nel mondo greco-romano proverebbe l’assenza dei fenomeni corrispondenti. Ad esempio egli afferma che ‘neither in Greek nor in Latin was there a word with which to express the general notion of “labour” or the concept of labour “as a general social function”. The nature and conditions of labour in antiquity precluded the emergence of such general ideas, as of the idea of a working class.’⁵⁶ Per questo al concetto di classe egli sostituì quello meno univoco di status e nell’orizzonte più generale della schiavitù riconobbe una molteplicità di condizioni sociali.⁵⁷ Ad appannare ulteriormente la vulgata marxista si sovrapposero le tesi di Karl Polanyi, secondo

⁵⁵ I *Grundrisse*, scritti fra il 1857 e il 1858, rimasero inediti fino al 1939. Nella sezione dedicata alle forme economiche che precedettero il capitalismo (*Formen die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen* = MECW 28: 399–439), Marx intravede nell’economia delle *poleis* una sorta di armonia primigenia, ancora immune dalle conseguenze del progresso e dalle dinamiche del conflitto sociale. Seguendo Aristotele (soprattutto il primo libro della *Politica*), Marx sembra riconoscere alla produzione antica un sostanziale disinteresse per lo sfruttamento del lavoro finalizzato alla creazione di plusvalore. In questa ottica è arduo vedere negli schiavi una classe di sfruttati e attribuire al mondo della *polis* il medesimo meccanismo della lotta di classe che caratterizza il mondo moderno. Sull’influenza di Aristotele su Marx cf. i saggi raccolti in McCarthy (1992); Pike (1999); per una lettura marxista di Aristotele cf. Lotito (1980–1981). Sul pensiero economico aristotelico: Meikle (1997). Sulla questione si veda inoltre Marcaccini (2012); Marcaccini (2021: 336–337).

⁵⁶ Finley (1999: 81). Finley sostiene anche che le associazioni di mestiere che sorgevano nelle città del mondo ellenistico e sotto l’impero romano non avevano uno scopo economico di tipo corporativo e la loro attività ‘was restricted to religious, social and benevolent affairs’. Questo modello è poi diventato dominante, anche se di recente si sta tentando di superarlo: Gerardin (2019).

⁵⁷ Finley (1999: 35–61, spec. 49), in cui contesta la categoria di classe: ‘There is little agreement among historians and sociologists about the definition of “class” or the canons by which to assign anyone to a class. Not even the apparently clearcut, unequivocal Marxist concept of class turns out to be without difficulties. Men are classed according to their relation to the means of production, first between those who

il quale le *poleis* erano comunità primitive, in cui la dimensione economica era ‘incorporata’ (*embedded*) nella politica e nella religione e le dinamiche del profitto erano una sorta di derivazione da esigenze primarie di altra natura.⁵⁸ La stessa linea di ricerca era stata avviata da Louis Gernet nello studio del diritto greco, non più inteso come un rozzo antenato del diritto romano, ma come espressione politica dell’appartenenza a una comunità.⁵⁹ Possiamo aggiungere che in tempi più recenti anche negli studi di storia delle religioni si sta diffondendo l’idea di una ‘religione della polis’ come sistema di pensiero condiviso e organico alla cultura della comunità, contro una lettura razionalistica che tendeva a opporre la superstizione popolare al laicismo dell’*élite*.⁶⁰

De Ste. Croix si oppone fermamente a una visione primitivista della società antica e rivendica l’esistenza del conflitto anche nel mondo greco-romano, vedendo in esso il motivo principale della sua decadenza.⁶¹ In *CSAGW* egli cerca di dare una definizione teorica di ‘classe’ in senso marxiano e suppone che una classe possa essere tale anche senza avere coscienza di sé, purché sussista un rapporto di sfruttamento.⁶² Nell’antichità la lotta consisteva proprio in questa relazione di subalternità, in cui

do and those who do not own the means of production; second, among the former, between those who work themselves and those who live off the labour of others. Whatever the applicability of that classification in present-day society, for the ancient historian there is an obvious difficulty: the slave and the free wage labourer would then be members of the same class, on a mechanical interpretation, as would the richest senator and the non-working owner of a small pottery. That does not seem a very sensible way to analyse ancient society.’

⁵⁸ Polanyi (1957). Sul rapporto fra Finley e Polanyi: Nafissi (2004: 384).

⁵⁹ Gernet (1955); Gernet (1983). Sulla formazione di Gernet cf. Di Donato (1990: 1–130).

⁶⁰ Eidinow (2011) applica allo studio della religione della *polis* la Social Network Theory, una teoria post-moderna che postula l’organicità dei sistemi comportamentali all’interno delle comunità. La netta distinzione fra religione popolare e saggezza laica dell’*élite* fu sostenuta da Dodds (1959: 211–242).

⁶¹ Sulle visioni contrastanti di de Ste. Croix e di Finley: Nafissi (2004: 382–383).

⁶² De Ste. Croix (1981: 65): ‘To me, the essence of the relationship of classes, in a class society founded on the existence of private property in the means of production, is the economic exploitation which is the very *raison d’être* of the whole class system; and, as I have insisted all along, Marx himself normally takes this for granted. I we adopt the view I am combating, we are obliged to take the expression “the class struggle” in the very limited sense of “effective and open class struggle *on the political plane*, involving actual *class consciousness* on both sides”.’ Può essere interessante notare che de Ste. Croix (1963: 82) rivaluta la scienza greca spostando l’attenzione dagli esperimenti (rari e rudimentali) all’osservazione, di cui rivendica l’importanza. Così fa con la questione della lotta di classe, ponendo in evidenza lo ‘sfruttamento’, a

i proprietari di schiavi sfruttavano gli schiavi. Per de Ste. Croix la categoria dello status, usata da Finley, è priva di un reale potere esplicativo e serve solo per descrivere le stratificazioni sociali, rischiando di creare delle tautologie, mentre la classe è una categoria scientifica, poiché mette in evidenza una relazione economica oggettiva e per questo è in grado di svelare l'autentico funzionamento della società greco-romana.⁶³

De Ste. Croix afferma che sono tre i principi che ispirano il suo lavoro di storico: 'objectivity, truthfulness, fruitfulness'.⁶⁴ I primi due riguardano la ricostruzione degli 'eventi storici e dei processi', mentre il terzo si riferisce all'utilità che un'indagine oggettiva è in grado di produrre. È significativo che per lui 'eventi e processi' possano essere riassunti nell'unica categoria dei 'fatti storici' ('For "historical events and processes" I should almost be willing to substitute "historical facts"'). In questo modo egli sottolinea che la ricerca si fonda unicamente sull'individuazione di fatti specifici e che lo storico ha il dovere di sfuggire alle generalizzazioni.⁶⁵ Come era già evidente dalla sua lettura di Tucidide in *OPW*, de Ste. Croix rifiuta un approccio concettuale (antropologico, sociologico ecc.)⁶⁶ e mostra invece di muoversi in un'ottica testuale e

scapito della 'coscienza'. A dimostrazione che questo modo di ragionare è già tipico di de Ste. Croix ben prima di *CSAGW*.

⁶³ Così ad esempio scrive Finley (1999: 50–51): 'In short, from neither a Marxist nor a non-Marxist standpoint is class a sufficiently demarcated category for our purposes — apart from the safe but vague "upper (or lower) classes" to which I have already referred — and we are still left with the necessity of finding a term that will encompass the Spartan "Inferiors" (citizens, technically, who had lost their holdings of land), the nobility of the late Roman Republic, the "friends of the king" who made up the ruling circle around the early Hellenistic kings, the men Cicero had in mind when he allowed the professions of medicine, architecture and teaching to "those whose status they befit", and Trimalchio. [...] It is for such distinctions that I suggest the word "status", an admirably vague word with a considerable psychological element. [...] Rich Greeks and Romans were, in the nature of things, members of criss-crossing categories. Some were complementary, for example, citizenship and land ownership, but some generated tensions and conflicts in the value system and the behaviour pattern, as between freedmen and free men, for instance.' Così ribatte de Ste Croix (1981: 92–93): 'Status, as conceived by Finley (following Weber), is often convenient enough as a pure means of classification; and again, I have no wish to deny its usefulness for some purposes. As an analytical tool, however, it has, when compared with Marx's concept of class, the same fatal weaknesses as the corresponding set of categories in Weber [...] status is a purely descriptive category, with no heuristic capacity, no such explanatory power as the dynamic Marxist concept of class provides — because [...] there can be no organic relationship between statuses.'

⁶⁴ De Ste. Croix (1981: 31).

⁶⁵ Cf. de Ste. Croix (1984: 98).

⁶⁶ Dei sociologi de Ste. Croix (1981: 87) rifiuta anche il gergo: 'I shall try to represent those of Weber's views that are immediately relevant as fairly as I can; but the reader

documentale, secondo cui la verità può emergere soltanto grazie alla corretta ricostruzione del senso delle parole di una fonte. In altri termini, per lui la comprensione del significato letterale di un testo conduce direttamente alla verità che esso sottende. Significativa in tal senso la sezione di *CSAGW* dedicata alla terminologia che Aristotele usa nella *Politica* per descrivere le parti della città. Siccome le distinzioni aristoteliche sono di tipo economico ('ricchi', 'poveri' e 'quelli in mezzo', *εὐποροί, ἄποροί* e *μέσοι*: *Pol.* 1295b), de Ste. Croix non esita a riconoscere in esse la nozione marxiana di classe, giungendo ad affermare che la democrazia, in quanto espressione politica dei poveri, 'can only too easily become (if I may be forgiven a momentary lapse into highly anachronistic and inappropriate terminology) the dictatorship of the proletariat!'.⁶⁷ D'altra parte de Ste. Croix è sinceramente convinto che se una cosa è vera essa possieda anche un fine pratico, cioè pensa che nel riconoscimento dei fatti sia intrinseca una volontà di miglioramento e che la conoscenza spinga inevitabilmente all'azione. 'Objectivity' e 'truthfulness' non sarebbero veramente tali senza essere anche 'fruitful'.⁶⁸

Il prezzo di questo razionalismo ottimistico è una concezione deterministica della storia. In *CSAGW* de Ste. Croix cerca di difendere Marx dall'accusa di 'determinismo' e di 'economicismo', mettendolo a confronto proprio con Tucidide.⁶⁹ Egli prima scrive che Marx, nella sua analisi storica, non tenne conto solo dei fattori materiali ed economici, ma considerò anche i fattori culturali e religiosi. Tuttavia de Ste. Croix ammette poi che Marx diede grande rilievo alle condizioni di necessità

who fears that his stomach may be turned by the horrible jargon that is characteristic of so much sociological theorising and by the repellent welter of vague generalisation that infects even a powerful intellect like Weber's in such circumstances had better skip the next few paragraphs.'

⁶⁷ De Ste. Croix (1981: 75). De Ste. Croix mette in evidenza alcuni passi della *Politica* in cui Aristotele definisce democrazia e oligarchia non in base al numero ma al censo di chi è al potere: *Pol.* 1279b.34–1280a.6; 1290a.30–1290b.3. Analoghe osservazioni in Canfora (1982: 53–55). Sui ricchi e i poveri in Platone si veda Fuks (1984: 80–171), che ha un'impostazione analoga a quella di de Ste. Croix.

⁶⁸ Questo approccio razionalista è ben spiegato da Popper (2019: 64): 'A chi vorrebbe aumentare l'influenza della ragione nella vita sociale, lo storicismo non può consigliare che lo studio e l'interpretazione della storia per scoprire le leggi del suo sviluppo. Se questa interpretazione mostra che sono imminenti dei mutamenti che corrispondono al desiderio di queste persone, allora il desiderio è ragionevole, poiché concorda con la predizione scientifica. Se invece succede che lo sviluppo tenda ad un'altra direzione, allora il desiderio di rendere il mondo più ragionevole risulta del tutto irragionevole; e per gli storicisti è, allora, soltanto un sogno utopistico. L'attivismo può essere giustificato soltanto in quanto concordi con i mutamenti imminenti e li assecondi.'

⁶⁹ De Ste. Croix (1981: 26–28).

che vanno oltre il controllo degli uomini e sostiene che la dinamica di classe può influenzare il comportamento degli individui, permettendo così di fare previsioni con un alto grado di probabilità. In *CSAGW* ritorna l'idea dei 'patterns of behaviour' attribuita a Tucidide, secondo la quale sia i singoli individui sia i gruppi sociali, per quanto spinti dalle circostanze, agirebbero in base agli stessi schemi di comportamento. Così scrive di Tucidide: 'Thucydides, by enabling his readers to recognise and understand some of the basic recurring features in the behaviour of human groups in the political and international field, believed — surely with reason — that his History would be for ever "useful" to mankind (1.22.4)'. E subito dopo così afferma di Marx: 'Similarly, what Marx wished to do was to identify the internal, structural features of each individual human society (above all, but not only, capitalist society), and reveal its "laws of motion". If his analysis is largely right, as I believe it is, then, by revealing the underlying Necessity, it increases human Freedom to operate within its constraint, and has greatly facilitated what Engels called "the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom".'⁷⁰

5. La modernità del mondo antico

Per mettere alla prova la validità della categoria di classe, de Ste. Croix ha bisogno di riconoscere un certo grado di modernità nella società antica. Accettare l'idea di un livello elevato di sviluppo e di civilizzazione implica la sostanziale legittimità dell'analisi economica marxiana in termini di relazione di produzione e surplus. Per questo egli non può che rifiutare le categorie antropologiche derivate dallo studio delle società primitive. Afferma infatti: 'for my purpose primitive society is irrelevant since its structure is totally different from that of Graeco-Roman antiquity [...] and any exploitation which may exist at the primitive stage takes place in quite different ways'.⁷¹ Il grado di sviluppo della società greco-romana si esplica in un tenore di vita più alto, in una più ampia specializzazione dei ruoli e delle funzioni e in una differenziazione sociale che prevede anche rapporti di sfruttamento. Nell'antichità, insomma, non si produce solo per il consumo personale, ma anche per mantenere chi non si fa carico individualmente della produzione, in quanto occupato in altri compiti. L'esistenza di questo surplus fa sì che la società antica sia più simile alla nostra che a una società primitiva. Naturalmente de Ste. Croix riconosce la specificità e i limiti del mondo greco-romano: uno di essi è l'assenza

⁷⁰ De Ste. Croix (1981: 27–28).

⁷¹ De Ste. Croix (1981: 36).

della tecnologia moderna, l'altro è la schiavitù, che garantisce ai liberi di emanciparsi rispetto alle necessità quotidiane, esprimendo il massimo dello sfruttamento in un'economia soprattutto agricola. De Ste. Croix non crede nell'esistenza di una classe mercantile, come pensavano invece Eduard Meyer, Georg Busolt e George Thomson, che pure era marxista.⁷²

Il fatto che l'antichità classica possieda già una struttura sociale di stampo classista, sia pur con delle modalità specifiche, la sottrae a una visione idealizzata e la rende a tutti gli effetti una tappa del cammino che porta al mondo moderno. Questo approccio emerge nelle pagine di *CSAGW* in cui l'autore affronta la questione del lavoro salariato.⁷³ Secondo lui, la classe dei proprietari ricavava il suo surplus soprattutto dal lavoro non libero, in particolare dagli schiavi, e solo in scarsa misura dai salariati. Com'è noto, questa tesi viene contestata da Meiksins Wood, la quale non solo non condivide l'idea che il surplus dei proprietari terrieri, grandi e piccoli, derivasse dagli schiavi, ma soprattutto cerca di rovesciare l'immagine dei cittadini ateniesi come 'massa oziosa'.⁷⁴ In questo modo ella può presentare la democrazia non come un regime schiavista, ma come un regime di lavoratori liberi, non liberi dal lavoro in senso aristocratico, ma liberi di lavorare.⁷⁵ La questione è politica, oltre che economica, e consiste nella difficoltà di conciliare l'idea egualitaria della democrazia con una struttura sociale classista. La soluzione di Meiksins Wood è riconoscere il ruolo fondamentale degli artigiani e dei contadini liberi nell'attività produttiva, marginalizzando il lavoro degli schiavi. De Ste. Croix, invece, che pure ammette l'importanza del lavoro libero,⁷⁶ pone l'accento sulla risonanza ideologica dello sfruttamento servile, poiché 'the poison of slavery, in a "slave society" — one in which the propertied class draws a substantial part of its surplus from unfree labour, whether of slaves or of serfs or of bondsmen [...] — works powerfully in the ideological as well as in the social and economic spheres'.⁷⁷ La polarità 'schiavi-possessori di schiavi' gli permette di distinguere fra l'economia capitalista moderna, fondata sul lavoro

⁷² De Ste. Croix (1981: 41). Peraltro egli considera il commercio un'attività marginale dei proprietari terrieri, che fondavano il loro guadagno sull'agricoltura e vendevano i loro prodotti soprattutto nei mercati locali: de Ste. Croix (1981: 132). Questo aspetto è sottolineato in Boer (2013: 222–225); cf. Vegetti (1977: 46–47).

