

SOME COMMENTS ON THUCYDIDES 1.20-23

Quite often, language framed and chained to learned conventions and norms of grammar proved and proves burdensome and restricting to historians.* Thus even the ancient historian was prevented from communicating clearly with his readers. New thoughts and notions were especially liable to become the source of an unintended lack of clarity.

The thoughts, and notions and criticisms which Thucydides put before his reader in Book 1, chapters 20-23, were mostly new to the prevailing conventions. Thucydides had to deal with these difficulties in formulating new views on history¹; his deliberations and formulations embody the method he developed and adopted².

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The following will be cited by the author only: Bétant, E., -A., *Lexicon Thucydeum* (Hildesheim, 1961²); Classen J. — Steup, J., *Thukydides (erklärt)* (Berlin, 1897); De Romilly, J., *Histoire et Raison chez Thucydide* (Paris, 1956); Egermann, F., Zum Historiographischen Ziel des Thukydides, *Historia* 10 (1961) 435-447; Finley, J.H. Jr., *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Fuks, A., Introduction to Hebrew Translation of Thucydides by A.A. Halevy (Jerusalem, 1959); Gomme, A.W., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford, 1945); Grosskinsky, A., *Das Programm des Thukydides* (Berlin, 1936); Patzer, H. *Das Problem der Geschichtsschreibung des Thukydides* (Berlin, 1937); Powell, E., The Programme of Thucydides, *CR* 50 (1936) 174-175; Schmid, W. Zu Thukydides I.22.1 und ·2, *Philologus* 99 (1955) 220-233; Strasburger, H., Die Entdeckung der politischen Geschichte durch Thukydides, *Saeculum* 5 (1954) 395-428; von Fritz, K., *Die Griechische Geschichtsschreibung I* (Berlin, 1967).

¹ Cf., e.g., Wolcott J.D., *TAPhA* 29 (1898) 104 f. Cochrane C.N., *Thucydides and the Science of History* (London, 1929) 11 ff.; Gomme 29 sq., Grosskinsky 13 f.; Patzer 37 f.; Strasburger 395 sq.; De Romilly 9 f.; Finley 55 sq.; von Fritz *Geschichtsschreibung*, I 618 ff.

² Parry A., Thucydides' Historical Perspective, *YCLS* 44 (1972) 51 "Taking over the devices of the Sophists and turning them to an individual use, he writes an exposition in which ideas and events are strongly marked by key terms. These key terms are semiabstract nouns and verbs designed to distill the elements of experience into an articulate pattern."

A conceptional analysis of these four³ chapters may enable us, therefore, to obtain a more precise picture of Thucydides' historical judgement and method.

The Evidence of the Past

Thucydides uses several expressions to describe the evidence of the past. Though these phrases lack terminological differentiation at first glance, a closer examination of their meaning, as well as of their varied uses throughout the *ἱστορία*, helps to disclose that Thucydides was not playing with synonyms but rather distinguishing between e.g. τὰ ἀρχαῖα, "what had happened in the past" while past is to be understood as a quality, and τὰ παλαιά, "the ancient events" dating from a definite past, as points of a linear sequence of time. Thucydides could easily have repeated the same word had he not had intended to underline differences of meaning. Thucydides described the evidence of the past as a fabric of deeds ἔργα, and thoughts, whether spoken λόγοι, or mute; as being of antiquity, as being beyond human guidance, and as comprising occurrences which man provoked and deeds he had done, as well as events which acted upon men permanently.

