Spatial Contingencies in Thucydides’ History

This paper argues that spatial contingencies, defined by the relationship between where historical actors are in the narrative and what they say, are crucial for understanding the political and ideological effects of Thucydides’ History. A comprehensive approach to these contingencies is linked to two related premises. First, that the city of Athens is the principal spatial referent in the History and, second, that Athens refers both to a set of “real” topographical features and to a transcendent and trans-historical ideal that exceeds those features. The dynamic between these two is mediated by Athens’ inevitable defeat and by the related conflict between the History as the presentation of facts about the past, on the one hand, and as the source of future predictions, on the other. Framing this analysis are the distinctive characteristics ascribed to the Athenians as a collective and to the positions of Thucydides and Alcibiades as Athenians in exile.

Prior to the first Spartan invasion of Attica, and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War proper, Thucydides tells the story of Melesippus, the “last ambassador . . . to Athens.”\(^1\) Having been sent by Archidamus to find out if the Athenians will “give in” (ἐνδο/ιοταπερισπομενεεν, 2.12.1), he is instead refused admittance to the city and escorted out of Athenian territory:\(^2\)

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1. The phrase “the last ambassador sent to Athens” is used by Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981: ad loc. Griffith 1961: 23 notes that Melesippus’ patronymic (“the son of Diacritus”) confers “consequence on a Spartan who thereupon vanishes promptly from history, never to reappear.”

2. Citations of Thucydides’ text are from Jones and Powell 1942. Translations throughout rely on the text of Crawley in Strassler 1996, but often with modifications.
[The Athenians] sent him away before hearing him and they ordered him to be outside their borders that same day; for the future they ordered the Lacedaemonians to go back to their own borders before sending an embassy, if they wished anything. And they sent an escort with Melesippus so that he might not come into contact with anyone.

Prevented from entering and speaking inside the city, Melesippus utters a prophetic and “epic” message on the borderlands of Attica (ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀρίοις, 2.12.3) where he speaks to no one in particular and receives no direct response: “This day,” he says, “will be the beginning of great evils for the Hellenes” (ἥδε ἡ ἡμέρα τοιαπερισπομενε ἄρκσιει, 2.12.3). One effect of this anecdote is to demonstrate that Athens’ borders are both topographical and ideological; they serve as a physical barrier against an external enemy and as a political defense against “giving in.” It seems only natural, of course, that a city’s physical borders are constructed—at least in principle—to keep people, objects and ideas in or out. But the anecdote is also based on a homology between spatial and verbal displacements, i.e., between the space beyond Athens’ borders and the extra-historical (i.e., epic) content of Melesippus’ one-liner. Or, more generally, between what Melesippus says and where he says it. It might be objected that he could have made his prophecy inside the city of Athens, had he been allowed to do so. But the objection only emphasizes the rhetorical effect of the passage as it stands; Melesippus’ barred entry to the city is the spatial analogue to the generalizing truth of his prophecy in the History.

What I am calling spatial contingencies in Thucydides’ History are clearly important features in the narration of specific events, as in the story of Melesippus. What is needed, however, is a comprehensive approach to these contingencies, i.e., one that analyzes their function in the narrative at large and addresses both their historiographical and ideological effects. Two related premises frame this inquiry. First, that the city of Athens is the principal spatial referent in the History.

3. Hornblower 1991 ad loc. notes the Homeric and Herodotean resonances in Melesippus’ statement. Compare Thucydides’ own prosaic statement about the beginning of the war: “At this point the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians and their allies begins . . . ” (ἀρχεται δὲ ὁ τάλαμος ἐνθένδε ἤδη Αθηναίων καὶ Πελοποννησίων καὶ τῶν ἐκατέρως ἐναντίων, κτλ., History 2.1).

4. Melesippus’ treatment is explained by the passage of a motion (γνώµη) introduced by Pericles (2.12.1). But we are not told why the Athenians prevented the herald from communicating with anyone on his way out of Athenian territory. One reader suggests that the “simple” explanation is that the Athenians did not want the failure of his mission to be reported to the Spartans. But to the extent that this explanation relies on unreported facts, it is less simple than it seems.
and second, that Athens refers both to a set of “real” topographical features on the one hand and to a transcendent and trans-historical ideal that exceeds those features on the other. Both premises are tied to a singular if obvious fact, namely, that Athens is fighting a war that she will lose. In this respect, the *History*’s early references to the inevitability of the war (ἀναγκάσαι ἐ̋ τὸ πολεµε/ιοταπερισποmενε ν, 1.23.6) also refer—if only obliquely—to the inevitability of Athens’ defeat. That defeat is clearly a defining if continually deferred feature of the work; like his readers, Thucydides knows the outcome (and says so) and our reading of his narrative is shadowed by this knowledge. But more to the point, Athens’ eventual defeat is also the ultimate source of its transcendence, that is, of the rhetorical effects by which the city exceeds its physical and temporal limits.

In light of these premises, the *History* can be read in terms of the relative proximity of historical actors to Athens, where proximity is measured in the dynamic relationship between the physical city and its imagined ideal. One aspect of this dynamic, as noted above, is the relationship between where actors are positioned in the text vis-à-vis Athens and what they say. This relationship provides a theoretical orientation for both actors in and readers of the *History*. It is prepared for in the very first words of the work, i.e., “Thucydides the Athenian,” and has consequences that extend from the Archaeology to the narrative of events in Sicily and its aftermath. Spatial contingencies thus also refer to an implied conflict between the *History* as the presentation of facts about the past, on the one hand, and as the source of future predictions, on the other, i.e., between what Athens was and what it might have become. My overall aim is to show how these contingencies contribute to and modulate the discourse of empire in Thucydides’ narrative.

I. “THUCYDIDES THE ATHENIAN”

In addition to the paired speeches, where interlocutors from opposing sides address each other face to face (at least in principle), the *History* imposes a position on the reader that is simultaneously spatial and political, beginning with its very

6. Cf. Gribble 1999: 170 on *History* 2.65: “The crucial point of the chapter is that it places Athens, specifically Athenian failures, at the centre of the *History*’s account of why the war came to the conclusion it did.”
7. Cf. Andersen 1987: 2 on Homer’s “reluctance to tell the history of the war or even of Achilles to its very end. . . .” Also, Ober 1993: 94.
8. Cf. Ober 1994: 110 on the Demos as an “imagined entity” within Athenian civic ideology. Ober goes on to argue that, following the Sicilian debate, the Athenians “created an imaginary Sicily as an opponent for the imagined Demos” (116).
9. Cf. Porter 2006: 31 on “Athenocentrism” and Aristides’ Panathenaic Oration (c. 170 ce) which “places the Acropolis at the geographical and spiritual center of Athens and at the center of all of Greece, which in turn lies ‘at the center of the whole earth.’”
first words, “Thucydides the Athenian” (Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος, 1.1.1). This opening phrase is traditionally explained by comparison with the epic predication of identity based on the warrior’s home city or by the fact that Hecataeus and Herodotus begin their histories with similar statements. Gomme’s argument has become canonical: “Thucydides, like most Greek historians, is writing for a Greek, not for a specifically Athenian public; hence the name of his polis is given” and not his demotic, for example. But neither formal comparisons nor appeals to the historical composition of Thucydides’ primary audience are wholly satisfactory. In saying so, I do not mean that Gomme’s conclusion is wrong of course but only that it is partially right. “Thucydides the Athenian” does not simply refer to a biographical or historical fact or to an implied audience; it establishes the principal and governing subject position in the work and gives Thucydides the authority to write about a war that was “more worthy of report than any that had preceded it” (ἀξιολογώτατον τῶν προγεγεγενμένων, 1.1.1).

In short, it determines how we read and interpret the History as a whole. But insofar as Athens eventually loses the war, “Thucydides the Athenian” names both a retrospective acknowledgment of that loss and a prospective defense against it. In doing so, the phrase also alludes 10. Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. Thucydides uses his patronymic at 4.104.4 where he talks about his role as a general but refers to himself again by his polis at 5.26.1 where he is talking about his role as historian; I discuss this passage below. On 1.45.2, Gomme notes that ‘Thucydides’ use of the patronymic is “in accordance with everyday usage in Athens” while the demotic—as inscriptions demonstrate—was more common in “official documents.” Thus, for example, Thucydides uses the patronymic to identify the three Athenian generals who commanded the expedition to Corcyra in 433 (1.45.2) while the demotic is used on a financial inscription (I.G. ι 295) that names these same three generals. On the inscription, see Meritt 1928: 68–71. I have found only two similar uses of Ἀθηναῖος to identify an individual in the History, each with the article: (1) Thucydides refers to Themistocles “the Athenian” (Θεµιστοκλέα τὸν Ἀθηναίον, 1.138.6) and (2) to Demosthenes “the Athenian” in the narrative about the defense of Naupactus (Δηµοσθένης δὲ ὁ Ἀθηναῖος, 3.102.3). With respect to the latter, Gomme ad loc. says that “edd. have thought it necessary to defend (or even alter) ὁ Ἀθηναῖος. We forget that Demosthenes was not then as eminent as he is now, and that Thucydides was not writing for an Athenian audience only.” But since Demosthenes has already been named as the “general of the Athenians” (3.94.2; his patronymic will not appear until 4.66.3 and 7.16.2) and since he becomes well known in the course of the History, it is hard to know what Gomme means by “then” and “now.” If the usage is simply explained by the fact that Thucydides was writing for non-Athenians, moreover, we might expect him to identify other less well-known Athenians as such. Cf. Hornblower 1991 ad loc. and Griffith 1961: 23–31. In any event, the desire to “defend or alter” Ἀθηναῖος at 3.102.3 suggests the singularity of Thucydides’ self-attribution. Other examples are found in the History, but generally in some sort of explanatory or concessive clause, i.e., at 1.126.3, 6.59.3, and 8.74.1. Individuals from other cities are also identified by their poleis, of course, i.e., at 1.103.3, 1.108.3, 8.35.1, 8.92.8. In her discussion of the phrase “Thucydides the Athenian,” Loraux 1986b: 144n.7 expressly avoids the question of the second preface “qui mérite un développement autonome.” In the same note, she mentions those several instances in which Thucydides ends his account of each year of the war by identifying himself, as at 2.70.4: “and so ended the second year of the war which Thucydides wrote” (δεύτερον ἔτος ἐτελεύτα τῷ παλέω τῶ ὃν Θουκυδίδης ξυνέγραψεν). It may be relevant that in none of these cases does Thucydides call himself “Thucydides the Athenian.” 11. See the discussion of Loraux 1986b; also, Edmunds 1993: 841–42 on Loraux’s argument. Cf. Ober 1993: 84 on Thucydides’ establishment of himself as “the sole arbiter of the truth about the Peloponnesian War.”
to a fundamental conflict in the *History* between an immanent and a transcendent Athens, i.e., between Athens as a set of topographical features and Athens as an idea, including its function as a source of personal and authorial identity.

The contingencies associated with this position are more overtly specified in the so-called second preface in Book 5 where Thucydides first mentions his twenty-year exile from Athens after Amphipolis (424 BCE). In light of Syme’s suggestive comment that “exile may be the making of an historian” we are encouraged to ask why Thucydides does not mention his exile at the very beginning of the *History*. The fact that his absence from Athens provided him the opportunity to observe events from both sides of the conflict (5.26.5) might have been included among his programmatic statements at 1.22, for example.

Why the need for a “second” preface with its own unique evidentiary criteria? One plausible answer is that it prepares for the narration of events that take place during his exile, i.e., after the end of the Archidamian War in 421. Thus, it appears where it does in the narrative in accordance with Thucydides’ chronological scheme.

But the second preface is also the source of a longstanding and complex debate about the chronology of the *History*’s composition and publication; in other words, it is not easily explained by the strict requirements of chronology. My point, however, has less to do with the so-called “composition question” than with Thucydides’ exile as a spatially contingent position in the *History* and, in particular, with the statement that introduces the second preface, namely that he is “the same Thucydides the Athenian”:

5.26.1

The same Thucydides the Athenian wrote these things in order as each happened, accounting them by summers and winters, up to the time when the Spartans and their allies put an end to the Athenian empire, and took the long walls and the Piraeus. At this point in time the war had lasted in its entirety for twenty-seven years.


13. Of course, Thucydides’ exile can also be used to explain what he did not know. On this question, see Murray 1990: 149n.3 and the works cited there. See Forsdyke 2005: 179 with n.106 on the question of whether Thucydides’ exile was legally mandated or self-imposed.

This “same” Thucydides then goes on to tell us that he lived through the whole war, was old enough to understand it, and strove to tell the truth about it. And it is only then that he tells us about his twenty-year exile:

καὶ ξυνέβη μοι φεύγειν τὴν ἐμαυτοῦ ἐτη εἴχοσι μετὰ τὴν ἐς Ἀμφίπολιν στρατηγίαν, καὶ γενομένῳ τῷ ἀμφοτέρους τοῖς πράγμασι, καὶ οὔχ ἦσαν τοῖς Πελοποννησίων διὰ τὴν φυγήν, καθ' ἡσυχίαν τι κυτῶν μᾶλλον αἰσθέσθαι.

5.26.5

It happened to me that I was in exile from my city for twenty years after my command at Amphipolis, and being present during affairs on both sides, and not less with the Peloponnesians on account of my exile, I had the leisure to better observe each of them.

We can begin by asking if the Thucydides of 5.26 is indeed the “same” Thucydides of 1.1.1, as the statement implies. The later passage is written from his position as a returned exile and after the dissolution of the empire in 404. From this vantage point, his explicit acknowledgement of Athens’ defeat works retrospectively from the date of composition and prospectively from the dramatic date of the narrative.15 Thus, if the phrase “Thucydides the Athenian” in 1.1 signifies a kind of defense against the end of the Athenian empire, the phrase “the same Thucydides the Athenian” in 5.26 is its logical extension, made even more explicit (in retrospect) by the historian’s failure to narrate that ending.16 Both prefaces may have been written after Thucydides’ return from exile, of course. But this possibility only emphasizes how the second preface—with its explicit reference to the end of the war (μέχρι οὗ τὴν τε ἀρχήν κατέπαυσαν τῶν Ἀθηναίων Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι, 5.26.1)—constitutes an implicit commentary on the first preface with its explicit reference to the beginning of the war (ἀρχ MutableList.κτλ., 1.1.1).17

More to the point, however, the Athens to which Thucydides returns after twenty years in exile is not the same Athens he left. Moreover, the assertion of sameness only emphasizes how impossible it is for the writer of history to maintain a stable and unchangeable position with respect to the events he narrates. But my point is that this impossibility is figured in terms of the historian’s polis-specific identity and proximity; the fact that Thucydides has been away from Athens for so long, including time specifically spent among the Spartans, is the

15. See Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 on 5.26.5. Thucydides acknowledges the war’s outcome elsewhere, i.e., at 2.65.11–12, 5.26.1, and 6.16.3–4. See also the suggestive analysis of Flory 1993.

16. The History’s truncated ending has generated a number of hypotheses among ancient historians with most concluding that Thucydides had written notes for the whole work but had not yet finished it when he died sometime in the late 390s. See the recent remarks of Dewald 2005: 159–61.

pre-condition for the claim that he is the “same.” In this respect, the second preface functions as an ironic acknowledgement of the changes that have taken place during his absence, including the end of the war, the siege of the city, and the civil war that follows. In short, the returned exile cannot be the “same Thucydides the Athenian” because what it means to be an Athenian has changed in the interim.

