

Thucydides, Sicily, and the Defeat of Athens

Tim Rood

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RÉSUMÉ-. Cet article explore la réception du récit de Thucydide sur la défaite athénienne en Sicile en 415-413 av. J.-C., en insistant sur la relation entre la catastrophe sicilienne et la défaite finale d'Athènes en 404. Il commence par un bref aperçu de la renommée du récit de Thucydide. Il analyse ensuite la réception chez les écrivains postérieurs d'un certain nombre de motifs thucydidiens spécifiques : l'idée que l'expédition de Sicile est un symbole de la défaite d'Athènes, l'utilisation d'allusions littéraires aux guerres médiques et l'idée que la défaite aurait pu être évitée. Enfin, il fait valoir que la structure du récit de Thucydide sur l'expédition de Sicile a été perturbée par le transfert de motifs de son œuvre à d'autres guerres affectant la Sicile.

ABSTRACT-. This paper explores the reception of Thucydides' account of the Athenian defeat in Sicily in 415-413 BC, with a particular focus on the relation between the Sicilian disaster and the final defeat of Athens in 404 BC. It starts with a brief exploration of the fame of Thucydides' account. It then analyses the reception in later writers of a number of specific Thucydidean motifs: the idea that the Sicilian expedition is an emblem of Athens' defeat; the use of Persian Wars intertexts; and the possibility that defeat could have been avoided. Finally, it argues that Thucydides' own emplotment of the Sicilian expedition was destabilised by the transfer of motifs from his work to other wars involving Sicily.

Since antiquity, Thucydides' Sicilian narrative—and in particular the account of the closing stages of the Athenian defeat in the final part of Book 7—has been among the most admired and imitated sections of his work, rivalled only by Pericles' funeral oration, by the accounts of the plague and the Corcyra stasis, and by the opening methodological pronouncements. “There was no nation that had not heard of the disaster suffered by the Athenians in the Sicilian war,” explains at one point the narrator in Chariton's *Chariclea*, a fiction (generally dated between the first century BC and the second century AD) that itself includes as its central character the daughter of Hermocrates, the most prominent Syracusan figure in Thucydides' account of the Athenian invasion.¹ In the ancient world, its fame was attested further by numerous imitations of individual scenes—above all the final battle in the Great Harbour at Syracuse²—and by its use in a variety of educational settings.

(1) Chariton 7.2.4: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔθνος ἄπιστον ἦν τῆς Ἀθηναίων δυστυχίας, ἦν ἐδυστύχησαν ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τῷ Σικελικῷ. In context, the sentence explains that the disaster was known in Egypt (scene of an earlier Athenian disaster that Thucydides implicitly aligned with the defeat in Sicily (1.110.4, echoing 7.87.6)).

(2) See e.g. Lys. 2.38 (discussed below); Plb. 1.44.4-5, 3.43.7-8, 18.25.1 (WALBANK 1957-1979, p. i.109; HORNBLOWER 1991-2008, p. iii.698), 6.44.3-8 (ROOD 2012, p. 66); Sall. *Jug.* 60.4 (SCANLON 1980, p. 150-151); Caes. *BC* 2.4.3; *BAlex* 15 (GAERTNER and HAUSBURG 2013, p. 130-134); Dion. Hal. *AR* 3.19; Livy 1.25 (FELDHERR 1998, p. 129); App. *BC* 5.120; Cass. Dio 49.9, 74.13.4. For a more recent imitation, see GIBBON 1994, p. iii.954 on Mahomet II at siege of Constantinople: “The

The main focus of this article will be the ancient reception of the Sicilian expedition and of Thucydides' version of it in particular. I will explore in turn how the Sicilian expedition was made to encapsulate the idea of Athens' defeat; how Thucydides' use of Persian Wars intertexts was received; how later writers played with the idea of the avoidance of defeat, partly through a focus on Athens' capacity to bounce back, partly through indulgence in counterfactual history; and finally how Thucydides' own emplotment was destabilised by the transfer of motifs from his work to other wars. For the sake of comparison, however, I start by sketching briefly some aspects of the modern reception of the Sicilian defeat.

I. SOME MODERN RECEPTIONS

Athens' Sicilian disaster has been given a strong place in the story of Athens' defeat by many modern writers. One eighteenth-century discussion of the Athenian empire suggested that the Athenians' fall may be "properly dated from the destruction of their fleet and army in Sicily".³ Similar reflections can be found in more recent historians: in his volume in the *Fontana History of the Ancient World* series, J. K. Davies provocatively ends his chapter on "The Peloponnesian War" in 413 BC, while letting the following chapter, "Spartan Supremacy", cover the years 412–380 BC. He explains this "unorthodox" arrangement as "correspond[ing] to the military and political facts", given that "the actual ends of wars in 404 and 386 were comparatively unimportant".⁴

Judgements of the decisive importance of the Sicilian defeat owe much to the power of Thucydides' narrative. This power has often been filtered through the admiration for Thucydides' account expressed by an eighteenth-century poet, Thomas Gray, and a nineteenth-century historian, Macaulay. Macaulay conceded in a letter in 1836 that "Tacitus was a great man", but at once qualified that praise by writing that "he was not up to the Sicilian expedition".⁵ Presumably it was the pathos of the closing section of the Sicilian narrative that Macaulay felt was beyond Tacitus: a year earlier, he had told the same correspondent that "there is no prose composition in the world which I place so high as the seventh book of Thucydides [...] the *ne plus ultra* of human art." Macaulay then went on to express his delight at finding a letter by Gray in which the poet complained to a friend who was reading Thucydides that he was "in the twentieth year of the war", and yet had said "nothing of the retreat before Syracuse": "is it, or is it not, the finest thing you ever read in your life?"⁶ Gray's appreciation is grounded both in the idea of the immersive power of Thucydides' narrative (note that phrase "in the twentieth year of the war") and in his sensitivity to the distinctive aesthetic possibilities of disaster (Thucydides' account is "the *finest* thing").

Tragic readings of Thucydides' Sicilian books have been fostered by their use in modern education. As there is no space here to provide a quantitative account of this pedagogical use, I restrict myself to two instances (one real, one fictional) which demonstrate the spirit in which the account was often read in the classroom. Recollecting his schooldays at Marlborough College, the poet Louis MacNeice recalled being taught by "a humane dapper little Oxonian" who "was said

passions of his soul, and even the gestures of his body, seemed to imitate the actions of the combatants", with n. 45: "I must confess, that I have before my eyes the living picture which Thucydides (l. vii c. 71.) has drawn of the passions and gestures of the Athenians in a naval engagement in the great harbour of Syracuse."

(3) MEREDITH 1778, p. 75. Meredith was arguing against attempts to use ancient models of colonization to justify British taxation of the American colonies.

(4) DAVIES 1993, p. 117.

(5) MACAULAY 1974–1981, p. iii.181, 154 (letters to Wharton, 25 July 1836 and 25 August 1835).

(6) GRAY 1820, p. 180 (letter to Ellis, 11 December 1746).

to drink a glass of absinthe each Sunday and to weep in his Thucydides class whenever he came to the collapse of the Athenian expedition to Syracuse".⁷ Rather more elliptically, Evelyn Waugh inserted into a post-Second World War novella a scene in which a school class, after a lesson on Latin gerunds, "stumbled through half a page of Thucydides", informed by their teacher that "these last episodes of the siege have been described as tolling like a great bell".⁸ Waugh does not actually specify the siege in question, but the sense of a protracted narrative that reaches its climax with a pervasive sense of unavoidable doom is appropriate only for the Sicilian campaign.

While the passages cited so far focus on Thucydides' account as an affecting portrayal of disaster, some modern receptions of the Sicilian expedition overtly point up the political implications of responses to disaster. Consider some remarks which were anonymously published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1836, but were written by Sir Daniel Sandford, Professor of Greek at Glasgow (and briefly a Member of Parliament). Sandford is explaining that his overall preference for Herodotus over all other historians must be qualified in one important respect:

the seventh book—the Sicilian book—of his immediate successor is an insurmountable exception to the entireness of this judgment: simply because that seventh book is the finest piece of prose composition that ever flowed from human pen not superhumanly inspired. There is no picture so vivid. There is no tragedy so piercing. There is no climax of retributive horrors so overwhelming. We have blistered the last pages of that book with many tears. And the fount is not yet dried up.

He then proceeds to contrast the pity aroused for the fate of the Athenians in Sicily with his feelings for their compatriots at home:

But never, for the thousandth part of a second, did we pity the Athenians at home. We laugh, shout, sing, dance, jump about the room, in exultation at their misery. The base scoundrels! The low, dirty, greasy, phrasing, canting, turncoat rabble! Was it a second incarnation of Alcibiades's judges that hooted WELLINGTON on the anniversary of WATERLOO?⁹

Sandford's comments expose a paradox at the heart of Thucydides' work: the negative image of the Athenians at home is combined with profound pathos for their sufferings abroad. That paradox would soon be undermined by George Grote, who adopted an openly hostile attitude towards one of the main vehicles for Thucydides' pathos, the Athenian general Nicias, as part of his recuperation of the Athenian democracy.¹⁰ But even at the time Sandford was writing the standing of Thucydides' version had been challenged. The historian William Mitford had pointed to the problem of the selectivity of our evidence.¹¹ And before this, around the start of the American War of Independence, the example of Syracusan resistance to Athens was used as a warning against British chances of success against the American colonists: "Let anyone read also, the history of the war which the Athenians, from a thirst of Empire, made on the Syracusans in Sicily, a people derived from the same origin with them; and let him, if he can, avoid rejoicing in the defeat of the Athenians."¹² Here Thucydides' account is still read as a story of Athenian defeat rather than Syracusan triumph, but the sympathies assumed of the reader are reversed.

(7) MACNEICE 1965, p. 90.

(8) WAUGH 1947, p. 10. The sequel is: "a chorus rose from the back bench—"The bell? Did you say it was the bell sir?" and books were noisily shut."

(9) ANON. 1836, p. 480.

(10) GROTE's comment (1903–1906, p. vi.182) "our great historian—after devoting two immortal books to this expedition—after setting forth emphatically both the glory of its dawn and the wretchedness of its close, with a dramatic genius parallel to the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles' is significantly placed in the context of a discussion of why Thucydides comments on the death of Nicias but not on that of Demosthenes. Marchant in his school edition of Book 7 cited this 'eloquent protest' as known to 'every reader of Grote'" (1893, p. xviii).