⁷³ De Ste. Croix (1981: 179–204).

⁷⁴ Meiksins Wood (1994: 61–62, 73–79, 80–118), dove ella discute anche le tesi analoghe di Anderson (1974) e Jameson (1977). Per una risposta cf. lo stesso Anderson (1995: 27 n. 14).

⁷⁵ Cf. Meiksins Wood (1998).

⁷⁶ De Ste. Croix (1981: 133).

⁷⁷ De Ste. Croix (1981: 201).

salariato, e quella antica, basata sul lavoro servile, ma l'applicazione delle stesse categorie di analisi gli consente anche di individuare delle somiglianze fra i due mondi. È infatti in questo sistema classista che egli riconosce una forma di progresso dal quale fa dipendere l'alto grado di sviluppo politico dell'Atene classica.

De Ste. Croix afferma in modo chiaro che la classe dirigente greca era formata dai proprietari, i quali, liberati dal lavoro grazie agli schiavi, erano in grado di dedicarsi all'arte, alla letteratura, alla scienza, alla filosofia, formando anche una buona parte degli eserciti che vinsero a Maratona e a Platea. Gli esponenti di questa classe parassitaria non erano dei sostenitori della democrazia, ma fornirono molti *leaders* democratici. De Ste. Croix ammette che è in loro e attraverso di loro che prese vita ciò che noi conosciamo come 'Greek civilisation'.⁷⁸ Egli sottolinea che l'élite democratica coincideva con la classe economica dei proprietari e rimarca il solco profondo che separava il ceto dominante dal popolo; inoltre era convinto che la democrazia fosse sostenibile proprio grazie al lavoro degli schiavi: erano loro, infatti, ad essere sfruttati e non i cittadini poveri, che così erano protetti dai soprusi dei più ricchi. Non dobbiamo sorprenderci, scrive, 'if we find a more intense development of slavery at Athens than at most other places in the Greek world: if the humbler citizens could not be fully exploited, and it was inexpedient to try to put too much pressure on the metics, then it was necessary to rely to an exceptional degree on exploiting the labour of slaves'.⁷⁹ Questo per lui spiegherebbe lo sviluppo parallelo di libertà e schiavitù nel mondo greco: un fatto naturale, purché le dinamiche sociali siano pensate nei termini della lotta di classe.⁸⁰

La stessa idea emerge nello studio sulla popolarità dell'impero marittimo ateniese del 1954, in un periodo in cui de Ste. Croix non aveva

⁷⁸ De Ste. Croix (1981: 115).

⁷⁹ De Ste. Croix (1981: 141). Comunque si voglia rispondere, la domanda sul nesso schiavitù-democrazia non si può eludere. Così Cartledge (2002: 164): 'The really problematic issues, which have not been broached explicitly in this short paper, seem to me to be these two. How far did the ownership of slaves enable Athenian citizens either to participate in politics at all in the first place or to do so in ways they would not have done otherwise? Second, how far did slave ownership make the democracy — the type of democracy Athens was — possible?' Jameson (2002: 172) risponde in modo affermativo: 'To the degree that Athenian democracy was marked by the freedom and participation of the poorest free citizens, these may not have depended on slave-ownership but were surely facilitated by it'. Altri non sono d'accordo: oltre a Meiksins Wood, cf. Ober (1989: 27).

⁸⁰ De Ste. Croix (1981: 141–142). Di nuovo polemizza con Finley: si veda il saggio 'Was Greek Civilisation based on Slave Labour?', contenuto in Finley (1981: 97–115).

ancora trattato il problema teorico della definizione di classe.⁸¹ Qui egli già delinea una dinamica classista nell'opposizione fra i molti e i pochi che Tucidide e Aristotele individuano come motivo d'instabilità e di conflitto all'interno delle *poleis* e come causa scatenante delle *staseis*.⁸² L'impero democratico ateniese sarebbe stato ben accetto al popolo delle città sottomesse, in quanto i poveri potevano avere più occasioni di rivalsa sui ricchi nei tribunali popolari ateniesi, che avocarono la giurisdizione di alcune questioni riguardanti le *dependencies* dell'impero.⁸³ De Ste. Croix, sulla scia di George Grote, dà grande risalto al discorso che Tucidide fa pronunciare a Frinico di fronte ai congiurati ateniesi durante la riunione segreta che si tenne a Samo nel 412 a.C.⁸⁴ Frinico mise in guardia i suoi compagni dall'abbattere le democrazie nelle città alleate, che fra tutte le forme di governo avrebbero preferito un regime democratico, in quanto erano consapevoli che dal popolo ateniese potevano ottenere più comprensione e protezione che dagli aristocratici (Thuc. 8.48.6). La democrazia, insomma, era un regime vantaggioso per le classi inferiori di cittadini perché era basata sullo sfruttamento degli schiavi, ed è in questa dinamica classista che de Ste. Croix vede il fattore essenziale dell'alto livello civile e politico degli Ateniesi.

6. Conclusione

Se volessimo paragonare de Ste. Croix a uno storico del passato, il nome che viene in mente è quello di Leopold von Ranke, col quale condivide la certezza che una corretta lettura delle fonti e una attenta analisi documentale ci consentano di giungere a una verità oggettiva, la convinzione che la ricerca storica sia del tutto autonoma rispetto ad altre discipline e la sconfinata ammirazione per la perspicacia e il rigore intellettuale di

⁸¹ De Ste. Croix (1984: 97) afferma che solo dopo essere divenuto uno storico antico, cioè negli anni Cinquanta, comprese che una classe, per essere definita tale, non ha bisogno di essere cosciente di se stessa, non ha bisogno cioè di svolgere attività politica.

⁸² De Ste. Croix (1954: 21–31). L'analisi di queste categorie in Aristotele è poi ampliata in de Ste. Croix (1981: 69–80) (vd. *supra* n. 67), mentre la *stasis* ateniese del 411 è l'oggetto di uno studio immediatamente successivo: de Ste. Croix (1956). Per una diversa lettura dell'opposizione pochi-molti si veda Bruce (1971). Sulle guerre civili nelle *poleis* è d'obbligo rimandare allo studio di Gehrke (1985).

⁸³ Sulla giurisdizione imperiale dei tribunali ateniesi è ancora importante de Ste. Croix (1961). Fra gli studi più recenti si possono citare Pébarthe (2007); Liddel (2010); Low (2013).

⁸⁴ Thuc. 8.48.4–7. Grote (1888, vol. 4: 524 n. 1); de Ste. Croix (1954: 37–38); cf. de Ste. Croix (1972: 44). La tesi di de Ste. Croix suscitò molte critiche — per la questione si veda Kallet (2009: 44–50) — ma di recente è stata ripresa da Ober (2015: 217–220).

Tucidide, considerato il precursore della storiografia scientifica. D'altra parte, in *CSAGW* de Ste. Croix impiega quasi cento pagine per definire il concetto di lotta di classe e dimostrare che l'economia dell'antichità può essere interpretata in chiave marxista.⁸⁵ In altri interventi egli delinea addirittura il percorso di vita che lo ha condotto a prendere questa posizione: il che potrebbe spiegare il motivo per cui negli anni successivi alla sua morte non si sia sentito il bisogno di approfondire la sua biografia intellettuale, dal momento che essa è già contenuta nei suoi scritti. Eppure la giustificazione della propria appartenenza ideologica non sembra contrastare con la ricerca dell'oggettività, poiché la sua ampia speculazione teorica contiene degli elementi che vanno oltre il marxismo e hanno una valenza epistemologica più generale.

De Ste. Croix fu un marxista eretico, perché pur di applicare la categoria di classe allo studio dell'antichità rinunciò al concetto di 'coscienza' e si concentrò unicamente su quello di 'sfruttamento'. Per lui ciò significava badare solo alla sostanza e riportare l'attenzione sui fattori materiali in grado di esplicitare le dinamiche sociali ed economiche del mondo greco-romano. Questa versione del marxismo venne sostenuta contro alcuni studiosi che ritenevano che la categoria economica della classe non fosse applicabile all'antichità e confinavano il conflitto nella sfera politica. Una polemica che, se pure costituì una parte importante del lavoro di de Ste. Croix, oggi appare quasi secondaria se si guarda al suo metodo in una prospettiva più ampia, nella quale egli ci appare quasi come uno storico di stampo tradizionale, alla Ranke. Non ha importanza se l'oggettività o la veridicità ('objectivity', 'truthfulness') prendessero allora il nome di 'marxismo': questa era solo una definizione di cui ora percepiamo con chiarezza la transitorietà, ma che in effetti celava l'intento di ricondurre la storia allo studio attento dei documenti, alla ricostruzione accurata dei fatti e alla ricerca rigorosa delle cause.

Abbiamo visto che del positivismo de Ste. Croix non recuperò solo il culto per la verità, ma riprese anche la concezione determinista, secondo la quale nella totalità degli eventi è possibile rinvenire delle costanti strutturali in grado di spiegare le trasformazioni politico-sociali e in qualche misura di anticiparle. In questo egli si distaccava da Ranke e accettava l'idea dell'utilità della storia, condividendo il razionalismo ottimistico di una parte della speculazione ottocentesca, marxismo incluso. De Ste. Croix tentò una sorta di restaurazione del pensiero marxiano e pretese di ricondurlo nell'alveo di un paradigma determinista, nel quale egli includeva anche la storiografia scientifica tucididea. Egli si riconobbe e si immedesimò in Tucidide prima e ancor più a fondo che in

⁸⁵ De Ste. Croix (1981: 31–111).

Marx a tal punto che in *OPW* giunse a farlo parlare in prima persona, componendo una prosopopea in cui lo storico antico spiegava i tratti generali della sua opera.⁸⁶ Quanto a Marx, in alcuni passaggi de Ste. Croix gli attribuì i suoi pensieri e le sue conclusioni, facendogli affermare cose che non aveva detto, ma dichiarando che è così che avrebbe voluto dire.⁸⁷

Questa libertà stilistica, oltre che di pensiero, oltrepassa l'adesione a un'ideologia. Se consideriamo che in quel momento proprio i marxisti stavano conducendo la storia antica in ben altra direzione, appare chiaro che l'operazione di de Ste. Croix si configurava come una scelta conservativa, finalizzata a restituire all'antichità un valore speciale. Per lui essa era in grado di rivelare i medesimi meccanismi economici e sociali che, pur in forma diversa, caratterizzano il mondo moderno e contemporaneo. La sua visione modernista non dipendeva solo dall'uso di categorie interpretative moderne, ma anche dal ruolo chiave che assegnava soprattutto alla cultura greca nello sviluppo dell'Occidente. De Ste. Croix non si rassegnò a vedere in Tucidide un semplice cronista, ma lo considerò un pensatore che rifletteva il momento culminante di una civiltà, capace cioè di rappresentare non solo l'epoca in cui viveva, ma anche di cogliere alcuni meccanismi storici universalmente validi.

Ho detto all'inizio che non intendevo entrare nel merito dei contenuti della ricerca di de Ste. Croix, ma limitarmi al suo metodo. Tuttavia, alla fine di questa indagine si può ammettere che la volontà di restaurare il marxismo, interpretando le fonti secondo una visione determinista, lo ha portato all'elaborazione di tesi originali e dunque a compiere dei progressi nello studio di alcune questioni. D'altra parte non c'è alcun dubbio che le sue analisi migliori precedano le speculazioni di carattere teorico: *OPW* e il saggio sulla popolarità dell'impero marittimo ateniese sono lavori innovativi nei quali l'ideologia probabilmente è stata soltanto un fattore esterno che lo ha spinto in una certa direzione. In *CSAGW* egli ha tentato di vincere le resistenze che l'oggetto del suo studio opponeva a un'applicazione radicale della sua visione; ma è significativo che, quando lo schema marxista sembrava non funzionare, egli lo abbia modificato, giungendo ad ammettere che il 'suo' Marx era quello più autentico, quello appunto che emergeva dallo studio della società antica, che così riguadagnava la sua centralità nella storia occidentale. La sfida epistemologica di

⁸⁶ De Ste. Croix (1972: 22–23).

⁸⁷ Per esempio de Ste. Croix (1981: 32).

de Ste. Croix è sicuramente imperfetta sul piano intellettuale, anche se — e forse proprio perché — è affascinante nei risultati.

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LE PLUS GRAND DESASTRE MILITAIRE
DE L'HISTOIRE OCCIDENTALE ? LA RECEPTION DE
L'EXPEDITION DE SICILE AU XXI^E SIECLE

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ABSTRACT

La réception contemporaine de l'Expédition de Sicile se distingue par une étonnante pluralité de lectures. A la suite de F.W. Ullrich, de G. Grote et de F.M. Cornford, les historiens du XXI^e siècle portent un regard plus critique sur La Guerre du Péloponnèse, une œuvre ouverte et aporétique. Les différentes interprétations des paradoxes et des passages énigmatiques des livres VI et VII sont à l'origine de quatre types de représentation de l'Expédition de Sicile : un conflit autonome, un tournant dans l'histoire athénienne classique, une acmé dans la civilisation grecque et un événement paradigmatique utile pour comprendre les catastrophes militaires de l'histoire occidentale.

The reception of the Sicilian Expedition (Thuc. VI–VII) over the last century is characterised by an astonishing plurality of readings. Following in the footsteps of F.W. Ullrich, G. Grote and F.M. Cornford, twentieth-century historians have taken a more critical look at Thucydides' open and aporetic masterpiece. The different interpretations of paradoxical and enigmatic passages in Books VI and VII of his History are at the origin of four types of representations of the Sicilian Expedition, which has been seen in turn as an autonomous conflict, a turning point in Athenian history, a highest achievement of Greek civilisation, and a paradigmatic event that can be useful to the understanding of military disasters in Western history.

KEYWORDS

*Thucydide, Expédition de Sicile, Die thukydideische Frage /
Thucydides, Sicilian Expedition, Die thukydideische Frage*

La réception de l'Expédition de Sicile au XXI^e siècle se distingue, chez les historiens, par une étonnante pluralité de lecture. Conflit autonome, tournant de la Guerre du Péloponnèse et de l'impérialisme athénien, *akmè* de l'histoire grecque ancienne, paradigme des catastrophes de l'histoire humaine tout autant que simple épisode militaire

voire péripétie sans grande conséquence... Fascinante, la plasticité historique de l'Expédition de Sicile s'explique par la conjonction de deux facteurs majeurs.

Le premier tient au regard critique porté par les historiens contemporains sur l'œuvre de Thucydide. La recherche érudite du XIXe siècle prend effectivement ses distances avec la lecture classique qui présente *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* comme une *Historia magistra vitae*, dans laquelle on peut puiser, avec Nicias ou Alcibiade, des modèles ou des contre-modèles pour guider la réflexion et l'action politiques. La voie est dès lors ouverte à une interprétation plus critique de l'Expédition de Sicile. A la suite de George Grote (1846–1856), les historiens interrogent ainsi l'autorité et les partis pris de Thucydide. Dans les années 1930, ils critiquent les informations de l'Expédition de Sicile grâce aux sources épigraphiques et archéologiques. Dans les années 1960, ils se montrent plus critiques encore : W.P. Wallace, A.S. Vlachos ou V. Hunter conçoivent le texte de Thucydide comme partial, mensonger voire manipulateur.¹ Après F.W. Ullrich puis F.M. Cornford, les historiens se penchent encore sur la composition et la nature littéraire de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*.² La « Question Thucydide » (*Die Thukydideische Frage*) interroge ainsi la place de l'Expédition de Sicile au sein des différentes strates de composition de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*. De nombreux historiens présentent, par ailleurs, l'Expédition de Sicile comme un texte dramatique, à l'image d'A. Parry, de H.-P. Stahl ou, aujourd'hui, de P. Ponchon.³ Après le *linguistic turn*, on étudie enfin les logiques de l'écriture de Thucydide : J. de Romilly, H.-P. Stahl, H.R. Rawlings III, W.R. Connor, J. Grethlein s'intéressent ainsi au style, aux jeux d'échos et aux *patterns* littéraires.⁴

Le deuxième facteur tient à la nature même de l'œuvre de Thucydide. L'auteur de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* invite en effet son lecteur à multiplier les contextualisations historiques pour comprendre l'Expédition de Sicile. Comme un bon stratège, le lecteur doit maîtriser l'*eikazein* : il lui faut comprendre un fait historique en le comparant aux événements du passé grâce à une habile articulation du particulier (*to kath' ekaston*) au général (*to katholou*). Thucydide propose notamment plusieurs contextes pour comprendre les enjeux de l'Expédition athénienne : un contexte immédiat, un contexte grec classique voire archaïque, le contexte de la geste humaine avec des *patterns* reproductifs dans un temps logique.

¹ Wallace (1964) ; Vlachos (1970) ; Hunter (1973).

² Ullrich (1845–1846) ; Cornford (1907).

³ Parry (1972) ; Stahl (2003) ; Ponchon (2017).