So in spite of—or perhaps because of—the assertion that exile afforded Thucydides the freedom to better observe the events of the war, the second preface may be understood more accurately as signaling the beginning of the end, including the narrative of the disastrous expedition to Sicily. One effect of deferring mention of his exile then is to emphasize how the historian is defined by his spatial relationship to the city as a site of identity and power on the one hand (“Thucydides the Athenian”) and absence and loss on the other (“the same Thucydides the Athenian,” i.e., the returned exile). The dialogical relationship between these two positions may help explain the hesitancy or ambivalence with which Thucydides’ exile is brought into the History as a methodological principle. But in the shadow of the end of the empire the phrase “the same Thucydides the Athenian” is also a compensatory gesture manifested in the implicit assertion that Athens too is (always) “the same”; I will return to this point below. Here, the historian’s enforced absence from Athens both establishes the relationship between proximity (to the city) and identity in the History and—as a means of disavowing its negative implications—is a principal source of conceptualizing the city’s spatial and temporal transcendence.

II. “NOTHING OTHER THAN HIS OWN CITY”

But if this transcendent Athens is one effect of the historian’s absence, how is the “real” or physical city of Athens figured in the work? In Thucydides’ report of the speech in which Pericles outlines his plan to move the Athenian population inside the city proper prior to the first Spartan invasion (2.13–17; cf. 1.143.3–5; 2.62.3), the city’s material resources are enumerated in detail, including a description of its surrounding walls (2.13.3–7). One effect of this speech is to equate the people who reside within its walls with the city’s resources

18. On the sources for these events and the controversies surrounding them, see Wolpert 2002, chap. 1.

19. It might be objected that Thucydides is simply re-establishing his authorial persona in the second preface. But this objection only contributes to the point I am making by raising the question of why he needs to do so in the first place. The ambivalence I mention here is also expressed in the impersonal construction of the introductory phrase “it happened to me that I was in exile” (καὶ ξυνέβη µοι φεύγει ν, 5.26.5).

20. By “negative implications” I mean those that pertain to Thucydides’ reputation and personal circumstances. Whatever form these may have taken, they are glossed over in favor of the one positive effect of his exile, i.e., that it allowed him to see both sides of the conflict.
and capital. Thucydides then goes on to describe the political unification of Attica under Theseus (2.15–16) as a means of explaining the Athenians’ resistance to Pericles’ plan; 22

Because therefore the Athenians had held this land for so long in an independent fashion, even after they had been made to live as a single community, the majority of them from ancient times and of those who came later down to the time of this war, having been born and having lived in the country on account of their accustomed way of life, were not finding it easy to relocate along with their households, especially because they had only recently rebuilt their properties after the Persian war. They took it hard and bore it with difficulty, having to leave behind their houses and the sacred places that were hereditary in accordance with state custom, and being about to change their

21. On the equation of the city walls with the state in the History, see Ober 1985: 181–82, with n.24. Jones 2004: 8 concludes that “the walls of Athens constituted . . . the significant internal physical barrier defining not only the town and country spaces called asty and chorae (or ‘the fields’) but also, as the testimonies so clearly illustrate, a formidable social and cultural divide as well” (emphasis in the original). Cf. Wolpert 2002: 121 on the lists of Athens’ “misfortunes” following the city’s final defeat in 404: “The demolition of the Long Walls, the only item included in all lists, symbolized the full extent of Athenian defeat more than any other image.”

22. On the unification of Athens and Attica into a “region-state,” see Anderson 2003, esp. the Introduction and chap. 1. Cf. Debnar 2001: 46: “The construction of the Long Walls signaled [the Athenians’] willingness to withdraw from their countryside; as a naval power they could supply their city from overseas.” Given Thucydides’ description of the Athenians’ reluctance to leave the countryside at 2.16.2, their “willingness” is perhaps less certain than Debnar suggests. Commenting on this passage and on AthPol 27.2, Jones 2004: 8 suggests that “prior to the confinement, Athenians in the country had resisted involvement with the town and its institutions.” The passages he discusses, however, speak less of a prior resistance than of the gradual acceptance of a population that had been forcibly urbanized. In any event, I take the phrase “nothing other than his own polis” at History 2.16.2 to signify Thucydides’ understanding of the city as an ideological and political comparandum, whether or not the rural population held this view. Ober 1985 argues that Pericles’ strategy was not to abandon the countryside outright but relied on a “cavalry/garrison defense strategy” like that employed by the Syracusans (177). He sees the political benefit of playing down this defensive approach in favor of Pericles’ “long range strategy, which was based on sea power and empire” (182). See also Bosworth 2000: 7–8 and Rood 1998: 138–42.
way of life as each one was leaving behind nothing other than his own city.\textsuperscript{23}

The notion that a \textit{polis} can be equated with a person’s \textit{oikia} and \textit{hiera} may not seem unusual: Hornblower comments that the phrase “his own city” refers to the Attic demes.\textsuperscript{24} But even if this is the correct sense, Thucydides is clearly calling attention to the equation by implying that the pain of leaving behind one’s accustomed dwelling place is heightened by referring to it as a \textit{polis} (rather than a \textit{deme}). In the previous chapter, Thucydides had concluded his account of the unification of Attica by remarking that, because of their ancient habitation of the Acropolis, the Athenians still refer to it as “the city” (χαλείται δὲ διὰ τὴν παλαιὰν ταύτη κατοίκησιν καὶ ή ἀκρόπολις μέχρι τούδε ἐτι ύπ’ Ἀθηναίων πόλις, 2.15.6).\textsuperscript{25} This emphatic attribution lends support to the idea that in the phrase “nothing other than his own city,” \textit{polis} is more than an equivalent for “deme.” Rather, it refers to a unique conflation of space and time or, more specifically, to an essential and original Athens. This is the city that each Athenian may conceivably consider “nothing other than his own” in 2.16.2.\textsuperscript{26} Another way of putting the matter is to say that, for an Athenian, there is no other city worth equating with “his own.” But at the same time this \textit{polis} transcends the temporal and spatial limits of “the city” as a reference to the ancient acropolis; here each Athenian’s “own city” is a state of mind created out of the necessity of leaving it behind.

The paradigmatic act of leaving the city behind is of course the Athenians’ abandonment of Athens to the Persians before the Battle of Salamis, an event referred to here (\textit{ta Medika}) and already described in some detail by the Athenian

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\item \textsuperscript{23} On the difficulties of the passage, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. Also, Fantasia 2003 ad loc. on [Aristotle] \textit{Ath. Pol.} 24.1. The phrase “nothing other than a city” occurs only one other time in the \textit{History}, namely, where Thucydides remarks that the retreating Athenian army in Sicily looked like “nothing other than a besieged city in flight, and not a small one” (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο ἢ πόλει ἐκπεπολιορκηµένη ἐκέρασαν ὑποφευγούση, καὶ ταύτῃ οὐ σµικραπερισποµενε, 7.75.5). Here too this other “city” is defined against the city to which the soldiers are heading, i.e., Athens. I discuss this passage in more detail below.
\item \textsuperscript{24} On the debates over the meaning of \textit{oikia} (residential house or nucleated settlement?) in rural Attica, see Jones 2004: 17–47.
\item \textsuperscript{25} In answer to my question whether a deme can be called a \textit{polis} in the epigraphical sources, Stephen Lambert referred me to SEG 21.541 (375–350 BC) in which he suggests that the phrase \textit{ἐπὶ πόλει Ἐρχ(ι)απερισποµενεσι} means “on the acropolis of [the deme] Erchia.” Here \textit{polis} is not the equivalent of deme, but (at least in the fourth century) refers to a well-known part of the deme, perhaps its earliest settlement(?). On this point, see also Vanderpool 1965: 23. Cf. Loraux 1986: 281–82 on the identification of “ancient Athens . . . with the Acropolis” in Aristophanes’ \textit{Knights}.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Cf. Ober 1985: 175–76: “It seems likely that Pericles’ great building program had the effect of fostering the identification of the \textit{asty} with the polis as a whole.” The question remains whether this effect would have been experienced by the urban or rural populations, or both. Immediately following the passage under discussion, Thucydides uses \textit{asty} to describe the arrival of the rural population into the city proper: “And when they arrived in the \textit{asty} . . . (ἐπειδή τε ἀφίκοντο ἐ̋ τὸ ἄστυ, κτλ., 2.17.1). This suggests a distinction between \textit{polis} as an abstraction and \textit{asty} as a physical locale.
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envoys at Sparta in Book 1 (to be discussed below). Mentioned by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as part of his explanation of why historical events do not have the *telos* necessary for poetry, the Battle of Salamis has become emblematic of historical events in general by the fourth century; it also serves as a metonym for the Persian Wars and for the emergence of Greek hegemony in the Mediterranean (*Poetics* 1459a17-b8; cf. Herodotus *Histories* 7.166; 8.60–61; 8.144.2–3). For our purposes, however, the significance of Salamis does not lie in the outcome of the battle itself, but in the abandonment of Athens as its precondition. When Thucydides uses the figure of “leaving behind nothing other than his own city” to describe the Athenian who is forced to leave the Attic countryside, he gives an ironic twist to this defining act of Athenian political and military history. For in abandoning their “own cities” these Athenians are compelled to move inside the walls of Athens itself where, crammed into stifling huts and living even in the sacred places (τὰ τε ἱερὰ, 2.52.3), they will die of the plague and turn the city into an open grave (2.52). In the most literal sense, this unexpected outcome is due to an unforeseeable act of nature (cf. 2.61.3). But its ironic effects are rooted in “the city” as an abstract entity. The city that the Athenians are forced to leave behind, in other words, is an idealized version of the city they are compelled to enter and in which their physical sufferings are so graphically described by Thucydides.

Stahl has noted how the narrative of the plague in Athens contains elements similar to that of the Theban attack on Plataeae, the event that marks the beginning of the war proper (ἀρχέται δὲ ὁ πόλεμος, 2.1.1; cf. 5.20.1). Like the plague, this episode too is characterized by vicissitudes of nature and by reversals in the aims and expectations of the actors. Both events, according to Stahl, are models for war’s unexpected outcomes and “for the failure of a well-conceived plan.” This conclusion pertains most significantly to the plans for an overall Athenian victory in the war, as laid out in Pericles’ first speech in the *History* (1.140–144) and as explicitly recapitulated in the speech he delivers in defense of moving the Athenians into the city in Book 2 (ἅπερ καὶ πρότερον, 2.13.2). Thucydides sums up the latter speech as follows:

ταύτα γὰρ ὑπήρχεν Ἀθηναίοις καὶ οὐκ ἔλασσον ἔκαστα τούτων, ὅτε ἤ ἐσβολὴ τὸ πρῶτον ἐμελλε Πελοπονησίων ἑσεθαι καὶ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον


28. In stating from one sentence to the next that the plague’s arrival in Attica came within a few days of the Spartans’ arrival, and in using similar phrases to describe both (ἐς τὴν Ἀττικήν, 2.47–2; ἐν τῇ Αττικῇ, 2.47.3), Thucydides effectively equates the two.


30. Stahl 2003: 67–70; the quotation is on page 68.
Such were the resources of Athens in the different departments when the Peloponnesian invasion was about to commence and they were entering into a state of war. Pericles also said other things that he was accustomed to say in order to show that [the Athenians] would prevail in the war.

The fact that Thucydides reports this speech in indirect discourse may suggest that he is already distancing himself from the optimism he attributes to Pericles in the earlier speech. And if his reference to Pericles’ “customary” statements about the expectation of an Athenian victory verges on being dismissive, then the description of the city’s financial resources and protective walls is close to hyperbolic. It is true, of course, that just as the vicissitudes of nature do not negate the soundness of the Theban plan of attack on Plataea, so the plague does not necessarily negate the soundness of Pericles’ removal plan. But in both narratives, the unexpectedness of events and their consequences are elaborated in terms of the physical confines of the city, between the promise of security and the danger of isolation and death. The Thebans are captured and killed because, like the Athenians during the plague, they are trapped within the city walls (History 2.4.3). The difference, of course, is that the Thebans are trapped within their enemy’s walls while the Athenians are confined within their own. But this difference only emphasizes the ambiguous nature of a city’s physical defenses and, more specifically, the vulnerability of Pericles’ faith in an overall Athenian victory.

The defeat of the Thebans in Plataea also prepares for the final fate of that city in 427 when the Thebans (with the support of the Spartans) will raze it to its foundations (ἐδαφος, 3.68.3) and, as Thucydides succinctly puts it, Plataea will come to an end:\footnote{On this episode, see Stahl 2003: 69–71; Luginbill 1999: 193ff.; and Debnar 2001: 125ff.}

\begin{verbatim}
καὶ τὰ μὲν κατὰ Πλάταιαν έτει τρίτω καὶ ἐνενηκοστῷ ἐπειδὴ Ἀθη-
ναίων ξύμμαχοι ἐγένοντο οὔτως ἐτελεύτησεν.
\end{verbatim}

3.68.5

These things happened in Plataea in the ninety-third year after [the Plataeans] became the allies of Athens and thus the city came to an end.

In the case of Plataea, Thucydides gives us the narrative of a city with a beginning, a middle and an end.\footnote{Cf. White 1987: 174: “By discerning the plots ‘prefigured’ in historical actions by the agents that produced them and ‘configuring’ them as sequences of events having the coherency of stories

:\footnote{Edaphos appears only three times in the History: 1.102, 3.68.3, 4.109.1. The first is in the Archaeology where instructively the counter-intuitive relationship between the hypothetical remains of Athens and Sparta and their former power is described (1.10.1).}}
the total destruction—of Athens that will be acknowledged at 5.26 and has already been alluded to in those poleis abandoned to the Spartans at 2.16. Here the single most disastrous consequence of war is exemplified in the near annihilation of a city whose end comes about in part as the result of its alliance with Athens. But my point is that the spatial contingencies that structure the Plataean narrative are not simply statements of historical fact. Rather, taken together with the narrative of Pericles’ removal plan and the plague in Athens, they signify the potentially dangerous effects of a city’s physical boundaries in the time of war. And in so doing, they point to the benefits of conceptualizing the city as more than the sum of its physical features. In the act of leaving “his own” city behind (ἀπολείπων, 2.16.2) the individual Athenian—like the exiled historian—becomes an agent of this conceptualization.

III. “THE CITY OF BRIEF HOPE”

In a recent article, Francois Hartog summarizes the place of the Trojan War in the Western imaginary:

In Greece all begins with the epic. With it, through it, the Trojan War, which for ten years pitted the Achaeans against the Trojans, became the “axial” event situated at the edge of history. At first it was only a Greek event, then a Roman one, and finally a Western one.

Part of the truth of Hartog’s statement has to do with the spatial contingencies of this “axial event,” beginning with the fact that the proximity of warriors to their home cities is a foundational and generative thematic in Greek narratives of military conquest; I will return to this point in more detail in the following section. The Greeks leave home and win the war while the Trojans fight in defense of a city that will be destroyed in the process. This difference is a given of

with a beginning, middle, and end, historians make explicit the meaning implicit in historical events themselves.”

33. See Xenophon Hellenica 2.2.19–20 where the historian reports that Theban demands for the destruction of Athens are rejected by the Spartans. On the sources for this episode, see Wolpert 2002: 13.

34. Cf. Connor 1984: 92 with n.30. Also, Pelling 2000: 61, with the sources cited in n.2: “Plataea had been an ally of Athens for ninety-two years. Victory over Persia had been won there in 479; the allies had then sworn an oath to liberty, guaranteeing (so it seems) Plataean independence and binding the swearers to protect Plataean soil. No wonder the town’s destruction lived on in Athenian memory, a scar in the popular historical consciousness, a perpetual reproach to Thebes and Sparta and an emblem of the horrors of war.”