(11) MITFORD 1829, p. iii.287: "Had we Syracusan histories of these times, provocation for such barbarity would probably be found alleged." He is alluding to the mistreatment of the Athenian prisoners in Sicily.

(12) PRICE 1776, p. 91.

This brief sketch of modern receptions has moved beyond purely emotional responses to point to the political implications of receiving Thucydides' narrative of disaster. Implicated in such responses are attitudes to the broader construction of the movement of history (whose side are we on?) as well as to internal politics and the workings of imperialism. These political implications are particularly apparent in another strain in the reception of the Sicilian disaster: the habit of drawing parallels between Athens' foolish foreign expedition and modern military adventures.¹³ It would require an altogether different sort of study to follow through such receptions in detail—but even they have their counterparts in the ancient evidence to which we now turn.

II. SICILY AND THE IDEA OF DEFEAT

The dominant focus on the Athenians' decisive loss within the reception history of Thucydides' work is a tribute to the artistry of his narrative. The extraordinary scale of the disaster is conveyed by the memorable closing summary and the immediate transition to the response in Athens to news of the defeat:

κατὰ πάντα γὰρ πάντως νικηθέντες καὶ οὐδὲν ὀλίγον ἐς οὐδὲν κακοπαθήσαντες πανωλεθρία δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον καὶ πεζῶς καὶ νῆες καὶ οὐδὲν ὅτι οὐκ ἀπόλετο, καὶ ὀλίγοι ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπ' οἴκου ἀπενόστησαν. ταῦτα μὲν τὰ περὶ Σικελίαν γενόμενα. Ἐς δὲ τὰς Ἀθήνας ἐπειδὴ ἠγγέλθη, ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν ἠπίσταν καὶ τοῖς πάνυ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔργου διαπεφευγῶσι καὶ σαφῶς ἀγγέλλουσι, μὴ οὕτω γε ἄγαν πανσυδὶ διεφθάρθαι· ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἔγνωσαν [...] πάντα δὲ πανταχόθεν αὐτοὺς ἐλύπει τε καὶ περιεστήκει ἐπὶ τῷ γεγεννημένῳ φόβος τε καὶ κατάπληξις μεγίστη δὴ· ἅμα μὲν γὰρ στερόμενοι καὶ ἰδία ἕκαστος καὶ ἡ πόλις ὀπλιτῶν τε πολλῶν καὶ ἰππέων καὶ ἡλικίας οἶαν οὐχ ἑτέραν ἐώρων ὑπάρχουσαν ἐβαρύνοντο· ἅμα δὲ ναῦς οὐχ ὀρώντες ἐν τοῖς νεωσοῖκοις ἱκανὰς οὐδὲ χρήματα ἐν τῷ κοινῷ οὐδ' ὑπηρεσίας ταῖς ναυσὶν ἀνέλπιστοι ἦσαν ἐν τῷ παρόντι σωθῆσεσθαι, τοὺς τε ἀπὸ τῆς Σικελίας πολεμίους εὐθὺς σφίσι ἐνόμιζον τῷ ναυτικῷ ἐπὶ τὸν Πειραιᾶ πλευσεῖσθαι, ἄλλως τε καὶ τοσοῦτον κρατήσαντας [...]. (7.87–8.1)

This was, as they say, total annihilation. Beaten in every way on every front, extreme miseries suffered on an extreme scale, and army, fleet, and everything else destroyed, few out of all those many made their return home. Such were the events in Sicily. When the news reached Athens, for a long time they could not believe that their forces had been so utterly destroyed, and would not credit even the unambiguous reports brought back by soldiers who had actually witnessed the events and made their escape. Then when they had to accept the truth [...] on every side there was nothing for them but pain, and they were plunged into fear and the utmost consternation at what had happened. The burden of loss lay heavy on individual families and on the city at large—so many hoplites gone, so many cavalrymen, such a swathe of youth and no replacement to be seen. And when at the same time they could not see an adequate number of ships in the docks, adequate funds in the treasury, or an adequate supply of officers for the ships, they despaired of surviving the situation as it was. They thought that their enemies in Sicily, particularly after such a crushing victory, would immediately send their fleet against the Peiraeus ...

Through an array of techniques such as repetition, litotes, and polar and proverbial expressions, Thucydides lays stress on the totality of the Athenian defeat.¹⁴

(13) E.g. GREENWOOD 2012, p. 167–172 for the Greek invasion of Anatolia; GRANT 1972, p. 1466, STRADIS 2015, p. 435–436, and RAWLINGS 2015, p. 558 for Vietnam; SAWYER 2015, p. 531–532 for the 1991 Gulf War; NORTON 2004, p. 200, BRECHER 2005, for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

(14) For other accounts of how the Athenians heard of the defeat, see Plut. *Nic.* 30, *Mor.* 509a–c (news unwittingly revealed in a barber–shop); Athen. 9.407ab (news received in the theatre during the performance of a gigantomachy by the parodist Hegemon). Cf. SMITH 2004, p. 64–65 on the thematic weight of these anecdotes.

It is not just through the rhetorical grandeur of this closing section that Thucydides makes the Sicilian expedition central to his exploration of Athens' defeat. In his overview of Athens' mistaken strategy after the death of Pericles, the expedition is the only event outside Athens mentioned to substantiate the claim that Athens' overall defeat was the result of internal dissension:

ἐξ ὧν ἄλλα τε πολλά, ὡς ἐν μεγάλῃ πόλει καὶ ἀρχὴν ἔχουσα, ἡμαρτήθη καὶ ὁ ἐς Σικελίαν πλοῦς, ὃς οὐ τοσοῦτον γνώμης ἀμάρτημα ἦν πρὸς οὓς ἐπήσαν, ὅσον οἱ ἐκπέμψαντες οὐ τὰ πρόσφορα τοῖς οἰχομένοις ἐπιγινώσκοντες, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας διαβολὰς περὶ τῆς τοῦ δήμου προστασίας τὰ τε ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ ἀμβλύτερα ἐποίουν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν πόλιν πρῶτον ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἐταράχθησαν. (2.65.11)

The consequence was—this being a great city and one in possession of an empire—that many mistakes were made, in particular the Sicilian expedition. That was not so much a mistake of judgement about the enemy they were attacking as a failure on the part of those sending the men abroad to follow up this decision with further support for them. Instead they engaged in personal intrigues over the leadership of the people and so blunted the effectiveness of the forces in the field and for the first time embroiled the city at home in factional dispute.

Athens' final defeat is subsequently mentioned in another prolepsis before Alcibiades' speech promoting an attack on Sicily:

ὧν γὰρ ἐν ἀξιώματι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀστῶν, ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις μείζουσιν ἢ κατὰ τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν οὐσίαν ἐχρήτο ἔς τε τὰς ἵπποτροφίας καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δαπάνας· ὅπερ καὶ καθεῖλεν ὕστερον τὴν τῶν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν οὐχ ἥκιστα. φοβηθέντες γὰρ αὐτοῦ οἱ πολλοὶ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς τε κατὰ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα παρανομίας ἐς τὴν δίαίταν καὶ τῆς διανοίας ὧν καθ' ἐν ἕκαστον ἐν ὄτῳ γίγνοιτο ἔπρασεν, ὡς τυραννίδος ἐπιθυμοῦντι πολέμοι καθέστασαν, καὶ δημοσίᾳ κράτιστα διαθέντι τὰ τοῦ πολέμου ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστοι τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν αὐτοῦ ἀχθεσθέντες, καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπιτρέψαντες, οὐ διὰ μακροῦ ἔσφηλαν τὴν πόλιν. (6.15.3–4)

For Alcibiades' status among the townspeople was such that he indulged his desires beyond his actual means in maintaining a stable of horses and in other expenses, which was just the kind of thing that was largely responsible later for the destruction of Athens. The people at large were so apprehensive about the scale of his general lawlessness and the self-indulgence of his lifestyle and also about the ambitions behind every activity he engaged in that they thought he craved a tyranny and became hostile towards him; and although in the public sphere he was excellent at managing the affairs of war, in private matters they were every one of them offended by his mode of life and so they put their trust in others and in no time at all brought about the downfall of the city.

It is revealing that this passage has sometimes been read as referring to the defeat in Sicily in 413 BC rather than to the final defeat in 404 BC (the confusion stems from the fact that Alcibiades was exiled twice and from the apparent similarities in the reasons for his exiles).¹⁵ Interpreted as an evocation of the final defeat, the passage has a powerful rhetorical effect: in the context of the decision to send the expedition to Sicily—highlighted at 2.65.11 as the greatest departure from the Periclean strategy—Thucydides again directs readers' attention to the final defeat, pointing to some of the continuities in the relations between the *demos* and its leaders that led to that defeat.