The Rules of Reality

Thucydides thought it necessary and, indeed, as a precondition to historical writing that he formulate and adopt rules of reality. These constant and unchanging rules dealt primarily with the limitations of man's achievements *qua* human being. Thucydides demonstrated these limitations tellingly when he notes that men, even when trying wholeheartedly to tell the truth οὐ ταῦτὰ ἔλεγον, "do not recount the same thing". It is the nature of man (κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον) which should be regarded as an invariable given factor within the historical process. Similar circumstances are, therefore, apt to produce historical similarities, τὰ παραπλήσια, repeated occurrences (τοιαῦτα) have to be taken into account yet be seen as unlimited as to time, place or obliging necessity. However, the expected and foreseen (τὰ μέλλοντα) are not lesser factors in shaping historical realities, although no such questions

³ Cf. Grosskinsky 12: "Dagegen kann Kap. 23 ohne Schaden ausserhalb unserer Betrachtung bleiben".

as “when”, *πότε*, and “again”, *αὔθις* may be answered in anticipation. These were to Thucydides the self-evident proofs for the existence of general rules of reality.

The Method

The method Thucydides had developed for his work was, therefore, wholly set out, and was based on these expressive distinctions. However, one should note the controls and warnings he added to the implements of historical investigation as the epoch-making part of his new method. Thucydides warned himself, and his reader as well, against errors made in innocence and inadvertence, *ἀμαρτία*, as well as those due to over-trusting the evidence such as it be. He notes that the more attractive, *τὸ προσαγωγότερον*, is not necessarily the more reliable, and, that human inclinations and preferences, *εὐνοια*, can cause missing the point no less than the fabulous, *τὸ μυθώδες*. Similarly the loss of the proportions of reality (1.21.2) impedes the search for historical truth equally with selective memory, *μνήμη*, and that which seems most fitting to the occasion, *τὰ δέοντα*. Thucydides does not pretend to avoid the inevitable subjectivity of the writer, *ὡς ἐδῶκουν μοι*. He is conscious of the limits of historical investigation as a whole, while alert to the possibility of analyzing components of a problem.

The abundance of objects of investigation, *τὰ πολλὰ*, makes scholarly work more than difficult, yet Thucydides is aware that the collected evidence on the historian’s desk is not necessarily the best and most exhaustive. Thus, even within the limits of honest analysis, there will always remain that which is “incapable of disproof”, *τὰ ἀνεξελέγκτα*, as well as that which one cannot prove. The utmost human effort, *ὅσον δυνατὸν*, limited by definition is not enough to overcome the insuperable difficulties (*χαλεπὸν*) of historical research. He is wholly aware of the arbitrariness of the “sufficient”, *ἀποχρῶντως*, as well as the febleness of generalizing tendencies.

History

Once the *past* had been examined by this *new bilateral method*, despite the intrinsic difficulties due to the passage of time, (*τὸ ὑπὸ χρόνου*, i.e. by *the method based on general rules of reality* as stated by Thucydides, these clarified facts, *τὸ σαφές*, became what Thucydides appreciated as *history*.

This is the past, saved from oblivion and manifested, ἡ δῆλωσις, whose aim is the truth — ἡ ἀλήθεια — beyond any doubt about what happened, τῶν γενομένων τὸ σαφές. Yet, history is nevertheless more than an inquisitive occupation for Thucydides; there is in history that which is the useful to men, ὠφέλιμα, and a “possession for all time”, κτῆμα ἐς αἰεὶ.