36. On the epic hero’s return see Thalmann 1992 and Malkin 1998. The hero’s departure and contested return to his city are also essential features of the plots of Attic tragedy from Aeschylus’ Persians to Sophocles’ Oedipus the King and Euripides’ Helen. The longing for home also has its modern cultural forms, both high and popular. See, for example, Romanyshyn 1989: 10–11 where he suggests that “technology at its deepest cultural-psychological levels is a dream about home.”
the epic narrative and inaugurates a distinction between the city as an immediate physical or topographical space and the city as a distant and longed-for ideal, i.e., as the object of nostos.

In the Archaeology, Thucydides outlines the development of cities and the competition for wealth and power that leads to intercity warfare and then precedes and prepares for the Greek expedition to Troy (καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ μᾶλλον ἵδη ὄντες ὑπερεν κρόνῳ ἐπὶ Τροίαν ἐστράτευσαν, 1.8.3–4; cf. 1.5.3). And it is possible, he says, “to compare the sorts [of campaigns] that took place before it with this campaign [to Troy]” (εἰκάζει ν δὲ χρὴ καὶ ταύτη τῇ στρατείᾳ οἷα ἦν τὰ πρὸ αὐτῆς, 1.9.4). In other words, the Trojan War is not simply a point of departure in Thucydides’ chronological narrative of the distant past but an event that—as Hartog implies—has explanatory potential. This potential is realized in the conclusion that both the Trojan and the Peloponnesian Wars were caused by the fear of a rival city, and culminates in Thucydides’ much discussed statement that the Spartans’ fear of Athens’ increasing greatness was the “truest cause” of the latter:

τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγω, τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγούμην μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λαχεδαμόνιοις ἀναγκάσας ἐς τὸ πολέμην. αἱ δ’ ἐς τὸ φανερὸν λεγόμεναι αἰτίαι αἵδ’ ἦσαν ἐκατέρων, αἱ’ ὁν λύσαντες τὰς σπονδὰς ἐς τὸν πόλεμον κατέστησαν.

1.23.6; cf. 1.9.3

For I think that the truest cause [of the war], but the one most hidden in speech, was the growing greatness of Athens, which instilled fear in the Lacedaimonians and made it necessary for them to go to war. The following reasons, however, were expressed in the open by each side and it is from these that they broke the treaties and embarked on war.

Given as the first-person opinion of the histor (μοι δοκεῖ, 1.9.3; ἡγούμη, 1.23.6), fear acts as a corrective to the traditional causes of both wars, i.e., the oaths sworn to Tyndareus and the breaking of the Thirty Years’ Peace, respectively. Unlike the breaking of an oath or a treaty, however, fear is not an act or an event but a collective state of mind that exceeds the evidentiary criteria Thucydides sets


39. Cf. Gribble 1998: 47, with n.42. Gribble excludes 1.1–23 from his discussion of “narrator interventions” in the History on the grounds that a “prologue is not an intervention.” But first-person statements in the prologue prepare for those in what Gribble calls the “narrative proper.”
The conclusion that fear made this war necessary (ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεµε/ιοταπερισποmενε ν, 1.23.6; cf. 1.33.3: εἴ τις ὑµ/οmεγαπερισποmενεν µὴ οἴεται ἔσεσθαι, κτλ.) also suggests an inverse relationship between the inevitability of war and the extent to which its causes are tangible and demonstrable; the less tangible the causes (or the more “hidden in speech”), the more necessary the war.\(^{41}\)

Linked to hypotheses about the legendary causes of the Trojan War and expressed in the language of concealment (ἀφανή̋), Spartan fear is directed at the “growing greatness of Athens” (τοὺ̋ ᾿Αθηναιοι̋ … µεγάλου̋ γιγνοµένου̋, 1.23.6).\(^{42}\) This growth is contextualized within the overall growth of Hellas (1.13.1) and specified in the differences between the territories of Attica and the Peloponnesus:

διὰ γάρ ἁρετὴν γῆς αἱ τε δυνάµεις τισὶ µείζου̋ς ἐγγιγνόµεναι στάσεις ἐνεποίου̋ν εξ ὧν ἐφθείροντο, καὶ ἄµα ὑπὸ κάλλοσίς µᾶλλον ἐπεβουλευόντο. τὴν γο/υπσιλονπερισποmενεν ᾿Αττικὴν ἐκ το/υπσιλονπερισποmενε ἐπὶ πλε/ιοταπερισποmεστον διὰ τὸ λεπτόγεων ἀστασίαστον ο/υπσιλονµελισπερισποmενεσαν ἄνθρωποι ὤ/ιοτασυβοmεγακουν οἱ αὐτοὶ αἰεί.

1.2.4–6

On account of the excellence of the land [in the Peloponnesus], and because the power of some men was greater as a result, they engaged in civil war out of which they were destroyed, and at the same time they were especially subject to invasion by foreigners. But Attica, because its soil was especially poor, was without civil war and the people who lived there were always the same.

Thucydides goes on to say that Athens became a safe haven for victims of civil and foreign wars and that, because of the increase in the citizen population that

\(^{40}\) In contrast, the desire to enslave others is the cause of barbarian (i.e., Persian) hostility (ὁ βάρβαρο̋ τοµεγαπερισποmενε/ιοτασυβοmεγα µεγάλω/ιοτασυβοmεγα στόλω/ιοτασυβοmεγα ἐπὶ τὴν ῾Ελλάδα δουλωσόµενος ἤλθεν, 1.18.2). Cf. 1.141.1 where Pericles implies that the Spartans aim to enslave Athens. Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. call this “an exaggerated, but forceful expression.”

\(^{41}\) Cf. Stahl 2003: 25: “The larger motifs that remain unalterable in the course of history are therefore the desire for power (or for money, as the case may be) and fear. Both are objective factors [objektive Faktoren] which give impulse to political events” (emphasis added). This comment is made in the context of Stahl’s argument against importing modern principles of causation into the History. But the idea that fear is an “objective factor” diminishes the extent to which this emotion constructs, rather than simply responds to, its object, i.e., Athens. Recent events in US foreign policy may be said to illustrate the inverse relationship suggested here. See also Ober 1993: 89–90.

\(^{42}\) This act of concealment is retrojected back to the beginning of the war and ascribed to unspecified participants so that, on the literal level, what is concealed in the History itself is both the identity of those who knew the “truest cause” (but didn’t admit it) and their reasons for doing so. Ste. Croix 1972: 58 argues that Thucydides is referring to the Spartans in both cases: “just as the prophasis in 23.6 is the explanation of the Peloponnesian decision to go to war, the aitiai are the grounds of complaint openly expressed by the Peloponnesians in their official decisions and propaganda . . . ” (emphasis in the original).
resulted, the city sent out colonies (ἀποικίας ἐξέπεμψαν, 1.2.6). The “historical failings” of this account are not my concern here, except insofar as such “failings” may be pertinent to the spatially contingent aspects of Thucydides’ aitiological narrative.

This narrative continues in the speech of the Corinthians to the assembled allies at Sparta, in which they sum up their account of the “great differences” (µεγάλων τῶν διαφερόντων, 1.70.1) between the Athenians and the Spartans in terms of what have been called their “national character traits”:

καὶ μὴν καὶ ἄοκνοι πρὸς ύμᾶς µελλητάς καὶ ἀποδηµηταί πρὸς ἐνδηµοτάτους' οἴονται γὰρ οἱ µὲν τῇ ἀποσίλα ἀν τι χτάσθαι, ύµείς δὲ τῷ ἐπελθεῖν καὶ τὰ ἐτοίµα ἀν βλάψαι.

1.70.4

Moreover, they [the Athenians] act without hesitation in contrast to you who are procrastinators, and they leave their city in contrast to you who remain in yours; for they believe that there is something to be gained by their absence while you think on the contrary that by setting out, you might even harm the things you have at hand.

The opposition here between those who leave (ἀποδηµηταί) and those who stay put (ἐνδηµότατοι) may be overly formulaic, just as its truth-value is weakened by the fact that it is put in the mouth of the Corinthian envoys. The intended effect of the speech is to induce the Spartans to act more like the Athenians, principally (and not a little ironically) by taking swift action in invading Attica.

43. The problematic phrase at 1.2.6, διὰ τὰς µετοικίας ἐς τὰ ἄλλα µὴ ὁµοίως αὐξηθῆναι, is discussed by Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. See also Hunter 1982: 21 with n.10, and Hornblower 1991 ad loc.

44. Cf. Hornblower 1991: 8: “We misunderstand the Archaeology if we treat it as a unit apart; and if we neglect its literary function through concentrating too severely on its historical failings” (emphasis in the original).

45. On these “national character traits,” see Griebble 1998: 56, with n.77; Cartledge, in Strassler 1996: 591; Connor 1984: 166; Zumbrunnen 2002. Raafraub 1994 argues that these characteristics are evidence for the connection between democracy and imperialism in Athenian civic discourse: “It seems possible . . . that the idea of a collective Athenian character portrait linking imperialism and democracy emerged only during the Periclean era, not long before its first attestation in situations described by Thucydides” (121). As I will argue below, however, the explanatory value of this “portrait” is compromised over the course of the History so that this connection—while persuasive—is also tenuous. Raafraub notes (145) that the connection is based on the Athenians’ ongoing successes in warfare and expansion. But in the History such successes are in constant conflict with the certainty of Athens’ final defeat.

46. Earlier in their speech, the Corinthians criticize the Spartans for allowing the Athenians to fortify their city and build the long walls after the Persian defeat (1.69.1). Thus, the Athenians are characterized both by their building of defensive walls and by their willingness to venture beyond them. Strassler 1996: 50 notes that, in contrast, “Sparta, alone among important Greek cities, had no defensive wall in 479.”

47. Cf. Kallet 2001: 40. The terms ἀποδηµηταί and ἐνδηµότατοι are rather rare in general and appear only here in the History.
(κατὰ τάχος ἐσβαλόντες ἐς τὴν Ἀττικήν, 1.71.4). In other words, this essential difference between the two cities is introduced only to be subverted by a logic intended to persuade the Spartans to be more like the Athenians. As a result, the question is not—in Gomme’s words—whether Thucydides actually believed in the “historical content” of the speech.  

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In introducing the speech of the Athenian envoys that follows, Thucydides says that their intent was to convince the Spartans to “turn towards tranquility instead of war” (νομίζοντες μάλλον ἂν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῶν λόγων πρὸς τὸ ἰσιράζειν τραπέζακα ἤ πρὸς τὸ πολεμεῖν, 1.72.1), i.e., to play to the Spartans’ reported tendency to procrastinate and to stay at home.  

The Athenians then proceed to corroborate the Corinthians’ judgment of themselves when they champion their former willingness to leave their city and homes behind before the battle of Salamis (1.74.2–3).  

And they conclude their speech by saying that they “set out with determination from a city that no longer existed and ran a risk for the sake of a city that existed in brief hope” (ἡµεῖς δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς οὐκ ὦσις ἕτω ὁρµόµενοι καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐν βραχείᾳ ἐλπίδι οὐσίας κυδονεύοντες, 1.74.3; cf. 4.65.4). This highly rhetorical statement, based on competing conditions of existence, links the spatial and ideological contingencies that structure the Athenians’ victory at Salamis; here the city is simultaneously a physical point of departure and an idea—based on a hoped-for return—that exceeds that physical point.

But the meaning of the Athenians’ reputation for being ἀποδηµηταί must also be considered in the context of a similar act of daring that leads not to victory, but to defeat. In his description of the fleet’s departure for Sicily, Thucydides specifies the Athenians’ collective daring in terms of how far from home the fleet must sail:  


49. Cf. White 1999: 7: “any attempt to comprehend how historical discourse works to produce a knowledge-effect must be based not on an epistemological analysis of the relation of the mind of the historian to a past world but, rather, on a scientific study of the relation of the things produced by and in language to the other kinds of things that comprise the common reality.”

50. Scholars have found this speech as a whole to be “awkward” both because it seems to interrupt what would otherwise be a “well-balanced” debate and because, in the speech that follows, Archidamus makes no direct response to the Athenians’ provocative statements. But the resulting questions about whether the speech was actually delivered in 432 or whether it was invented and inserted into the narrative at a later date only lead to further conjectures or, more seriously, to circular reasoning. Thucydides claims both that the Athenian envoys delivered such a speech and that its content is consistent with what they would have said (cf. 1.22.1). For a summary of the scholarly debate, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981: vol. 1, 252–55. See also Hornblower 1987: 59–60.

51. On this passage, see the comments of Euben 1986: 374–75. Zumbrunnen 2002: 578–80 argues—although not in so many words—that tropos refers to the precedent provided by past actions.

52. Cf. Hermocrates’ prescient remark at 6.33.5: “Few indeed have been the large armaments, either Hellenic or barbarian, that have gone far from home and been successful” (ὦλγοι γὰρ δῆ στόλοι
καὶ ο στόλος οὐχ ἦσον τολμής τε θαμβεί καὶ οὐκ ἤλπις λαμπρότητι
περιβόητοι ἐγένετο ἢ στρατιάς πρὸς οὐς ἐπήσαν ὑπερβολἠ καὶ ὁτι
μεγίστος ὤρη διάλους ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκείας καὶ ἔπι μεγίστῃ ἔλπις τῶν
μελλόντων πρὸς τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἐπεχειρήθη.

Indeed the expedition became not less talked about for its wonderful
boldness and for the splendor of its appearance, than for its overwhelming
strength as compared with the peoples against whom it was directed, and
for the fact that this was the longest sailing from home to date, and that
it was attempted with the greatest hope for the future considering the
resources at hand.

In retrospect, this description of the bravura display of Athenian daring becomes
the ironic prefiguration of the city’s greatest tactical defeat just as the description
of that defeat looks back to the devastating effects of the plague in Athens.53
Like the victims of the plague, the Athenian prisoners in Sicily will be kept in
stiffly overcrowded conditions, will suffer from hunger and thirst and, when
they die, will be left “heaped together, one upon the other” (τῶν νεκρῶν ὡμοί ἐπ’
ἀλλήλους ξυννυκτίμενον, 7.87.2; cf. 2.52.1–3).54 Thus, if the Athenians’ daring
is defined in terms of their willingness to sail far from home, their vulnerability
is defined in terms of their suffering under confined conditions like those they
endured inside the city at the beginning of the war.

But what does this general conclusion have to do with the aitiological dis-
course of the History, i.e., with Thucydides’ assertion that the “truest cause” of
the war was the Spartans’ fear of Athens’ “growing greatness” and that this fear
made the war necessary (τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἠγούμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ
φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμόνιοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολέμειν, 1.23.6)? In
Pericles’ first speech to the Athenians, he too argues for the necessity of the war:

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ ὅτι ἀνάγκη πολέμειν, ἢν δὲ ἑκούσιοι μᾶλλον δεχώμεθα,
ἤσον ἐγκεισομένους τοὺς ἐναντίους ἐξομέν, ἐκ τοῦ μεγίστων
χινδύνων ὅτι καὶ πόλει καὶ ἰδιώτη ἡμείς μέγίστῳ διέργονται.
οὶ γούν πατέρες ἠμῶν ὑποστάντες Μήδους καὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ τοσοῦτο
ὄρμωμενοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἐκλιπόντες, γνώμη τε πλέον ἢ
tύχη καὶ τόλμη μείζον ἡ δυνάμει τῶν τε βάρβαρον ἀπεώσαντο καὶ ἐς

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54. These parallels are also noted by Connor 1984: 204 with n.51.
It must be understood that it is necessary to go to war and that the more we are willing to accept it, the less vehement will be the enemies we face. It is also necessary to understand that from the greatest dangers the greatest honors accrue to both city and individual. Indeed your fathers, standing against the Medes, and beginning without the sorts of advantages we have, but even leaving behind those they had, with more wisdom than fortune and with daring greater than their power, drove back the barbarian and led the way to the present circumstances. It is not fitting [for us] to be inferior to [literally: be left behind] these men, but we must repel the enemy in every way possible and attempt to bestow no less on those who come after us.