⁴ De Romilly (1956) ; Stahl (2003) ; Rawlings III (1981) ; Connor (1984) ; Grethlein (2013).

Par ailleurs, Thucydide choisit d'offrir à son lecteur une œuvre ouverte et aporétique. Comme les autres œuvres d'époque classique, *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* est destinée à une « competitive critical community »,⁵ à un public cultivé qui aime débattre. Comme les dialogues platoniciens aporétiques, *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* multiplie encore les contradictions et les passages énigmatiques pour défier l'esprit critique de son lecteur. *La République* autant que *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* sont des œuvres plurivoques inépuisables : contre le savoir grossier qui se rassure dans l'univocité et la fixité des opinions les plus simples, ces deux œuvres exigent un réexamen constant de la part du lecteur afin de lui faire distinguer et peser les potentialités d'interprétation diverses et contradictoires. Puisque la vérité est davantage à trouver dans le partage dialectique des interprétations savantes, et non dans des arguments dogmatiques définitifs, la *Guerre du Péloponnèse* peut s'ouvrir à une grande variété d'interprétations possible.

La conjonction de ces deux facteurs (le nouveau regard critique des historiens contemporains ainsi que la nature ouverte et aporétique de l'œuvre de Thucydide) contribue à multiplier les interprétations de l'Expédition de Sicile qui intègrent, au XXe siècle, au moins quatre grandes catégories.

1. L'Expédition de Sicile, un conflit autonome

Depuis le XIXe siècle, *Die Thukydideische Frage* questionne la place de l'Expédition de Sicile au sein de l'œuvre de Thucydide et incite à voir l'aventure athénienne comme un événement à part dans la Guerre du Péloponnèse.

Pour les historiens « séparatistes », l'Expédition de Sicile se lit effectivement comme un récit autonome. Rédigée à part et assez tôt (entre 413 et 404 avant J.-C.), l'Expédition de Sicile aurait été intégrée tardivement dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre (quand Thucydide a pris notamment conscience de l'unité des différentes phases de la Guerre du Péloponnèse). Les arguments des séparatistes sont nombreux. L'Expédition de Sicile est tout d'abord qualifiée de *polemos* par Thucydide, 6.44.1 ; 88.6 ; 7.7.2, à l'instar des autres conflits péloponnésiens. L'Expédition de Sicile occupe, par ailleurs, une part considérable de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* (deux livres entiers sur les huit livres de l'œuvre entière). Thucydide considère enfin l'Expédition de Sicile comme une guerre aussi importante que la Guerre du Péloponnèse en 6.1.1 ; 7.18.2 et 28.3.

⁵ Ober (1998 : 47–48).

Certains historiens unitaristes considèrent, eux aussi, que Thucydide structure *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* pour opposer l'Expédition de Sicile aux débuts de la Guerre d'Archidamos. Tel est notamment l'avis de H.-P. Stahl, de V. Hunter et de H. Konishi.⁶ Pour H.R. Rawlings III, l'œuvre de Thucydide est notamment structurée par la confrontation de deux guerres de dix ans (la Guerre d'Archidamos et celle de Décélie), séparées par la fausse paix de Nicias.⁷ Les deux conflits sont écrits l'un en fonction de l'autre pour mettre en parallèle les deux Archéologies, les deux causes les plus vraies des conflits, les débats athéniens sur l'aide à apporter à leurs alliés (Corcyre, Egeste), les troubles de l'affaire de Potidée et ceux de la mutilation des Hermès, les conférences de Sparte et de Syracuse, les accusations contre Périclès et Alcibiade, la puissance des Athéniens lors de la Pentékontaétie et sa fragilisation en Sicile.

La représentation de l'Expédition de Sicile comme un conflit autonome est cependant contredite par les historiens qui voient en elle un tournant dans une histoire plus vaste. Leurs arguments sont de deux types. Ils s'appuient tout d'abord sur le texte de Thucydide : le récit de l'Expédition de Sicile est introduit, non par un prologue, mais par la formule habituelle précédant les autres épisodes de la Guerre de Péloponnèse : « au cours de cet hiver » ; Thucydide, 7.87.5–6 considère, par ailleurs, l'Expédition de Sicile comme « l'événement le plus considérable » de la Guerre du Péloponnèse. Ils retiennent également les structures de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*. Dans cette perspective, le discours d'Alcibiade à Sparte⁸ semble jouer le rôle de pivot dans l'œuvre et associe l'Expédition de Sicile au reste de la guerre. Après le désastre de l'Expédition de Sicile décrit à la fin du livre VII, Athènes paraît enfin sur le point de s'effondrer au début du livre VIII, avec la reprise de la guerre contre Sparte, la fortification de Décélie, les défections des alliés et la coalition soutenue par les Perses.

2. L'Expédition de Sicile, un tournant du Ve siècle avant J.-C.

Pour justifier le rôle de tournant dans l'histoire du Ve siècle prêté à l'Expédition de Sicile, les historiens insistent sur sa dimension exceptionnelle : elle serait la campagne la plus longue, la plus chère, la plus spectaculaire, la plus audacieuse du siècle de Périclès. L'*ergon* sicilien est notamment considéré comme le paroxysme de la lutte entre Athènes et

⁶ Stahl (2003) ; Hunter (1973 : 129–131 et 145–148) ; Konishi (2009 : 1630–1631).

⁷ Rawlings III (1981 : 5–12 ; 63–64 ; 251–253).

⁸ Thucydide, 6.89–92.

Sparte de l'aveu d'A. Parry ou de P. Green, car il place précisément le *pathos* à son comble.⁹

Conçue dans cette perspective, l'Expédition de Sicile joue tout d'abord le rôle d'événement tournant dans la Guerre du Péloponnèse. Pour Victor David Hanson, les modes de combat changent, par exemple, durant l'Expédition de Sicile : les affrontements entre hoplites menés par de grands hommes laissent la place à des conflits entre de puissantes armées menées par des spécialistes (Lamachos) et soutenues par une nouvelle arme : la cavalerie.¹⁰ J. K. Davies choisit quant à lui d'achever la Guerre du Péloponnèse en 413 avant J.-C., car les conflits suivants (ceux de 404 et 386 avant J.-C.) ne sont pas, à ses yeux, aussi graves que l'échec athénien en Sicile.¹¹

D'autres historiens, plus nombreux, préfèrent élargir la focale d'étude et considérer, de façon plus globale, l'Expédition de Sicile comme un tournant dans l'histoire athénienne classique. S. Forde la considère comme le paroxysme de l'impérialisme athénien avant sa chute.¹² Pour d'autres, l'Expédition de Sicile marque le début de la fin de l'empire athénien.¹³ W. Deonna, P. Lévêque et J.H. Finley préfèrent quant à eux placer l'Expédition de Sicile à l'origine même de la chute d'Athènes, et T. Rood rappeler qu'elle « encapsule » l'idée de la défaite athénienne.¹⁴

Cependant, de nombreux arguments sont susceptibles de contredire cette représentation de l'Expédition de Sicile. On notera tout d'abord, avec L. Strauss et L.L. Brice, que l'échec athénien en Sicile ne met pas fin à la Guerre du Péloponnèse.¹⁵ Au contraire, la guerre reprend sans véritable offensive spartiate : « les deux camps s'employaient ainsi et s'organisaient pour la guerre comme si elle commençait ». ¹⁶ Les Athéniens, qui rejettent des offres de paix en 410 et 406 avant J.-C., auraient même pu gagner la guerre. Une lecture attentive de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* montre, par ailleurs, que l'Expédition de Sicile ne peut prétendre au titre du plus grand événement de la Guerre du Péloponnèse : ses effectifs militaires sont en effet moins importants que ceux engagés lors des expéditions de Périclès à Epidaure et d'Hagnon à Potidée, et même que

⁹ Parry (1972 : 50) ; Green (1970 : 24).

¹⁰ Hanson (2010 : 359–360).

¹¹ Davies (1993 : 117).

¹² Forde (1989 : 11–15 et 33).

¹³ Hatzfeld (1945 : 179) ; Green (1970 : XIII) ; Rawlings III (1981 : 60–61) ; Cogan (1981 : 93) ; Konishi (2009 : 1949).

¹⁴ Deonna (1922 : 145) ; Lévêque (1964 : 279) ; Finley (1967 : 135–136) ; Rood (2017 : 19). Voir aussi Rood (1998 : 159 sq).

¹⁵ Strauss (1987 : 286) ; Brice (2013 : 640).

¹⁶ Thucydide, 8.5.1.

lors de la bataille de Mantinée qui « était la plus importante bataille que, depuis les temps les plus lointains, se fussent livrée des Grecs et elle groupait des peuples parmi les plus considérables ».¹⁷ L'aventure athénienne en Sicile réunit moins de forces que l'invasion de Mégare et n'engage pas autant de navires que la bataille navale entre Corinthe et Corcyre.¹⁸ De même, l'événement le plus inattendu du conflit n'est pas le désastre de l'armée athénienne en Sicile mais bien la défaite spartiate de Sphactérie.¹⁹ Elle n'est même pas le drame le plus dévastateur au regard des pertes infligées par la Peste aux Athéniens. P. Vidal-Naquet et P. Lévêque remarquent enfin que l'Expédition de Sicile participe à un processus de longue durée qui tend à diluer son importance historique : comme les massacres des Mytiléniens et des Méliens, elle n'est qu'une des différentes étapes de la dynamique agressive de l'impérialisme athénien.²⁰

3. L'Expédition de Sicile, akmè de l'histoire grecque

La gravité paroxystique de l'Expédition de Sicile invite à l'inscrire dans le contexte plus large de l'histoire grecque ancienne. Thucydide, 7.87.5–6 rappelle en effet :

L'événement le plus considérable de notre guerre et même à mon avis, des événements grecs dont on a gardé le souvenir, exploite sans égal pour les vainqueurs, chef d'œuvre d'infortune pour les vaincus [...]. C'était, comme on dit, le désastre à son comble (traduction J. de Romilly).

A la suite de Thucydide, de nombreux historiens considèrent l'Expédition de Sicile comme un « pic civilisationnel ». Mise en parallèle avec l'Archéologie de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*, elle est conçue comme le sommet de l'histoire du progrès civilisationnel. Tout au long de l'histoire ancienne, les Grecs se concentrent effectivement autour de pôles antagonistes de plus en plus puissants, comme le rappellent S. Forde et P. Payen.²¹ Conçue dans cette perspective, l'Expédition de Sicile devient alors la dernière étape d'une série de guerres de plus en plus importantes : la Guerre de Troie — le conflit entre Chalcis et Erétrie — les

¹⁷ Thucydide, 2.56 et 58 ; 5.74.1 ; 6.31.2–3.

¹⁸ Thucydide, 1.50.1–2 ; 2.31.1–2.

¹⁹ Thucydide, 4.90.1.

²⁰ Vidal-Naquet (1964 : 260) ; Lévêque (1964 : 279).

²¹ Forde (1989 : 49) ; Payen (2012 : 11).

Guerres médiques — la Guerre du Péloponnèse. Le massacre de l'Assinaros constitue, à la lumière de cette dynamique historique, le summum de la destruction, tout comme celui de Mykalessos, une cité modèle de la grécité ravagée par des mercenaires thraces.

On comprend alors pourquoi certains historiens ont pu faire de l'Expédition de Sicile un point de rupture majeur dans l'histoire de la civilisation. Les points de vue varient en fonction des sensibilités face à l'ampleur de la catastrophe athénienne en Sicile. Si, pour P. Green, elle annonce seulement la chute d'Athènes, pour W. Deonna, R. Cohen et Ed. Will, elle entraîne la Grèce entière sur la pente glissante du déclin.²² « Pivotal event »²³ de toute l'histoire occidentale, l'Expédition de Sicile, conçue dans sa dimension la plus dramatique, alimente encore les hypothèses d'une « what if history » pour le moins imaginative. Convaincus par le discours d'Alcibiade chez les Lacédémoniens, G.B. Grundy, P.J. Fliess, P. Green ou bien J. de Romilly estiment ainsi qu'une victoire de l'armée de Nicias contre Syracuse aurait permis à l'empire athénien de s'étendre à l'ensemble de la Méditerranée et, de ce fait, de modifier le cours de toute l'histoire occidentale.²⁴ Sensibles à l'ampleur de la confrontation entre Athènes et Syracuse, d'autres historiens laissent libre cours à leur imagination. Alors que, pour E. Ciccotti, les Athéniens auraient pu, en cas de victoire, créer à l'Ouest ce qu'Alexandre le Grand a bâti à l'Est, A. Thibaudet assure que les Athéniens auraient, dans ces conditions, réussi à conquérir le monde oriental pour helléniser l'Égypte et l'Asie !²⁵

Deux arguments contredisent cependant l'interprétation faisant de l'Expédition de Sicile une *acmé* historique de première importance. A.S. Vlachos rappelle, à juste titre, que l'échec athénien en Sicile n'est pas aussi grave que la débâcle de la cité en Égypte au milieu du Ve siècle avant J.-C.²⁶ Par ailleurs, l'argument de Thucydide prouvant l'importance de l'Expédition de Sicile et de la Guerre du Péloponnèse fonctionne assez mal. À la suite de Denys d'Halicarnasse, *Thucydide*, 19.2, nombreux sont aujourd'hui ceux à remarquer que Thucydide nie la grandeur de la Guerre de Troie et des Guerres médiques alors même qu'il les utilise pour démontrer la grandeur de sa propre guerre : la Guerre du Péloponnèse

²² Deonna (1922 : 46, 145, 174) ; Green (1970 : 353) ; Cohen (1939 : 271) ; Will (1970 : 347).

²³ Creasy (1987 : 36).

²⁴ Thucydide, 6.90.2–3 avec Grundy (1911 : 7) ; Fliess (1966 : 9) ; Green (1970 : XIII, 93, 309) ; de Romilly (1995 : 99).

²⁵ Ciccotti (1920 : 154) ; Thibaudet (1922 : 123).

²⁶ Vlachos (1970 : 157–159) avec Thucydide, 1.109–110.

dépasse en importance des faits finalement importants... ce qui ne risque pas de la grandir ! Consciemment élaborée pour rivaliser avec les conflits rapportés par Homère et Hérodote, la Guerre du Péloponnèse porte aussi la marque indéfectible des choix personnels opérés par Thucydide, qui restent eux-mêmes discutables. La périodisation proposée par *La Guerre du Péloponnèse* a forgé durablement les représentations des antiquisants mais ne s'impose pas d'elle-même dans la longue liste des conflits qui ont secoué le Ve siècle avant J.-C. B.S. Strauss, A. Bresson et Ph. Lafargue proposent ainsi de sortir de la chronologie imposée par Thucydide et invitent à reconsidérer la place historique des principaux *erga* de son œuvre.²⁷ Une nouvelle périodisation, plus sensible à la multiplicité des conflits, pourrait ainsi attribuer à l'Expédition de Sicile le simple rôle d'épisode guerrier dans une histoire quasi séculaire rythmée en quatre temps : la première Guerre du Péloponnèse (460–446) — la Guerre d'Archidamos (431–421) — la Guerre décélique (414–404) — la Guerre de Corinthe (395 et 386).

4. L'Expédition de Sicile, une expédition paradigmatique pour lire les catastrophes militaires de l'histoire humaine

Présentée comme un événement extrême, l'Expédition de Sicile est enfin régulièrement utilisée comme un événement paradigmatique pour lire les désastres militaires tout au long de l'histoire occidentale.

La représentation de l'Expédition de Sicile comme événement paradigmatique s'appuie sur la présentation du projet de Thucydide en 1.22.4 :

Si l'on veut voir clair dans les événements passés et dans ceux qui, à l'avenir, en vertu du caractère humain qui est le leur, présenteront des similitudes ou des analogies, qu'alors on les juge utiles, et cela suffira : ils constituent un trésor pour toujours (traduction J. de Romilly).

