

Correcting the Record? Thucydides on Pausanias of Sparta

The excurses on Pausanias and Themistocles in Book 1 of Thucydides (1.128.3-138.6) have long been described as decidedly un-Thucydidean in both their form and their content (e.g. Gomme 1956, Westlake 1977, Hornblower 1987). They purport to be an explanation of the Curse of Athena of the Bronze House, but the bulk of the discussion focuses not on this specific transgression, but on the lives of Pausanias and Themistocles. Biographical in tone, these two digressions describe the actions of Pausanias after the Battle of Plataea until his death, and those of Themistocles regarding his flight to Persia after he was accused of medism. The historical veracity of the narrative presented in these digressions has been the subject of much scrutiny (e.g. Fornara 1966, Evans 1988, Giorgini 2004), but the role that they play in the narrative itself has received significantly less attention. While investigations into the historicity of these passages in Thucydides are important historical questions, to grasp the meaning of these passages it is imperative to investigate why Thucydides discusses the events in these two figures' lives in the tone and order that they appear.

In this paper, I will explore the role of the digression on Pausanias in Thucydides's narrative. Whereas earlier scholars, such as Kohishi (1970), and more recently Ellis (1994), have called attention to the symmetrical structure of the Pausanias and Themistocles digressions, sufficient attention has not been paid to the role of the Pausanias digression specifically in identifying Sparta as the initiator of the Peloponnesian War. I will demonstrate that through the contents as well as the structure of the digression Thucydides refutes the explanation given by Herodotus for both why and how the power dynamics in Greece developed as they did over the course of the 5th century. For Thucydides, the build-up to the Peloponnesian War did not start in the aftermath of the Persian War, but both during and as a direct result of this conflict with

Persia, as may be seen embodied in the figure of Pausanias. Rather than being the hero of Plataea, in Thucydides's account Pausanias stands as the root cause for why Athens was able to begin her ascent in power and gain dominance in Greece. Thucydides has crafted Pausanias into a representation of the Spartan ideology that led to the outbreak of the war; it was his failure as a leader that lost Sparta her hegemony, and it was Sparta's failure to act when time and again presented with evidence of Pausanias's actions that cemented the relationship between Sparta, Athens, and the rest of the Greek states. In sum, Pausanias serves as a cap for Thucydides, marking a definitive end to his discussion of how affairs in Greece were brought to the brink of war, before he opens the next chapter of his history with the start of his war and the introduction of Pericles.

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