Through examining the methodical nomenclature used by Thucydides

Evidence of the Past	Rules of Reality
20.1;21.1 παλαιά: τὰ παλαιά ⁴ 20.1 τὰς ἀκοάς 22.1 αὐτὸς ἤκουσα 23.3 ἀκοῆ: ἡ ἀκοή ⁵ 20.1 τῶν προγεγενημένων: τὰ προγεγενημένα 21.1 ἅ διήλθον: ὅ διήλθον ⁶ 21.1 τῇ ἀκροάσει: 22.4 ἀκρόασιν: ἡ ἀκρόασις 21.2 τὰ ἀρχαῖα 21.2 τῶν ἔργων: 22.2 τὰ ἔργα: 22.3 τοῖς ἔργοις: 23.1 θῆργων: τὰ ἔργα 22.1 λόγῳ: λόγοι 22.1 τῶν λεχθέντων: τὰ λεχθέντα 22.2 τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων: τὰ ἀληθῶς λεχθέντα 22.2 τῶν πραχθέντων: τὰ πραχθέντα 22.2 ἐπεξεληθῶν: τὸ ἐπεξεληθόν 22.4 τῶν γενομένων: τὰ γενομένα	20.3 ἀμνηστούμενα: τὰ ἀμνηστούμενα 22.1 μέλλοντες 22.4 τῶν μελλόντων: τὰ μέλλοντα 22.4 πότε: (τὸ) πότε 22.4 αὐθις: (τὸ) αὐθις 22.4 κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ⁷ 21.1 τοιαῦτα 22.4 τοιούτων: τοιαῦτα 22.4 παραπλησίον: τὰ παραπλησία 23.5 τὰς αἰτίας 23.6 αἰτίαι: αἱ αἰτίαι ⁸ 23.5 τὰς διαφοράς: αἱ διαφοραί 23.5 τὴν ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν: ἡ ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις ⁹ 23.6 ἀναγκάσαι: ἡ ἀνάγκη ¹⁰

in these four chapters in accordance with its intrinsic classification, derived from the conceptualizing system proposed, one can distinguish clearly the Thucydidean definition of history as a scientific discipline.

The Conceptual Setting

The following terms indicate his conceptual setting as it appears in the chapters under consideration.

The METHOD	
Implements	Controls and Warnings
20.1 ἡῶρον	20.1 χαλεπὰ
20.1 ἡῶρησθαι: ἡ εὔρεσις	22.1 χαλεπόν: τὸ χαλεπόν ¹⁵
20.1 τεκμηρίω	20.1 πιστεῦσαι:
21.1 τῶν τεκμηρίων: τὸ τεκμήριον ¹¹	21.1 πιστεύων: (τὸ) πιστεῦσαι
20.1 ἀβασανίστως: (τὸ) βασανίζειν ¹²	20.1 ἐπιχώρια: (τὸ) ἐπιχώριον
20.3 ἡ ζήτησις	20.3 πολλὰ καὶ ἄλλα:
23.5 ζητῆσαι: ἡ ζήτησις	21.1 τὰ πολλὰ: τὰ πολλὰ
21.1 ἡγησαμένος	20.3 ἀταλαίπωρος: τὸ ἀταλαίπωρον ¹⁶
23.5 ἡγοῦμαι: (τὸ) ἡγησαμένον	20.3 τὰ ἐτοίμα
21.1 τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων σημείων: τὰ ἐπιφανέστατα σημεία	21.1 οὐχ ἄμαρτάνοι: ἄμαρτία
22.1 τὴν ἀκρίβειαν:	21.1 τὸ προσαγωγότερον ¹⁷
22.2 ἀκριβεία: ἡ ἀκρίβεια ¹³	21.1 ἀνεξέλεγκτα: τὰ ἀνεξέλεγκτα ¹⁸
22.1 ἐμοὶ ἀπαγγέλουσιν: (ἡ) ἀπαγγελία	21.1 ὑπὸ χρόνου: (τὸ) ὑπὸ χρόνου
22.1 τῶν παρόντων:	21.1 τὸ μυθῶδες
22.1 τὰ παρόντα	21.1 ἀποχρώντως: (τὸ) ἀποχρώντως ¹⁹
22.1 διαμνημονεῦσαι: (τὸ) διαμνημονεῦσαι ¹⁴	22.1 ὡς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν μοι:
	22.2 οὐδ' ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει: (τὸ) ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει ²⁰
	22.1 τὰ δεόντα ²¹
	22.1 ξυμπάσης γνώμης: γνώμη ²²
	22.2 ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος: τὸ παρατυχόν
	22.2 ὅσον δυνατόν ²³
	22.3 ἐπιπόνως: (τὸ) ἐπιπόνον
	22.3 εὐνοίας: ἡ εὐνοία
	22.3 μνήμης: ἡ μνήμη ²⁴
	22.4 ἀγώνισμα: τὸ ἀγώνισμα