Fidèles au projet de Thucydide, les livres VI et VII cherchent à dégager la portée universelle des événements et donnent à penser l'essence des conquêtes et des désastres militaires. Événement paroxystique, l'aventure athénienne condense en un modèle ce que sont toutes les conquêtes. En touchant ainsi à l'universel atemporel de l'impérialisme et des conduites humaines, l'Expédition de Sicile s'offre comme une grille de lecture pour dire l'ampleur des désastres militaires, expliquer leurs fatales origines,

²⁷ Strauss (1997) ; Bresson (2010 : 392–396) ; Lafargue (2015 : 14).

sonder la profondeur de leurs souffrances et déterminer leurs conséquences historiques. Il faut pour cela être convaincu du caractère immuable de la nature humaine, de l'existence de lois universelles et de la constance des contextes généraux. Thucydide ouvre lui-même la voie en utilisant l'Expédition de Sicile pour lire l'histoire. D'après V. Hunter, l'Archéologie fonde notamment l'analyse de la longueur, des effectifs et des ressources de la Guerre de Troie sur l'expérience de l'aventure athénienne en Sicile.²⁸ H.-P. Stahl pousse l'hypothèse plus loin en considérant la guerre de 415–413 avant J.-C. comme une sorte de paradigme de l'ensemble de *La Guerre du Péloponnèse*.²⁹

Plus nombreux sont les historiens à utiliser l'Expédition de Sicile comme un *pattern* pour lire l'histoire militaire occidentale. Elle devient souvent le patron des audacieuses expéditions militaires embarquées vers de lointaines destinations. Pour J. de Romilly, elle annonce par exemple l'Invincible Armada espagnole de 1588 dirigée contre l'Angleterre par Philippe II.³⁰ Elle est plus régulièrement rapprochée de la Guerre d'indépendance américaine, de la guerre des Boers, de la Guerre de Corée, du Vietnam, du Golfe et d'Irak, comme le font par exemple W.R. Connor, J.B. Hattendorf, J. Ober, R.N. Lebow ou bien H.R. Rawlings III.³¹

L'Expédition de Sicile permet encore de comprendre l'*hybris* des conquérants qui échouent face à la *némésis* de coalitions ennemies. Tel est le cas des expéditions d'Alexandre le Grand, de Napoléon en Russie et l'Opération Barbarossa des nazis mais aussi, plus rarement, de l'expédition des Alliés dans les Dardanelles en 1915–1916. C'est notamment l'avis de C. Castoriadis, G. Méautis ou bien G.S. Shrimpton.³²

5. Conclusion

Au terme de ce rapide panorama de la réception de l'Expédition de Sicile chez les historiens contemporains, deux caractéristiques majeures restent à retenir.

L'Expédition de Sicile joue un rôle historique très différent d'un historien à l'autre : elle peut être considérée comme un épisode sans grande conséquence, un conflit autonome, un tournant inévitable de

²⁸ Hunter (1973 : 165).

²⁹ Stahl (2003 : 189).

³⁰ De Romilly (1995 : 97).

³¹ Connor (1984 : 3–4) ; Hattendorf *et al.* (1984 : 285) ; Ober (2001 : 273) ; Lebow (2012 : 210) ; Rawlings III (2015 : 558).

³² Castoriadis (2011 : 281) ; Méautis (1964 : 23, 28–29) ; Shrimpton (1997 : 77).

l'impérialisme athénien ou de l'histoire de la cité athénienne, mais aussi une *akmè* de l'histoire ancienne ou bien encore un événement paradigmatique recyclable d'un siècle à l'autre.

La pluralité des lectures de l'Expédition de Sicile est favorisée par deux facteurs. Le premier répond aux nouvelles exigences, plus critiques, de la recherche en histoire (critique de l'autorité historique de Thucydide, enquête littéraire dans les structures internes de l'œuvre). Le second relève de la nature même de l'œuvre de Thucydide, une œuvre ouverte voire aporétique qui confronte ses lecteurs à des contradictions pour défier leur esprit critique et leur permettre de participer aux débats de leur temps sur l'écriture de l'histoire.

Lire et méditer l'Expédition de Sicile pour un Athénien du Ve siècle, c'est effectivement enrichir ses arguments pour entrer dans le débat et répondre à chaque prise de position. Conçue comme un grand événement autonome, l'Expédition de Sicile donne effectivement des arguments aux contemporains de Thucydide qui sont convaincus de la pluralité des conflits : Aristophane et Hellanikos distinguent deux guerres (Archidamos / Décélie) ; Andocide évoque trois guerres (une guerre contre Sparte au sujet de Mégare, une guerre contre Syracuse puis une guerre contre Sparte à l'instigation d'Argos) ; pour les Athéniens, 425 avant J.-C. représente sans doute la fin de Guerre du Péloponnèse. Considérée comme une étape historique majeure, l'Expédition de Sicile sert les démonstrations qui mettent au jour les logiques d'épanouissement et de déclin des puissances. Alors qu'Hérodote met en parallèle les histoires de Sparte, d'Athènes et des Perses pour saisir les logiques des conquêtes impérialistes, le *Ménéxène* de Platon fait de l'Expédition de Sicile une étape de la décadence d'une cité impérialiste qui s'oppose peu à peu à tous les Grecs. Représentée comme un épisode qui affecte peu la résistance athénienne, l'Expédition de Sicile peut encore servir la lecture héroïque des Oraisons funèbres qui, d'une guerre à l'autre, font répéter à l'identique l'*arété* éternelle de la cité athénienne. Imaginée comme un événement paradigmatique, l'Expédition de Sicile se prête enfin à l'utilisation moralisatrice de l'histoire au début du IVe siècle avant J.-C. Convaincus comme Thucydide de la constance de la nature humaine, les orateurs invitent à tirer de prudentes leçons de l'aventure athénienne. Andocide, 3.30–32 brandira ainsi le contre-exemple de l'Expédition de Sicile pour persuader les Athéniens de ne pas se lancer dans une politique extérieure agressive. Isocrate, *Sur la paix*, 8.84–85 et Eschine, *Sur l'ambassade infidèle*, 2.76 reprendront l'argument et opéreront une distorsion historique plaçant le

départ de l'Expédition de Sicile après la fortification de Décélie afin de mieux souligner la folle imprudence des politiques belliqueuses.

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THUCYDIDES' TRAPS. THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR IN
AMERICAN POLITICAL RHETORIC AND
IN SENIOR MILITARY EDUCATION*

— VIRGILIO ILARI —

ABSTRACT

Not surprisingly, Thucydides came to early American devotees of classical antiquities and entered American political rhetoric through Hobbes, thus as both a constitutional theorist and a critical observer of democracy. Later, however, Thucydides was read in the United States primarily as the historian of the first democratic imperialism, the Athenian one, seeking analogies and lessons for the present. This article seeks to reconstruct the specific reasons that led twentieth- and twenty-first-century security and defence theorists to give so much space to the Peloponnesian War in the training of senior officers, and even in strategic analysis and forecasting.

KEYWORDS

rhetoric, education, strategy, culture of war, analogy, neocon

Exiled Thucydides knew /
All that a speech can say, /
About Democracy, /
And what dictators do /
[...] We must suffer them again.
W.H. Auden, *September 1, 1939*

1. Three Thousand Tyrants for the Founding Fathers

‘Why should I agree to exchange a tyrant three thousand miles away with three thousand tyrants a mile from me?’ said the protagonist of *The Patriot*, the rebel colonist Benjamin Martin (inspired by the historical character Francis Marion) at the South Carolina assembly, before deciding to take up arms against George III’s redcoats. Pronounced by Mel Gibson, in the film by Roland Emmerich

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(2001), the phrase seems to evoke the exasperated individualism of the current American militias, but at the time of the Rebellion it summed up the point of view of moderate loyalists. It is in fact attributed to the wise reverend Mather Byles (1706–1788), who remained in Boston after the evacuation of the British, guarded by a sentry of the ‘Three Thousand’.¹

Direct democracy as the worst tyranny sounds reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes’ *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament* and Edward Hyde Earl of Clarendon’s *History of Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*,² ‘Thucydidean’ antidotes against the biblical inspirations of the Levellers. Therefore, the Athenian *στρατηγός* is not surprisingly among the twenty ‘military’ authors preferred by British officers serving against the American Rebellion: in a sample of 42 officers, as many as 14 (a third) owned at least one copy of *The Peloponnesian War*, and the general James Edward Oglethorpe (1696–1785) owned both the Greek and Latin edition of John Hudson (Oxford 1696) and the translations of Hobbes³ (in the 1676 ed.) and William Smith (1753).⁴

The latter two volumes were also owned by John Adams (1735–1826), and in a letter from Philadelphia dated 11 August 1777 the future second President of the United States recommended that they be read to his son, the then ten-year-old John Quincy (1767–1848), the future sixth President.⁵ On August 20th, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that he felt ‘an inclination sometimes to write the history of the last three years, in imitation of Thucydides. There is a striking resemblance in several particulars between Peloponnesian and American war.’⁶ Thirty-five years later, in a letter dated 3 February 1812 to Thomas Jefferson, Adams said he had read Thucydides and Tacitus so many times, and in various periods of his life, that he seemed to read in those books the history of his time and his same life.⁷

¹ ‘Which is better — to be ruled by one tyrant three thousand miles away or by three thousand tyrants one mile away?’ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910: 896). The theme of republican tyranny being worse than monarchical tyranny because it multiplies the despots also occurs in Byron’s *Marin Faliero* (Act 2, scene 2a): cf. de Vivo (2002).

² Hornblower (2010: 347–365). On Thucydides in the ‘Elizabethan’ author Alberico Gentili, see Hoekstra (2008).

³ Cf. Schlatter (1975). On the Hobbesian reading, see now Sullivan (2015: 239–260); Iori (2015), Arienzo (2017), and Iori (2019).

⁴ Gruber (2010: 233–234). The 42 libraries acribiously rebuilt by Gruber included a total of 650 ancient and modern military books (including various editions and translations of the same work).

⁵ Butterfield, Friedlaender & Kline (2002: 188).

⁶ Adams (1876: 293).

⁷ Cappon (1988: 295).

Formed by the classics,⁸ even the revolutionaries drew arguments from Thucydides. One of the theses of the Virginian ideologists of the Rebellion — that the Greek colonisation was more ‘human, just and generous’ than the Roman one and that the Athenian colonies were independent of the motherland — derived from the Thucydidean chapters on Corcyra (1.34.1), recalled in *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies* (1766) by Richard Bland (1710–1776), Jefferson’s cousin.⁹

As for democracy, the Founding Fathers practically thought of it as Reverend Byles did. Their anti-monarchist concern was balanced by anti-anarchist concern, and from Plutarch, Thucydides, and Plato they ‘yearned to see Athens as the epitome of the democratic state, a chronically unstable, often hellish, society controlled by violent and erratic mobs that frequently executed their nation’s best citizens on the flimsiest grounds’.¹⁰ In Thucydides they found confirmation of their aristocratic pessimism about human nature; with him they abhorred the demagogue Cleon and appreciated the unfortunate wisdom of Nicias; but some were drawn to a more conservative mind, because they preferred to learn from Plutarch about Pericles’ despotism.¹¹

2. Athens, Georgia

Neglected by Europe, the conscious use and refined art of rhetoric flourished more than ever in America. The most popular political discourse today is the two-minute Gettysburg Address given by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863 at the inauguration of the cemetery of the fallen in the bloodiest and most decisive battle of the civil war, which entered the

⁸ Ziobro (2006).

⁹ Richard (1994: 76).

¹⁰ Richard (2008: 77) (but in general see Chapter 4, ‘Athens and the Perils of Democracy’). On the late invention of the term *δημοκρατία* as a slogan in the Archidamic war, see Harris (2016). The ‘illiberal’ character of Athenian democracy was underlined by Benjamin Constant in a speech of February 13, 1819 at the Athénée Royal in Paris (*De la liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes*). See Saxonhouse (1996); Greco (1998); Piovan (2008). On the difficulty of American journalists to conceive of their ‘hero’ Thucydides as an ‘enemy’ of democracy, see Tolbert Roberts (1994: 297).

¹¹ It is in fact from Plutarch, not Thucydides, that George Mason’s (1725–1792) comparison is made between Pericles, who had brought Athens to war for his own financial interests, and George Grenville (1712–1770), the Whig prime minister who introduced the fatal stamp act which triggered the constitutional conflict between the colonies and the Crown. Cf. George Mason, ‘To the Committee of Merchants in London, June 6th, 1766’, in Mason Rowland (1892: 386). See also Reid (1987); Richard (1994: 95).

Holy Gospel of American ‘civil religion’,¹² continually evoked in films and documentaries¹³ and obviously compared to Pericles’ speech for the fallen of the first year of the Archidamic war.¹⁴ Thucydides’ *Epitaph* actually inspired a speech delivered that day in Gettysburg: not Lincoln’s ‘few appropriate remarks’, but the previous pompous two-hour speech of the Greek scholar Edward Everett (1794–1865), former secretary of state, president of Harvard and, as a young man, apostle of Greek independence.¹⁵

During the Antebellum Period ancient Athens was still a tool of Southerners, not only for having given its name to the town built around the University of Georgia, but because the same patrician, cultured and evangelical society ‘of the sword and magnolias’,¹⁶ based on the *isonomia* of the peers, resembled the ‘imperfect’ Athenian version rather than the ‘perfect’ Spartan version of a compassionate slave democracy.¹⁷ Everett himself, in 1826, had justified slavery, as well as another Northerner Greek scholar, Cornelius Conway Felton (1807–1862), President of Harvard at the outbreak of the war. Classical culture¹⁸ in fact represented freedom as *otium*, freedom from work, founded on the natural inequality of men.¹⁹ In addition, apologists for slavery preferred the Greek paradigm

¹² Kirk (2012: 164).

¹³ Among the most recent Salvador Litvak’s *Saving Lincoln* (2013), and the TV documentary *The Address* (2014) by Ken Burns.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Zagorin (2005: 64–65).

¹⁵ Roberts (2012: 144–145). Everett is played by Ed Asner in Sean Conant’s documentary *The Gettysburg Address* (2015). Another eulogy, once famous, modelled on Thuc. 2.35–46 was the one pronounced in the Basilica of San Marco for the fallen of Lepanto by Senator Paolo Paruta (1540–1598), official historian of the Republic (Hoekstra (2008: 33–34)).

¹⁶ Luraghi (2007).

¹⁷ Canfora (2004: 15–16) recalls the paradoxical definition of Sparta as ‘supreme democracy’ (Isoc. *Areop.* 61: *Λακεδαιμονίους διὰ τοῦτο κάλλιστα πολιτευομένους, ὅτι μάλιστα δημοκρατούμενοι τυγχάνουσιν*).

¹⁸ On the reform of classical studies at Harvard promoted in the 1830s by Felton and by the German immigrant Charles Beck (1798–1866), see Winterer (2002: 58–60). On the American interpretation of Georg Grote’s *History of Greece* (1846–1856), see Winterer (2002: 93). On Grote’s representation of the Athens/Sparta polarity, see Kierstead (2014) and Cartledge (2014).

¹⁹ Daly (2002). The study of Thucydides in American colleges of the Antebellum Period was based on the edition with commentary written for New York students by John J. Owen, using the Greek text edited by Ludwig August Dindorf in 1824. Born in Connecticut, Reverend John Jason Owen (1803–1869) was the ‘principal’ of the Cornelius Institute, an ‘academy’ of classical studies founded in 1835 by the New York Young Men’s Education Society. Professor of Latin and Greek at the N.Y. Free Academy since 1848, in 1866 Owen was elected vice president of the College of the City. His

to the Roman: the Southerners felt themselves Athenians before the civil war, assigning the role of the Roman oppressors to the Northerners.²⁰

On various occasions, including in the speech at Gettysburg, Lincoln called the ongoing war 'a great civil war', an expression also used by the Supreme Court in 1862 and by all military leaders, but still in 1881, when the first volume of the *Officials Records of the War of the Rebellion* came out, the official title of the war remained the Unionist one, which did not recognise moral legitimacy in the defeated, despite the compromise of 1877. The official Southern name was instead the 'War Between the States', which implied the sovereignty of the Confederation and the 'international' nature of the war, while Southern polemicists presented it as the clash between two opposing civilisations.²¹ As Jonathan J. Price pointed out, it was Thucydides, not the parties to the conflict, that defined Corcyra's internal war *stasis*: recognising the 'civil' character of a war in progress implies neutrality, third parties, and humanity towards the enemy, that clash with the passions and justifications of the belligerents.²²

Pressed by colleagues and students from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore to explain why he had fought for the South, the great classicist Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve (1831–1924),²³ founder (1880) and editor of the *American Journal of Philology*, wrote in this regard two magnificent articles, published by *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1892 and September 1897, which were widely echoed and assembled in a volume in 1915 for the fiftieth anniversary of the civil war.²⁴ The title of the second article is 'A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War':²⁵ an epic and elegiac re-enactment of his youthful experience in the summer campaigns of the Army of Northern Virginia alternated with the winter Greek course in Charlottesville, proudly claiming the Southern cause, which was not identified with slavery (after all 'with a human face').

The comparison with the Greek civil war tacitly reintroduced the Southern thesis of the American Civil War as an 'international' war. Even in ancient Greece, the alleged cultural unity among the belligerents was questionable: 'The Attic did not like the broad Boeotian speech'. The

editions of Xenophon, Homer and Thucydides and of the Septuagint, the first in America, were reprinted innumerable times. Hall (2010: 48 n. 1).

²⁰ Malamud (2009: 77–80). Cf. duBois (2008: 18ff.); Tise (1987: 49, 101, 191, 225–226, 338, 340).

²¹ As many as 32 different labels of the 1861–1865 war have been registered: Davis (1960: 79–80). Cf. Musick (1995); Coski (2006).

²² Price (2001: 34–36).

²³ Benario & Briggs (1986); Briggs (1998); Cox (2008).

²⁴ Gildersleeve (1915). Cf. Luraghi (1978: 65); Luraghi (2007: 59).