Here Pericles does not refer to Salamis directly but he does so indirectly by alluding to what the Athenians of an earlier generation left behind (ἐκλιπόντες). This indirectness confirms both the recognition value and the paradigmatic force of this event in Athenian self-representation. The progression of thought from war’s necessity, to the relationship between danger and honor, to the (indirect) example of Salamis is clear enough, if somewhat circular: we must go to war; war brings honor; our ancestors went to war and won (and we honor them); we must live up to their example (by winning the war and being honored in turn). Pericles does not appeal to any immediate causes of the war but to a proximate cause (the acquisition of honor) and to precedent where the force of this precedent is emphasized in the implicit comparison between those ancestors who left their property behind and those who must not now be left behind or “inferior” (ὡν οὐ χρὴ λείπεσθαι).

This figurative use of *leipomai* to mean “inferior” is not uncommon in the *History* (1.10.3; 2.85.2; 5.69.1; 7.70, etc.); the fact that it also refers to the “survivors” of the war will be discussed in the following section. Here its effect is to equate the Athenians’ willingness to leave their property/city behind with the proof of their superiority in war. Pericles’ words also imply that, as a precedent, the willingness of the previous generation to go to war makes it necessary for the present generation to do so. The fact that this argument is less than logical only demonstrates again the causal force of the Athenians’ reputation for being ἀποδηµηταί in the *History*. But it also brings us back to the historian’s earlier statement that the Spartans’ fear of Athens’ “growing greatness” made the war inevitable (1.23.6). For just prior to Pericles’ statement about the necessity of war, he too talks about fear:

55. At 1.141.1 Pericles implies that if the Athenians do not go to war, they will be enslaved, no matter if the reason (*prophasis*) is great or small.
I have many other reasons to be hopeful about the outcome, as long as you are willing neither to expand your empire while you are at war nor to succumb to self-chosen dangers. In fact, I am more afraid of our homegrown errors (τὰς οἰκεῖας ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίας) than I am the plans of the enemy.

That this fear is justified, i.e., that the Athenians do succumb to their own “homegrown errors,” is the point of Thucydides’ later summary of events following Pericles’ death. There he reminds his readers of Pericles’ earlier admonitions and says that the Athenians did the exact opposite of what Pericles’ advised (οἱ δὲ ταῦτά τε πάντα ἐς τοῦναντίον ἔπρακσιαν, 2.65.7). The factors governing these events are the internal or private differences (τὰς ίδιας διαφοράς, 2.65.12) that crippled the Athenian war effort and led to the city’s final defeat (2.65.12). But the “error” specified by name is the Sicilian Expedition (ἡμαρτήθη καὶ ο ἐς Σικελίαν πλοῦς, 2.65.11). Obviously written after the end of the war, this chapter shows both that Pericles’ fear was prescient and that his hope for the future was misplaced (πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἔχω ἐλπίδα τοῦ περιέσεσθαι, 1.141.1). Or rather, that Thucydides makes Pericles a catalyst for these responses in the History.

Thucydides will subsequently attribute this same misplaced hope to the Athenians as a collective when, as we have seen, he says that the Sicilian Expedition became famous for the fact that it was “the longest sailing from home to date, and that it was attempted with the greatest hope for the future considering the resources at hand” (μέγιστο ἤδη διάπλου ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκείας καὶ ἐπὶ μεγίστη ἐλπίδι τῶν μελλόντων πρὸς τά ὑπάρχοντα ἐπεχειρήθη, 6.31.6). As the object of misplaced hope, the Athenians’ “longest sailing from home” is the most spectacular example of their “homegrown errors” (τὰς οἰκείας ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίας). Read against the detailed description of the many who set out on that long voyage to Sicily (6.31; cf. 7.75.6) Thucydides’ terse observation that “few of the many returned home” (καὶ ὀλίγοι ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπὶ οἴκου ἀπενόστησαν, 7.87.6) gives a particularly ironic connotation to Pericles’ statement that it is not fitting for the Athenians to be “left behind” (οὐ χρὴ λείπεσθαι, 1.144.4). For if the former description is close to epic in scale, the language of heroic return (aponostēθι) in the latter emphasizes both the similarities and the dissimilarities

56. See Gribble 1999: 169–75 on 2.65 and the general theme of the destructive effects of private interests and “individualism” on Athenian political life following the death of Pericles.
between the return of the unnamed few to Athens and the return of the lone Odysseus to Ithaca.\textsuperscript{57}

But more to the point, if the rhetoric of Athenian boldness and hoped-for victory is confirmed by a willingness to leave the city behind, the resulting defeat in Sicily (including its similarity with the physical effects of the plague) figures Athens as the site of an idealized or epic return. In this respect, the Spartan fear of the Athenians’ expansionist policies—what Pericles more pointedly calls their desire to expand their empire—is less the “truest cause” of the war than a projection of the fear that Thucydides attributes to the city’s “first man” (τοῦ πρῶτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχῆ, 2.65.10). More than “the plans of the enemy,” the object of Pericles’ fear is the future of a city that, as Thucydides’ readers know, exists only in “brief hope” (ἐν βραχεία ἐλπίδι, 1.74.3). And insofar as the “longest sailing from home” is equated with the Athenians’ “greatest hope for the future” (μέγιστο οἰκεία ἐλπίδι τομεγαπερισπομενεν µελλόντων, 6.31.6), the failed expedition to Sicily is the source of that knowledge. In short, the Athenians’ famed willingness to leave their city behind—including the idealization of the city that results—may be understood as the necessary antidote to being confined within it.

IV. “MEN ARE THE CITY”

Faced with the major defeat in Sicily, Nicias delivers a speech to the assembled Athenian and allied soldiers in which he begins by telling them that it is necessary to have hope (ἐλπίδα χρὴ ἔχει ν, 7.77.1) and ends with the maxim that “Men are the city, not walls or ships empty of men” (ἄνδρε ἀνδρ/ομεγαπερισπομενεν κεναί, 7.77.7; cf. 1.73 and 1.143.5). Scholars frequently note that Nicias’ statement is a commonplace; Connor calls it “trite.”\textsuperscript{58} As another example of misplaced hope and of the conflict between an immanent and a transcendent city, however, the statement is instructive. For if the version of the maxim in Sophocles’ \textit{OT} is closest to the one attributed to Nicias, it also demonstrates what is distinctive about Nicias’ adaptation. In Sophocles’ play, the chorus ask Oedipus to find a remedy for the plague and comment that, “It is better to rule [a city] with men than to rule an empty [city]. For neither a wall nor a ship is anything if it is bereft of men when they do not occupy it [with you]” (ξυν ἀνδράσιν κάλλιον

\textsuperscript{57} Connor 1984: 162 with n.9 comments on the allusions that “associate Sicily with the forces that impede Odysseus on his return to Ithaca.” On the thematic resonances of \textit{aposte} in the \textit{History}, see Frangoulidis 1993: 100–102 and Allison 1997: 512–15.

Nic... will no longer be a city (or at least one worth ruling).

Nicias offers a more radical version of this idea, namely, that men are the city. And he equates Athens not with the men who dwell within it but with its troops in the field. In fact, the metonymic effect of his statement depends on the fact that the troops are not in the city or rather, that the city is an empty space (κεναί, cf. OT 54) because of their (the troops’) absence. In the History, the adjective *kenos* (“empty”) is used almost exclusively of ships.59 For an Athenian audience whose identity is so closely tied to its navy (cf. 1.18.2), the image of empty ships must have been particularly powerful.60 We can appreciate the full effect of this collocation in one of the few instances in which *kenos* is predicated of something other than “ships.” I refer to the introduction to Pericles’ Funeral Oration, in which Thucydides describes the “empty” coffin for the bodies of those men who are missing in action:

59. Ships are described as *kenos* at 1.27.2, 2.90.6, 2.93.4, 4.14.4, 4.25.4, 6.31.3, 8.19.3, 8.39.3, 8.57.1, and 8.103.1. This includes ships that are ready for service (6.31.3) but, most frequently, those that have been abandoned in battle. Metaphorically, *kenos* is used for the “empty” retching of plague victims (2.49.4) and “empty” or baseless panic (3.30.4). Cf. Xenophon *Hellenica* 2.1.28 where, because the crews at Aegospotami must forage for provisions, some of the ships are “empty” (κεναί); this is the cause of the decisive Athenian defeat. *At Iliad* 4.178–81, Agamemnon imagines losing the war and returning to his native land “with empty ships” (σὺν κεναί/εταλενισπερισπο/ιοτασυβετασι). Kirk 1985 ad loc. states that he is referring both to war booty and to Helen; he is also and more directly referring to Menelaos. But the image of the empty ships exceeds these literal meanings; it is the image of defeat.

60. On the professionalization and social hierarchy of the Athenian navy, see van Wees 2004 chap. 14. The fact that most “classical Athenian triremes [were] manned by lower-class professional rowers” does not undermine their tactical or symbolic value. In the Funeral Oration, Pericles makes no distinction between the classes of the war dead to whom he pays tribute. At 3.98.4 (cited by van Wees 2004: 210) Thucydides refers to the heavy-armed Athenian marines who died in Aetolia as the “best men” (βέλτιστοι δὴ ἄνδρε̋) to have died in the war. Because of the physical stamina required of them, van Wees (227) guesses that marines “were generally quite young, perhaps no older than 30.” In short, if the mature citizen hoplite is the model of ancient military virtue, the youthful marine—if not the rower—must have come to have an increasing share of this virtue during the fifth century even if this phenomenon is difficult to document in the sources. Cf. Raaffaub 1994: 138–46; Loraux 1986: 278. Wolpert 2002: 131 notes that, unlike members of the elite, “ordinary citizens became *agathoi* only by dying or were addressed as *agathoi* only after they were dead…” This changed after 404, however, when ordinary citizens who had opposed but survived the reign of the Thirty could be invested with this elite virtue.
In the funeral procession cypress coffins are borne in carts, one for each tribe; the bones are placed in the coffin belonging to their tribe. Among these is carried one empty coffin decked for the missing (τῶν ἀφανῶν), that is, for those whose bodies could not be found for taking up.

The idea that an empty coffin is the correlate of an empty ship is perhaps easy to understand; as Gomme notes, “particularly in naval battles there must have been many missing.”61 The use of ἀφανής, moreover, infers that “the missing” are more precisely those who can no longer be seen, such as the victims of drowning.62 Thus, the empty coffin is figuratively related to the empty ships that—in the course of the History—come to symbolize Athens’ defeat.63 I admit that this relationship is subtle, but if accepted it reveals the complex nature of Nicias’ statement that “Men are the city, not walls or ships empty of men.” On the one hand, the statement represents a denial of the spatial confines of walls and ships which become, in effect, immaterial; “men are the city” no matter where they are spatially. The further qualification that the city is not to be equated with empty ships then makes sense only to the extent that it resonates with other versions of the saying. For the logical connection here, unlike the example from the OT, is tenuous at best. In the History, the statement works to negate the reality of the present disaster in Sicily while it also adds an ironic qualifier to the image of the empty coffin in the Funeral Oration.

Together with the Athenians’ reference to Athens as a city that existed only in “brief hope” before the battle of Salamis (1.74.3), Nicias’ statement also betrays a nostalgia for an idealized polis, one that defies spatial definition and the situated knowledge it entails. It also idealizes the soldier in the field (or the marine on duty) as the personification of political stability and continuity. The force of this idea is illustrated in subsequent events on Samos where Thucydides reports that the Athenian army decided to preserve the “ancestral laws of the city” (πατρίου νόµους, 8.76.6) even though the Athenians in Athens had “abolished the institutions of their ancestors.” Here the army can be called a democracy in absentia as opposed to the distant city of Athens which is now (i.e., in 411)

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62. ἀφανής occupies several semantic ranges in Thucydides, beginning with the cause of the war that was “most hidden in speech” (ἀφανεστάτη δὲ λόγῳ, 1.23.6). It can refer to objects which are difficult to see (1.51.2) and, metaphorically, to hidden thoughts (3.43.4), to hidden dangers (3.45.5), to the obscurity of a man’s position in life (2.37.2) and to hidden worth (2.61.4). In a close parallel to 1.23.6, Nicias writes a letter to the Athenians about the situation in Sicily so that his opinion will not be “hidden in the reporting” (γνώµην µηδὲν ἐν τοµεγαπερισποµενειοταςυβοµεγα ἀγγέλωιοταςυβοµεγα ἀφανισθειοταπερισποµενεσαν, 7.8.2). The term seems to be used of being lost at sea at 8.38.1 where Therimenes sails away in a small boat and “disappears” (ἀφανιζόται). This usage is explicit at Xenophon Hellenica 1.6.38 where Kalikratidas falls overboard and “disappears into the sea” (εἰς τὴν θάλατταν ἠφανίσθη).
63. Van Wees 2004: 225 notes that “it was harder for shipwrecked sailors to swim to land fast enough than it was for hoplites to run to safety; casualty figures in the thousands were therefore more common in naval combat than on land.”
in the hands of the Four Hundred.\footnote{Forsdyke 2005: 181–91 refers to the forces on Samos as a “democracy in exile” (190) although “exile” seems too technical a term to be applied in this case. The soldiers on Samos and the city of Athens are explicitly equated in the remarks attributed to Alcibiades at 8.86.7 (ἦ τὸ ἐν Σάμῳ ἢ ἐκείνῳ [= the Athenians]); Thucydides subsequently refers to the army as “the demos of the Athenians in Samos” (τὸ ἐν τῇ Σάμῳ τῶν Αθηναίων δήμῳ, 8.86.8). See also Greenwood 2006: 96–98. On the oligarchic coup in general, see Kagan 1987, esp. chaps. 5 and 6 with the critical remarks of Taylor 2002.} Thucydides stresses the interdependence of these two entities when he says that the former wanted the city to “democratize” while the latter wanted the army to “oligarchize” (οἱ μὲν τὴν πόλιν ἀναγκαζόμενος δημοκρατεῖσθαι, οἱ δὲ τὸ στρατόπεδον ὀλιγαρχεῖσθαι, 8.76.1).\footnote{As if to illustrate its democratic sympathies, Thucydides reports that the forces on Samos hold assemblies (ἐκκλησίαις, 8.76.2, 8.77.1, 8.81.1, 8.82.2, 8.86.1). Cf. Forsdyke 2005: 190.} Nonetheless, the forces on Samos are “the city” insofar as Athens is a political entity as opposed to a spatial location.