In an earlier article I have argued that Xenophon evokes Thucydides' account of the reception of the news of the Sicilian disaster in Athens when he turns himself to describe the reception of the news of the defeat at Aegospotami. The effect is to show that what was feared in the immediate aftermath of the Sicilian disaster is now imminent and to point to the lingering impact of that earlier disaster. I also suggested in that article that the Sicilian historian Diodorus (first century BC) in turn transfers back to the context of the Sicilian expedition a motif that Xenophon placed in that Aegospotami setting, namely the Athenians' fear that they might themselves now be punished

(15) See Rood 1998a, p. 127–128 for discussion; also Rood 2004, p. 370–371 for the possibility that Diodorus' account of the second exile is influenced by Thucydides.

for what they had done to the Melians and other allies (in Diodorus, the example of Melos is used in a speech advocating the harsh treatment of the Athenian captives in Sicily). The effect in Diodorus is to make his native island rather than Aegospotami the scene of the Athenians' imperial comeuppance and an emblem of their defeat.¹⁶

The view that the defeat in Sicily spelt the end of Athens' empire was expressed by prominent Latin authors in the same century in which Diodorus was writing. One instance of this trope is found in Cicero's *Verrines*: "Hic primum opes illius civitatis comminutae depressaeque sunt; in hoc portu Atheniensium nobilitatis, imperii, gloriae naufragium factum existimatur" (5.98: "There it was that the hitherto triumphant power of that famous state was shattered and brought low; it was in this harbour that we think of the pride and power and glory of the Athenian people as suffering shipwreck"). Cicero is here seizing on the geographical link offered by Syracuse to underline the contrast between the extraordinary grand reversal of fortune suffered by Athens and the humiliation of Syracuse under the praetorship of Verres, when a pirate ship was able to sail unscathed into the harbour. The magnification of the scale of the Athenian disaster in Sicily evidently serves Cicero's rhetorical purposes, but his gambit at least presupposes that the claim would not sound wholly implausible.¹⁷ Its plausibility is confirmed by the similar vision of the scale of the Sicilian defeat made by Livy in a speech attributed to Fabius Maximus warning the Romans against an overseas venture—in this case, transferring the war against Carthage to Africa at a time when Hannibal was still in Italy: "Athenienses, prudentissima ciuitas, bello domi relicto, auctore aequae impigro ac nobili iuvene magna classe in Siciliam tramissa, una pugna nauali florentem rem publicam suam in perpetuum adflixerunt" (28.41.17: "The Athenians, although their state had great foresight, leaving a war at home crossed over to Sicily with a great fleet under the leadership of a young man as energetic as he was noble, and in a single naval battle permanently ruined their prosperous state"). As we shall see in the final section of this article, this passage is also part of a wider trend in later historiography whereby the geopolitical dynamics of the Athenian–Sicilian conflict are implicitly reconfigured by comparison with conflicts involving Carthage.¹⁸

We may close this section by discussing a rhetorical treatment of Thucydides' narrative choices that points again to how the Sicilian campaign could be construed as an emblem of defeat. In his essay on Thucydides, the critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BC) objected to Thucydides' placement of the *Epitaphios*, suggesting that it was inappropriate to include so important a speech in the first year of the war, given the small scale of the fatalities in that year. Far more appropriate, he suggested, to include a speech to commemorate either the men who fell in the glorious victory over the Spartans at Pylos or those who died in the Sicilian campaign:

οἱ ἐν Σικελίᾳ μετὰ Νικίου καὶ Δημοσθένους ἀποθανόντες Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν συμμάχων ἐν τε ταῖς ναυμαχίαις ἐν τε τοῖς κατὰ γῆν ἀγῶσι καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον ἐν τῇ δυστήνῳ φυγῇ τετρακιςμυρίων οὐκ ἐλάττους ὄντες καὶ οὐδὲ ταφῆς δυνηθέντες τυχεῖν τῆς νομίμου πόσῳ μᾶλλον ἦσαν ἐπιτηδειότεροι τυγχάνειν οἴκτων τε καὶ κόσμων ἐπιταφίων; (*Thuc.* 18)

(16) ROOD 2004, p. 351–353 et 357–358, discussing Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.3 and Diod. 13.30.6. For links between Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3 and Thucydides' Sicilian expedition, see Ehrhardt 1994 (who argues that Thucydides wrote his account of the Athenians' disastrous retreat from Syracuse with knowledge of the successful retreat of the Ten Thousand); further links are explored in a forthcoming commentary by L. Huitink and T. Rood.

(17) The common application of naval imagery to politics lends the claim further plausibility, in that a defeat in a naval battle can be seen as a "shipwreck" of empire. Similar to Cicero's rhetoric is GIBBON 1993, p. i.343: "The opulent city of Syracuse, in whose port the navies of Athens and Carthage had formerly been sunk, was sacked by a handful of barbarians." Cf. also Plut. *Dion* 14.2–3 (the Syracusans' indignation at the influence in Syracuse of a single Athenian "sophist", i.e. Plato, when formerly the Athenians failed to take Syracuse with great naval and infantry forces).

(18) Within Livy, cf. also how Marcellus, victor over Syracuse in the Second Punic War, weeps as he recalls the Athenian and Carthaginian defeats at the hands of Syracuse (25.24.12); for discussion see FEENEY (2007) 52 with n. 49 for further bibliography, and Levene in this volume.

What of those Athenians and their allies who died in Sicily with Nicias and Demosthenes in the sea-battles, the land engagements and finally in the lamentable retreat? There were no fewer than forty thousand of them, and they could not be given the customary burial-rites: how much more did these men deserve to be mourned and honoured with funeral speeches?

Dionysius' judgement has often been criticised, but here he does show himself an acute reader of the shaping of Thucydides' narrative. The initial suggestion picks up the important structural relation of Pylos and Sicily in Thucydides' narrative: the success at Pylos fomented the ambitions that brought the Athenians to Sicily (the causal linkage is underlined by the important land/sea reversals and by an explicit comparison at 7.71.7).¹⁹ He also picks up on the particular horrors of the retreat, culminating in the lack of proper burial for the Athenians crammed into the quarries at Syracuse. In focusing on the desirability of honouring men who were not properly buried with a funeral speech, Dionysius re-writes Thucydides' own juxtaposition of the *Epitaphios* with the plague at Athens. Thucydides sets the disorder instigated by the plague against the idealised image of the funeral oration; Dionysius proposes a funeral oration that would compensate for the extremes suffered in Sicily. Dionysius' suggestion could even be read as a response to the way that Thucydides' account of the sufferings in the quarries itself echoes the earlier account of the plague.²⁰ In reading Sicily as the climax of defeat, then, Dionysius paves the way for defeat itself to be overcome by speech.²¹

III. SICILY AND THE PERSIAN WARS

Central to Thucydides' presentation of the Athenians' defeat in Sicily is the idea of contrast with their great successes against Persia. This leitmotif is conveyed through explicit allusions within the text to the Persian Wars as well as through echoes of the accounts of those wars by Aeschylus and Herodotus (and perhaps by others too). The series of echoes is the more pointed because Thucydides traces a causal connection between the Athenians' spirited display against Persia and their subsequent rise to a position of hegemony in the Greek world, which ultimately leads to their downfall in Sicily.²²

Links were made by other ancient writers between the victory over Persia and the defeat in Sicily. Diodorus, for instance, reported Nicias drawing on the memory of the Persian Wars as he encourages the Athenians before the final battle in the Great Harbour: ἀπαντας δ' ἀναμνησθέντας τῶν ἐν Σαλαμῖνι τροπαίων ἡξίου μὴ καταρρίψαι τῆς πατρίδος τὴν περιβόητον δόξαν, μηδὲ αὐτοὺς ἀνδραπόδων τρόπον παραδοῦναι τοῖς Συρακοσίοις (13.15.2: "all of them he reminded of the trophies erected at Salamis and begged them not to bring to disrepute the far-famed glory of their fatherland nor surrender themselves like slaves to the Syracusans"). Diodorus here offers a re-writing of the emotional pre-battle speech that Thucydides gives Nicias at 7.69.2— and makes explicit what is implicit in Thucydides, namely that the coming defeat is to be read as a reversal of the success at Salamis.

(19) Cf. ROOD 1998a, index, s.v. "Pylos, and Sicily".

(20) For this pattern see ROOD 2012a, p. 159, with further references.

(21) Cf. the similar ideological implications of Dionysius' criticism in his *Letter to Pompeius* (3) of Thucydides' choice of an ending to his work: "it would have been better after describing all the events of the war, to end his history with a climax, and one that was most remarkable and especially gratifying to his audience, the return of the exiles from Phyle, which marked the beginning of the city's recovery of freedom."

(22) See ROOD 1999a; HARRISON 2000.

Other authors still more clearly used the Persian Wars and the Sicilian expedition as opposite poles of success and defeat. The second-century AD philosopher Maximus of Tyre (who frequently made moralizing points out of the history of the fifth and fourth centuries BC) drew on these events in a discussion of the resources of human deliberation (as opposed to divination): *ἐπίασιν Μῆδοι, πῶς φυλάξομαι; κἄν ὁ θεὸς μὴ συμβουλευῆ, τὰς τριήρεις ἔχω· ἐπιθυμῶ Σικελίας, πῶς λάβω; κἄν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς μὴ κωλύῃ, ἡ Σικελία πολλή* (11.6: “The Medes are advancing; how shall I defend myself? Even if the god does not advise me, I have my triremes. ‘I desire Sicily; how may I capture it? Even if the god does not prevent me, Sicily is large’”).²³ Maximus even throws in a clear echo of a memorable expression in Nicias’ letter in Thucydides (7.13.2: *πολλὴ δὲ ἡ Σικελία* (“Sicily is large”))—a bitter reminder of the failure of his earlier warnings. Similarly, in Chariton’s novel, the heroine Callirhoe speaks of her beloved Chaereas as *πόλεως πρῶτος, ἦν οὐκ ἐνίκησαν οὐδὲ Ἀθηναῖοι οἱ ἐν Μαραθῶνι καὶ Σαλαμῖνι νικήσαντες τὸν μέγαν σου βασιλέα* (6.7.10: “the foremost man in a city which not even the Athenians have defeated—and they defeated your Great King at Marathon and Salamis”).

Thucydides’ technique of echoing earlier accounts of the Persian Wars is reversed when echoes of Thucydides appear in descriptions of the earlier war. A striking example comes in Lysias’ *Epitaphios*, which offers a narrative of Salamis that has clear echoes of Thucydides’ account of the final battle in the harbour at Syracuse. Both accounts, unsurprisingly, focus on the grouping of large numbers of ships in a confined area. They focus too on the noise and confusion of battle, offering generalizing accounts of the action by means of an accumulation of short clauses. The clearest link, however, is the shared emphasis on the emotions of onlookers:

Lys. 2.38: *ἀντιπάλου δὲ πολὺν χρόνον οὐσης τῆς ναυμαχίας δοκοῦντες τοτὲ μὲν νενικηκέναι καὶ σεσῶσθαι, τοτὲ δ’ ἠττήσθαι καὶ ἀπολωλέναι* (“As for a long time the battle was evenly matched, they thought at one moment they were victorious and safe, at another they were defeated and destroyed”).