²⁵ Gildersleeve (1897: 330–342).

‘jealousies’ between South and North dated back to colonial times: therefore, a period twice as long as the *Pentekontaetia*. And then, in both wars, there had been a third factor behind the scenes: the Peloponnesian War could have been called ‘war of Attica’; or rather ‘of Corinth’, the perfidious ‘plutocratic’ power that appears subtly only at the beginning and end of the tragedy. ‘The exchange, the banking-house, were important factors then as now. “Sinews of war” is classical expression. The popular cry of “Persian gold” was heard in the Peloponnesian War as the popular cry of “British gold” is heard now.’²⁶

For Gildersleeve, the Thucydidean analogy therefore lay not in book three, that of the fratricide *stasis*, as it appears to those who try today to draw a parallel between the two wars,²⁷ but in a brilliant reversal of the old Southern self-perception: now Athens became the North, and the South, therefore, Sparta. ‘The Peloponnesian war, like our war, was a war between two leagues, a Northern Union and a Southern Confederacy. The

²⁶ Gildersleeve (1897: 333).

²⁷ Murray & Wei-siang Hsieh (2016: 82, 327) on Corcyra (other Thucydidean quotations on pages 13, 17, 36, 93, 104, 512). Murray & Wei-siang Hsieh (2016: xi) say they are inspired by the lessons of Donald Kagan, but in his books there is no real comparison between the Peloponnesian War and the American Civil War, apart from a few casual parallels, *e.g.* the forced one between Pericles’ refusal to submit his strategy to the assembly and the suspension of habeas corpus by Lincoln and Grant (Kagan (1991: 234)). Victor Davis Hanson thinks of the Peloponnesian War as ‘The Great Ancient Greek Civil War’ (Hanson (2005: xv)); he connects also the Brasidas dilemma, whether to arm the helots, to the Southern one, whether to arm the slaves (Hanson (2005: 302)), and compares the Athenian generals to real strategists such as Grant and Sherman and the Spartans to mere tacticians such as Lee and Sheridan (Hanson (2005: 379)). On the contrary, the (English!) philologist Bernard William Henderson (1872–1929) contrasted the mediocre Athenian hoplites with the well-commanded Confederate infantry capable of winning one against three (Henderson (1927: 29, 47, and 232)). The Greek ‘war on agriculture’ tactic is found in Sherman’s campaign (Hanson (1998: 27 n. 11, 37 n. 29, 53 n. 26)). See also McNaull (2004) and Sommers (2016). In a paper titled ‘Observations on Atmospheric Humidity’, inserted in the *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1865*, James Starr Lippincott (1819–1885) compared the scorched earth strategy of the civil war to the *δενδροτομεῖν*, that is the cutting of the vines, olive trees and other trees useful for the construction of ships, considered contrary to the *κοινοὶ νόμοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων*, the ethical code of the wars ‘among the Greeks’ that the *poleis* mutually reproached each other for violating; cf. Lippincott (1866: 541): ‘The single word, *dendrotomein*, the feller of trees, conveyed [...] the idea of the most barbarous form of devastation’. Lippincott quotes *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (Charles Scribner, New York, 1864), a book by George Perkins Marsh (1801–1882), first American ambassador to united Italy, later considered to anticipate ecological theories, in which it is argued that deforestation leads to desertification and that the shortage of resources is caused by man and not by nature.

Northern Union, represented by Athens, was a naval power.²⁸ The Southern Confederacy, under the leadership of Sparta, was a land power.²⁹ The reason for the Southern war thus slipped from the plane of values to the geopolitical and sociological one: land against sea, hoplite elite against merchant mass, the controversial theme of the anonymous *Athenaion Politeia*.³⁰ The reversal of the roles, in fact, is a fate in history, as in life. It is not too surprising, therefore, to find a Southern connection in the political process that led the President to be re-elected in 1916 with the slogan of 'America First' and to head the first American democratic interventionism.³¹

3. Thalassocracy Does not Mean Sea Power

The American climate of 1897 was moreover conducive to the clever operation of shifting the memory of the Southern war from slavery to thalassocracy. The war with Spain, the Yellow Danger and the imperial challenge to Britain were mounted, and the *Influence of Sea Power Upon the French Revolution and Empire 1793–1812* was drafted, sequel of the celebrated study of the commander Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) published in 1890 and already translated into Russian.

As Hans Kopp points out,³² in English literature the association between Thucydides and the Command of the Sea dates back to at least 1577,³³ and in 1884 Admiral Stephen Bleecker Luce (1827–1917), founder of the Naval War College, recommended that the Navy's senior officers read the *Peloponnesian War*.³⁴ However, the first application of the

²⁸ Indeed, one of the key factors of the Union's victory was the firm loyalty of the US Navy. Cf. Surdam (2000).

²⁹ Gildersleeve (1897: 334); Luraghi (1993).

³⁰ *Ath. Pol.* 1.14–2.16.

³¹ Ilari & Crociani (2018).

³² Kopp (2016).

³³ The *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation* by John Dee contains a paragraph 'Of what importance It is, to be Lords of the Seas' and, in the appendix (Dee (1577: 69–79)), the Latin summary of two speeches *de Rebus Peloponnesi* by the Byzantine philosopher Georgius Gemistus Plethon. Cf. Ames & Herbert (1785: 660–662). The supporters of the *mare liberum* — Grotius (1609: 18): 'eam terram quae in divisione populo nulli obvenit, ἀόριστον' (i.e. Thuc. 1.139.2) — and those of the *mare clausum* called to the authority of Thucydides, and the latter derived from the Athenian historian the principle of the 'Command of the Sea' (John Selden, *Mare clausum*, 10.14–15 on Corinthians 'Lords of the Sea' — see Selden 1635: 44)).

³⁴ Hayes & Hattendorf (1975: 38, 75, 129). Luce quoted Thucydides yet in 'Signals and Signalling' (Luce (1877)); cf. Scammell (1921); Seager (1977: 430); Bradford (2013).

modern concept of Sea Power to the history of the Peloponnesian War is due to an Englishman, Frederick Thomas Jane (1865–1916), the eccentric creator of the famous reference works on the world's fleets and aviation, in a book written in acute controversy with Mahan and American Navalism. According to Jane, a thalassocracy was a purely socio-economic concept, far from the modern Sea Power, because the Athenians did not perceive the strategic value of their fleet (as Venice then did): they used their oar force only as a tax police and component (more logistic than operational) of a defensive triad integrated by the army and Long Walls; and only during the Peloponnesian War did they begin to develop a rudimentary naval tactic.³⁵ A similar judgment is implicit in Mahan, since the only aspect of the war that attracted his attention was the Athenian expedition to Sicily, compared with the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt as classic examples of 'Distant Operations and Maritime Expeditions'.³⁶

Without examining the political reasons for the Athenian decision, Mahan emphasised the military one, that is, to prevent the aid, in grain and ships, that in the event of the resumption of the war Sicily could provide to the enemy. Even without naming them, he therefore re-evaluated Alcibiades and Cleon against Nicias, saying that the Athenian attempt, however disastrous, 'was justified, because they were by far the superior naval power'. But his admiration³⁷ went to the bold strategic

³⁵ Jane (1906: 24–39). According to Jane, Thucydides' initial references to the fleets of Minos, Agamemnon, and Themistocles only indicate the confidence of the Athenians in their naval deterrent ('steady silent pressure' — cf. Jane (1906: 31)), not that they had an idea of the strategic use of the fleet. This was just one weapon next to the others. Salamina had been 'a land battle fought on shipboard'; ramming and cutting the lines were maneuvers borrowed from battles between hoplites. Naval tactics originated in Naupactus, with the idea of Phormio to attack in the open sea (as in Tsushima), and in Cyzicus, where Alcibiades (like Togo in Port Arthur) divided forces to lure Mindarus into a trap. But naval superiority ensures victory only if the rules of the game are imposed upon the enemy. Syracuse rejects the clash on the high seas and near the coast its 'battleships' destroy Athenian 'frigates' as the Confederate *Merrimac* did the Northerner frigates. At Egospotami Lysander turns his luck upside down surprising the victorious fleet at sea.

³⁶ Mahan (1911: 222–230). Mahan (1910: 38–39) had compared Germany and Japan to Sparta: cf. Vlahos (1980: 8, 124). Mahan is never mentioned by Donald Kagan. Thucydides' reading at the Naval War College was introduced in November 1911 by the new President Captain W. L. Rodgers, who had borrowed many ideas from his previous experience in the Army War College. Cf. Hattendorf, Simpson & Wadleigh (1984: 79). Later on, Rodgers (1937) published an important study on Greek and Roman naval warfare: cf. Ilari (2014: 157).

³⁷ 'In the propositions of Hermocrates, then, we have a true and fruitful strategic thought, with the modification due to tactical conditions, put forth two thousand years

plan that according to Thucydides had been proposed by Hermocrates³⁸ in vain to the Syracusans; or to testify with two months of food in Taranto, 'a position secured from attack [...] flanking the route the enemy must take, as do Jamaica, Gibraltar, Malta', to block the enemy expedition to Corcyra (Corfu) or to force the Athenian war units to leave the charges behind and try to flush out the Syracusans, risking being attacked by surprise and with exhausted rowers. Of course, it meant discharging the risks on Taranto (giving her the role of Santiago de Cuba for the Spanish team of 1898 and Port Arthur for the Russian of 1904), but the appeal *ante litteram* to the principle of 'Fleet in being' would have perhaps deterred the Athenians or delayed their decision beyond the auspicious season. Instead, seduced by 'a Grecian anticipation of "buncombe"' the Syracusans covered Hermocrates with contumelies, 'the resulting being the unopposed progress of the Athenians, and the consequent siege, suffering, and narrow escape of Syracuse, with the change of attitude before mentioned in her friends, the Italian-Greek cities'.

Forgetting the Mahan hints and Jane's criticism, it was the maritime aspects of the Second World War that aroused the famous article (1944) by Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987) on 'Sea-Power in Greek Thought', which, however, actually deals with the antidemocratic criticism of Athenian thalassocracy (*Athenaion Politeia* and Stesimbrotus of Thasus), Thucydides' answer in Pericles' last speech (2.60–4) and the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.³⁹ Even in the case of sea power, the "lessons" of the Peloponnesian War were taken into consideration only much later, when, as we shall see, the trauma of Vietnam led the US Navy to discover Thucydides and a Roman sea power specialist such as Chester G. Starr (1914–1999) to deal also with the Athenian one.⁴⁰

ago by a man who never heard the words "strategy" and "tactics" technically used, nor tried to formulate their laws' (Mahan 1911: 228).

³⁸ Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892) had compared the principle of non-interference theorised by Hermocrates in the pan-Sicilian congress of Gela in 424 BC to the 'Monroe Doctrine' (Freeman (1892: 52–53); cf. Micciché (2010: 77–86)). On Hermocrates and the reliability of Thucydides see Westlake (1969) and Grosso (1966); Kagan (1974: 266–268, 270); Kagan (1981: 219–222, 243, 245, 263, 311); Kagan (1987: 15, 62, 65, 70, 102, 180, 248, 284).

³⁹ Momigliano (1944). See Luigi Loreto's criticism in Loreto (2006: 120).

⁴⁰ Starr (1978); Ober (1978), Ober (1987); Eadie & Ober (1985); Zaccarini (2015); Kopp (2016).

4. The Peloponnesian War as an Archetype of Bipolarism

The great competitions for global supremacy in modern and contemporary history have always prompted, at least in the West, the comparison with those of Classical Antiquity. Teutoburg, for example, nourished both the myth of the *translatio imperii* (because of the three legionary eagles taken by Arminius) and the Protestant revolt against Catholic Rome,⁴¹ while classical German culture, from Barthold Georg Niebuhr to Eduard Schwartz, imagined Germany as ideal heir of Ancient Greece. But the analogical paradigm most prevalent by far in Europe was Roman history, from the myth of the Trojan descent of the Tudor and the Valois, to the Roman clothes worn by the French Revolution, to Spartacus and Caesar in Marx up to the Punic Wars as archetype of the collision between Great Britain and its continental competitors (France, Russia, Germany)⁴² — although the Peloponnesian War would have been equally and perhaps even more fitting. By implicitly comparing himself to Scipio Africanus, in the speeches to the Legislative Body of December 3, 1809 and June 18, 1811, Napoleon referred to his ‘Spanish ulcer’⁴³ as ‘Fourth’, and then ‘Second Punic War’;⁴⁴ a parallel later challenged by Liddell Hart’s famous book on Scipio — *A Greater than Napoleon: Scipio Africanus* (1926). Of course the Great War was also seen as the ‘Fourth’ Punic War, with John Maynard Keynes’ famous essay on the Treaty of Versailles as a ‘Carthaginian Peace’.⁴⁵

Luciano Canfora joked about the careless ‘Periclean’ quotation in Giscard’s draft of the European constitutional treaty, which provoked a formal protest by Greece and Cyprus.⁴⁶ But apart from this incident, there

⁴¹ Ilari (2015).

⁴² Salas (1996a), Salas (1996b).

⁴³ Gates (1986).

⁴⁴ Napoleon (1866: 49); Napoleon (1867: 244). There is a Greek parallel in Napoleon writings, but to Plutarch: in the letter of 13 July 1815 to the Prince Regent he placed himself at the service of France’s traditional enemy, as Themistocles had done with the Persians — cf. Napoleon (1869: 348), with Rood (2016). But in Saint Helena Napoleon dictated a *Précis des guerres de César* (posthumously published in 1836), cf. Maguire (2018).

⁴⁵ Loreto (2000); Tondini (2019). Tondini recalls that the label ‘Fourth Punic war’ was applied (by Mussolini) to the North African campaign of 1942, (by Charles V) to the taking of Mahdia and (by Sidonius Apollinaris) to the Vandals’ conquest of North Africa.

⁴⁶ Canfora (2004: 11–16). The incomplete (and misleading) citation of the passage on democracy as government ‘of the most’ (implying the dictatorship of the majority) was in the preamble. The citation was omitted by the Irish presidency for the objections of Greece and Cyprus: see Miller (2004: 9).

is nothing in Europe similar to the popularity of the Thucydidean references in American public rhetoric. These references begin with the Cold War, as emerges from the excellent studies of Lawrence A. Tritle⁴⁷ and Michael Reed Schmidt,⁴⁸ who for the previous period have not traced significant evidence.⁴⁹

In the introduction to his classic commentary on the eight books (1984),⁵⁰ Walter Robert Connor writes that he had already read them in his early twenties (in the 1950s) and recalls the reflections of George Marshall (1947) on the risk that the confrontation of the United States and the Soviet Union, despite the United States being the best, would end as Athens' confrontation of Sparta did; and of Louis Joseph Halle (1952) on the relevance of Thucydides in the challenge of the Spartan communist world to the Athenian free world — citations then entered into the standard canon of American 'Thucydidology'.⁵¹ However, only in 2008, thanks to the historiography of the Cold War and the Halle's archive preserved in Charlottesville,⁵² Michael Reed Schmidt reconstructed the thread that connects them and explains their political sense, while also illuminating Halle's subsequent 'Thucydidean' influence on the Department of State as well as on the Reform of Studies at the Naval War College (1973).

Marshall's speech, the first in his new capacity as Secretary of State, was delivered at Princeton University on February 22, 1947, the birthday of George Washington.⁵³ Five days later, on February 27, Truman,

⁴⁷ Tritle (2006).

⁴⁸ Schmidt (2008).

⁴⁹ In March 1941 Walter Lippmann (1889–1974), the founder of *New Republic*, advocated for, in his very popular column 'Today and Tomorrow', the analogical study of the Persian, Peloponnesian and Punic wars (Schmidt 2008: 11). *Thucydides and the World War* by Louis Eleazer Lord (1875–1957), published in January 1945 as No. 12 in the series of Martin Classical Lectures at the Oberlin College (Harvard UP), is actually a simple anthology of Thucydidean comments: the title is taken from a lecture — reprinted in Lord (1945: 232–233) — on the Melian Dialogue, held in 1914 at the University of Toronto, in which he had replaced the names of Athens, Sparta and Melos with those of Germany, Great Britain and Belgium (Tritle (2006: 130)).

⁵⁰ Connor (1984: 3).

⁵¹ See e.g. Zagorin (2005: 163); Lee, B.A. (2014: 353). See also Iglesias-Zoido (2015).

⁵² The Papers of Louis J. Halle, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collection Library, University of Virginia (Schmidt (2008: 11 n. 34)).

⁵³ 'I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic international issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the Fall of Athens' (Marshall (2013: 49)). In *New Republic*, Walter Lippmann wrote that Marshall's

Marshall, the Deputy Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1893–1971) and Arthur Vandenberg (1884–1951), chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, secretly discussed how to convince a Republican and isolationist Congress to replace the exhausted England in economically supporting Greece and Turkey to avoid their collapse and the Soviet advance to the Dardanelles. Impressed by Marshall's speech at Princeton, which he had read in preview, it was Acheson who had the idea of beating on the grandiose '[bi]polarization'⁵⁴ of the contemporary world, which reproduced that of the ancient world between Athens and Sparta and between Rome and Carthage. The concept was then formulated in a presidential address to Congress⁵⁵ and taken up by Acheson in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors when Marshall launched the controversial European Recovery Program.