Early in the History, Thucydides had said that there were many young men in both Sparta and Athens who, because of their inexperience, “grasped after war” (τότε δὲ καὶ νεότης πολλή μὲν οὐσα ἐν τῇ Πελοποννήσῳ, πολλή δὲ ἐν ταῖς Αθήναις οὐκ ἁκουσίω ὑπὸ ἀπειρία ἥπτετο τοῦ πολέμου, 2.8.1).\footnote{Cf. Stahl 2003: 191 on this passage and the concept of “safe forethought” in Thucydides.} The young men in Athens in particular were both eager to undertake the expedition to Sicily and “had every hope that they would be saved” (εὖέλπιδε ὄντε σωθῆσεται, 6.24.3).\footnote{These scenes are found on Attic black- and red-figure vases dating from the archaic and classical periods. See van Wees 2004: 97 with Plates VIII, IX and X; Osborne 2000: 35–36; Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999, esp. 53; Lissarrague 2001: 84–88 and 1989: 44; Matheson 1995: 269–76; Barringer 1995: 23–25; and Spiess 1992; cf. Ferrari Pinney 1983. Beazley vacillates on at least one vase (1054.54) which he describes as a “warrior leaving home (or returning).” Matheson 1995: 271 asks, “Are these warriors actually leaving for battle? Or are they ephebes leaving for a ceremony that will initiate them into adulthood as hoplites or cavalrymen? . . . Either way the vase paintings would depict a departure of the youth from his family, whether to a battlefield or to a new, adult, role in life.” This indecision in conflating the departure for war (with its threat of impending death) with the promise of a new or enhanced life may be an effect of the necessary uncertainty of the warrior’s return.} We may assume that these are the men in Nicias’ equation, albeit now experienced in battle and in a state of despair rather than hope. These are also the young men depicted on numerous sixth- and fifth-century Attic vases in scenes that art historians describe as “warriors departing” or “warriors leaving home.”\footnote{See Stahl 2003: 71–72.} I don’t know the source of this iconographic designation, but it is used by Beazley and others to talk about a class of vases that spans the period of the Persian to the Peloponnesian Wars. The illustrated example is typical; it shows a young warrior with a shield, helmet and spear standing before a woman who holds out her hands toward him. This Attic red-figure lekythos, of unknown provenance, is dated from between 435 and 430 (Fig. 1).\footnote{See Oakley 1990, Plate 94b-c. Oakley (6) notes that “Most hoplitodromoi and arming scenes date to this period [435–430 BCE], the latter perhaps reflecting the fact that the Peloponnesian War was taking place.” It seems to me that the war is necessarily “reflected” in these scenes. On the}
In the only book-length study of these vases, Angela Spieß notes that the earliest scenes in which weapons are given to a departing warrior are attached to the figure of Achilles and can be dated to the seventh century.\(^\text{70}\) And although there is confusion in the scholarly literature as to where many of these scenes are located (is Achilles in Phthia or on the plain of Troy?) Spieß concludes that "The arms make it clear that the warrior is preparing himself for the approaching war."\(^\text{71}\) François Lissarrague suggests that these scenes depict "the individualizing aspects of war."\(^\text{72}\) More recently, Mark Stansbury-O’Donnell has argued that "The use of such a vase in a funerary context, as many such were, creates another level of association with the theme of departure and the meaning of the actions of the deceased for family and culture."\(^\text{73}\) Stansbury-O’Donnell does not explain what he means by "another level of association"—perhaps that departure is equated with death—but his approach has the virtue of situating the vases’ iconography in the context in which they were found. And even if that context is often uncertain, these scenes present a visual antidote to the inevitable risk of being killed that the warrior faces when he leaves the city for battle. By comparison, as John Boardman has noted, dead warriors on vases are often stripped of their armor.\(^\text{74}\)

But the fact that many of these scenes are found in funerary contexts in the mid-fifth century, including on white lekythoi, suggests the darker side of Nicias’ invocation of a city that transcends its fixed spatial or physical boundaries. For while they may perform an apotropaic function, they also inevitably refer to the departing warrior’s possible (perhaps even likely) return as a corpse (or as ashes) and to the city as the site of his burial.\(^\text{75}\) Here Pericles’ claims in the Funeral Oration (\textit{History} 2.43.2–3) that the tombs of the war dead are not restricted to the place where their physical bodies are buried but consist of an “eternally remembered report” (δόξα αἰείµνηστο̋) and that “the whole earth is the tomb of famous men” (ἀνδρ/οmεγαπερισποmενεν γὰρ ἐπιφαν/οmεγαπερισποmενεν π/αλπηαπερισποmενε τάφο̋) complement but re

\(^\text{70.}^\text{Spieß 1992: 27; cf. Lissarrague 2001: 84–87 on AVB 296, 6, dated to 540 BCE. (p. 88).}\)
\(^\text{71.}^\text{Spieß 1992: 41.}\)
\(^\text{72.}^\text{Lissarrague 2001: 88; cf. Lissarrague 1989: 44.}\)
\(^\text{73.}^\text{Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 53. Lissarrague 2001: 105 states that “the painters . . . were more interested in heroes and their armor than in war and tumultuous battles.” If statistically verifiable, this interest suggests not only “all the tragic violence of war” (exemplified by Achilles’ armor) but also the deferral of that violence through images of the warrior protected against it. See also Lissarrague 1989: 44.}\)
\(^\text{75.}^\text{That those who died on the battlefield were ideally, if not necessarily, returned to the city for burial in the fifth century is clear from Pericles’ remark that the dead at Marathon were accorded the singular honor of being buried on the spot where they fell (\textit{History} 2.34.5; cf. Pausanias \textit{Periegesis} 1.29.4. On this topic see Bosworth 2000: 4, n.19 and Loraux 1986: 18–19 with n.18.}\)
Nicias’ equation; they also work to replace the physical city of Athens with a transcendent and eternal “everywhere” (πᾶσα γῆ). In both cases, the image of a transcendent city without walls or tombs memorializes the dead warrior’s heroic departure (as seen on the vases) and disavows his return (as commemorated in the tombs). I am not suggesting that Athens is to be equated with its tombs and cemeteries, of course, but that the ambivalence that structures the young warrior’s departure is both an effect of Athens’ possible and eventual defeat and a source of its transcendence.

This ambivalence is presented in the form of a bitter reversal in Thucydides’ description of the final Athenian retreat from Sicily in 413. Lacking the time and resources needed to bury the dead and aid the wounded, the army is forced to leave both behind:

δεινὸν οὖν ἦν οὐ καθ’ ἐν μόνον τῶν πραγμάτων, ὥστε τὰς τε ναῦς ἀπολωλεκότες πάσας ἀπεχώρουν καὶ ἀντὶ μεγάλης ἐλπίδος (καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἡ πόλις κινδυνεύοντες), ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀπολείψει τοῦ στρατοπέδου ξυνέβαινε τῇ τε ὀψει ἐκάστου ἄλγειν καὶ τῇ γνώμῃ αἰσθέσθαι. τῶν τε γὰρ νεκρῶν ἀτάφων ὄντων, ὥσπερ τις ὅδι τινα τῶν ἐπιτηδεῖων κεῖσαι, ἐς λύπην μετὰ φόβου καθίστατο, καὶ οἱ ζώσις καταλείπομενοι τραυματίαι τε καὶ ἀσθενεῖς πολὺ τῶν θεμυστών τοῖς ζώσι λυπηρότεροι ἄθλιωτεροι.

77. See Morris 1987 on burial practices in Athens from the Archaic period to the fifth century. Ancient cemeteries were not located in the city proper, but were closely associated with the city and were “powerful symbols of descent and citizenship in the fifth and fourth centuries” (210).

both wounded and weakened, were much more painful to the living than the dead and more worthy of pity than those who had perished.

In an ironic simile that follows, Thucydides says that this army looked like “nothing other than a besieged city in flight, and not a small one” (οὐδὲν γὰρ άλλο ἢ πόλει ἔχεπενολωροκαλβήν ἐφάκεσαν ὑπωφευγοῦσῃ, καὶ ταύτῃ οὐ συμιχρά, 7.75.5; cf. 7.11.4). The irony lies in the fact that the Athenians have clearly failed to reduce or besiege the cities they are leaving behind, coupled with the fact that an invading army in retreat constitutes a “besieged city” only as a kind of rough euphemism. The simile is governed, of course, by the emphasis Thucydides places on what the soldiers are forced to leave behind; in this case, what they leave behind are not their houses and possessions but their own dead and wounded. Thus, the scene also gives a negative connotation to Nicias’ statement that “Men are the city, not walls or ships without men in them.” For here the idea that “men are the [besieged] city” is an acknowledgment of defeat and loss. And insofar as the soldiers stand in a metonymic relationship to the city of Athens, the defeat of the army is equated with the defeat of the city (καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἡ πόλις, 7.75.2).

But at the same time, this “besieged city in flight” works, by an act of displacement, to distance this defeat from the city the soldiers had left behind with such “great hope” (μεγάλη ἐλπίς, 7.75.2) and to which they now hope to return. This, of course, is the Athens of the Funeral Oration, a city whose greatness—measured in the willingness of its citizens to leave and die on its behalf—transcends its physical and topographical limits. The displacement begins with the fact that a city under siege is necessarily and by definition a victim of such limits; I will return to this point below. Here, the retreat in Sicily responds to the Funeral Oration in more specific ways. So, for example, Pericles’ statement that “the whole earth is the tomb of famous men” (ἀνδρ/ομεγαπερισπομενεν γὰρ ἐπιφαν/ομεγαπερισπομενεν π/αλπηαπερισπομενεσα γ/ετεπερισπομενε τάφο̋, 2.43.3) is countered by the image of the dead who are left unburied in Sicily (τ/ομεγαπερισπομενεν τε γὰρ νεκρ/ομεγαπερισπομενεν ἀτάφων ὄντων, 7.75.3). And when we compare the survivors to whom the Funeral Oration is addressed (τ/ού̋ λοι̋ το/ιοταπερισπομενε̋ λειποµένε̋, 2.41.5; το/ιοταµού̋, 2.43.1; το/ιοταλειποµένοιος, 2.46.1) to those who are left behind to die in Sicily (ο/ι ζ/ομεγαπερισπομενεν λειπόµενοι, 7.75.3), we are reminded also and with no little irony of Pericles’ admonition that it is not fitting for the Athenians to be “left behind” their victorious ancestors (ἀν ο/ χρη λεπεσθαι, 1.144.4).79 In sum, when Thucydides compares the retreating army to “nothing other than a besieged city in flight” he demonstrates how the spatial contingencies that define Athens in the History and, in particular, the trope of leaving the city behind, structure both the narrative of the city’s transcendent power and the reality of its eventual defeat.

79. Cf. Gribble 1999: 175: “The seeds of the Athenian defeat were already latent in the political system and the characteristics praised in the Funeral Speech: a competitive ethic which sought civic strength through the private efforts of individuals, an active posture in the search for wealth and empire, an almost alarming spirit of daring and indefatigability.”
In political terms, this episode illustrates the idea that “men are the city” only temporarily and under extraordinary circumstances. And in this respect, Nicias’ equation works to preserve Athens as an idealized city in a process of abstraction that—as Nicole Loraux has shown is true for the epitaphios—is fundamental to the discourse of empire.80

V. “A CITY THAT NO LONGER EXISTS”

It may not be surprising that Thucydides will attribute a revisionist version of this idea to Alcibiades, the “outlaw” (φυγάς, 6.61.7).81 Having deserted and turned traitor to Athens, Alcibiades delivers a speech in Sparta in which he urges the Spartans to send troops to Syracuse and to fortify Decelea (6.91.4–7). Addressing the hypothetical charge that his advice is only the “ready enthusiasm of an outlaw” (φυγαδικὴν προθυµίαν, 6.92.2–3), he counters with an argument about what it means to love a city that has been “lost”:

φυγάς τε γάρ εἰμι τῆς τῶν ἐξελασάντων πονηρίας, καὶ οὐ τῆς ψυκτε- ρας, ἦν πεθηκὲ μοι, ὄφελος. καὶ πολεμιώτεροι οὐχ οἱ τοὺς πολε- μίους ποτ' ἔλαφαντες ψυκὴ ἢ οἱ τοὺς ψυκὴν ἀναγκάσαντες πολεμίους γενέσθαι. τό τε φιλότολοι οὐχ ἢ ἀδικοῦμαι ἡχο, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ ἀσφαλίης ἐλευθερίην. οὐδ' ἐπὶ πατρίδα οὕσαν ἐ γεῖ ἤγοομαι νῦν ἡγούμαι, πολὺ δὲ μάλλον τὴν οὐχ οὕσαν ἀνακτάσθαι. καὶ φιλότολοι οὔτος ὅρθος, οὐχ ὃς ἄν τὴν ἔστων ἁδίκος ἀπολέσας μη ἐπίθη, ἀλλ' ὃς ἂν ἐν τοῖς ἐκπόντος τρόποις διὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν πειραθῆ αὐτὴν ἀναλαβεῖν.

6.92.3–4

80. See Loraux 1986 chap. 6 and Conclusion on the abstract nature of the city in the epitaphios: “Thus the funeral oration has abolished the frontiers that separate reality from fantasy and, by trying to focus excessively on Athens, which it turns into a spectacle or a mirage, it ends by displacing Athens from itself and substituting for the real city the phantom of an ideal polis, a utopia. Citizens of nowhere, the dazzled Athenians are enthralled by the hollowest of fantasies” (267). Cf. Ober 1993: 97; Most 2006: 382.

81. The question of the political circumstances leading to Alcibiades’ defection is outside the scope of this paper, except to note how it contributes to Alcibiades’ political persona in the History. If Alcibiades was involved in the desecration of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms, did he so in order to further the Sicilian expedition and the democracy or to thwart them? Furley 1996: 20, comments that the intent of the mutilators may have been to undermine the expedition to Sicily by making “any venture beyond familiar territory seem perilous in the extreme, without Hermes’ protective company” (cf. History 6.27.3). But if Alcibiades was among the mutilators and if their intentions were political we would expect them to have acted in order to gain public support for the expedition, not to endanger it. And yet, as Thucydides tells us, Alcibiades’ rivals successfully accuse him of involvement in these events on the grounds that he aimed to overthrow the democracy (6.28.2). The general point here, however, is that Alcibiades’ position as a phugas is linked—however uncertainly—to violations of the city’s physical boundaries, specifically represented by the mutilation of the Herms but extended to the expedition to Sicily. Cf. the Excursus on the Herms and the Mysteries in Gomme, Andrews and Dover 1959–1981, vol. 4, esp. pp. 283–88. See also Wolpert 2002: 90 on the erection of the Herm to commemorate the rebuilding of Athens’ fortifications in 395/4 and its connections with events in 415.
I am an outlaw from the baseness of those who drove me out, and not from your aid, if you will be persuaded by me. For they are not more hostile who, like you, have harmed their enemies than those who have forced their friends to become enemies. I hold that love for the city is not possible where I am treated unjustly, but where I live securely as a citizen. I do not think that I am now attacking a country that still exists; rather I think that I am recovering one that no longer exists. Moreover, he who is rightfully the lover of his city (philopolis) is not the one who, having lost his own city unjustly, does not attack it, but he who in every way attempts to take it back through his longing [for it].