Thuc. 7.71.3: *δι’ ὀλίγου γὰρ οὐσης τῆς θέας καὶ οὐ πάντων ἅμα ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ σκοποῦντων, εἰ μὲν τινες ἰδοίεν πῆ τοὺς σφετέρους ἐπικρατοῦντας, ἀνεθάρσησάν τε ἂν καὶ πρὸς ἀνάκλησιν θεῶν μὴ στερῆσαι σφᾶς τῆς σωτηρίας ἐτρέποντο, οἱ δ’ ἐπὶ τὸ ἡσώμενον βλέψαντες ὀλοφυρμῶ τε ἅμα μετὰ βοῆς ἐχρῶντο καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν δρωμένων τῆς ὕψεως καὶ τὴν γνώμην μᾶλλον τῶν ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ ἐδουλοῦντο· ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἀντίπαλόν τι τῆς ναυμαχίας ἀπιδόντες, διὰ τὸ ἀκρίτως ξυνεχῆς τῆς ἀμίλλης καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν αὐτοῖς ἴσα τῇ δόξῃ περιδεῶς ξυναπονεύοντες ἐν τοῖς χαλεπώτατα διήγον· αἰεὶ γὰρ παρ’ ὀλίγον ἢ διέφευγον ἢ ἀπώλλυντο* (“Since the spectacle they were witnessing was close to the shore they were not all looking at the same thing at the same time. If one group saw their comrades coming out on top anywhere their spirits rose, and they fell to invoking the gods not to dash their hopes of a safe return; while those who were watching some reverse uttered loud cries of lamentation and were more crushed at the sight of what was going on than were those in the thick of the action; and yet others, who had their eyes fixed on some part of the battle where the outcome was undecided lived through agonies of suspense as the conflict continued inconclusively, even swaying their bodies in the extremity of their terror in sympathy with the movement of their opinions, as at any one moment they were either on the point of salvation or on the point of destruction”).

What Lysias offers is a distillation and simplification of Thucydides’ complex narrative.²⁴

The linking of the Persian Wars and the Sicilian expedition also affected the way events themselves came to be told. In his *Life of Nicias*, Plutarch recounts the various omens that were said to have occurred at the time the Athenian fleet was leaving for Sicily: *ἐν δὲ Δελφοῖς Παλλάδιον ἔστηκε χρυσοῦν ἐπὶ φοίνικος χαλκοῦ βεβηκός, ἀνάθημα τῆς πόλεως ἀπὸ τῶν Μηδικῶν ἀριστείων· τοῦτ’ ἔκοπτον ἐφ’ ἡμέρας πολλὰς προσπετόμενοι κόρακες, καὶ τὸν καρπὸν ὄντα χρυσοῦν τοῦ*

(23) Cf. also Max. Tyr. 24.6–7; Aeschin. 2.76.

(24) Cf. POHLENZ 1948, p. 72–73; TODD 2007, p. 242–243.

φοίνικος ἀπέτρωνον καὶ κατέβαλλον (13.5: “At Delphi, moreover, there stood a Palladium, made of gold and set upon a bronze palm tree, a dedication of the city of Athens from the spoils of her valour in the Persian wars. Ravens alighted on this image and pecked it for many days together; they also bit off the fruit of the palm-tree, which was of gold, and cast it down to the ground”). The story (repeated at *Mor.* 397f) is presumably a later invention designed to convey the idea that the defeat in Sicily was effectively the undoing of the glorious successes against Persia; perhaps it plays on the later development of the κόραξ (“raven”) as a grappling hook for use on ships (e.g. *Plb.* 1.22.3). More detail is given in Pausanias (10.15.4–5), who names a source, the Atthidographer Cleidemus (*FGrH* 323 F10), and reveals that the dedications were specifically associated with the Battle of Eurymedon (and so not with the Persian invasion of Greece in 480–479 BC, the main focus of Thucydides’ plotment).

The Sicilian paradigm also changed the way the story of the Persian Wars was told. In his *Life of Themistocles*, Plutarch seems to draw on Thucydides’ account of the Sicilian expedition in his description of the abandonment of Athens in 480 BC:

Ἐκπλεούσης δὲ τῆς πόλεως τοῖς μὲν οἴκτον τὸ θέαμα, τοῖς δὲ θαῦμα τῆς τόλμης παρέιχε, γενεὰς μὲν ἄλλη προπεμπόντων, αὐτῶν δ’ ἀκάμπτων πρὸς οἰμωγὰς καὶ δάκρυα γονέων καὶ περιβολὰς διαπερώντων εἰς τὴν νῆσον. καίτοι πολὺν μὲν οἱ διὰ γῆρας ὑπολειπόμενοι τῶν πολιτῶν ἔλεον εἶχον, ἦν δὲ τις καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμέρων καὶ συντρόφων ζῶων ἐπικλώσα γλυκυθυμία, μετ’ ὠρυγῆς καὶ πόθου συμπαραθεόντων ἐμβαίνουσι τοῖς ἑαυτῶν τροφεῦσιν. (*Them.* 10.8–9)

When the entire city was thus putting out to sea, the sight provoked pity in some, and in others astonishment at the hardihood of the step; for they were sending off their families in one direction, while they themselves, unmoved by the lamentations and tears and embraces of their loved ones, were crossing over to the island. Besides, many citizens who were left behind on account of their great age invited pity also, and much affecting fondness was shown by the tame domestic animals, which ran along with yearning cries of distress by the side of their masters as they embarked.

There is no counterpart in Thucydides to those dogs, but the section as a whole contains clear echoes of his famous description of the departure of the Athenian force for Sicily from the Piraeus (6.30–31): both passages contain the idea that those left behind are escorting the departing fleet (cf. *προπέμποντες* Thuc. 6.30.2), an emphasis on the Athenians’ astonishing daring and on the spectacle (cf. Thuc. 6.31.6: ὁ στόλος οὐχ ἦσσαν τόλμης τε θάμβει καὶ ὄψεως λαμπρότητι περιβόητος ἐγένετο), and a strong focus on shifting moods (cf. Thuc. 6.30.2–31.1).²⁵ It blends with this description, however, echoes of a Thucydidean passage which is the counterpoint to the departure scene—the Athenians’ subsequent withdrawal on land: thus Thucydides compares the departing army with a city (7.75.5) and dwells in particular on the feelings aroused by those left behind

(25) See the detailed discussion of GRANINGER 2010 (anticipated by ROOD 1999b, 2004, p. 367 n. 67); cf. Mary RENAULT’s fictional account of the departure in *The Last of the Wine*: “So must my great-grandfather have seen the fleet gather at Salamis” (2015, p. 14). Thuc. 6.30–31 was much evoked or imitated in antiquity: see e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.13 (ROOD 2004, p. 366–367); perhaps Ap. Rhod. 1.238–241, 310–311 (HUNTER 1988, p. 439); Livy 29.26.1–2, 7–8; Arr. *Ind.* 20.9, perhaps *Parth.* fr. 68 Roos; also Chariton 3.5.2–3 (a description of a Syracusan fleet sailing to Asia Minor), where, as in Plutarch, motifs from the departure of the fleet from the Piraeus are combined with motifs from the Athenian collapse: Συρακόσιοι δὲ δημοσίᾳ τὸν στόλον ἐξέπεμψαν, ἵνα καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ἀξίωμα προστεθῆ τῆς πρεσβείας. καθέλκουσαν οὖν ἐκείνην τὴν τριήρη τὴν στρατηγικὴν, ἔχουσαν ἔτι τὰ σημεῖα τῆς νίκης. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦκεν ἡ κυρία τῆς ἀναγωγῆς ἡμέρα, τὸ πλῆθος εἰς τὸν λιμένα συνέδραμεν, οὐκ ἄνδρες μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ παῖδες, καὶ ἦσαν ὁμοῦ δάκρυα, εὐχαί, στεναγμοί, παραμυθία, φόβος, θάρσος, ἀπόγνωσις, ἐλπίς (“The Syracusans sent out the expedition at public expense so that this too might add to the mission’s prestige. So they launched the famous flagship which still carried the standards of their victory. When the appointed day for departure arrived, the people flocked to the harbour, not only men but also women and children, and there simultaneously occurred tears, prayers, moaning, encouragement, terror, courage, resignation, hope”); cf. the focus on conflicting emotions at Thuc. 7.71.4, with a similar use of asyndeton, with SMITH 2007, p. 176–192 on the broader spatial dynamics.

(7.75.4: οὐκ ἄνευ ὀλίγων ἐπιθειαςμῶν καὶ οἰμωγῆς ὑπολειπόμενοι, ὥστε δάκρυσι πᾶν τὸ στράτευμα πλησθῆν). Plutarch thereby offers an implicit commentary on Thucydides' own narrative teleology within the Sicilian account as well as a reminder of his overarching vision of the trajectory of Athenian imperialism.²⁶

IV. TURNING DEFEAT INTO VICTORY

The closing cadences of Thucydides' Sicilian narrative do not simply magnify the sense of defeat by recalling Athens' prior greatness. They also invite readers to ponder the fact that the meaning of defeat is not set in stone (unlike the epigrams celebrating the Greek victories over Persia that his language at points evokes²⁷) but is itself subjected to change with the passing of time. The Athenians' fears at 8.1.2 about the onset of a Peloponnesian fleet remind us that it in fact took several more years, and another great naval defeat, at Aegospotami, for those fears to be realised. Thucydides points, then, to a connection between the Athenians' defeat in Sicily and their eventual defeat in the Peloponnesian War, but also to their powers of endurance. And those powers are overtly signalled in the impressive Athenian response:

ὁμως δὲ ὡς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἐδόκει χρήναι μὴ ἐνδιδόναι, ἀλλὰ παρασκευάζεσθαι καὶ ναυτικόν, ὅθεν ἂν δύνωνται ξύλα ξυμπορισαμένους, καὶ χρήματα, καὶ τὰ τῶν ξυμμάχων ἐς ἀσφάλειαν ποιέσθαι, καὶ μάλιστα τὴν Εὐβοίαν, τῶν τε κατὰ τὴν πόλιν τι ἐς εὐτέλειαν σωφρονίσει, καὶ ἀρχὴν τινα πρεσβυτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἐλέσθαι, οἵτινες περὶ τῶν παρόντων ὡς ἂν καιρὸς ἢ προβουλεύσουσιν. πάντα τε πρὸς τὸ παρακρήμα περιδεές, ὅπερ φιλεῖ δῆμος ποιεῖν, ἐτοῖμοι ἦσαν εὐτακτεῖν. καὶ ὡς ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐποίουν ταῦτα. (8.1.3–4)

Nevertheless, they thought that as far as their circumstances permitted they should not give in. Instead, they should prepare a fleet, gathering timber and money from whatever sources they could, and they should make sure of their allies, especially Euboea; they should also make prudent economies in the city's expenditure, and select a board of elders to oversee current business as might be required. And in the panic of the moment they were ready to accept good discipline in everything, as the people tend to do in such circumstances. They then proceeded to implement the decisions they had made.