Beyond propaganda to persuade Americans to sacrifice their immediate economic interests in the name of national security, the 'esortazione alle Istorie' also caught on in the media. During the presidential campaign of 1948, a journalist who had compared the candidate Henry Wallace to the 'traitor' Alcibiades for breaking the unity of the democratic party, was picked up by Truman, according to whom the fitting comparison was, if anything, with Aeschines, the spokesman for the pro-Macedonians and the opponent of Demosthenes (Wallace wanted appeasement with the USSR).⁵⁶

However, the ancient history of theorists and practitioners of international relations had less grip. In the first edition (1948) of *Politics Among Nations* by Hans Morgenthau (1904–1980), the Bible of American realism, there are no references to the Peloponnesian War, which was completely unknown to George Kennan (1904–2005) when his *American Diplomacy* was released (1951). This is not surprising, as Stanley Hoffmann explains; Thucydides is still an historian, and the new social science, the 'American' science of 'International Relations', needed to 'emancipate' itself from social and political history, as political philosophy and public law did (according to Hoffmann) in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

reference to the decline of Athens after 404 BC was related to that of Britain after 1945, cf. Schmidt (2008: 11).

⁵⁴ The pseudo-Thucydidean matrix of the concept of 'Bipolarism' is also noted by Tritle (2006: 129).

⁵⁵ 'Not since ancient times has there been such a polarization of power on this earth. Not since Athens and Sparta, not since Rome and Carthage, has economic and military strength been divided so preponderantly between two states': Schmidt (2008: 6).

⁵⁶ Schmidt (2008: 5).

⁵⁷ Hoffmann (2001).

Louis Joseph Halle (1910–1998), a recruit from the Policy Planning Staff, made Thucydides known to the State Department. During a six-month course at the National War College he had read a summary of the *Peloponnesian War*⁵⁸ and advertised it in the *Foreign Service Journal* of August 1952, earning the compliments of Walter Lippman and the assignment to review the 1950 National Security Council document (NSC–79) on the political objectives to be pursued in the event of a global war.⁵⁹ But outside the DoS further echoes were scarce. In 1953 a Canadian historian compared the Soviets' denial of support to the Warsaw uprising with the Spartan non-intervention on Melos;⁶⁰ and in the 2nd edition (1954) of Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* appeared an excerpt from the Corinthians' speech at the second assembly in Sparta. For the Melian Dialogue, however, we had to wait for 1959.⁶¹

John Bloxham has reconstructed the gradual appropriation of Greek thought, in particular Platonic, by the American right which occurred at the turn of the Second World War.⁶² But in the years in which it was 'un-American' to speak of Spartacus,⁶³ the most sensationalising reading of Thucydides in English was that of Marxist historian Geoffrey Ernest Maurice de Ste Croix (1910–2000), who enthusiastically compared Athenian democracy to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Athenian garrisons in the Delio-Attic Amphictyony to the Soviet forces in Eastern Europe.⁶⁴

Thucydides' first real breakthrough into American realist political science occurred in the Vietnam years. Besides, were McNamara and Westmoreland not the reincarnation of Nicias and Demosthenes, as Halle

⁵⁸ In the popular epitome of R.W. Livingstone (1943) taken from the translation by R. Crowley (1874); cf. Tritle (2006: 129).

⁵⁹ 'The present, in which our country finds herself, like Athens after the Persian Wars, called upon to assume the leadership of the free world brings him [Thucydides] virtually to our side. [...] It seems to me that since World War II Thucydides has come still closer to us so that he now speaks to our ear': Halle (1952: 15–16). A former assistant diplomatic adviser to the United Nations Commission in Guatemala and El Salvador, Halle had just joined the State Department's Policy Planning Staff at the time. From 1956 to 1977 he was professor at the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales in Geneva. Historian, political scientist, ornithologist, he wrote among other books *Cold War as History* (= Halle (1967)) and *The United States Acquires the Philippines: Consensus vs Reality* (= Halle (1985)). Cf. Schmidt (2008: 11–20).

⁶⁰ McNeill (1953: 432), quoted in Tritle (2006: 128).

⁶¹ Quoted in Waltz (1959), then by Morgenthau (1967): cf. Tritle (2006: 128); Neacsu (2010).

⁶² Bloxham (2018: 9–53).

⁶³ Kaltsas (2011).

⁶⁴ De Ste. Croix (1954).

thought?⁶⁵ While Henry Kissinger adopts extracts from the Peloponnesian War as reference texts in his course on ‘Government 180’ at Harvard,⁶⁶ Peter J. Fließ publishes *Thucydides and the Politics of Bipolarity* (1966) and Halle *Cold War as History* (1967). In 1969, the year of his conservative conversion caused by the excesses of 1968, Donald Kagan published *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*,⁶⁷ the first of the 4 volumes completed in 1987 and the first complete history of the conflict in English after that of B. W. Henderson (1927).

In 1972, to prepare himself for the historic meeting with Nixon, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai had *Patton* shown, the film preferred by the American president, released in 1970 and winner of seven Academy Awards. In the long sequences related to the landing plans in Sicily, the commander of the 7th Army proposes (in vain) to land in Syracuse, ‘in the same manner’ of Alcibiades: at Jodl’s headquarters a cultured aide de camp explains that Patton is always inspired by the great enterprises of the past and therefore he will land in Syracuse. All this is pure invention by Francis Ford Coppola: Patton did not take part in the summit of May 2, 1943 which decided to land in the Gulf of Gela, on the opposite side of the Island’s southern corner, nor do biographers record his ‘reincarnations’ of Alcibiades. But it is telling that in 1970 Hollywood Patton’s Sicily could evoke that of the Athenian expedition.⁶⁸

But to root Thucydides as the theoretical archetype of international relations is Kenneth Waltz’s (1924–2013) *Theory of International Politics* (1979), which reforms the realist tradition by replacing the anarchist vision of international relations with a systemic one (and emphasising Thucydidean determinism rather than psychology). In 1981, Robert Gilpin developed from Thucydides the concept of ‘hegemonic war’, taken up by Robert Keohane (1983: *After Hegemony*) and Richard Ned Lebow (1991: *Hegemonic Rivalry*).⁶⁹ In 2001 John Mearsheimer published *The*

⁶⁵ Schmidt (2008: 29).

⁶⁶ Schmidt (2008: 24); Ferguson (2015).

⁶⁷ However, Kagan gives few actualising comparisons. Two are recorded by Tritle (2006: 128, 130–131): one, between the Spartan refusal to attend the 449 BC congress and the 1947 Soviet refusal to enter the Marshall Plan; the other, between the ‘forced’ outbursts of war in 431 BC and 1914 AD. The second analogy is frequently found in the realist literature, which considers Thuc. 1.23 as an archetype of the ‘security dilemma’.

⁶⁸ Winkler (2009: 196–198); Suid (2002: 260–277). The screenplay was based on Omar Bradley’s memoirs (1951) and on *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (1963) by Ladislav Farago (1906–1980).

⁶⁹ See already Lebow (1984a); Lebow (1984b). Cf. also Lebow & Kelly (2001).

Tragedy of Great Power Politics, another masterpiece of Thucydidean neorealism.⁷⁰

There are two opposite ways, therefore, to actualise Thucydides. On the one hand, the centuries-old philosophical and political tradition seeks 'universal truths'; on the other, that initiated by Halle, emphasises the 'historical parallels' between the ancient and the contemporary,⁷¹ precisely the rhetorical *exempla historica* criticised by Clausewitz (*Vom Kriege* 2.6). In contrast to Schmidt, who enthusiastically sides with Halle's apostles, Tritle severely criticises the misleading analogies invented by American political science. The most conspicuous regards the alleged 'bipolarity' of Thucydides' world, which was actually multipolar and had at least three 'thirds' (Corinth, Syracuse, Persia).⁷² This is followed by ideological prejudice about the responsibility of the war, leaning against Sparta because a democracy 'cannot be aggressive'. This is in fact the petition of principle of the modern liberal theory of 'democratic peace';⁷³ to which is added, in the case of Athens, the alleged impossibility of the demos voting on decisions contrary to the individual instinct for conservation.⁷⁴ Finally, Tritle criticises the axiom of the 'inevitability' of war: a misunderstanding born from the bad translation of ἀναγκάσαι⁷⁵ by the most widespread English versions, and paradoxically detected in 1964 by Leo Strauss,⁷⁶ the greatest philosophical referent of neocon Thucydidology, which best translates as 'forced' or

⁷⁰ Keohane (1986); Garst (1989); Clark (1993); Johnson (1993); Johnson Bagby (1994); Forde (1995); Tabachnick & Koivukoski (2009) (especially the chapters by Johnson Bagby, Tabachnick, Ryan K. Balot, Clifford Orwin, and Barry Strauss); Sorgenfrei (2009); Dolgert (2012); Forde (2012); Lebow (2012); Ruback (2008); Ruback (2015); Ruback (2016).

⁷¹ Schmidt (2008: 31): 'Morgenthau, Waltz, Gilpin, Kissinger read Thucydides in search not of historical parallels but rather of universal truths. [...] Marshall, Lippman, Halle and Turner read the *History* using the "knowledge of the past" that Thucydides provided as an aid to the understanding of the future.'

⁷² Tritle (2006: 137).

⁷³ The most complete bibliography is in the Wikipedia entry 'Democratic Peace Theory': <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q1186378> (last accessed 9 February 2022). Adde Howard (1978); Barkawi & Laffey (2001); Henderson (2002); Gottfried (2012).

⁷⁴ Tritle (2006: 133–134), citing as the only critical voice Mearsheimer (2001: 367–368) and qualifying the 2003 war as an example of 'democratic aggression'.

⁷⁵ Thuc. 1.23.6: τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ, τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἠγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι εἰς τὸ πολεμεῖν.

⁷⁶ Strauss (1964: 182–183); Tritle (2006: 131–132). On the erroneous inference see also Eckstein (2003).

‘compelled’, completely changing the meaning of the sentence and resetting the interpretation of Thucydides’ thought.

5. ‘Embedding Thucydides’⁷⁷

In addition to neorealist political science, the ‘Thucydidean’ historical parallels were even more hastily ‘embedded’ in Langley and the Pentagon. The Spartan paradigm, already used in 1880s by Herbert Spencer to define the backward peasant militarism of Tsarist society,⁷⁸ and later to reinterpret Prussian ideology and military thought in the nineteenth century,⁷⁹ was taken up again in 1971, regarding the USSR, by Rush Greenslade (1917–1978), the legendary Head of the Economic Research Office (OER) of the CIA, then lecturer in Charlottesville and at the School of Advanced International Studies in Baltimore.⁸⁰ However, according to Schmidt, Halle’s most lasting success was the canonisation of Thucydides in the American military cult, proclaimed in 1973 by Vice-Admiral Stansfield M. Turner with the reform of the Naval War College, which, again according to Schmidt, provided for the reading of *A Message from Thucydides*.⁸¹ The alleged role of Halle, however, is not reflected in the very accurate official history of the NWC: actually, advising the (re)introduction of Thucydides was William Richard Emerson (1923–1997), Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the NWC in 1963–1964. Although Thucydides was almost unpronounceable and completely unknown to visitors, Turner became convinced that the Peloponnesian War ‘was absolutely the best example of how you could use historical case studies to teach contemporary or strategic problems’.⁸²

This story was later remembered by John Lewis Gaddis, ‘recruited to co-teach “Strategy and Policy” by Admiral Stansfield Turner, a man with flexible views on credentials but firm ones on the relevance of the classics to contemporary affairs’. Probably Turner’s decision to choose as a

⁷⁷ Lee, C. (2014: 271).

⁷⁸ Spencer (1906: 568–602). Quoted (as ‘Spenser’) in Bernstein (1989: 1).

⁷⁹ Roche (2012).

⁸⁰ Bernstein (1989: 2). Cf. US Congress, Joint Economic Committee (1982: ix); Firth & Noren (1998: 136, 248).

⁸¹ Schmidt (2008: 25–29); Stradis (2015).

⁸² Hattendorf, Simpson & Wadleigh (1984: 279, 284). According to the authors, ‘the story of the Athenian government’s attempt to conduct an ever more expensive, protracted, overseas war in the face of political disaffection at home had broad similarities to the United States in Vietnam’ (Hattendorf, Simpson & Wadleigh (1984: 285)). I am grateful to Prof. Hattendorf, Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History, Emeritus, for this and other valuable assistance.

lecturer of Thucydides someone who had never read it before was more practical than intentional: but it was the best in terms of the objective, which was to make students reflect on the experience that most of them had had in Vietnam. Gaddis in fact started the course by extracting from the text the 'resemblances' ('walls, armies, navies, ideologies, empires, strategies') on which to base the "analogy" with Vietnam: which, of course, concerned above all the fateful expedition to Sicily. 'At which point — Gaddis remembered — there was silence, followed by a falling away of all constraints. We were doing post-traumatic stress therapy before it had a name. Thucydides trained us.' The therapy worked because reflecting on the present through the frame of a past great story served to 'make us feel less lonely', as many years later other cadets responded to Gaddis after reading *War and Peace*.⁸³

The 'Turner revolution'⁸⁴ was inaugurated while the Kippur war was under way, the subject of a hard clash between Kissinger and the head of naval operations. Admiral Elmo Russell 'Bud' Zumwalt (1920–2000) accused the secretary of state of slowing down American military support to Israel in order to ingratiate itself with the Arabs. Soon after leaving active service, Zumwalt wrote in his memoirs that on November 28, 1970, while travelling by train with himself and Halperin, Kissinger had confided that he thought that the United States, like Athens, had 'passed their high point' and that he was trying to convince the Soviets, new Spartans, to grant 'the best deal we can get, recognising that the historical forces favored them'.⁸⁵ The book came out in February 1976, while the election campaign was underway (Zumwalt himself fought in vain for Senator Harry F. Byrd Jr.'s Virginia seat), and Ronald Reagan, candidate for the Republican nomination against outgoing President Gerald Ford, exploited it on TV to accuse his Secretary of State of defeatism.⁸⁶ Despite

⁸³ Gaddis (2018: 61–62). As Turner later told Gaddis, the idea of the 'legendary' Newport course on 'Strategy and Policy' came 'from Yale'; Gaddis (2005: xiv). It is worth mentioning that Turner was later more famous as Jimmy Carter's Director of the CIA: Turner (2005).

⁸⁴ Bernstein (1996–1997: 126–127). Bernstein taught Greek and Roman history at Cornell University and served as Chairman of the Strategy Department at Naval War College; Kiesling (2003: 94–95); Grayling (2015: 197).

⁸⁵ Zumwalt (1976: 319): 'K. feels that U.S. has passed its historic high point, like so many earlier civilizations. He believes US is on downhill and cannot be roused by political challenge. He states that his job is to persuade the Russians to give us the best deal we can get, recognizing that the historical forces favor them.'

⁸⁶ Thompson (2009: 240ff.); Rothkopf (2009: 159). Similar accusations of defeatism had been made in 1975 against Kissinger by another admiral, Chester Ward, in a book (*Kissinger on the Couch*) written together with conservative activist and anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly: Critchlow (2005: 240).

the dry denial and a complaint by Kissinger, various authors continue to attribute to him a Thucydidean parallel that is most likely misunderstood.⁸⁷ Moreover, in the early 1980s, at the time of Reagan's final offensive against the USSR,⁸⁸ the Soviet–Spartan parallel was shared by the CIA deputy director, Robert Gates, and by Henry Rowen (1925–2015), former president of RAND and the National Intelligence Council.⁸⁹

Kagan was among those who inspired the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) and the signatories of the appeal to liquidate Saddam Hussein.⁹⁰ In 2003 he published the epitome of his four volumes and his two daughters-in-law — the military historian Kimberley Ellen Kagan⁹¹ and the diplomat Victoria Nuland⁹² — distinguished themselves in the Global War on Terror and the 'Cold War 2.0'.

However, Kagan was too academic⁹³ to turn into propaganda the idealistic reinterpretation of Thucydides by Leo Strauss (1899–1973),⁹⁴

⁸⁷ For example Tritle (2006: 128); Boller & George (1989: 61).

⁸⁸ Schweizer (1994); Bailey (1999); Dobson (2005).

⁸⁹ Hildebrandt (1985: 139–141), quoted in Bernstein (1989: 3).

