

## Parallel *Poleis*: Athens and Syracuse in Thoukydides

The role of speeches in Thoukydides has always been a prolific field of scholarly debate, and one that will certainly never have an unequivocal answer nor a wholly satisfying conclusion. Parallels have, naturally, always been seen between the five direct speeches at the beginning of book 6: Nikias, Alkibiades, and Nikias again in Athens and Hermokrates and Athenagoras in Syracuse. However, the vast majority of writers concerned with these speeches have not emphasized that there is a sixth direct speech, that of an unnamed Syracusan *strategos*, which directly follows Athenagoras'. To my knowledge, only one scholar has noticed its importance, W.R. Connor (1984). This paper attempts to further analyze these speeches in addition to larger narrative structures in order to demonstrate that Thoukydides purposefully and artfully displays Athens and Syracuse as parallel *poleis*.

Beginning first, with the larger narrative structure, the 'Thoukydides Question' must be addressed. We know that Thoukydides lived to see the end of the war, but we do not know exactly when he composed his work or precisely how he went about composing it. If we trust what he tells us at the beginning, that he started at the very moment the war broke out (1.1), why, in book 5, does he step back and give what is agreed to be a second proem (5.25-6)? Many have argued that this second proem divides his work into two halves: one that he likely wrote while the war was in its first stage and the other that he wrote after its conclusion. This has important implications on his narrative as a whole, as we do not know what Thoukydides originally wrote during the war and what he possibly interpolated into the first half of his work after he knew the war's outcome. I think there is good reason to believe that Sicilian affairs are in the latter category.

After his brief introductory section, Thoukydides begins his work with an 'excursus' on the history of Hellas, conventionally called the 'Archaeology' (1.2-19). Only briefly does he mention Sicily, as a place where tyrants have the ability to accrue great and lasting power (1.17). He also largely ignores the first Athenian expedition to Sicily and what little information he does provide

still does not give us the clearest picture. Significantly, Thoukydides limits himself to only relating the most important actions that took place between the Athenians and the Sicilians (3.90), perhaps hinting that Thoukydides only later came to realize the ultimate role that Sicily and Syracuse in particular would come to play. Because of this omission, Thoukydides must prepare the reader with a corresponding excursus on Sicily at the beginning of book 6. After a brief introductory section, Thoukydides provides a Sicilian ‘archaeology’, the ‘*Sikelika*’, recounting the history of habitation of the island and its peoples (6.2-5). Books 6 and 7 can thus be seen as echoing the work as a whole, with Sicily itself mirroring the entire Greek world.

Turning to the speeches, those given in Athens have long been seen as significant for two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, they are a triad rather than the typical pair that Thoukydides utilizes. Secondly, it is the only instance in Thoukydides where a speaker speaks twice on the same occasion. Once we include the speech of the Syracusan *strategos* with those of Hermokrates and Athenagoras, we have a second triad, a Syracusan one, and one that conspicuously corresponds to the Athenian triad.

The speeches take a comparatively different turn in the second half of Thoukydides (5.25ff), as they are much more artificial and elaborate, the ‘Melian Dialogue’ being the prime example (5.84-111). But they are also slightly fewer in number: twenty-five of the forty-one direct speeches occur in the first four books, sixteen are left for books 5, 6 and 7, and book 8 does not contain a single direct speech proper nor military address. W. West counted eighty-eight indirect speeches in Thoukydides (1973), with book 8 containing thirty-seven indirect speeches, nearly half of the total. I believe that we should see the direct speeches in the second half of Thoukydides not as simply illustrating both sides of a debate, but as serving a more nuanced narratological role.

By these methods of composition, Thoukydides portrays a Syracuse that is a near-perfect reflection of Athens, two parallel *poleis*. This duality is only explicitly crystalized later, when in books 7 and 8, he states that only against the Syracusians were the Athenians fighting a people most

like them in character, *homoiotropos*, the only instances where he uses this term for two specific *poleis*.

## Bibliography

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