Alcibiades’ words both anticipate and reformulate Nicias’ appeal to the idea that “men are the city” (7.77.7). The implication here—emphasized in the repeated use of the first-person (ἐν ὧν ἄλογοί τινες ἐγχώροι, ἀλλ’ ἐν ὧν ἄφρακτος ἐπολιτεύθη)—is that the city does not exist without the presence of one man, i.e., Alcibiades, and that in forcing him to become a fugitive the Athenians have forfeited their city. At the same time, Alcibiades’ words also revise the position of the exile as Thucydides describes it in his own case (διὰ τὴν φυγήν, 5.26.5). For Alcibiades, exile does not mean the opportunity to observe events from both sides (παρ’ ἄφρακτος τοῖς πράγμασι, 5.26.5) but to play one side against the other (ἐπαμφοτερίζω, 8.85.2). His speech thus re-conceptualizes exile as a methodological principle in the History; the source of impartiality implicitly

82. On the use of first-person verbs in the speeches of Alcibiades, see Gribble 1999: 210–11. I have stressed the absolute sense of ο’ς οὔσαν in 6.92.4. Crawley’s translation places the emphasis on Alcibiades’ singular relationship to the city: “I do not think that I am attacking a country that is still mine; I am rather trying to recover one that is mine no longer” (emphasis added). But the absolute sense of ο’ς οὔσαν is warranted by comparison with the speech of the Athenian envoys in Book 1 where (as quoted above) they say that they “set out with determination from a city that no longer existed and ran a risk for the sake of a city that existed in brief hope” (ἡµε/ιοταπερισποµενε̋ δὲ ἀπό τε τ/εταπερισποµενε̋ οὐκ οὔση̋ ἔτι ὑπὲρ τ/εταπερισποµενε̋ ἐν βραχεία/ιοτασυβαλπηα ἐλπίδι οὔση̋ καὶ νδυνεύοντε̋ , 1.74.3). Here too the participles may be translated “we set out from a city that was no longer ours and ran a risk for the sake of a city that was ours in brief hope.” But this translation weakens both the pan-Hellenic significance of the Athenians’ sacrifice and the rhetorical effect of the contrast between the two clauses. In either case, however, the point is that the city’s principal condition of existence has been altered. See also 8.92.11 where, in describing the deterioration of the political situation in Athens, Thucydides says that the Four Hundred “neither wished the Five Thousand to exist nor that it be clear that they did not exist, thinking that on the one hand setting up such a number of partners would be tantamount to the People and, on the other, that this lack of openness would in turn make people afraid of each other (καὶ οἱ τετρακόσιοι διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἤθελον τοὺς πεντακασισδόνοις οὔτε εἶναι οὔτε ἂν δήλος δήλος εἶναι, τὸ μὲν καταστῆσαι μετάγχος τοσούτοις ἄντικρυὶς ἀν δήλον ἐγώγων, τὸ δ’ οὐ ἔφανες φόβον ἐς ἄλλης παρέξεν).” Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. argue that this passage is “the most certain indication that in Thucydides’ view no Five Thousand had been appointed before the overthrow of the Four Hundred.” As in the speech attributed to Alcibiades at 6.92.3–4, here too the proposition that a political entity does not exist is an expedience. Cf. Herodotus Histories 8.57.7.

83. In the word’s only appearance in the History, Hermocrates is enlisted to accuse Tissaphernes of “double dealing” in his activities with Alcibiades (ὡς ἔμελλε τὸν Τισσαφέρνην ἀποφαίνειν φθείροντα τῶν Πελοποννησίων τὰ πράγματα μετὰ Ἀλκιβιάδου καὶ ἑπαμφοτερίζοντα, 8.85.2).
claimed by the historian is turned into an opportunity for Alcibiades to realize his own political ambitions.84

Similarly, Alcibiades’ claim that the “rightful lover of the city” (φιλόπολις οὕτος ὁρθός) is the one who attempts to “take it back through his longing for it” revises Pericles’ claim that he (Pericles) is a philopolis man because of the soundness of his war policies and his resistance to bribery. This is the only other instance of philopolis in the History:85

καίτοι ἐμοὶ τοιούτω ἄνδρι ὀργίζεσθε ὃς οὐδένος ἡσυχος οἷομαι εἶναι γνώναι τα τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἔρμηνεύσαι ταῦτα, φιλόπολις τε καὶ χρημάτων χρείσσων.

2.60.5

And yet you are angry with me, a man who I think is inferior to no one for knowing and interpreting what is necessary, who is also philopolis and stronger than money.

In this speech, his last in the History but coming early in the war, Pericles is trying to convince the Athenians to stay the course in spite of the difficulties they are currently facing. He maintains that he is the “same man” and has not changed his opinion about the prosecution of the war while the Athenians have changed theirs (ἔγω μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἐξιστάμαι: ὑμεῖς δὲ μεταβάλλετε, 2.61.2; cf. 1.140.1). He negatively contrasts those who espouse “pacifism” (ἅπαγμον, 2.63.2–3) with those who dare to act. He reminds the Athenians of the greatness of their city, the deeds of their ancestors, and the extent and superiority of their resources (2.62). And he concludes that, while the hatred of enemies is short lived, the “splendor of the present is left behind even in time to come as [the source of] an always remembered reputation” (ἡ δὲ παραυτίκα τε λαμπρότης ἐτὸ ἔπειτα δόκσια αἰεί µνησται, 2.64.5). Confronted with

84. On Alcibiades’ personal and public ambitions, see Gribble 1999: 57–61 and chap. 3. Similar arguments in defense of harming one’s own city are attributed to Phrynichus, the Athenian general, at 8.50. Cf. 6.92.5 where Alcibiades remarks on his own version of viewing the war from both sides, and where his shifting between enemy and friend provides a sharp contrast to Thucydides’ implied neutrality at 5.26.5. It is perhaps noteworthy that Thucydides and Alcibiades seem to be the two Athenians who spend a significant amount of time among the Spartans in the History.

85. The fact that the lover of the city in the Funeral Oration is an eraste and not a philopolis may be due to the different quality of their objects. The object of the love of the philopolis man is an abstract political entity while the object of the love of the eraste is physical (whether a man or a city), a love enhanced—as the text makes clear—by visual stimuli. The only other eraste in the History is Aristogeiton, the tyrannicide (6.54.3). See Wohl 2002, chap. 4 on the “erotics” of imperialism and, in particular, her discussion (188–203) of Nicias’ characterization of those who support the Sicilian expedition as “morbid lovers of what is absent” (δυσέρωτα τῶν ἀπόντων, 6.13.1). Wohl comments (190), “the imperial desire is always a desire for τὸν ἀπόντον, absent things.” In the case of the lovers of the city in the Funeral Oration (ἐραστὲς γυγομένους αὐτής, 2.43.1) imperial desire is activated by what lies before the eyes, i.e., by the physical city of Athens. But this physical city is only the transient incarnation of the eternal city that Pericles eulogizes. See also Loraux 1986: 305 with n.267.
the destruction of their houses and property outside the city walls and with the indiscriminate ravages of the plague inside, we might well ask how Pericles’ audience would respond to this reference to the “splendor of the present” (ἡ δὲ παραυτίκα τε λαμπρότης). Clearly, this splendor is a projection into the future (ἐ̋ τὸ ἔπειτα) of what is now at risk or, more to the point, of what does not exist at the moment of its enunciation. Athens’ “always remembered reputation” is thus constituted in—or the basis of—an idealized future. And what is “left behind” is an idealized past, constructed from the point of view of a volatile present. Here, in other words, the spatial contingencies that define the city are measured in terms of the relative temporal distance from its present (physical) realities and vulnerabilities.

In Pericles’ version, moreover, the philopolis man and the city he loves are the agents of an enduring “sameness” as the basis of this future legacy. This sameness is exemplified in the fact that Pericles is describing essentially the same city he had described in the Funeral Oration just as the claim that he remains the “same man” in his opinions means that he remains the same man who delivered his earlier speeches in the History. This claim is epitomized in the verbatim repetition of a phrase from the Funeral Oration where, as we have seen, Pericles remarks that the dead are not commemorated in their physical tombs alone but in the “always remembered reputation” that is left behind (καταλείπεται) are not the bodies of dead soldiers or the city with its “imperishable monuments” (µνηµε/ιοταπερισποµενεα ... ἀίδια, 2.41.4). These are the literal or physical—and hence ephemeral—remains of Athens; the fact that they are described as everlasting only emphasizes the fact that they are subject to decay. Thus, when the “first man” of Athens claims that he is the “same man” in his opinions—just as when the historian claims that the “same” people always lived in Attica (ἄνθρωποι ὤιοτασυβοµεγακουν οἱ αὐτοὶ αἰεί, 1.2.6) or that “the same Thucydides the Athenian” wrote the latter part of the History (γέγραφε δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ὁ αὐτὸς Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναίος ἔξξης, 5.16.1)—his words

86. Lamprotes in the History generally refers to appearances in contrast to concrete phenomena or accomplishments. Alcibiades uses it to describe the effect of his honors and prizes on the city (6.16.3; cf. 6.16.5). At 6.31.6 (quoted above) the term is used to describe the effect of seeing the Athenian armada as it sets out for Sicily. Nicias uses it to rally the men before the battle in the Syracuse harbor, in a passage remarked upon for its hyperbolic commonplaces (7.69.2). But perhaps most pertinent to the present context, Thucydides uses it to contrast the humiliation of the Athenians’ defeat in Sicily with the “splendor” of the beginning of the expedition (ἄλλω̋ τε καὶ ἀπὸ οἵα̋ λαµπρότητο̋ καὶ αὐχήµατο̋ το/υπσιλονπερισποµενε πρώτου ἐ̋ οἵαν τελευτὴν κατεπει νότητα ἀφ/ιοταπερισποµενεκτο, 7.75.6). My point is that Pericles’ reference to the city’s “present splendor” at 2.64.5 is subject to the same ambivalence elicited by these other examples. Cf. Gribble 1999: 198–99; Connor 1984: 165 with n.18; Raaflaub 1994: 110–12; and Loraux 1986: 170 on Lysias’ epitaphios as an attempt to “distract attention from a disappointing present, to ‘replace’ it.”
work against this fact and, as I’ve been arguing, in the service of an idea of Athens that transcends its physical and temporal limitations.87

Alcibiades seems to appeal to a similar conservative “sameness” when he speaks of Athens as a city that must be brought back into existence through longing. But he also offers a correction to Pericles’ self-presentation when he indirectly refers to himself as a “rightly” philopolis man (φιλόπολις οὕτως ὀρθῶς, 6.92.4). This man is both a realist and a pragmatist; he is also a political chameleon. Throughout Book 8, Alcibiades’ political sympathies are elusive at best and subject to stasis in the city. Thucydides reports that Alcibiades thought he would be restored by an oligarchy and that he intrigued with the trierarchs at Samos to overthrow the democracy (8.47.1–2). But the forces on Samos are subsequently said to recognize that Alcibiades is not the man for an oligarchy (8.63.4) and, once they decide in favor of the democracy, proceed to make him one of their generals (8.82.1). On the other side of the aisle, the oligarchic conspirators in Athens assume that Alcibiades will be recalled (8.65.2). But Phrynichus (like the forces on Samos) is sure that no oligarchy will restore him (8.68.3). And in fact the Four Hundred do not bring back those who had been exiled under the democracy “on account of Alcibiades” (τοὺς φεύγοντας οὐ κατηγον τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου ἑνεκα, 8.70.1). In the end then Alcibiades is not recalled by an oligarchy in Athens (as he is said to have originally expected) but by the democracy in absentia on Samos (8.81.1; cf. 8.47.1).88 In short, the political turmoil of Athens during this period is linked in all its transformations to the fact of Alcibiades’ exile.

87. In contrast, see 3.38.1 where Cleon states that he is “the same in his opinion” (ἐγὼ µὲν οὕτως εἰµι τῆ γνώµη) about the execution of the Mytilenians and where the rhetorical value of “sameness” as a political principle reveals its negative potential. In the Funeral Oration, Pericles also says that one of the things that distinguishes the Athenians—presumably from the Spartans—is that the “same men” can be both bold actors and sound deliberators (διαφερόντω γὰρ δὴ καὶ τόδε ἔχουµεν ὡςτε τοµῆν ταὶς οὐ κατηγος καὶ περὶ ἐν ἐπιχειρήσεων ἐκλογίζεσθαι, κλτ., 2.40.3). Here “sameness” refers to the Athenians’ positive ability to possess seemingly contradictory dispositions. The best discussion and critique of this quality of Athenian sameness is found in the concluding chapter of Loraux 1986 in which she concludes that, “the oration suggests that the Athenians have never imitated anyone but themselves, in a repetitive but homogenous time” (332). See also Wolpert 2002: 78 on the class-specific implications of “sameness” in the discourse of Spartan and Athenian citizenship. It is interesting to note too how this appeal to “sameness” persists in the scholarly literature on the History. Taylor 2002, for example, criticizes Kagan’s view that the demos interpreted arguments on behalf of the oligarchic coup in 411 (History 8.53.1–54.1) to mean that “the democracy would remain the same in all respects, except that there would be a limitation on officeholding” (Kagan 1987: 133). Taylor’s point is that Kagan (and others) mistakenly explain the success of the coup in terms of the proponents’ ability to mislead or forcibly coerce the people. While I think that Taylor’s own argument misses some of the ambivalence in Thucydides’ presentation of events, her criticism points to a tendency in the literature to valorize the intent (if not the actions) of the Athenian demos; the people must have wanted the same democratic institutions even though they succumbed to changes.

88. Cf. Brunt 1993 and Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 on 8.45.1 for the hypothesis that Alcibiades is the source for this narrative. Gribble 1999: 162–64 offers a useful critique of this sort of biographical criticism.
In the course of this complex narrative, Thucydides demonstrates why he concurs with Phrynichus, who supposes that Alcibiades does not care whether Athens is ruled by an oligarchy or a democracy. Or rather he enlists Phrynichus in support of his own opinion about Alcibiades’ political indifference:

ἀλλ’ ὁ τε Ἀλκιβιάδης, ὀπερ καὶ ἤν, οὐδὲν μάλλον ὀλιγαρχίας ἢ δημοκρατίας δείσθαι ἐδόχει αὐτῷ οὐδ’ ἄλλο τι σκοπεῖσθαι ἢ ὅτω τρόπῳ ἐκ τοῦ παρόντος κόσμου τὴν πόλιν μεταστήσας ὧπο τῶν ἔταφρων παρακληθεῖς κάτεισι, κτλ.

8.48.4

But it seemed (to Phrynichus)—and this was the case—that Alcibiades preferred oligarchy no more than democracy and that he was watching out for nothing other than in what way, having changed the city from its existing order and having been called in by his associates, he might come back.

In addition to the death sentence passed against Alcibiades by the Athenians for plotting against the democracy (6.61.7), here in Book 8 he is also reported to be under (an unexplained and abandoned) death sentence passed by the Spartans (8.45.1). His situation may thus be said to demonstrate in extreme terms that there is in fact very little difference between these competing constitutional regimes.89 I mention Alcibiades’ shifting allegiances and lapsed loyalties, however, not to speculate about their historical veracity or about the difficult question of their relative chronology. Rather, motivated by the fact that he is a phugas, they provide the context for understanding his statement that he is striving to “recover a [country] that no longer exists” (τὴν οὐκ ὑπσιλονλενισπερισπομενεσαν ἀνακταλπηαπερισπομενεσθαι, 6.92.4) and thus illustrate the general principle—mentioned at the beginning of this paper—that the ideological effects of what an historical actor says are conditioned by where he says it. More specifically, they illustrate the fact that Alcibiades’ return to Athens is the central and unifying element in the final books of the History, even if scholars detect a “confusing ambivalence” in Thucydides’ presentation of his activities.90 My point is that this ambivalence can be explained in part by the spatial contingencies that structure the narrative.

Keeping in mind Thucydides’ remarks about the principles underlying the composition of the speeches in the History (1.22), Alcibiades’ reference to a “country that no longer exists” both speaks to what the particular occasion demands and—as mentioned above—recalls the speech of the Athenian envoys in Sparta in Book 1. There, as we’ve seen, the Battle of Salamis is summed up in the statement

89. On the Athenian ambivalence toward the constitutional differences between the two forms of government and on exile and ostracism as key elements in this ambivalence, see Forsdyke 2005: 181–204.