⁹⁰ Born in spring 1997 and chaired by the journalist William Kristol, on February 19, 1998 the PNAC addressed an open letter to the President in which it invited military intervention to disarm and remove Saddam, after both the 'simple containment' through 'sanctions and exhortations' had proven to be ineffective, as well as the long-standing policy of 'encouraging coups and internal conspiracies'. The letter was signed by 40 people, including 5 members or advisers of the National Security Council, 4 representatives of Foreign Affairs, 16 of Defense (including former secretaries Frank Carlucci, Donald Rumsfeld and Caspar Weinberger, 3 ex-Under Secretaries, 7 ex-Assistants Secretaries, 1 ex-director of ACDA and 2 generals), one from RAND, 2 parliamentarians, 3 journalists and 9 members of conservative think tanks (including Kagan).

⁹¹ Kimberly E. Kagan, who holds a PhD in military history from Yale, was the founder (2007) and President of the Institute for the Study of War in Washington. She was among the main supporters of the 'surge' in Iraq and in the strategic assessment team of General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan. Quite right! Against we 'armchair generals', military history must be written on the field; see *e.g.* Maloney (2005).

⁹² Entered into history for having exclaimed 'fuck Europe' on January 28, 2014 in a telephone call with the American ambassador in Kijev, Nuland was an American ambassador to NATO and Assistant secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

⁹³ Morefield (2014: 69–96).

⁹⁴ Klusmeyer (2011); Robertson (2006); Jaffe (2015); Howse (2014); Marcotte-Chenard (2018).

which helped transform the Trotskyite doves of the *Strawberry Statement* and *nuclear freeze* into the willing neocon hawks of humanitarian interventionism and democratic militarism.⁹⁵

It was not a pupil of Kagan who inherited the leadership of embedded Thucydidology, but Victor Davis Hanson, twenty years younger and with a 'Southern Agrarian' accent,⁹⁶ whose first works — inspired by *The Face of the Battle*, the masterpiece of Sir John Keegan (1934–2012) — on the hoplite matrix of the *Western Way of War*,⁹⁷ were used in 2003 to build the rhetoric of *Democratic Warfare*.⁹⁸ On the night of November 27, 2001, Hanson telephoned the 'Lt. Gen. Thucydides' to ask him what to do: surprisingly quoting Cleon, in essence the wise man replied 'bomb them all. *Deus suos agnoscet*'.⁹⁹ In 2003 Hanson reviewed Kagan's epitome¹⁰⁰ and in 2005 published his *Peloponnesian War*,¹⁰¹ the most popular book, after Strassler's *Thucydides* (1996), among the volumes on the subject then published in the US and UK.¹⁰² Kagan and Hanson also contributed to a 'Thucydidean' rereading of the Korean War¹⁰³ and in 2013 Hanson claimed that, like Themistocles in Salamis, Belisarius in Dara, Sherman in Atlanta and Ridgeway in Korea, David Petraeus had won the Iraq war in extremis (victory then faded because instead of Lincoln and Truman, Petraeus' President was Obama).¹⁰⁴

However, 'Thucydidean' predicaments and historical parallels have been mere details in the rhetoric of the first American wars of the twenty-first century, hitherto focused on the apologue of the fatal British

⁹⁵ Bloxham (2011); Bloxham (2018). On the abuse of Thucydides by Neocon circles, see also Porciani (2005).

⁹⁶ Devlin (2003–2004).

⁹⁷ Hanson (1989); Hanson (1991); Hanson (1999); Hanson (2001b). See also his introduction to Strassler (1996), reprinted several times.

⁹⁸ Ober (2010).

⁹⁹ Hanson (2002). Topics taken up in the subsequent study on the lessons of defeat, from Delos (424 BC) to Shiloh (1862) to Okinawa: Hanson (2003a).

¹⁰⁰ Hanson (2003b: 74).

¹⁰¹ Hanson (2005).

¹⁰² de Souza (2002); Lazenby (2004); Tritle (2004); Tritle (2010); Lendon (2010). See also Kallet (2001), and Mücke (2014a), Mücke (2014b). See also Rahe (2015), Rahe (2019), Rahe (2020), published in the Yale Library of Military History co-directed by Donald Kagan and Dennis Showalter. Rahe reconsiders the Peloponnesian War from a Spartan point of view, also as a lesson for the American attitude towards China and Russia (in the role of Persia and Sparta). He adopts for Sparta the definition that Churchill gave of Russia: 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma': Rahe (2016: 2).

¹⁰³ Hanson (2001a: 3–33).

¹⁰⁴ Hanson (2013).

‘appeasement’ and on the *reductio ad Hitlerum* of the tyrant in turn:¹⁰⁵ themes inherited from English and Rooseveltian ‘political warfare’ against populist isolationism and pacifism prevailing during the second American neutrality (1939–1941).¹⁰⁶

6. If China Becomes Athens...

Now, however, the *reductio ad Spartam*, used as we have seen against the bellicose and aggressive Soviet Union, is back in vogue, against the meek China that finances the enormous external debt and the wars of the United States. In 2012 Graham Allison, from the Belfer Center in Harvard, raised the theme of the ‘Thucydides Trap’¹⁰⁷ or the ‘inevitability’ of the Sino-American war, in which peace rests on the ‘balance of financial terror’.¹⁰⁸ This issue (based on twelve historical records of wars between latecomer and existing hegemon) was widely debated in the American media as well, so as to provoke a reassuring intervention by the Chinese President Xi Jinping¹⁰⁹ and a persuasive critique based both on the theory of international relations and on the text of Thucydides itself.¹¹⁰

But in the Sino-American *ἀνξίθηται*, who is Sparta and who is Athens? In wanting to be consistent with the comparison, the role of Sparta ‘fearing to be overcome’ (*φόβον παρέχοντας*) would be played not by Beijing, but Washington. After all, the reversal of roles between the adversaries would also be another lesson of the Peloponnesian War, because in the end, as David Pritchard pointed out in 2016,¹¹¹ Athens was ultimately defeated by Spartan sea power. And Rocky M. Mirza goes even further, stating that by dint of betraying its Greco-Roman origins, the West lost Athenian democracy to the BRICS.¹¹² A sign of incipient role-reversal is perhaps that among the American military units and ROTCs the fashion is spreading of boasting the title of ‘Spartan’, with an

¹⁰⁵ The sarcastic expression was coined by Strauss (1953: 42–43) as an example of logical fallacy attributable to the type-logic of the *ad hominem* argument.

¹⁰⁶ The famous John F. Kennedy’s thesis (*Why England Slept*, 1940) resumes the title of a Churchill pamphlet (*While England Slept*, 1938).

¹⁰⁷ Allison (2017).

¹⁰⁸ Drezner (2013).

¹⁰⁹ Mo & Chen (2016).

¹¹⁰ Chan (2020); Misenheimer (2019).

¹¹¹ Pritchard (2016).

¹¹² Mirza (2016).

iconography inspired by *300*, the film by Zack Snyder about Thermopylae (2007).¹¹³

Thucydides also illuminates the American debate on the abuse of unilateral sanctions, criticised as ineffective and counterproductive, but also because they provoke, if not justify, armed reaction (as in the case of Pearl Harbor).¹¹⁴ Indeed, the debate on the Athenian embargo against Megara as the cause of the Spartan invasion¹¹⁵ is resurrected.¹¹⁶

7. Lessons Learned

In 2018 John Lewis Gaddis graciously awarded Donald Kagan the title of 'greatest modern interpreter' of Thucydides. However, political scientists interpret the Peloponnesian War differently than historians. The latter seek the past in the present or — if they are politically engaged, like Kagan and Hanson — the present in the past (*e.g.* identifying the United States with Athens and their competitors with Sparta). Political scientists, on the other hand, are looking for 'lessons', just that *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί* ('an everlasting possession': Jowett) that the Athenian *στρατηγός* intended to create. Gaddis' *On Grand Strategy* is a penetrating search for 'grand-strategic' lessons in ten great epochal books or figures: Herodotus, Thucydides, August ('Teachers and Tethers'), Augustine and Machiavelli ('Souls and States'), Elizabeth I Tudor ('Princes as Pivots'), the Founding Fathers ('New Worlds'), Clausewitz and Tolstoy ('The Grandest Strategists'), Lincoln ('The greatest President'), Wilson ('Last best hope'), Isaiah Berlin. In my opinion, not all the chapters are equally appreciable: I find the last one much too sermonising and III and IV quite superficial. On the other hand, the paradoxical analogy between *Vom Kriege* and *Vojna i Mir* is keen, the slating of Sun Tzu¹¹⁷ is sacrosanct and the insightful strategic lessons of the Xerxes expedition and the Peloponnesian War are the best.

As for the latter, Gaddis focuses the lesson on 'the Long Walls' interlocking Athens with Piraeus, which turned Athens into an island and

¹¹³ The current American ground deployment in the Middle East, started in 2012, is named 'Operation Spartan Shield' (OSS), with a 'Task Force Spartan' detached in Southwest Asia; many battalions and brigades (as the 4th Airborne of the 25th ID) bear the 'Spartan' title. Originally SPARTAN was an acronym for Special Proficiency And Rugged Training And Nation building Program adopted by the Special Forces after the Vietnam War.

¹¹⁴ Higgs (2006); Miller (2007); Record (2009); Paine (2012).

¹¹⁵ Bonner (1921); Schmitt (1939); Brunt (1951); Kagan (1969: 266–267); de Ste. Croix (1972: 225–289); Legon (1973); Wick (1977); Tuplin (1979); Stadter (1984).

¹¹⁶ Baldwin (1985: 152–154); Fornara (2009: 213–228); Zarate (2013).

¹¹⁷ Gaddis (2018: 63–66)

which, according to Thucydides, were the remote prodromes (*ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν*) of the war. Protecting the fleet from a ground threat, unloading the weight of the war on the Attic farmers and thus giving up a second-rate army in favour of a first-rate navy, Themistocles and later Pericles seemed to have definitively dissuaded Sparta from hindering the Athenian pursuit of hegemony. But in the end the balance between *ὑβρις* and *φόβος* was broken by the secondary confrontation between Athens and Corinth, and the ‘Long Walls’ proved to be a trap, causing major Athenian suffering during the Archidamian war.

Unlike Kagan and Hanson, Gaddis does not discuss Hans Delbrück’s praise for Pericles, ‘inventor’ of the attrition strategy (*Ermattungsstrategie, cunctatio*) and ‘precursor’ of Frederick II in the Seven Years War.¹¹⁸ Of course the Long Walls made *cunctatio* obligatory, albeit combined with naval raids; but *cunctatio* is the last resource of those who, once deterrence has failed, are forced to defend themselves in depth or in a pivot area. However, it was Pericles, not Sparta, who wanted the war, although he knew how high the cost would be. The reason for Athenian inflexibility towards Megara was — as later towards Melos — that hegemony does not allow you to withdraw, losing thus your credibility. Such was — according to Gaddis — the case of the Korean War. The American equivalent of the ‘Long Walls’ was the U.S. declaration ‘to hold the “defensive perimeter” of offshore islands — Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines — in the Western Pacific’. North Korea misinterpreted the declaration as a green light to invade South Korea, thus constraining Truman ‘to defend that mainland position’.¹¹⁹ Unlike ‘Insular’ or ‘Pivotal’ strategy, ‘Containment’ seems to better prevent misunderstandings about the hegemon’s commitment to defend any far-off ally such as Segesta, Saguntum or Saigon, whatever its real strategic importance is. This is just another way, though, in which a hegemon can hit a dead end, like the Athenian expedition to Sicily and the Vietnam War.

Colin S. Gray (1943–2020) was elsewhere fascinated by the famous passage of the Corcyrean debate (Thuc. 1, 76, 2) on the three factors that influence political decisions, ‘fear, honor, self-interest’ (*δέος, τιμή, ὠφέλεια*):¹²⁰ he mentions it in various works,¹²¹ and always quoting

¹¹⁸ Delbrück (1890).

¹¹⁹ Gaddis (2018: 54–55).

¹²⁰ Here too, the different focus of the political scientist and the engaged historian emerges. Whereas Gray looks for a general theory, Kagan uses this passage as an argument in support of democratic interventionism and against realist appeasement: Kagan (1997).

¹²¹ Gray (2009b: 144); Gray (2016: 4, 14–15, 174).

Strassler's guide.¹²² However, rather than an analysis of the individual factors, what seems to attract Gray's attention most is the 'triadic framework' itself. What he calls the 'triphyc' coined by Thucydides in fact reminds him of the Clausewitzian 'wondrous trinity' (*wundersame Dreifaltigkeit*) of 'passion, chance and reason',¹²³ and even that of the Indian Kautilya, by which Gray means 'intellect, wealth, psychology'; indeed, he relates them to the three elements of the strategy, 'ends, ways and means', although there is no evident correspondence between the elements of these four triads.¹²⁴

This observation can be found in a 2009 brochure on teaching strategy to senior officers of the U.S. Army. Here Gray also advocates the study of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu and Thucydides as 'the most sacred of authorial icons in the strategic canon',¹²⁵ while granting Machiavelli and Bernard Brodie inclusion in 'a near-great short list'.¹²⁶ Gray was indeed convinced that 'there have not been truly major, let alone transformative alterations in human behaviour from the time of Thucydides [...] to the present day'.¹²⁷ And in a subsequent pamphlet for the U.S. Army War College, he proposes a Thucydidean reading of the antebellum *Πεντηκονταετία* as 'a guidance superior to the alternatives from our contemporary social science' to 'best continue to perform a benign hegemonic role in international security' in the twenty-first century, maintaining a 'prudential defence planning' to face unexpected threats and avoiding the 'immoderateness' that ruined the Athenian empire.¹²⁸

Already in 1997, however, a new research professor at the National Defense University had nominated Thucydides as Patron Saint of the Pentagon's courses of strategy.¹²⁹ He was Alvin H. Bernstein (1939–2001), a former professor of Greek and Roman history at Cornell University who taught Thucydides at the Naval War College from 1982 to 1989 and was also chairman of its Department of Strategy from 1984 to 1989, then director of the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU from 1990 to 1993.¹³⁰ Thenceforth, strategic studies on Thucydides have

¹²² Strassler (1996: 43).

¹²³ Waldmann (2013).

¹²⁴ Gray (2009a: 4, 24).

¹²⁵ Gray (2009a: 53).

¹²⁶ Gray (2018: 36).

¹²⁷ Gray (2018: 60).

¹²⁸ Gray (2015).

¹²⁹ Bernstein (1996–1997).

¹³⁰ Cohen (2001).

multiplied,¹³¹ and in 2009, just for Colin Gray's peroration, the Athenian strategist also entered the senior courses of the U.S. Army¹³² and was even proclaimed a prophet of the 'Operational Art', the new gospel the U.S. Army derived from the 1930s Soviet military theorists.¹³³ The 2016 course on Strategy at the U.S. Army War College 'uses Thucydides as a vehicle for the student to understand some basic concepts related to war, policy, and strategy'.¹³⁴ Two lessons (III and IV, held by R. Craig Nation) out of sixteen use Thucydides in discussing Strategy, Culture, Values, Interests, Power, Victory and Defeat, with eleven 'learning objectives'.¹³⁵ Readings are selections from the *Peloponnesian War* and 18 books or papers are also suggested.¹³⁶ One of the two 'written requirements' (a 'guided response paper' of 3 or 4 pages) that students are required to carry out during the course concerns the Peloponnesian War. In 2017 AWC Strategy course the classtime spent on the Peloponnesian War (and Craig Nation) doubled, covering the first 4 lessons of 16 (plus 2 staff rides to Gettysburg). Even in the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) the *Peloponnesian War* is read.¹³⁷

In 1963 a young student of Indo-European Philology and Greek Paleography in Princeton, a pupil of Robert Connor, protested against the war with a letter, rejected by the *New York Times*, in which he compared Vietnam

¹³¹ Garrard (2001); Tsakiris (2006); Platias & Koliopoulos (2010).

¹³² Craig Nation (2010); Murray (2013); Walling (2013).

¹³³ McGowan (2006).

¹³⁴ US Army War College (2017: 4).

¹³⁵ *E.g.* on the Athenian refusal of the Spartan offer of peace after Pylos, the reasons why both accepted the Peace of Nicias, the different political leadership of Cleon and Brasidas, the significance of Melian Dialogue, the Sicilian Expedition ('a good strategic choice executed badly or was it a bad choice from the start?'), 'the challenges of democracies in a protracted conflict', 'the role of Persia in the Spartan victory', the 'fruits of Spartan victory' inherited by Thebes, Persia, and Macedonia.

¹³⁶ Edith Foster, Donald Kagan, John E. Lendon, James V. Morrison, R. Craig Nation, Clifford Orwin, Martha C. Taylor, Theodore G. Tsakiris, Perez Zagorin, James A. Andrews, Steven Forde, Victor D. Hanson, Thomas Heilke, Athanassios G. Platias, Konstantinos Koliopoulos, Richard N. Lebow, Lawrence A. Tritle, Michael Whitby.