HISTORY
<p>20.3 οὐκ ὀρθῶς οἴονται: (οἱ, τὸ) ὀρθῶς οἴονται 20.3 τῆς ἀληθείας: ἡ ἀλήθεια 21.2 δηλώσει: (ἡ) δήλωσις 22.4 τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες 22.4 τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν²⁵</p>

⁴ Cf. 1.5.2; 49.1; Grossinsky 14-15; Gomme 135; De Romilly 293-294.

⁵ Cf. 4.17.6; 4. 126.3; Gomme 136, 151.

⁶ V. Classen — Steup 60-61.

⁷ V. Grossinsky 68-69; Strasburger 401; De Romilly 149.

⁸ V. Gomme 153-154; Gordon M. Kirkwood, *AJPh* 73 (1952) 37-61; Schuller S., *Rev. Belge de Phil. et d'Hist.* 34 (1956) 971 f.

⁹ von Fritz 624; Pearson L., *TAPhA* 103 (1972) 381 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. 3.71.1; Gomme 152; Classen-Steup 70.

¹¹ Cf. Gomme 135; De Romilly 242; Finley 9; Erbse H., Über das Prooimion des Thukydideischen Geschichtswerkes, *RhM* 113 (1970) 57 f.

¹² Cp. 6.53.2: βασιανῖσαι τὸ πρᾶγμα: Classen-Steup 58.

¹³ V. Classen-Steup 63; Grossinsky 78; Erbse H., Über eine Eigenheit der thukydideischen Geschichtsbetrachtung, *RhM* 96 (1953) 56; Schmid 230; Fuks 22: ἀκριβεια = strictness and systematic meticulousness. Egermann 435; Adcock F.E., *Thucydides and his History* (Cambridge, 1963) 7; De Romilly 297.

¹⁴ Hapax legomenon, v. Bétant I, 243.

¹⁵ Grossinsky 16 n. 3, 18 n.5.

¹⁶ Hapax legomenon, v. Bétant s.v.

¹⁷ Hapax legomenon, v. Bétant II, 381.

¹⁸ Once more in 4.126.5.

¹⁹ Once more in 7.77.3.

²⁰ Grossinsky 49, 56; Patzer 36 f.; Harrison A.R.W., Thucydides 1.22, *CR* 51 (1937) 7; Gomme 140 f.; De Romilly 247.

²¹ Hapax Legomenon, v. Bétant I, 243; Classen-Steup, Iviii; Schwartz E., *Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (Bonn, 1919) 25 f.; Jaeger W. *Paideia* (Berlin, 1933) 489 sq.; Grossinsky 33, 39; Powell E. 175; Gomme 140 f.; Fuks A. 32 f. Rokeah D., A Note on Thucydides, I.22.I, *Eranos* 60 (1962) 104 f.; De Romilly 237-238; Finley 11.

²² Once more in 7.8.2; Grossinsky 30-31; Powell 174; Egermann 442 f. Walbank F.W., *Speeches In Greek Historians*, (The Third J.L. Myres Memorial Lecture) (Oxford, 1972) 3-4.

²³ A hapax legomenon, Bétant 280, translates: *Quantum fieri potest*.

²⁴ Cf. οἱ ἀνθρώποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιούνο 2.54.3; φόβος γὰρ μνήμην ἐκπλήσσει 2.87.4.

²⁵ Grossinsky 62-63; Gomme 149-150; Erbse, *RhM* 96 (1953) 61; Schmid 233; Meyer C., Die Urkunden im Geschichtswerk des Thukydides, *Zetemata* 10 (1955) 98; De Romilly 88.

Thus the evidence of the past — having been scrutinized by the well-balanced method devised by Thucydides — is transformed into scientific history.

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

DAVID GOLAN