

The Didactic Purpose of Vivid Scenes in Thucydides' *History*

Thucydides' masterly utilization of vividness in shaping select scenes of his *History* has been recognized since antiquity. Plutarch, for one, ranked Thucydides' pages as the most gripping examples of history writing, in that he attained vividness, *enargeia*, by turning his readers into spectators and by instilling in them the very emotions that befell the actual viewers of those past events (*de Gloria Ath.* 347a).

Modern scholarship has primarily insisted on disengaging the notion of *enargeia* from the realm of subjectivity and has taken pains at pinning down the formal characteristics whereby some historical descriptions may be regarded as conducive of vividness: for instance, the deployment of emotion-driven verbs (Davidson, pp. 10-1), the 'mimetic' mode of certain tenses (Bakker, p.37), or the accumulation of minute details (Woodman, p. 27). While these studies have been fundamental in identifying on a more systematic basis the cases in which the historian deploys *enargeia*, they have ultimately understood vividness as a rhetorical technique isolated from the context. This paper instead explores in what ways the use of *enargeia* serves broader narrative strategies in Thucydides' *History*. Two scenes unanimously recognized as vivid will be analyzed: the dispatch of the second Athenian trireme to Mytilene (Thuc. 3.49) and the disastrous outcome of the Athenian expedition to Sicily (Thuc. 7.44; 7.70-71; 7.84-87; 8.1).

I contend that Thucydides frames his narrative according to a coherent pattern, wherein the representation of vivid scenes follows as a consequence of leading figures' lack of judgment, *hamartia*. The historian interprets *hamartia* as the failure of the human intellect to recognize *tekmeria*, "signs" (Thuc. 1.21.1). By placing *tekmeria*, textual clues in the form of authorial statements or 'objective' third-person descriptions, and setting them in contrast with the course of action advocated by leaders such as Cleon and Alcibiades, Thucydides exposes glaring cases of *hamartia* for his readers to ponder. Once these instances of *hamartia* are revealed, Thucydides then explores and magnifies the repercussions of an individual's *hamartia* on the community by coloring with *enargeia* the subsequent misfortunes the collectivity underwent due to a leader's misguided judgment. Thucydides' use of *enargeia* thus serves the didactic purpose of cautioning his readers against the potential risks of *hamartia*, thus prompting them to strive for their own clarity of vision (*to saphes*; Thuc. 1.22.4).

Bibliography

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