

# THUCYDIDES, SELECTIONS ON HISTORIOGRAPHY

translated by David Reed

[1.1] Thucydides, an Athenian, compiled [ξυγγράψαι] the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians — how they warred against one another — beginning directly from its breaking-out and expecting it to be a great war, and most worthy of relation out of prior occurrences, judging [τεκμαίρομαι] that both sides were fully prepared for it in all respects, and seeing the rest of the Hellenes aligning themselves with each side, some directly, others being so minded. For this indeed was the greatest movement among the Hellenes and a portion of the barbarians — that is to say, the greatest part of mankind. For it was impossible to clearly find out things before these, and those still more ancient, due to the great length of time; yet based on proofs [τεκμήρια] which I happen to trust from an investigation carried as far back as possible, I do not think great things occurred, either in wars or in other matters.

*Thucydides lays out a long and intricate proof of this statement. This section is called the Archaeology.*

[1.20] I have found ancient things to be so, though it is difficult to believe in every proof [τεκμήριον]. For men receive reports from others of earlier occurrences [προγεγενήμενα], even if they should be of their own country, in the same uncritical manner. Indeed, the majority of the Athenians believe that Hipparchos was killed while he was tyrant by Harmodios and Aristogeiton, and they do not know that Hippias was the eldest of the sons of Peisistratos; that Hipparchos and Thessalos were his brothers; that Harmodios and Aristogeiton, suspecting on that day and on the spot that something had been betrayed to Hippias by one of their accomplices, held off from him [Hipparchos] for being foreseen. Wishing before being taken to risk doing something, they came upon Hipparchos organizing the Panathenaic procession near the place called Leokoreion and killed him. The rest of the Hellenes also do not believe rightly about many other things, both those existing now and those not yet lost to memory in time, such as that the kings of the Lakedaimonians do not cast one vote each but two, and that there is a Pitane company, which never existed at all. Thus the inquiry after truth, for many, is not painstaking, and they turn upon what is ready at hand.

[1.21] Nevertheless, one cannot go wrong in believing the things I have gone through to be such from the stated proofs [τεκμήρια], and not trusting them to be as the poets have sung about them, greatly embellishing them for the most part, nor as the writers of accounts compose things, in a manner more tempting to the ear than true, difficult to refute, and many of them beyond belief, due to time having entered legend [τὸ μυθῶδες]; but rather holding these things to have been found from the most manifest signs [σημεῖα] sufficiently given their antiquity. And this war, despite that men always judge that war in which they are presently fighting the greatest, but, after having stopped, wonder more at ancient things, will nevertheless by inquiries [σκοποῦντες] into the deeds [ἔργα] themselves be seen to be a greater occurrence [γεγενημένως] than those.

[1.22] And with respect to the speeches, they were each given either when they were about to go to war or when they were already in it. It was difficult to remember the things said accurately, both those which I heard myself and those which others reported to me. But as it seemed to me they would say the most suitable things about the circumstances of the time, so has it been said, adhering as closely as possible to the overall sense of what was in truth said. I deemed worthy of writing the matters [ἔργα] of what was done in the war not which I learned from any chance person, nor as they seemed to me, but at which I myself was present and which I learned from others, examining each [ἐπεξέρχομαι] with as much accuracy as possible. They were found out laboriously, because those who were present at the deeds [ἔργα] did not say the same

things about them, but as someone would have favor for one of the sides or memory. And perhaps their lack of the fabulous [τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες] will seem less pleasing to the ear. But as many as wish to inquire into the truth [τὸ σαφές] of occurrences [γεγόμενα] and things which will someday happen again, alike or similar to these according to human nature — it will be enough for them to judge these things useful. They are composed rather as a possession for eternity than a declamation to be heard in the moment.

[...]

[1.23.5-6] I wrote down first the causes [αἰτίαι] and the differences [διαφοραί] on account of which [the treaty] was broken, so that no one ever need ask whence such a war came to be among the Hellenes. As to the most true cause [τὴν ἀλεθεστάτην πρόφασιν], least apparent in speech, I believe the Athenians' becoming great and the fear present among the Lakedaimonians impelled [ἀναγκάσαι] them to war. But the causes spoken openly [ἐξ τὸ φανερόν λεγόμενα αἰτίαι] were these, following, for each side, for which they broke the treaty and began the war.

*Thucydides again digresses into the history supporting his point; this section is called the Pentekontaetea and covers the period between the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War proper.*

[1.118] After these things, not many years later, the things already related earlier occurred, those of Kerkyra and Potidaia and those which established the pretext [πρόφασις] of this war. All these things the Hellenes did against each other and the barbarian occurred in the fifty years just between the retreat of Xerxes and the beginning of this war. In these years the Athenians solidified their control of the empire and themselves increased their power greatly. The Lakedaimonians, perceiving this, did not hinder it but for a short time; and they remained quiet for most of the time, being on the one hand before this slow to go to war if not compelled [ἀναγκάζω], and on the other hindered by wars at home, until the power of the Athenians blatantly removed some of their allies and attached them to the Athenians. Then no more could they endure; but it seemed they must attack with all their zeal and cast down that strength, if they could, by starting this war.