

Why Did Thucydides Need to Justify His Use of Speeches?

Thucydides' commentators, from Dionysus Halicarnassus onward, have struggled to understand 1.22.1, his *Redensatz* (Luschnat for a survey, Schütrumpf most recently). Generally they take the inclusion of this statement of method for granted. Rarely will a reader register surprise to encounter it, but even then he does no more than suggest that Thucydides wanted to justify his claim to have created a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεὶ (Kagan, 32), imply that by including speeches Thucydides felt some “kind of bad conscience” (Hornblower 1991, 1:5), or coyly rehearse the influences that should have kept him from articulating his method in the first place (Gomme, 147). Never, as far as I have found, has anyone asked seriously why Thucydides includes the *Redensatz*. I propose that we should not limit ourselves to asking what Thucydides meant in his *Redensatz* and whether or not he follows it in the speeches themselves. We should also—and perhaps prior to analyzing the meaning—ask why he found it necessary to include this statement of method that so many find so problematic.

I shall briefly point out that the epic, dramatic, and historiographical tradition that Thucydides inherited left him little choice but to include speeches, and I shall show how the sophists gave him tools to craft the speeches in modern style while holding to the classical spirit of reconciling the generic and the specific. Then I shall point out how he also learned the importance of accuracy from the sophists. Thus far I build on previous scholarship (esp Cochrane, 25-26; Finlay, 59-73; Walbank; Hornblower 1987, 45-72). The crux of my argument comes when I identify the cause for the *Redensatz* precisely in the tension Thucydides felt (as Edmunds noticed, 166-67) between the subjective and rhetorical orientation that informs his *λόγοι* (ὡς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν ἐμοὶ ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα εἰπεῖν) and the claim to objective accuracy that informs his narrative of the ἔργα, which include the speeches as

actually made (ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων). I conclude that Thucydides' very commitment to accuracy made him feel the need to justify the inclusion of speeches that the historiographical tradition compelled him to include; moreover, the justification itself embodies the tension between subjectivity and objectivity that he felt in including the speeches.

Precisely that tension within the *Redensatz* has fostered and often frustrated every attempt by scholars since the nineteenth century to understand it. Although I do not make a study of the grammar and meaning of the passage the subject of my paper, nor an analysis of the speeches themselves, I do suggest that by understanding why Thucydides included his statement on method we can work toward a better understanding of these other problems.

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