90. The phrase is from Brunt 1993 and is quoted by Gribble 1999: 188, with n.81. Peisander equates no less than the salvation of the city with the return of Alcibiades (8.53.3). While the truth of the equation may be suspect, the rhetorical effect is clear enough.
that the Athenians “set out with determination from a city that no longer existed and ran a risk for the sake of a city that existed in brief hope” (ἡµε/ίοταπερισποmενε̋ δε ἀπό τ/εταπερισποmενε̋ οὐκ οὔση̋ ἔτι ὁρµώµενοι καὶ ύπὲρ τ/εταπερισποmενε̋ ἐν βραχεία/ιοτασυβαλπηα ἐλπίδι οὔση̋ κι νδυνεύοντε̋, 1.74.3). As an echo of that earlier speech—and perhaps as an allusion to what the Spartans would like to hear—the idea that Athens no longer exists is the premise on which Alcibiades bases his hoped-for return. As such, it demonstrates how the political rhetoric generated by the Battle of Salamis, a rhetoric founded on figuring Athens as a transcendent and trans-historical city, can be subject to appropriation and revision. One effect of making Alcibiades the agent of this revision may be to illustrate the increasingly destructive power of “individualism” (as opposed to collective militarism) in the History. According to this argument, Alcibiades exemplifies factionalism and political opportunism in Athens, in contrast to the steadfast and incorruptible Pericles (cf. 2.65.7). But this self-evident conclusion does not tell the whole story. It is true that, unlike Pericles (and Thucydides), Alcibiades never professes to be “the same” where, as we have seen, “sameness” refers to the consoling fiction that Athens too will always be the same. When Alcibiades talks about Athens as a country that “no longer exists”—or that exists only under certain contingent circumstances—he denies the effectiveness of that fiction.

This conclusion can be extended to the link between Thucydides’ narrative of Alcibiades’ life and actions and the inevitability of Athens’ defeat. Or, more specifically, between Alcibiades’ reference to Athens as a city that “no longer exists” and the two pieces of practical military advice he gives to the Spartans, namely, that they send troops to Syracuse and that they fortify Decelea (6.91.5–7; cf. 7.18–19). Convinced of the soundness of these strategies, the Spartans put them into effect (6.93.1; cf. 6.91.1) with the result, as Thucydides reports, that the Athenians are unable to prosecute the war successfully:


7.27.3

At first, when Decelea was fortified by the whole [Peloponnesian] army in this summer, and then when it was occupied by means of garrisons entering the country from the [allied] cities according to agreed upon intervals of time, it harmed Athens in many ways. And chief among

91. On the “individualism” of Alcibiades in the History, see Gribble 1999: 169–75; 182–84 (on History 6.15.3–5); 205–207. There is a certain contradiction in this analysis, however, in that “individualism” is applied to a class of actors in the History (or in Athens). Cf. Loraux 1986: 295–96.

92. See Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 on 93.2. The fortification of Decelea was not put into effect until a year after the speech attributed to Alcibiades, i.e., in 414/413. Cf. 7.18–19.
these, both because of the destruction of property and because of the loss of men, [this fortification] caused their affairs to suffer.

Summarizing the devastating effects of the occupation of Decelea, Thucydides concludes by remarking that Athens became like “a fortress instead of a city” (τὴν τε πάντων ὁμολογήσω ἐπακτὸν ἐδείκτη τῇ πόλις, καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ τόποι εἶναι φρουρίουν κατέστη, 7.28.1).

Unable to rely on supplies from Euboea and fighting two wars at once, one in Sicily and one in Attica, Athens is no longer the polis of the Funeral Oration but a city under siege:

What pressed [the Athenians] in particular was that they were involved in two wars at once, and that they had entered into a state of desiring strife (philonikia) to an extent that, before it happened, anyone who had heard about it would not have believed. For [he would not believe that] the Athenians, under a siege of occupation by the Peloponnesians, did not on that account withdraw from Sicily, but besieged Syracuse in turn and in the same way, a city which in itself is no less than that of the Athenians, and that they made the unexpectedness (τὸν παραλόγον) of their power and daring among the Hellenes so great that, while at the beginning of the war some thought that they would hold out for one year, some for two, but no one [thought that they would hold out] for more than three years if the Peloponnesians invaded their country, in the seventeenth year after the first invasion they in fact went to Sicily and although they were thoroughly worn out by the war in every way, they

93. On the chronological and interpretive difficulties posed by 7.27–28, including the question of interpolation, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981: vol. 4, 400–404. The absence of what they call “strict chronological succession” in this digression emphasizes the logical connection between the fortification of Decelea and the war in Sicily, i.e., their equivalent status as the “two wars” to which Thucydides refers.

94. Compare 7.28.3 with 4.60.2 where, in the only other use of τρύχομαι in the History, Hermocrates hypothesizes that if the Sicilians continue to fight among themselves, they will become “worn out” and subject to Athenian attack. When that attack does come, it is Athens and not Syracuse that becomes “worn out” as a result.
undertook besides no less a war than the one which was already underway from the Peloponnesus.

Several aspects of this assessment of the Athenians’ predicament in 414/3 deserve comment, beginning with the fact that Alcibiades’ advice to the Spartans is directly responsible for inciting the Athenians’ philonikia, i.e., for causing them to fight two equally difficult wars at once. Thucydides’ claim that the Spartans were already contemplating these actions only emphasizes Alcibiades’ role as their catalyst.\(^95\) But my point here is that in implicitly equating Syracuse with Athens Thucydides prolongs the myth of Athens’ unique character in the *History*. In Book 7, this process is focalized through a hypothetical and incredulous “someone” (tis) who would not have believed the current situation “before it happened.”\(^96\) Extended to include what “some” people thought possible as opposed to what “no one” thought possible, this incredulity is offered as proof of the unexpected nature (paralogon) of the Athenians’ “power and daring.”\(^97\)

Part of the point of this focalization then is to disavow the victory of “a city in itself no less than that of the Athenians” (πόλιν οὐδὲν ἐλάσσω αὐτήν γε καθ’ αὑτὴν τῆς τῶν Αθηναίων) in a war that is “no less” (οὐδὲν ἐλάσσω) than the one Athens is waging against Sparta (cf. 6.1.1). But even while the repeated litotes works to verify the unexpectedness of Athens’ perseverance in adversity, it also demonstrates that the difference in kind that helps to explain the war between Athens and Sparta has, in the case of Athens and Syracuse, become a difference in degree. Later in Book 7, Thucydides will reduce this difference even further when he says that the Athenians and the Syracusans are in fact homoiotropoi (7.55.1), a term he will use again near the end of the *History* where he remarks that the Syracusans were “most like the Athenians in character, and also the best at waging war against them” (μάλιστα γὰρ ὁμοιότροποι γενόμενοι ἄριστα καὶ προσεπολέµησαν, 8.96.5).\(^98\) As an explanation of Athens’ unexpected naval defeat in 413, this equivalence is justified in political terms; Thucydides argues there

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95. Cf. Gribble 1999: 199 with n.109. Also, Brunt 1993: 27 who argues that the Spartans would have taken these measures anyway but speculates that Alcibiades’ speech is included because he is Thucydides’ informant. To the extent that the speech is historically incidental, however, its rhetorical and ideological effectiveness increases; this includes the effect of the statement that Alcibiades is trying to recover “a country that no longer exists” (6.92.4).

96. The implication too is that the historian—unlike this incredulous “someone”—abstains from anticipating the outcome of events before they happen.

97. On the difficulties of translating this passage, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc.

98. Gribble 1998: 50–54 argues that narrative intervention in Thucydides—such as that at 8.96.5—“arises out of events seen as having paradigmatic significance” in the *History*. The quoted passage is preceded by Thucydides’ statement that the Sicilian victory over Athens was the “greatest accomplishment of the war and, it seems to me, the greatest of those Greek deeds that we know by report” (ξυνέβη τε ἐργα τοῦτο [Ελληνικῶν] τῶν κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον τόνδε μέγιστον γενέσθαι, δοκεῖν δ’ ἔμοιγε καὶ ὧν ἄσκη Ἐλληνικῶν ἴσην, 7.87.5). Connor 1984: 197 states that “the battle in the harbor [at Syracuse] inevitably evokes the Battle of Salamis . . . ” but with an outcome that is “totally reversed.”
that the Sicilian cities were already democracies and so invulnerable to division by Athenian-led regime changes (7.55.1). Its reiteration near the end of Book 8 is part of a more general assessment in which the Syracusans “demonstrate” by contrast (ἔδεικσι δὲ οἱ Συρακόσιοι, 8.96.5) how different the Athenians and the Spartans are from one another with respect to *ton tropon* (διάφοροι γὰρ πλείστον ὄντες τὸν τρόπον, 8.96.4).

To note that Sicilian successes against the Athenians were due in no small measure to Spartan intervention is only to raise the question of why Thucydides continues to make use of these explanatory *tropoi* right up until the end of the *History*. Why does he do so, in other words, when the Spartans seem to be acting more like Athenians by acting on the advice of Alcibiades? I’ve already noted how the discourse of distinctive and oppositional “national character traits” is compromised in the *History* from its inception. So too scholars have noted similarities between Athens and her enemies in the course of the narrative, even when they are not made as explicit as they are in the case of the Syracusans. If we accept these similarities, part of their value is to suggest that winners and losers tend to become like one other as a war narrative progresses. But whatever its analytical value, this process of assimilation is only another way of noting the extent to which the *History*—and perhaps history writing in general—both creates and limits the distinctive characteristics of its collective actors. As a specific strategy adopted by the defeated party, however, the claim that the victor is like oneself implicitly preserves the validity of one’s own political and military institutions and achievements. In this respect, Thucydides’ claim that the Syracusans are *homoiotropoi* is—with no little irony—part of the discourse of Athenian exceptionalism following the narrative of a major Athenian defeat.

A similar explanation applies to the reiteration of the differences between the Athenians and the Spartans following the loss of Euboea. As an introduction to this catastrophe, Thucydides remarks that Euboea was “everything to [the Athenians] since they were shut out from Attica” (Εὔβοια γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἄποσκελημένης τῆς

99. But cf. Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 on 8.96.5: “Thucydides did not think that the democratic system had been an unmixed advantage to Athens in her attempt on Sicily. . . .”

100. See 7.50 on Gylippus’ arrival in Sicily. Agis’ diligence in prosecuting the occupation of Attica is described at 7.27.4.

101. We can consider here too Alcibiades’ confidence that the Spartans will act with “speed and zeal” in taking his advice (καὶ ἐν τάξει καὶ προθυµότερον, 6.92.1), i.e., that they will act more like Athenians than Spartans. Here again the explanatory value of their respective *tropoi* is compromised.

102. Debnar 2001: 2–12, for example, notes the “evolution of Spartan discourse” which becomes more like that of the Athenians as the narrative progresses. Cf. Connor 1984: 171–76 on the ways in which “the Athenians are to the Syracusans as the Persians once were to the Athenians themselves” (176). See also Euben 1986: 375, who suggests that in abandoning their land before the Spartan invasion the Athenians “were becoming more like Xerxes.”

103. Cf. Wolpert 2002: 120–36. Wolpert argues that in Athenian postwar discourse Sparta’s victory is blamed on the machinations of the Thirty in order to exonerate the *demos*: “This explanation, far from incompatible with one focusing on Sparta, allowed the Athenians to deny responsibility for defeat without forcing them to acknowledge Spartan military power” (125).
Ἀττικῆς πάντα ἦν, 8.95.2). We have already looked at his general statement about the difficulties caused by the occupation of Decelea (7.27.3, quoted above). Here that occupation is the unstated reason why the Athenians are “shut out” from Attica and provides the context for their response to the Spartan victory in Euboea:

When [news of] the things that had taken place concerning Euboea reached Athens, a sense of terror greater than ever before arose. For neither the disaster in Sicily, even though it seemed to be so great, nor anything else had made them so afraid. For when the army on Samos was in revolt, and there were no more ships or men to man them, and when they themselves were in a state of sta\textit{sis} and it was unclear when they would begin to fight among themselves, a disaster of such magnitude had come upon them, in which they had lost both their fleet and, greatest of all, Euboea, from which they benefited more than from Attica, how was it not fitting that they were disheartened?

This comparison with the defeat in Sicily together with the implied equivalence between the loss of Euboea and being “shut out” of Attica suggest that the Spartans and the Syracusans could be equally successful in their ability to wage war against the Athenians. In other words, here too the extent to which the conflicting tropoi of the principal warring states can be used to explain historical events is weakened. For when Thucydides attributes the Spartans’ failure to sail against the Piraeus to their slowness and lack of daring he both implies that past Spartan successes (such as the recent one in Euboea) have been out of character and holds out the possibility of future Athenian victories against them. On the one hand then the Syracusans are “most like” the Athenians because, as argued above, the Athenians have been decisively defeated by them. On the other hand, the Spartans are least like the Athenians because the narrative of their final victory remains outside the History. Another way to put the matter is to say that Thucydides’ repeated appeal to the Spartans’ inertia is a figure for the deferral of the Athenians’ final defeat. As readers of Thucydides we know, of course, that the Spartans will take the Piraeus and will bring an end to the Athenian empire in 404. But his brief references to the city’s eventual defeat only emphasize the struggle to preserve an Athenian
“national identity” as the History moves in chronological succession toward (but does not narrate) that defeat.  

Whether or not Alcibiades actually advised and persuaded the Spartans to send troops to Syracuse and to fortify Decelea in 415/4, Thucydides makes it clear that these two actions—complicated by the revolt of the forces on Samos and stasis in the city—constitute the greatest challenges facing the Athenians in the final books of the History. This judgment is summed up in the statement that the Athenians were fighting “two wars” at once (7.28.3) and is specified in the description of their reaction to hearing that Euboea had been lost (8.96.1–2). But in the midst of all these difficulties what the Athenians fear most is that the enemy will sail against the Piraeus. This is what they fear from “their enemies in Sicily” (τούς τε ἀπὸ τῆς Σικελίας πολέμους, 8.1.2) at the very beginning of Book 8 and from the Spartans near the end of Book 8.  

This, with a little more courage, [the Spartans] might have easily done, in which case they would either have increased the dissensions of the city by their presence, or if they had stayed to besiege it have forced the fleet from Ionia, even though opposed to the oligarchy, to come to the rescue of their households and the entire city and, in the meantime, the Hellespont, Ionia, the islands and everything up to Euboea; in other words, the entire Athenian empire would have nothing less than the end of the Athenian empire:  

This, with a little more courage, [the Spartans] might have easily done, in which case they would either have increased the dissensions of the city by their presence, or if they had stayed to besiege it have forced the fleet from Ionia, even though opposed to the oligarchy, to come to the rescue of their households and the entire city and, in the meantime, the Hellespont, Ionia, the islands and everything up to Euboea; in other words, the entire Athenian empire would have been theirs.