Thucydides goes on to signal a shift in Athenian perceptions of Sicily at the time of revolt of Euboea: Τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ὡς ἦλθε τὰ περὶ τὴν Εὐβοίαν γεγενημένα, ἔκπληξις μεγίστη δὴ τῶν πρὶν παρέστη. οὐτε γὰρ ἦ ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ ξυμφορὰ, καίπερ μεγάλη τότε δόξασα εἶναι, οὐτε ἄλλο οὐδέν πω οὕτως ἐφόβησεν (8.96.1: "When the news from Euboea reached Athens the sense of shock there was greater than ever before. Neither the disaster in Sicily, great though it seemed to be at the time, nor any other event had ever scared them as much").²⁸

Other sources (if they are reliable) suggest that Thucydides could have made even more of the Athenian capacity to endure had he focused more on the individual soldiers who escaped capture in Sicily. Thucydides does mention that some men made their way to Catana (7.85.4),

(26) Given this similarity, it is also worth speculating that Plutarch's (otherwise unattested) claim that Themistocles initially advised the Athenians to sail out and engage the Persians as far as possible from Greece (*Them.* 7.1) is modelled on the similar advice that Hermocrates offers the Syracusans in Thucydides (6.33). For links between the Persian Wars and the Sicilian expedition, see also Aristid. 6.36; Hermogenes *On Staseis* 1.23.1–5 Patillon; and the anonymous poem cited by the scholia on Thuc. 7.86.5.

(27) CONNOR 1984, p. 206, n. 54; ROOD 1998b, p. 262–266.

(28) For the link to Sicily, cf. ROOD 1998a, p. 278 n. 82. Despite the criticism of HORNBLOWER 1991–2008 *ad loc.* (who stresses Athenian recovery from the Sicilian disaster by this point and thinks that 8.96 is at odds with the emphasis given earlier to that disaster), I would still maintain that the revolt of Euboea is to be read as a consequence of the Sicilian disaster.

but it is the defendant in Lysias 20 who mentions his participation in subsequent raids using Catana as a base (Lys. 20.24–26). A more unexpected testimony comes in the midst of Pausanias' description of Achaea. He condemns an Achaean general, Diaeus, who fled a battle by suggesting that "his conduct towards the Achaeans showed a marked contrast to that of Callistratus, the son of Empedus, towards the Athenians" (οὐδέν τι γινόμενος ἐς Ἀχαιοὺς ὁμοίος ἢ καὶ Καλλίστρατος ὁ Ἐμπεδου πρὸς Ἀθηναίους). He then goes on to offer a detailed narrative of the heroic deeds of Callistratus:

τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ ἀνδρὶ ἵππαρχήσαντι ἐν Σικελίᾳ, ὅτε Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι τοῦ στόλου μετεσχίκεσαν ἀπώλλυντο πρὸς τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ Ἀσινάρῳ, τούτῳ τότε τῷ Καλλιστράτῳ παρέστη τόλμα διεκπαῖσαι διὰ τῶν πολεμίων ἄγοντι τοὺς ἵππεας· ὡς δὲ τὸ πολὺ ἀπέσωσεν αὐτῶν ἐς Κατάνην, ἀνέστρεφεν ὀπίσω τὴν αὐτὴν αὖθις ὁδὸν ἐς Συρακούσας, διαρπάζοντας δὲ ἔτι εὐρῶν τὸ Ἀθηναίων στρατόπεδον καταβάλλει τε ὅσον πέντε ἐξ αὐτῶν, καὶ τραύματα ἐπίκαιρα αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ ἵππος λαβόντες ἀφῖασι τὴν ψυχὴν. οὗτος μὲν δὴ ἀγαθὴν δόξαν Ἀθηναίοις καὶ αὐτῷ κτῶμενος περιεποίησέ τε ὧν ἦρχε καὶ ἐτελεύτησεν αὐτὸς ἐκουσίως. (7.16.4)

This man commanded some cavalry in Sicily, and when the Athenians and their partners in the expedition were being massacred at the river Asinarus, then this Callistratos courageously cut a way through the enemy at the head of his horsemen. He brought most of them safe to Catana, and then returned by the same way back to Syracuse. Finding the enemy still plundering the Athenian camp, he cut down some five of them, and then both he and his horse received mortal wounds and died. So he won glory for the Athenians and for himself, by saving the men under his command and seeking his own death.

Where Pausanias derived this story is unknown, but the story perhaps survived as a powerful suggestion that the aftermath of defeat can be palliated by displays of individual valour.²⁹

The Athenians' recovery from Sicily could also be thought to undermine the magnitude of the preceding defeat. Thus the second-century AD historian Arrian chose to highlight the destruction of Thebes by Alexander by contrasting it with earlier Greek misfortunes, starting with the Sicilian disaster:

Καὶ πάθος τοῦτο Ἑλληνικὸν μεγέθει τε τῆς ἀλούσης πόλεως καὶ ὀξύτητι τοῦ ἔργου, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ τῷ παραλόγῳ ἐς τε τοὺς παθόντας καὶ τοὺς δράσαντας, οὐ μείον τι τοὺς ἄλλους Ἑλληνας ἢ καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς μετασχόντας τοῦ ἔργου ἐξέπληξε. τὰ μὲν γὰρ περὶ Σικελίαν Ἀθηναίους ξυννεχθέντα, εἰ καὶ πλήθει τῶν ἀπολομένων οὐ μείονα τὴν ξυμφορὰν τῇ πόλει ἤνεγκεν, ἀλλὰ τῷ τε πόρρω ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκείας διαφθαρῆναι αὐτοῖς τὸν στρατόν, καὶ τὸν πολὺν ξυμμαχικὸν μάλλον ἢ οἰκείον ὄντα, καὶ τῷ τὴν πόλιν αὐτοῖς περιλειφθῆναι, ὡς καὶ ἐς ὕστερον ἐπὶ πολὺ τῷ πολέμῳ ἀντισχεῖν Λακεδαιμονίοις τε καὶ τοῖς ξυμμάχοις καὶ μεγάλῳ βασιλεῖ πολεμοῦντας, οὔτε αὐτοῖς τοῖς παθοῦσιν ἴσην τὴν αἴσθησιν τῆς ξυμφορᾶς προσέθηκεν, οὔτε τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἑλλήσιν τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ πάθει ἔκκληξιν ὁμοίαν παρέσχε. (*Anab.* 1.9.1–2)

This Greek disaster, because of the size of the captured city, the sharpness of the action, and not least the general unexpectedness of the event, both to victors and victims, horrified the other Greeks as much as those who had a hand in it. The misfortunes of the Athenians in Sicily brought no less a disaster upon their city measured by the number of the dead, yet their army was destroyed far from home; it was mainly composed of allies rather than of citizens, and their city was left them, so that they held out long afterwards in the war against Sparta, her allies, and great King; this disaster did not make even the victims themselves equally conscious of misfortune, and did not strike the other Greeks with like horror at the catastrophe.

He goes on to run through other disasters suffered by Athens (Aegospotami) and Sparta as well as by lesser cities.

(29) Cf. e.g. the breakout by a group of Roman soldiers in the aftermath of Cannae at Livy 22.50. Callistratus' willing death perhaps contrasts with the voluntary surrender for which Nicias was excluded from the Athenian casualty-list (Paus. 1.29.12).

The form of Arrian's rhetoric here recalls Polybius' claim that the disasters suffered by Greece in 146 BC were worse than any in the past (38.2). But there Polybius makes no mention of the Sicilian disaster, only of Athens' eventual defeat. The strong Thucydidean influence in Arrian is shown by the phrasing (e.g. πάθος τοῦτο Ἑλληνικόν), by the choice of lesser cities,³⁰ and by the mitigating factor of distance from home (a theme in Thucydides' stress on how the strategic importance of Euboea to Athens made the island's revolt even more of a shock than the Sicilian defeat (8.96.1–2, partly cited above)). In other respects, however, Arrian undercuts Thucydides' depiction of the disaster, which does portray the destruction of the army in Sicily as similar to the destruction of a city.

A different rhetorical move was to suggest that the scale of the disaster makes the scope of the recovery that much more remarkable. The rhetorical writer Aelius Aristides (second century AD) even went so far in his *Panathenaicus* as to extract a victory from the Athenian defeat: γενομένου δὲ τοῦ μεγάλου πάθους – οὐ γὰρ οὖν σιωπήσομαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο ἔτι μείζω μοι δοκεῖ δεικνύναι τὴν πόλιν – οὕτω τοῖς ὑπολοίποις προσηνέχθη πράγμασιν ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ πᾶσαν εἰλήφει τὴν Σικελίαν. οὐ γὰρ ἐστερημένη δυνάμεως ἐφύκει, ἀλλ' ἄρτι προσκεκτημένη (1.232: "But when that great misfortune took place—for I shall not keep silent, but even this, I think, proves the city to be greater still—it behaved in its future conduct as if it had taken all of Sicily. For it was not like a city deprived of its power, but one which recently had acquired more"). Aristides builds here on Thucydides' argument at 2.65 that Athens' recovery provides evidence for his overall thesis that Athens was defeated by internal problems—an argument that led Plato in the *Menexenus* to make the paradoxical or satirical argument that the Peloponnesian War as a whole could be conceived as an Athenian victory, since the Athenians defeated themselves.³¹

V. COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY AND THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION

Thucydides' account of the Sicilian disaster is pervaded not just by a strong sense of impending doom, but also by a powerful insistence that the invasion came close to success and certainly need not have ended as badly as it did. The sense that they almost succeeded is best conveyed by Thucydides' comment after the arrival at Syracuse of a relief force under the Spartan Gylippus: παρὰ τοσοῦτον μὲν αἰ Συράκουσαι ἦλθον κινδύνου (7.2.4: "So close to disaster did the Syracusans