¹³⁷ Downs & Murtazashvili (2012: 418). Prof. Ugo Fantasia reminded me that the film *Patriot Games* (1992, directed by Phillip Noyce) features a lecture on Thucydides at the Annapolis Naval Academy. The lecture is given by a former CIA agent (Harrison Ford as Jack Ryan) who discusses with his students the arguments put forward by the Segestans by which they were able to convince the Athenians to intervene in Sicily to aid them.

to Sicily in 415 BCE. He had come to Thucydides through Auden's verses, wondering 'how to think historically' in that 'low dishonest decade' of his generation. In 1981, he derived his fundamental *Structure of Thucydides' History*. In 1995 he was elected president of Cornell University and in 2001 his firstborn, a marine officer, began his first shift in the Middle East, serving once in Afghanistan and twice in Iraq, guiding his men in battle and visiting the family members of the fallen. In 2011, at the School of Advanced Warfighting at Marine Corps University, they made him read Thucydides. His colleagues, like most ordinary people, had never heard of him; he vaguely knew the text had something to do with his father's job. He began to write two or three emails a day, asking for explanations and bibliography. So Hunter Ripley Rawlings III learned that his son was studying Thucydides in a way he never had. He read it in English and not in Greek, and discussed it with other men who knew war, for whom reading Thucydides was 'not discovery, but *anagnorisis*, "re-cognition" of what they have already seen and done'.¹³⁸

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¹³⁸ Rawlings (2015: 558).

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CONCLUSIONS*

— PETER J. RHODES —

ABSTRACT

In this concluding chapter, the late P.J. Rhodes offers a critical assessment of the chapters included in the volume and presents his own views on Thucydides' work and its reception in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The editors introduced our discussions with G.T. Allison's 2017 book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*¹ and remark on the ways on which Thucydides has been invoked in connection with the problems of our own time, a time characterised by E. J. Hobsbawm in a 1994 book as *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. We have thus been invited to consider the uses to which Thucydides has recently been put, and to play our part in doing justice to him.

We begin with Tim Rood on 'A.E. Zimmern, Thucydides, and the Emergence of Modern Disciplines'. Zimmern started his career as a tutor in ancient history at Oxford but subsequently became a Professor of International Relations, first at Aberystwyth and afterwards at Oxford. His *The Greek Commonwealth*, of 1911, began with geography and climate, and then in separate sections continued with the political and with the economic development of Greece, invoking particularly the Archaeology in book 1 and Pericles' Funeral Oration in book 2. Zimmern was one of those who wanted to broaden the scope of ancient history at Oxford (on which I might remark that in the early 1960's, when I encountered it, although some lecturers were attempting various kinds of broadening,

* Peter J. Rhodes passed away unexpectedly on 27 October 2021 and was unable to make the final revisions to his text. With the generous assistance of Lynette Mitchell, Peter's literary executor, and the friendly support of Tim Rood, the editors of the present volume undertook the task of putting the finishing touches to Peter's 'Conclusions', limiting themselves to very minor interventions of an almost purely formal nature. Nothing that Peter had written was changed, except for some slight changes in the arrangement of his text, which now reflects more closely the final structure of the book.

¹ Cf. earlier a newspaper article, Allison (2012).

the formal syllabus had not yet been broadened at all), and he saw the germ of various social sciences in Thucydides. What Zimmern gave us, I think, was a reading of Thucydides against the grain, emphasising those insights of other kinds to be found particularly though not only in the Archaeology rather than the narrative of political decisions, marches and battles which occupies most of Thucydides' history.

In a pair of further papers on Anglophone scholarship Benjamin Earley looks at Christian pacifist readings of Thucydides in and after the First World War: while some, from Hobbes onwards, favoured the idea that Thucydides educates us about war so that we may live in peace, C.N. Cochrane in Canada (and also T.R. Glover in Britain) thought that Thucydides identified the problem but did not see how it might be resolved. Glover in *From Pericles to Philip*, in 1917, tried to reconcile his pacifism with his fear of German expansionism: Athens after defeating the Persians had failed to give Greece the right kind of leadership, as Britain in his time had failed to give Europe the right kind of leadership, and in Thucydides he saw an emphasis on the misfortunes which accompanied war. Cochrane in *Thucydides and the Science of History*, in 1929, argued that Thucydides, influenced by Ionian philosophy, investigated the causes of human events including war as the Hippocratics had investigated the causes of disease: the study of man had not shown how human passions could be reined in and war could be prevented; that needed a religious and moral dimension which was absent from Thucydides.

Ivan Matijašić turns to J.E. Powell, who played an active part in the Second World War (and therefore never actually occupied the chair of Greek at Durham to which he had been appointed before the war), and who had called Cochrane's book the very worst book ever written on Thucydides. Powell gave a lecture to the Classical Association in 1936, on 'The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies'.² In that he already foresaw a Second World War and wanted to see the First War and the Second as a single conflict, culminating in 'the historically inevitable self-defence and fall of the British Empire',³ as Thucydides had seen a single Peloponnesian War and fall of the Athenian empire from 431 to 404. Powell deplored not only pacifist readings such as that of Cochrane but also the enlistment of Greece and Rome by the Fascists to provide support for their policies. On international relations Powell was a Realist before the Realist School had come into existence; and from the past he drew the pessimistic lesson that 'Study of the pitfalls

² Powell (1936).

³ Powell (1936: 5).

into which contemporaries have fallen, of the blind alleys up which they have been led, may have a very real value for ourselves'.⁴

We turn then from the Anglophone world to twentieth-century Italy. Dino Piovan focuses on G. De Sanctis (who refused to swear the Fascists' oath of allegiance in 1931) and his pupils. De Sanctis was a pupil of K.J. Beloch, but combined with his influence his own Catholicism and B. Croce's view of history as contemporary history. In particular, the question of what parts of Thucydides' history were written when became for him a matter of tracing Thucydides' intellectual development, with the Melian Dialogue in book 5 written after the end of the war to serve as a condemnation of Athens' treatment of Melos and of its imperialism in general.⁵ A. Ferrabino in *L'impero atheniese* of 1927, in line with Fascist ideas, was opposed to democracy and to the Athenian empire, and criticised Athens for failing to achieve the unity of the Greek people; he saw Thucydides as an authoritative reporter and a realist on international relations. A. Momigliano in his degree thesis, even more than De Sanctis, focused on development: Thucydides' development, and subsequent development by the standards of which Thucydides was not yet an expert in the use of documents or in ability to formulate historical problems.⁶

Luca Iori introduces us to an overt use of Thucydides to counter Fascism, a selection of translated passages from book 3 on civil war and 8 on Athens' oligarchic revolution of 411 BC, entitled 'Tucidide e il Fascismo', and published in 1924 in P. Gobetti's Turin magazine *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. Articles about earlier history and historians could escape censorship as articles overtly about the current situation could not, and this was one of several such articles. The passages were re-arranged to support an argument; each of them was given a provocative title (the first, from book 8, was 'The March on Rome and the saviours of the fatherland'); the translations were not inaccurate, but they were slanted, by the omission of Athenian details which would weaken the analogy, and by the use of more emphatic language than that of Thucydides. Iori suggests that this use of Thucydides was due not merely to a desire to circumvent the censors but also to a belief that Thucydides — and Sallust and Machiavelli — did hold liberal views: Thucydides was seen as genuinely opposed to the use of violence for political objectives, and it was at Turin that De Sanctis was professor and represented Thucydides as a supporter of Periclean democracy. So this movement

⁴ Powell (1936: 17).

⁵ In De Sanctis (1939).

⁶ Momigliano (1930).

enlisted the classics against the Fascists' own enlistment of classical Rome.

We next have a paper on international relations. Hans Kopp deals with H.M. Frisch, a Danish classicist and politician. He published in 1939 a major essay on 'Ideology and Reality in Thucydides' ('Ideologi og Virkelighed hos Thukydid'), remarking that recent events had not diminished the value of reading Thucydides. That study Kopp says is almost devoid of topical remarks; but in discussing the Melian Dialogue Frisch claimed that that was written to show that in the face of Athens' overwhelming strength Melos' opposition was futile, and the Dialogue should become 'required reading in the schools of all small nations'; Melos' hope for support from Sparta was, so to speak, touchingly naïve, as Denmark's hope for support from Britain had been shown to be unrealistic in 1937. A paper on 'A piece of Classical Geopolitics' ('Et stykke klassisk geopolitik'), in a magazine article in 1940, was 'a comment on current world politics from the perspective of the Socialist intellectual', arguing that Athens' attack on Melos and the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland in 1939 were both to be understood in terms of materialism and geopolitics. In 1944, in 'Classical thoughts in a hard time', one of the essays collected in his *Thinking and Speaking in Wartime* of 1945 ('Klassiske tanker i en streng tid', in *Tænkt og talt under krigen*), Frisch gave an account of the civil war in Corcyra as an episode of universal relevance, presented as a new-year greeting from Thucydides' workshop to young workers in Denmark. Overall, Frisch wrote as a citizen of a small state who thought that heroic resistance to large states was doomed to failure and used Thucydides to support that view.

Carlo Marcaccini takes us into the second half of the twentieth century with the idiosyncratic Marxist G. E. M. de Ste. Croix,⁷ who before turning to other themes wrote articles on Thucydidean subjects and a book (ranging far more widely than its title suggests) on *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*.⁸ Marcaccini sees de Ste. Croix as a positivist in the tradition of Ranke, and as espousing also a positivist and predictive sociology; he retained the notions of classes (but not of a 'mercantile class') and class struggle when other Marxists abandoned them; and he interpreted Thucydides on that basis, comparing him with medical

⁷ I have a personal connection to admit to: for two terms when I was in Oxford but my supervisor David Lewis was not, de Ste. Croix stood in as supervisor of my D.Phil. thesis on 'The Athenian Boule'; his interest in it was detailed and factual, and his Marxism was kept in the background. Another characteristic of de Ste. Croix, again not impinging on my dealings with him, was his hostility to Christianity (his parents had been missionaries).

⁸ De Ste. Croix (1972).

writers. He saw in Thucydides and espoused for himself ‘objectivity, truthfulness, fruitfulness’;⁹ his view of the Graeco-Roman world was not primitivist but modernist: he emphasised the economically idle rich and the labour of slaves; but in this earlier work his emphasis was on establishing the facts and making reliable predictions, and his Marxism was only an ‘external factor’.

Francis Larran turns to one part of Thucydides’ narrative, the account in books 6–7 of Athens’ Sicilian expedition of 415–413 BC. He notes the abandonment of the older view of Thucydides as an authoritative reporter of facts, to be replaced by a biased Thucydides who wanted to purvey a particular point of view, or a literary writer who imposed literary patterns on his history, or a thinker interested in multiple contextualisation and in *aporiai* to be debated. He sees four kinds of recent interpretation of the Sicilian expedition: a self-standing episode, peripheral to the main war between Athens and Sparta; or a major turning-point, in the Peloponnesian War and indeed in Athenian history and in the fifth century as a whole; or indeed the ultimate achievement in Greek history (cf. Thuc. 7.87.5–6); or a striking instance of military disaster, paradigmatic for all time. Larran welcomes this plurality of responses, which fits a more critical approach to Thucydides and what he sees as the aporetic nature of Thucydides’ history, and he argues that Thucydides was open to multiple interpretations at the time, just as he is now.

Finally, Virgilio Ilari gives us another up-to-the-minute kind of Thucydidean reception, in American political rhetoric and military education. After briefly noting the fear of democracy among the Founding Fathers, Ilari proceeds to invocations of the Peloponnesian War in the American Civil War and in later discussions of sea power. Europeans sought Roman precedents for their wars, while Greece remained popular in America. After the Second World War G. C. Marshall, L. J. Halle and some others spoke of ‘bipolarization’, between the USA and USSR as between Athens and Sparta or Rome and Carthage; but not all were keen on ancient precedents, and it was in the time of the Vietnam War that parallels between the Cold War and the Peloponnesian War gained in traction with neo-realists. Thucydides was enthroned in the CIA and in the reformed Naval War College; and academics who have rallied to this cause have included D. Kagan, his pupil A.H. Bernstein, and V.D. Hanson. In the new century Americans have continued to invoke classical precedents in various ways, and ‘Thucydides’ Trap’ for an established power and a rising power has been invoked with regard to the confrontation of the USA and China, while scholars such as J.L. Gaddis and

⁹ Marcaccini in this volume, pp. 217–247.

C.S. Gray seek lessons for the present from the past without conflating the two.

* * *

Where does this take us? Different meanings in ancient texts are seen in different contexts. That is natural and acceptable; and it is that variety which makes Reception an interesting field for study.¹⁰ The willingness of the ancient Greeks to engage in substantial refashioning of their stories about what they believed to be their past shows that that possibility is one to which they themselves were open.

Thucydides was not an enthusiast for democracy, but he believed in right conduct both by individuals and by communities; and so it is not surprising that we find him enlisted in Italy in the 1920s by opponents of the Fascists, who, when they could not address contemporary events directly, could hint at them by writing about the past. Frisch in Denmark in the 1930s and 1940s pessimistically read the Melian Dialogue as a demonstration that small states caught up in wars between the great powers should seek a means of survival rather than heroic suicide, saw fifth-century Athens like the contemporary Soviet Union as driven by geopolitical forces, and found a universal relevance in the account of degradation which Thucydides based on the civil war in Corcyra.

In the Anglophone world Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth* mined Thucydides for information on the background to the political and military events on which most of his narrative was focused, and included a rhetorically effective translation of Pericles' Funeral Oration¹¹ whose effect spread from London buses in the First World War¹² to the armoury of quotations of American politicians after the Second. And while Italian opponents of Fascism had presented Thucydides as a writer on their side, Glover in Britain and Cochrane in Canada lamented that fifth-century Greece had not found how to achieve a peaceful inter-state order, and Powell with a different kind of pessimism looked at the First World War and the coming Second War, and the fall of the British Empire. De Ste.

¹⁰ As I have remarked before, this gives Reception a particular attraction for post-modernists, since they are able to focus on the variety of meanings perceived subsequently rather than the meaning for the author and the original audience, which I still believe should be our starting-point (Rhodes (2015a: 5)).

¹¹ Zimmern (1911: 195–204).

¹² London Transport Museum (1915). And Sawyer (2013) has pointed out that another translation, by A.S. Way, first published on the Isle of Wight in *The Ventnor Mercury*, 28 June 1918, also achieved very wide circulation.

Croix, inspired by Marx but disagreeing with other Marxists, took a positivist line on establishing the facts while believing that history could provide predictions.

Virgilio Ilari shows how Americans have long liked to see Greek precedents for their history and continue to do so in recent decades. At the end of his chapter he mentions, as do our editors in their introduction, one recent invocation of Thucydides: ‘Thucydides’ Trap’, by which when a new great power rises to challenge an established great power there is the threat of war, as when Thucydides gave as the ‘truest reason’ for the Peloponnesian War that ‘the Athenians by becoming great and inspiring fear in the Spartans forced them to go to war’ (1.23.6), and as China is now challenging the USA (I recently had to write an introduction to a Chinese translation of my Bloomsbury book *Thucydides*,¹³ and I was advised not to mention that term.)

Our contributors have focused particularly on what might be called active reception, the deployment of Thucydides for the recipients’ further purposes. That means that (with the exception of Larran) we have not attended much to a passive aspect of the reception of Thucydides, by those who want to use him as a source for Greek history: the change, which has intensified since the middle of the twentieth century, from Thucydides the paragon of objectivity and accuracy (as commonly perceived in the later nineteenth and the twentieth century) to Thucydides the ‘artful reporter’,¹⁴ who, in what different scholars see as different ways and for different purposes, led his readers to see as he wanted a history which could have been seen in other ways. The Thucydides whom we read nowadays is a far more slippery writer than the Thucydides whom our predecessors read. I cannot go into that in detail here, but this changed attitude to how we read Thucydides has implications for how we might deploy him for our own further purposes.

The editors open their Introduction by remarking that

Contextualising [Thucydides’] interpretations — especially the most daring and questionable ones, albeit often quite successful — is perhaps the only way to grasp not only Thucydides’ authentic message, but also his legacy in an ever-changing world that seeks reliable voices from the past to interpret the present.

¹³ Rhodes (2015b).

¹⁴ I borrow the phrase from the title of Hunter (1973). There have of course been exceptions, but my contrast is true of the main stream of interpretation of Thucydides.

Although we may indeed make of Thucydides what we wish, as classicists we need at least to start by ‘contextualising his interpretations’, by doing our best to work out his ‘authentic message’, what his history will have meant to him and to his first readers. That is not as easy a task as it seemed a century ago, and the results which we shall reach will be less certain; but it is all the more necessary. It is entirely proper to ask whether Thucydides has things to say to our circumstances which he could not have predicted, and to study the different things which he has been treated as saying to different circumstances. But, if we are to deploy Thucydides for our own purposes in the circumstances of our own world, we must first in fairness to him be careful and honest in trying to work out what he was saying about his world; and that exercise and the study of how he has been deployed subsequently should have beneficial effects on each other. If we do not do that, we may surpass Cochrane in producing the worst books ever written on Thucydides.

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