104. The deferral of the Athenians’ final defeat is also an effect of Thucydides’ statements about their perseverance, i.e., their willingness to continue fighting in both Sicily and Attica (7.28.3) and their determination to continue prosecuting the war following the Sicilian defeat (8.1.3). We can include here too the description of the Athenians’ unexpected or paralogon victory over the Chians in 412. Thucydides notes that the Chians “recognized their error along with those many to whom the same things seemed likely, namely, that the Athenians would be swiftly and utterly destroyed” (μετὰ πολλὸν ὡς ταύτα ἔδοξε, τὰ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ταχὺ ξυναφερθηκαίναν, τὴν ἄμφοτέραν ξυνέγνωσαν, 8.24.5). At the end of the History, the Athenians’ unexpected victory at Cynossema leads them to think that, with the necessary effort, they might yet prevail (ἐνόμισαν σφίσι ν ἔτι δυνατὰ εἰπέτειν ἢ καὶ καλὰ πράγματα, ἢν προφήτως ἀντίλαμβάνοντα, περιγενέσθαι, 8.106.5). In short, the History repeatedly holds out the possibility of an Athenian victory in the face of its impending defeat. Cf. Dewald 2005: 153 who notes the “restrained but compelling indications that [Athenian] weaknesses are already appearing” in 413.  

105. On the threat of sailing against the Piraeus, see also 8.92.7 and 8.94.3.
Just ten chapters earlier, a similar prediction had been made about the Athenian forces on Samos. Having decided to challenge the Four Hundred by sailing against the Piraeus, they are prevented from doing so by Alcibiades; Thucydides comments that “this seems the first occasion and as important an occasion as any that he aided the city” (8.86.4). There may be some irony in this statement, as Gribble suggests. But unlike other actions by which Alcibiades may have benefited (or harmed) the city, this one is direct and its consequences unambiguous. For had the men on Samos attacked their own country, says Thucydides, “it is absolutely clear that the enemy [i.e., the Peloponnesians] would have taken immediate possession of Ionia and the Hellespont” (ἐν οἷς ἔκλεισε τὸν Ἰονίαν καὶ Ἑλλήσποντον ἔλθος εἶχον οἱ πολέμιοι, 8.86.4; cf. 8.96.4). In short, in preventing the forces on Samos from sailing against the Piraeus Alcibiades is credited with something close to preventing the Spartans from controlling “the entire Athenian empire.” If there is any irony here then it has to do with the fact that it is because of Alcibiades’ advice to the Spartans (i.e., to send aid to Syracuse and to fortify Decelea) that an attack on the Piraeus is so feared and its projected consequences so fatal. Moreover, if the Spartans’ failure to sail against the Piraeus after Euboea is proof of the differences between themselves and the Athenians (8.96.4), then in following Alcibiades’ advice, the forces on Samos—what I’ve been calling the democracy in absentia—are implicitly behaving more like Spartans than Athenians.

The general point again is that the narrative of events in the final books of the History demonstrates a progressive weakening of the aitiological and historical value of the competing tropoi of the Spartans and the Athenians, even if Thucydides continues to invoke them. The more specific point has to do with the extent to which this process is linked to the spatial contingencies that structure the narrative and principally with Alcibiades’ position as an “outlaw” from Athens (φυγάς, 6.61.7). If his actions are inconsistent, i.e., if it is not always clear whose side he is on, this is not because Thucydides’ opinion of him changed over time or because he (Thucydides) wanted to emphasize the dominance of the individual actor over general historical principles. These may be the effects of the narrative as it stands, like the idea that Alcibiades was the source of his own story, but they do not adequately explain it. At the same time, to say that Alcibiades embodies a radical or extreme version of the Athenian national character is not simply to

106. On the translation, see Gribble 1999: 186 with notes 77 and 78. Also, Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 ad loc. who discuss Alcibiades’ similar role in preventing the soldiers from sailing to the Piraeus at 8.82.1–2.

107. Gribble 1999: 187. For the idea that this chapter represents Thucydides’ “change of view” about Alcibiades, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981 on 8.86.5.

108. In describing Alcibiades’ success in preventing the forces on Samos from sailing against the Piraeus, Thucydides says that he “put a stop to the expedition” (τοῦ ἔπιπλοον ἔπαυσε, 8.86.5). Epiploos appears only two other times in the History, where it refers to the expedition against Sicily (6.32.3 and 6.33.1). The fact that Alcibiades had been such an ardent and successful advocate of that earlier expedition is the source of some additional irony.
point to the inherent roots of Athens’ downfall.\textsuperscript{109} Such a conclusion only restates
the commonplace Nicias makes of this assessment of Alcibiades in his speech to
the Athenians before the Sicilian campaign (6.9.3). Or that Thucydides expresses
more directly when he comments that Alcibiades’ personal habits “had not a little
to do with the ruin of the Athenians’ city” (ὅπερ καὶ καθετελεῖν ὑπερον τὴν τῶν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν οὐχ ἤριστα, 6.15.3).\textsuperscript{110} Rather, Alcibiades’ words and actions
repeatedly raise the question of what it means to be an Athenian and, by extension,
of who or what is predicated of \textit{hoi Athēnaioi} in the \textit{History}.

As mentioned above, the defining feature of Alcibiades’ role as a historical
actor, including his dealings with the Spartans, the Athenian forces on Samos, and
the Persians, is his enforced absence from Athens. This is the position from which
he advises the Spartans to send aid to Sicily and to occupy Decelea and is thus the
proximate cause of the city’s “two wars.” As we’ve seen, the consequences of
these two wars are each expressed by a similar figure; because of the occupation
of Decelea, Athens becomes a besieged “fortress instead of a city” (7.28.1–3) and
because of their defeat in Sicily the Athenian army is like “nothing other than
a besieged city in flight” (7.75.5). It is clear that the image of the besieged city has
a powerful rhetorical effect in the \textit{History}, based in part on the fact that a siege
necessarily defines a city in terms of its physical and topographical limits. So
too, the image of Athens under siege puts additional pressure on the historical
value of the Athenians’ distinctive \textit{tropoi}, especially when it is used to describe
the defeated Athenian troops in Sicily. In short, the promise of Salamis, expressed
in the act of setting out from a city that no longer exists (ἀπὸ τε τῆς οὔχ οὔσης
ἐτι ὁμομένων, 1.74.3), is broken by events in Sicily and Decelea, expressed
in the image of the city under siege. The former is an expression of Athens’
ability to transcend its spatial and temporal limits, the latter is an expression of its
submission to those limits.\textsuperscript{111}

Although the Five Thousand vote for his recall in 411 (8.97.3), the last
reference to Alcibiades in the \textit{History} finds him returning not to Athens, but to
the democracy \textit{in absentia} on Samos (κατέπλευσε δὲ ὑπὸ τοὺ ἀυτῶν στάς φρόνως
tούτους καὶ ὁ Ἀλκιβιάδης ταῖς τριαὶ καὶ δέκα ναυσὶν ἀπὸ τῆς Καύνου καὶ
Φασάλεως ἐς τὴν Σάμον, κτλ., 8.108.1). The fact that he never returns to the city
he professes to love, or rather that Thucydides never acknowledges his return,
may be explained by the simple fact that the work does not go down to 407;
it would therefore be counter to Thucydides’ usual chronological procedure.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109}. On Alcibiades as a figure who exceeds normative political and sexual boundaries in the
Greek sources, i.e., as a \textit{paranomos} individual, see Wohl 2002, esp. chap. 3 and Gribble 1999:
73–82.


\textsuperscript{111}. On the siege and surrender of Athens in 404, see Wolpert 2002: 8–15.

\textsuperscript{112}. Of the eleven occurrences of \textit{kάθοδος} in the \textit{History}, seven refer to the “recall” of Alcibiades,
suggesting that its significance is linked to its deferral. For Alcibiades’ return to Athens, see
Xenophon \textit{HG} 1.4.11. Gribble 1999 chap. 2 with Appendix I discusses the various rhetorical
But together with Thucydides’ failure to describe his own return to Athens, it also suggests that descriptions of the actual returns of these two prominent exiles would illustrate the vain promise of returning to a city that is ideally and always the same. We can recall here too that in pressing for the oligarchy in 411, Peisander and the envoys from Samos equated recalling Alcibiades both with not being democratic “in the same way” (µάλιστα δὲ ὡς εξείη αὐτοὶς Αλκιβιάδην καταγαγοῦσι καὶ μὴ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον δηµοκρατουµένοις, κτλ., 8.53.1) and with saving the city (8.53.3). In other words, the question of his return focuses attention on the vicissitudes of Athenian Realpolitik and, at the same time, reveals the fabricated quality of the idealized “sameness” we’ve been discussing. Involved in fighting two wars at once, fragmented militarily and politically, forced to endure siege-like conditions, and becoming less and less distinct from its enemies, Athens is defined by and subject to its physical challenges and limitations, both close to home (Decelea) and overseas (Sicily). In this respect, the irony of making Alcibiades say that he is striving to recover a country/city that “no longer exists” (6.92.3–4) is due to the decisive role that Thucydides assigns him in making it so.

But what then is the country/city that Alcibiades is trying to recover, i.e., the one that no longer exists? It is easy enough to say that this is the city of Pericles’ Funeral Oration, a city defined by the collective willingness of its citizens to die on its behalf. To the extent that Alcibiades is adept at avoiding this particular sacrifice, his prominence in the final books of the History reveals the hyperbolic and tendentious nature of this assumption. And in this respect, the city of the Funeral Oration no longer exists in the sense that Athens (post Melos) is no longer worth dying for. This conclusion also looks ahead to the disaster in Sicily for which Alcibiades is in no small part responsible both because of his advice to the Athenians (to prosecute the war in Sicily) and because of his advice to the Spartans (to send aid to the Sicilians). If, as suggested above, the description of the Athenian defeat in Sicily negatively revises the Funeral Oration’s heroization of those who die on the city’s behalf, then as justification for attacking Athens “together with her worst enemies” (τῇ ἐμαυτοῦ μετὰ τῶν πολεμιωτάτων ... ἐπέρχοµαι, 6.92.2) Alcibiades’ claim that he is fighting to recover a country/city that no longer exists will be proven more plain fact than sophistry.

sources. On Thucydides’ “firm chronological framework,” see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1959–1981, vol. 5, Appendix 1, esp. 365–67. Exceptions to this framework are rare but include, for example, the report of Pericles’ death (2.65.6). We may wonder then why Alcibiades’ death in 404—the same year that Thucydides returned to Athens—is not similarly forecasted. The fact that these events—unlike Pericles’ death—happen after the final year recorded in the History provides a plausible answer. But then again Thucydides does confirm the final outcome of the war. Griffith 1961 has some useful things to say about references to past and future events in the History.

114. Cf. Loraux 1986: 294: “the Melian debate, a turning point in the Athenian theory and practice of imperialism, is also the point at which the funeral oration as model of discourse and political argument is definitively rejected.”
There is no doubt of course that Alcibiades speaks and acts in his own self-interest throughout the History. But the point here is not characterological, i.e., it is neither about Alcibiades' intentions and motives nor about Thucydides' evaluation of his intentions and motives. Rather, it has to do with how the words and actions of this phugas help explain post-Periclean Athens as a discursive formation in the History, or as a feature of what Nicole Loraux calls the “civic imaginary.”

In this context it may seem logical to accept the idea—outlined above—that Alcibiades’ justification for attacking Athens includes an implicit valorization of the idealized city of the Funeral Oration. This is the city/country that he is fighting to bring back into existence by attacking the one that condemned him to death and prevented his return (6.61.7). The problem, of course, is that these two cities are actually one and the same so that being condemned to death by the city becomes an ironic way of dying on its behalf. Thus, if the figure of Athens’ non-existence in the speech of the Athenian envoys in Book 1 (1.74.3) provides a precedent for Alcibiades’ use of the same figure in Book 6, it also reveals the extent to which the actions and statements of this singular Athenian expose the limits of the idealism that lies behind it. For if the citizens’ willingness to leave Athens and Attica behind before the Battle of Salamis is a source of the city’s transcendence and if it provides historical justification for the Athenian (Periclean) empire, then the narrative of Alcibiades’ exile and deferred return reveals the physical vulnerabilities and limitations that will lead to the empire’s eventual defeat. Put in the mouth of Alcibiades then, “the city/country that no longer exists” is both an example of self-interested hyperbole and a projection of that inevitable outcome.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued for a somewhat unusual approach to reading Thucydides’ History, namely, a sustained engagement with the various spatial contingencies that structure its ideological content. My focus has been on the spatial relations that exist between historical actors and the city of Athens, and specifically on the figurative language that describes the dynamic between leaving and returning to the city. If a dominant theme has emerged in the course of this discussion, it has to do with the ways in which war imposes and politicizes this dynamic. One unifying assumption throughout has been that spatial relations in historical narrative are neither neutral nor simply factual; they are necessarily political even (or especially) when their particular details are discreet and difficult to assimilate. This political aspect of the investigation is tied to two competing

115. Loraux 1986: 337.
116. Cf. Wolpert 2002, esp. 91–95 on rhetorical conventions following the rule of the Thirty: “Often [litigators] referred to the period of civil unrest by saying, ‘you were expelled,’ ‘you were in exile,’ or ‘you returned.’”
discourses in the History, one that validates Athens as a transcendent and eternal entity abstracted from material and temporal conditions and the other that charts the sources and effects of those conditions. The former constitutes the city’s future legacy, the latter is an acknowledgement that the war has already been lost.

As we’ve seen, this dynamic assumes a variety of forms in the History, all of which are governed by the centripetal or centrifugal forces that Athens exerts on historical actors. Among these, Thucydides’ twenty-year exile constitutes a kind of framing device, even if its specific details are only briefly and ambivalently acknowledged. The fact that this device is open ended, i.e., that Thucydides neither mentions nor describes his return to Athens, is part of the History’s unfinished business, like the final outcome of the war itself. Thus, if exile is “the making of an historian,” the hope of return (whether overt or implied) can be said to be the making of Athens in the History. This includes the hoped-for return of that “other” exile, Alcibiades, whose narrative represents perhaps the most compelling testament to Thucydides’ ability to see his subject from more than one point of view (5.26.5). On a more immediate level, however, this trajectory pertains to the soldiers and marines whose departures and returns are the measures both of the city’s eternal greatness and of its eventual defeat.

To the extent that Thucydides’ exile has methodological consequences, moreover, it is also a source of his famous claim to a work that “is put together to be a possession for all time rather than a competitive entertainment to hear in the present moment” (κτεμα εσ αει, 1.22.4).117 Addressed to “whoever will wish” (hosoi de bouléson) to know the truth (to saphēs) of what his history records and to judge similar (parapleisōn) events in the future, this statement about the transcendent quality of the work is easy to take at face value. But it also raises two related questions, one having to do with the wishes of future readers and the other with the figurative meaning of the phrase kteμα εσ αει. In brief, to what extent does the phrase condition those wishes? It is obvious that “a possession for all time” is a hyperbolic concept and that its effectiveness is due to the contradiction inherent in the ephemeral quality of kteμa.118 Thus while Thucydides defines his future readers by our desire to judge events in our own time, he also implicitly warns us about the seductiveness of a transhistorical perspective that limits our judgment to a single or prescribed point of view. This is not to discount the fact that his scrupulous attention to the evidence (1.22.1–3) extends the value of the History beyond a momentary hearing (es to parachrēma). But within that presentation, Athens occupies a position somewhere between a kteμa εσ αει and

117. Ober 2005: 66–67 suggestively speculates that Thucydides wrote this passage after the amnesty of 403, and thus as a response to the notion inherent in the amnesty that the usefulness of the past can be actively denied; he translates kteμa εσ αει as “a legacy-gift for all time.” See also 63n.41 on the biographical tradition that has Thucydides returning to Athens on account of the amnesty.

118. See Bassi 2005: 26–27.
a “city that no longer exists,” i.e., between the two extreme ends of the historiographical continuum. Viewed in this way, Thucydides’ text challenges us to position ourselves between these two extremes in order to judge the justifiable causes and consequences of present and future wars.

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