(30) Cf. BOSWORTH 1980–1995 *ad loc.*

(31) *Menex.* 243d: τῆ μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνων ἀρετῇ ἐνικήσαμεν οὐ μόνον τὴν τότε ναυμαχίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄλλον πόλεμον· δόξαν γὰρ δι' αὐτοὺς ἡ πόλις ἔσχεν μὴ ποτ' ἂν καταπολεμηθῆναι μηδ' ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων – καὶ ἀληθῆ ἔδοξεν – τῆ δὲ ἡμετέρα αὐτῶν διαφορᾷ ἐκρατήθημεν, οὐχ ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων· ἀήττητοι γὰρ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ὑπὸ γε ἐκείνων ἐσμέν, ἡμεῖς δὲ αὐτοὶ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐνικήσαμεν καὶ ἠττήθημεν ("It was owing to their valor that we were victorious not only in the sea—fight on that day but in all the rest of the war; it was indeed due to them that men formed the conviction regarding our city (and it was a true conviction) that she could never be warred down, not even by all the world. And in truth it was by our own dissensions that we were brought down and not by other men; for by them we are still to this day undefeated, and it is we ourselves who have both defeated ourselves and been defeated by ourselves"). Similar rhetorical topoi include: Athens was never defeated by the Persians, any success for the Persian being due to bribery (Dem. 15.23); death is an inappropriate word to use of those who die nobly (*Lyc. Leoc.* 49, Hyp. 6.27); Thermopylae was not a defeat because the Spartans preserved their courage (*Lys.* 2.31, *Isoc.* 4.92); the defeat at Thermopylae was more admirable than a victory (*Isoc.* 5.148, 12.187); cf. LORAUX 1981, p. 139–142. For later twists, cf. *Philos. VA* 6.20.4: the Spartans were defeated by the Athenians because they took on their bad customs; Paus. 1.13.5–6: the Spartans claim to have suffered no defeat on land before Leuctra because Thermopylae was a victory while Sphacteria was a trick of war (re-working Thucydides' implied contrast of Thermopylae and Sphacteria at 4.36.3; cf. Servius on Virg. *Aen.* 11.306, the Trojans as undefeated "quia per insidias oppressi sunt"); Max Tyr 3.8: Socrates as the real victor in his trial at Athens is compared with Leonidas as the real victor at Thermopylae; Cass. Dio. 66.6.3: Jews perceived destruction together with their temple as a victory.

come”)—a phrase that was itself much echoed in antiquity.³² After this decisive shift, the Athenians miss chances to escape (at the time of the lunar eclipse, for instance) and instead make decisions (notably the decision to send reinforcements in response to Nicias’ letter) that make the scale of the disaster all the greater.

The idea that disaster could have been avoided is an important part of the historiography of defeat. Though arguably all historical explanation involves speculation about what might have been, the historian E. H. Carr has referred to counterfactual history—the detailed construction of alternative realities—as “the favourite consolation of the defeated”.³³ Carr’s formulation suggests that the readers’ sympathies must lie with the defeated for this sense of “might-have-been” to be activated. This insight seems to be confirmed by the response of the classical scholar Peter Green: “whenever I re-read Book VII of Thucydides I keep hoping it’ll go the other way this time.”³⁴ Part of the power of Thucydides’ account lies in the way it opens up alternative futures.

Some ancient responses to the defeat in Sicily speak to Thucydides’ counterfactual sensitivity. An unusual arena where this sensitivity could be indulged was the theatre in imperial Rome, filled with water for the spectacle of mock sea-battles. Cassius Dio reports (under the year AD 80) that the emperor Titus “brought in people on ships, who engaged there in a sea-fight there, impersonating the Corcyreans and Corinthians” (ἐσήγαγε δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἐπὶ πλοίων. καὶ οὗτοι μὲν ἐκεῖ, ὡς οἱ μὲν Κερκυραῖοι οἱ δὲ Κορίνθιοι ὄντες, ἐναυμάχησαν); then after a horse-race on the following day, there was “on the third day a naval battle between three thousand men, followed by an infantry battle. The Athenians conquered the Syracusans (these were the names the combatants used), made a landing on the islet and assaulted and captured a wall that had been constructed around the monument” (66.25.3–4: τῇ τρίτῃ ναυμαχία τρισχιλίων ἀνδρῶν καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ πεζομαχία ἐγένετο· νικήσαντες γὰρ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τοὺς Συρακουσίους (τούτοις γὰρ τοῖς ὀνόμασι χρησάμενοι ἐναυμάχησαν) ἐπέξηλθον ἐς τὸ νησίδιον, καὶ προσβαλόντες τείχει τινὶ περὶ τὸ μνημεῖον πεπονημένῳ εἶλον αὐτό). The first day’s battle between the Corcyraeans and Corinthians is evidently a re-run of the battle of Sybota, described by Thucydides in his first book (1.48–51) in a vivid narrative which is picked up in the account of the final battle at Syracuse. The striking feature of the third day’s battle is the reversal of the actual result. By contrast, when there was a re-run of Salamis under Augustus, Cassius Dio makes the sardonic comment that “then too the Athenians were the victors” (55.10.7: καὶ ἐνίκων καὶ τότε οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι). Coleman suggests that “Dio’s words may imply that he thought that the outcome was a coincidence”, but it seems more probable that the Athenian victory was deliberate and that the reversal of history at Syracuse reflects a similar Athenocentricism.³⁵

Closer engagement with Thucydides is suggested by the attention paid to one of the turning-points in his account, namely the Athenian decision to magnify their commitment in Sicily following the receipt of Nicias’ letter. Within Thucydides’ narrative, that decision is in some ways strikingly underplayed: he presents Nicias’ letter as it is read out to the assembly at Athens, but no speeches arguing either for or against Nicias’ proposals (which included the suggestion that the whole expedition should be recalled). That absence was noticed in the rhetorical culture of Greek education under the Roman empire. Aelius Aristides crafted opposing speeches in favour

(32) App. *Hisp.* 119, *B Civ.* 1.116, 2.17, *Heliod.* 7.1.1, 10.1.1, *Agathias* p.113, *Procop.* 2.7.36, 3.20.6, 5.18.29, 7.10.9. Cf. *Thuc.* 3.49.4, echoed at *Σ Ar. Equ.* 834.

(33) CARR 1964, p. 99, n. 2.

(34) GREEN 1970, p. xii.

(35) COLEMAN 1993, p. 71 (part of a very rich discussion of the phenomenon of such mock-battles). For another Salamis (under Nero), see *Cass. Dio* 61.9.5 (with no indication of outcome). Dio also points out that the mock-Salamis under Augustus gained its own historicity: “even today some relics of it are still pointed out.”

and against sending reinforcements in response to Nicias' letter (5–6). A response to Nicias' letter is also referred to as a possible topic in Theon's *Progymnasmata* (61), and the idea of having (the already dead) Cleon write a response to Nicias' letter is dismissed as absurd by Hermogenes (*On Staseis* 1.23.1–5 Patillon). Implicit in the idea of re-crafting and supplementing Thucydides is the idea of opening up different possible futures. This imaginative re-creation can be seen in particular in Aristides: like Thucydides' own antilogies, the presentation of opposing speeches points up the possibility that history could have taken a different turn.

Counterfactual history was overtly constructed by Maximus of Tyre. In one of his lectures, he turns to the Sicilian expedition to illustrate the possible advantages of defeat: ἐγὼ καὶ στρατηγῶ διαπιστῶ πάντα εὐτυχῆσαντι, [...] οἷος ἂν ἦν Ἀθηναίοις στρατηγὸς Νικίας, σωθεὶς ἐκ Σικελίας (34.4: "I would also mistrust a general who has succeeded in all his ventures <and would be readier to trust one who occasionally failed,> the kind of general Nicias would have made for the Athenians if he had returned safely from Syracuse"). By claiming that success is dangerous while failure can instil good qualities, Maximus follows the reading that the Athenian defeat was not as bad as it might have seemed—even if in this case Nicias was not actually able to draw on the advantages of defeat himself. Maximus also shows himself here a close reader of Thucydides: the distrust in the fortunate general picks up Alcibiades' rash confidence in Nicias' good fortune (6.17.1), while the thought of what Nicias might have done had he returned safely evokes one of the reasons why Nicias was executed—the fear that he might cause more harm in the future (7.86.4). On the other hand, Maximus' overall argument does not suggest that he saw this sense of counterfactuality as a distinctive feature of the Sicilian narrative: he also allows that Cleon would have been a better general if he had returned alive from Amphipolis (34.4).

A much closer engagement with Thucydides can be found in a passage in Lucian's *De historia conscribenda* where he conjures up alternative Sicilian histories to illustrate by contrast the historian's obligation to tell the truth:

αὐτὸν φοβήσῃ [...] οὐδὲ ἡ σύμπασα πόλις τῶν Ἀθηναίων, ἦν τὰ ἐν Σικελία κακὰ ἱστορῆ καὶ τὴν Δημοσθένους λῆψιν καὶ τὴν Νικίου τελευτὴν καὶ ὡς ἐδίψων καὶ οἷον τὸ ὕδωρ ἔπινον καὶ ὡς ἐφονεύοντο πίνοντες οἱ πολλοί. [...] ἐπεὶ τοί γε εἰ σιωπήσας αὐτὰ ἢ πρὸς τοῦναντίον εἰπῶν ἐπανορθώσασθαι ἐδύνατο, ῥᾶστον ἦν ἐνὶ καλᾶμφ λεπτῶ τὸν Θουκυδίδην ἀνατρέψαι μὲν τὸ ἐν ταῖς Ἐπιπολαῖς παρατείχισμα, καταδύσαι δὲ τὴν Ἐρμοκράτους τριήρη καὶ τὸν κατάρaton Γύλιππον διαπεῖραι μεταξὺ ἀποτεριχίζοντα καὶ ἀποταφρεύοντα τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ τέλος Συρακοσίου μὲν ἐς τὰς λιθοτομίας ἐμβαλεῖν, τοὺς δὲ Ἀθηναίους περιπλεῖν Σικελίαν καὶ Ἰταλίαν μετὰ τῶν πρώτων τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου ἐλπίδων. (*Hist. Conscr.* 38)

Nor will the historian be frightened by the whole population of Athens, if he records the disasters in Sicily, the capture of Demosthenes, the death of Nicias, the Athenians' thirst, the sort of water they had to drink and how most of them were killed as they drank. [...] if he could have rectified these events by saying nothing about them or reversing them completely, it would have been very easy for Thucydides with a few strokes of his pen to demolish the counter-wall at Epipolae, sink Hermocrates' man-of-war and shoot a spear into that devil Gylippus, while he was sealing off the roads with walls and ditches, and end it all by throwing the Syracusans into their quarries, while allowing the Athenians to sail round Sicily and Italy with Alcibiades' early hopes intact.

Lucian's counterfactual musings concern in the first place the activity of the historian.³⁶ But through that counterfactual he constructs an alternative history that Thucydides could have written had he not been concerned with the truth. Revealingly, this fantasy image is tied to desires expressed

(36) Cf. GOULD 1988, p. 151, who uses as a thought-experiment in a discussion of the philosophy of history an alternative reality in which Thucydides incorrectly reported that the Syracusans were defeated. Edith Foster suggests that Lucian may be responding to criticisms of Thucydides' choice of subject matter as unpatriotic (Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 3).

within the text—in this case, the hopes expressed by Alcibiades.³⁷ By contrasting that fantasy image with what Thucydides did actually write, Lucian offers a commentary on the narrativization of disaster: “the disasters in Sicily” evokes the level of generality of Thucydides’ closing comments on the expedition (7.87); “the capture of Demosthenes, the death of Nicias” points to Thucydides’ selective use of Nicias’ death as a means of pathos (it is not that Thucydides does not mention Demosthenes’ death, but he does not offer a comment on it);³⁸ while the shift from abstract nouns to verbal expressions with imperfect tenses (ἐδίψων, ἔπινον, ἐφονεύοντο) brings out the immersive power of Thucydides’ account of the destruction at the River Assinarus (one of the highpoints in the reception history of the Sicilian disaster). Lucian here grounds the idea of disaster in the somatic, implicitly contrasting the Athenians’ eventual fate with their metaphorical “thirst” for conquest.

Lucian’s contemporary, the periegetic writer Pausanias, also set the Athenians’ grand hopes of conquest against a future that might have been: Ἀθηναίους δὲ ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἐλπίσασιν καὶ Ἰταλίαν πᾶσαν καταστρέψασθαι τὸ ἐν Συρακούσαις πταῖσμα ἐμποδῶν ἐγένετο μὴ καὶ Ῥωμαίων λαβεῖν πείραν (1.11.7: “One of the many ambitions of the Athenians was to reduce all Italy, but the disaster at Syracuse prevented their trying conclusions with the Romans”).³⁹ The focus here is not on the alternatives that might have made the Athenians’ hopes for conquest in Italy realizable, but on what would actually have been involved in pursuing those hopes: the striking prospect of a confrontation with Rome. This passage is a less cited (because much less developed) version of Livy’s disquisition on the likely outcome of the conflict that might have arisen between Alexander and the Romans but for Alexander’s premature death (9.17–19). At stake in such musings is a reflection on the broader shaping of history: both Pausanias and Livy write with consciousness of a shift of power over time from the eastern to the western half of the Mediterranean.⁴⁰

The theme of shifting power is reinforced in Pausanias’ account by the context in which he sets his counterfactual. It appears in a long account of the career of the Epirote ruler Pyrrhus, justified by the presence of a statue of Pyrrhus at Athens. Pausanias explains that Pyrrhus “waged war against the Romans, being the first Greek we know of to do so” (1.11.7: Ῥωμαίοις δὲ οὐδένα Πύρρον πρότερον πολεμήσαντα ἴσμεν Ἑλληνα), and then justifies this claim by noting that “no further battle, it is said, took place between Aeneas and Diomedes with his Argives” (Διομήδει μὲν γὰρ καὶ Ἀργείων τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ οὐδεμίαν ἔτι γενέσθαι πρὸς Αἰνεΐαν λέγεται μάχην) and by pointing to the fact that Athens’ failure in Sicily prevented conflict at that time. Pausanias also presents the eventual collision in the time of Pyrrhus as a re-run of the Trojan War, at least in Pyrrhus’ view: μνήμη τὸν Πύρρον τῆς ἀλώσεως ἐσήλαθε τῆς Ἰλίου, καὶ οἱ κατὰ ταῦτ’ ἤλπιζε χωρήσειν πολεμοῦντι-στρατεύειν γὰρ ἐπὶ Τρώων ἀποίκους Ἀχιλλέως ὦν ἀπόγονος (1.12.1: “Pyrrhus remembered the capture of Troy, which he took to be an omen of his success in the war, as he was a descendant of Achilles making war upon a colony of Trojans”). Pausanias, then, sets the Athens–Sicily conflict in the context of big international conflicts between Greeks and Romans, reminding the reader that Athens’ defeat (and all counterfactual musings over how events could have turned out differently) must be read in the light of the final defeat of the Greek cause.⁴¹

(37) See 6.90.2, 91.3, where a desire to conquer Italy and Carthage, as well as Sicily, is attributed to the Athenians by Alcibiades (though he himself had been credited with a desire only for Sicily and Carthage at 6.15.2).

(38) Similarly Lucian 33.34: αὕτη ἡ συμφορὰ Πλάτωνι περὶ Σικελίαν ὁμοία δοκεῖ γενέσθαι τῇ Νικίῳ (“this ‘Sicilian disaster’ of Plato’s is considered equal to that of Nicias”).

(39) ἄλλα τε πολλὰ echoes Thucydides’ own focus on Athens’ Sicilian ambitions at 2.65.11 (cited below).

(40) Cf. e.g. Lucian 43.17.

(41) Pausanias elsewhere shows that the Athenian attack on Sicily was not just an Athenian story through the attention he pays to its commemoration: besides a memorial at Athens (1.29.11–13), he mentions a monument at Argos to the Argives who died on the Athenian side (2.22.9) and a Syracusan treasury at Delphi dedicated from the spoils (10.11.5). For stress on the avoidability of the disaster see also Plb.9.9.1–2.

VI. THE SICILIAN VERSION

Other readings of Thucydides invite integration of Athens' invasion of Sicily into the story of Sicily's conflicts with Rome's great enemies, the Carthaginians, who had themselves been defeated in an invasion of Sicily in 480 BC and later fought over Sicily with Rome. In earlier papers I have explored how motifs found in Thucydides' Sicilian narrative (and particularly its pathetic closure) were used by Polybius in his account of the First Punic War, by Polybius and Livy in their accounts of the response in Rome to the defeat at Cannae,⁴² and again by Appian in describing the Carthaginian response to news of the outbreak of the Third Punic War (*Pun.* 76, 82) and the destruction of Carthage (*Pun.* 132).⁴³ Here I turn to representations of Carthage's fifth-century BC conflicts with Sicily.⁴⁴

The Carthaginian invasion of Sicily is presented by Aelius Aristides as a story of which the Athenians are conscious in two of the works discussed above, the *Panathenaicus* and the invented response to Nicias' letter arguing against magnifying the Athenian commitment in Sicily. In the former, it serves to justify what in Thucydides at least (6.15.2, cf. 90.2) is presented as a further side of Alcibiades' excessive ambition—namely a planned Athenian invasion of Carthage: διανοοῦντο δὲ διαβαίνειν ἐπὶ Καρχηδονίους ἀνθ' ὧν ἐκεῖνοι πρότερον ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας τοὺς ἐν Σικελίᾳ (1.232: “they planned to cross over from Sicily against the Carthaginians in return for their former crossing against the Greeks in Sicily”). In the latter speech, by contrast, the Carthaginian defeat stands alongside the failed Persian invasion of Greece as a warning for the imaginary audience of the speech: ἅμα δ' οἶμαι τὸν νόμον εἶσονται τῶν ὑπερορίων καὶ μεγάλων στρατειῶν· ᾧ περιέπεσε μὲν ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς ὁ δεῦρο στρατεύσας, περιέπεσον δὲ Καρχηδόνιοι διαβάντες εἰς Σικελίαν μυριάσι πολλαῖς καὶ πεζῆς καὶ ναυτικῆς δυνάμεως (6.51: “they will learn the law of great, overseas expeditions. On this law the king of the Persians stumbled when he campaigned here, and the Carthaginians stumbled on it when they crossed over to Sicily with their innumerable land and naval forces”). For Aristides' actual audience, the Carthaginian defeat is a parallel to the Athenian disaster that followed.

The implications of aligning the Carthaginian and Athenian disasters were fully explored by Diodorus Siculus. Diodorus drew extended comparisons between the Carthaginian invasion of Sicily and the Athenian expedition to Sicily—as portrayed by Thucydides. Particularly close to Thucydides is his account of the Carthaginian response to the news of their defeat at Himera:

ὀλίγοι δὲ τινες ἐν μικρῷ σκάφει διασωθέντες εἰς Καρχηδόνα διεσάφησαν τοῖς πολίταις, σύντομον ποιησάμενοι τὴν ἀπόφασιν, ὅτι πάντες οἱ διαβάντες εἰς τὴν Σικελίαν ἀπολώλασιν. οἱ δὲ Καρχηδόνιοι παρ' ἐλπίδας μεγάλη συμφορᾷ περιπεσόντες ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο κατεπλάγησαν, ὥστε τὰς νύκτας ἅπαντας διαγρυπνεῖν φυλάττοντας τὴν πόλιν, ὡς τοῦ Γέλωνος πάση τῇ δυνάμει παραχρῆμα διεγνωνκότος πλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν Καρχηδόνα. διὰ δὲ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀπολωλότων ἢ τε πόλις ἐπένηθη κοινῇ καὶ κατ' ἰδίαν αἱ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν οἰκίαι κλαυθοῦ καὶ πένθους ἐπληροῦντο. οἱ μὲν γὰρ υἱούς, οἱ δὲ ἀδελφοὺς ἐπεζήτουν, πλείστοι δὲ παῖδες ὄρφανοὶ πατέρων γεγονότες ἔρημοὶ ὠδύροντο τὸν τε τῶν γεγεννηκότων θάνατον καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν ἔρημίαν τῶν βοηθούτων. (11.24.2–4)

A handful only of survivors got safely to Carthage in a small boat to give their fellow citizens a statement which was brief: “All who crossed over to Sicily have perished.” The Carthaginians, who had suffered a great disaster contrary to their hopes, were so terror-stricken that every night they kept vigil guarding the city, in the belief that Gelon with his entire force must have decided to sail forthwith against Carthage. And because of the multitude of the lost the city went into public

(42) ROOD 2012b, p. 60–61, 62. For Livy cf. RAPIN 1706, p. i.316–317.

(43) ROOD 1998b, p. 253–254.

(44) This section uses some material from ROOD (forthcoming). Cf. also n. 18 for the linking of Athens and Carthage in Livy.

mourning, while privately the homes of citizens were filled with wailing and lamentation. For some kept inquiring after sons, others after brothers, while a very large number of children who had lost their fathers, alone now in the world, grieved at the death of those who had begotten them and at their own desolation through the loss of those who could succour them.

The model for Diodorus here is Thucydides' account of the Athenian defeat in Sicily and the subsequent response in Athens (7.87.6–8.1.2, cited earlier in this article). Both descriptions stress the small number of survivors; the despair felt back home at the unexpected news; grief at both a private and a public level; the lack of adequate reserves; and the fear of an attack by the very people they had sought to conquer.⁴⁵

The comparison Diodorus suggests between the Carthaginian and Athenian defeats in Sicily is reinforced by two sets of internal echoes. In arguing for the superiority of the Sicilian achievement in 480 BC over the mainland Greeks' victory against Persia, Diodorus presents Himera as a greater battle than Plataea and Gelon's stratagem as greater than Themistocles': "in the case of the Persians the king escaped with his life and many myriads together with him", while "in the case of the Carthaginians not only did the general perish but also everyone who participated in the war was slain, and, as the saying is, not even a man to bear the news got back to Carthage (μηδὲ ἄγγελον εἰς τὴν Καρχηδόνα διασωθῆναι)" (11.23.2). The proverbial phrase about no messengers surviving reappears twice in the extant parts of Diodorus, both times in connection with the Athenian disaster at Syracuse. The first passage occurs in Nicolaus' speech in the debate Diodorus presents at Syracuse over the punishment of the Athenian prisoners: "from the preparations they made on such a scale not a ship, not a man has returned home, so that not even a survivor is left to carry to them word of the disaster (μηδὲ τὸν ἀγγελοῦντα αὐτοῖς τὴν συμφορὰν περιλειφθῆναι)" (13.21.3). The second occurs in a speech denouncing the tyranny of Dionysius: "only yesterday, as it were, when the Athenians attacked Syracuse with such great armaments, our fathers left not a man free to carry back word of the disaster (οὐδὲ τὸν ἀπαγγελοῦντα τὴν συμφορὰν ἀπέλιπον)" (14.67.1).

The other set of internal echoes relates to the theme of moderation in success. Diodorus first praises Gelon after the battle of Himera for "bearing his good fortune as men should, not toward them [*sc.* envoys from previously hostile cities and rulers] alone but even toward the Carthaginians, his bitterest foes" (11.26.1: τὴν εὐτυχίαν ἀνθρωπίνως ἔφερεν οὐκ ἐπὶ τούτων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πολεμωτάτων Καρχηδονίων). Then, in the Syracusan debate over the Athenian prisoners in 413 BC, he presents Hermocrates arguing that "a fairer thing than victory is to bear victory with moderation" (13.19.5: ὡς κάλλιον ἔστι τοῦ νικᾶν τὸ τὴν νίκην ἐνεγκεῖν ἀνθρωπίνως). The counter argument in that debate, delivered by the Spartan general Gylippus, is in due course precisely echoed in the Roman debate over Carthage at the end of the Second Punic War (13.30.5, 27.18.1).⁴⁶ The theme of moderation in success is itself a common one in Diodorus,⁴⁷ but its articulation at these emphatic moments still serves to bind together the fortunes of Carthage and Athens.

Diodorus' linking of the Carthaginian and Athenian invasions of Sicily can be read as offering a commentary of sorts on Thucydides. Particularly significant is a section from Diodorus' version of Nicias' attempt to persuade the Athenians not to invade Sicily in 415. One of the arguments Diodorus attributes to Nicias is precisely the failure of the earlier Carthaginian invasion of Sicily (the argument later advanced, as we have seen, in Aristides' fictional response to Nicias' letter):

μη γὰρ δυνατὸν [...] ἐλπίζειν τὴν μεγίστην τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην νήσων περιποιήσασθαι, καὶ Καρχηδονίους μὲν, ἔχοντας μεγίστην ἡγεμονίαν καὶ πολλάκις ὑπὲρ τῆς Σικελίας πεπολεμηκότας,

(45) Cf. WILLIAMS 1993, p. 274; FEENEY 2007, p. 52.

(46) Cf. SACKS 1990, p. 107.

(47) Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 42–46.

μη δεδυνῆσθαι κρατῆσαι τῆς νήσου, τοὺς δὲ Ἀθηναίους, πολὺ λειπομένους τῇ δυνάμει τῶν Καρχηδονίων, δορίκτητον ποιήσασθαι τὴν κρατίστην τῶν νήσων. (12.83.6)

how could they hope to subdue the greatest island in the inhabited world? Even the Carthaginians, he added, who possessed a most extensive empire and had waged war many times to gain Sicily, had not been able to subdue the island, and the Athenians, whose military power was far less than that of the Carthaginians, could not possibly win by the spear and acquire the most powerful of the islands.

Here Diodorus uses Nicias to point up not so much Thucydides' historiographical patterning as the selectivity involved in that patterning. He draws our attention to Thucydides' suppression of a distinctively Sicilian version of 480 BC that is implied by Thucydides' account of the Sicilian expedition.

The Sicilian story that Thucydides suppresses equated the Sicilian victories over Carthage with the victories of the mainland Greeks over Persia. The battle of Himera was presented in the fifth-century as parallel to the Persian Wars, most famously in Pindar's ode celebrating the Pythian triumph of Hieron of Syracuse (*Pythian* 1.71–80). The battle of Himera was also synchronized with Salamis (Hdt. 7.166), and there was a production of Aeschylus' *Persians* at Syracuse (schol. Ar. *Frogs* 1028, *Vita Aeschyli* (Page OCT, p. 333 ll. 24–25)).

Thucydides, by contrast, presents Syracuse as a new Athens and Athens as a new Persia without any allusion to the fact that Syracuse had already resisted foreign invaders in 480 BC. He even has the Syracusan leader Hermocrates encourage his fellow citizens by alluding to the general failure of large expeditions abroad (6.33.5–6) without any mention of their victory over Carthage. He also underplays the scope of the Syracusans' naval experience in suggesting that they acquired naval proficiency in response to the Athenian invasion much as the Athenians had in response to the Persian invasion (Hermocrates at 7.21.3). The battle of Himera, moreover, is omitted from both the *Archaeology* (where the Carthaginians are mentioned only at 1.13.6 for their defeat in a sea-battle at the hands of the Phocaeans) and the *Sikelika* (6.1–5).

Diodorus, then, can be read as delivering a riposte to Thucydides' historiographical slight. In relation to Sicily, he presents Athens as a new Carthage rather than as a new Persia and as a one-off threat rather than as part of a continuing series of dangers for Sicily.

In his work as a whole, Diodorus may be engaging still further with Thucydides' spatio-temporal construction of the Sicilian expedition. Thucydides, as has been noted since antiquity, evokes the fall of Troy—the emblematic destroyed city—in his account of the defeat of the Athenian expeditionary force.⁴⁸ Diodorus, by contrast, presents a historical movement involving not just Troy and Athens but also Carthage and Rome—and it is a movement that it now makes sense to envisage in terms of “East” and “West”. A comparison between the Athenian disaster and the sack of Troy is encouraged by Diodorus' articulation of time: he notes at the start of Book 13 that his previous six books have covered the period of 768 years between the Trojan War and Athens' invasion of Sicily (13.1.2); he then uses Troy as a chronological marker at the start of the following book, where he gives the number of years from its sack to the fall of Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War (14.2.4). And later still Diodorus picked up his debate on the Athenian prisoners in Sicily (see above) with a debate on the fate of Carthage placed towards the end of the Second Punic War (27.15–18: the debate survives only in a few Byzantine excerpts). In these debates, Diodorus rehearsed the themes

(48) The links between Thucydides and the *Iliad* were explored in ancient scholarship: the scholia on Thuc. 7.71.4 cite *Il.* 4.450–451, while the scholia on *Il.* 4.450–451 cite Thuc. 7.71.4; the scholia on Thuc. 7.71.6 cite *Il.* 22.409; and directly in relation to the idea of the sacked city, the scholia on *Il.* 22.410 cite Thuc. 7.75.5. Cf. HORNBLOWER 1991–2008, p. iii.700. Note also that the scholia on *Il.* 21.9 cite Thuc. 7.84.3 (cf. the imitation of Thuc. 7.84.5 by Philostr. *Her.* 48.13 and Stat. *Theb.* 4.827–830 and its citation by [Longinus] *Subl.* 38.3 respectively). For alignment of the Trojan and Sicilian disasters see also Aristid. 18.7.

of moderation in success that are then central to his overall explanation of the success of Rome—including their ability (after Aemilius has used the downfall of Perseus of Macedon as a paradigm) to act in victory as if they had been defeated (30.23.1).⁴⁹

This article has explored the reception of Thucydides' account of Athens' Sicilian disaster in a variety of ancient texts as well as in ancient practice (the twisted re-enactment in Flavian Rome). To some extent, the texts that have been collected illustrate the truism of the malleability of all reception practices: Thucydides and the Sicilian catastrophe were there for ancient authors to use as they wished. But the very choice of Thucydides says much for the cultural prestige that his text, and (his) Athenians in general, enjoyed—and so is itself a revealing act of self-positioning on the part of those who chose to exploit it. The ideological stakes are even higher in the case of those authors who integrate the Sicilian expedition, implicitly or explicitly, into a wider historical narrative: Greek and Latin authors writing in the wake of Rome's rise to power insistently raise the question of what it means to read Thucydides under Rome, and modern receptions of the Sicilian expedition no less insistently prompt questions about the meaning of Thucydides' Athens for "the West" in the wider geo-political sense in which that term is now employed. And yet, from a different perspective, to encounter these later responses is simply to have reaffirmed the political significance of the greatest reception of Athens' defeat in Sicily—that of Thucydides himself.

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(49) Cf. Diodorus' generalization at 30.23.2; also 31.3.3 (δεῖ [...] νικᾶν μὲν ἀνδρεία τοὺς ἀντιπεταγμένους, ἠττᾶσθαι δὲ εὐγνωμοσύνη τοῦ τῶν ἐπτακόντων ἐλέου: from a speech?); Cass. Dio 56.38.5 (Augustus makes defeat seem victory to opponents).

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