there is pleasure to be found in passions, and it is a pleasure that Thyestes and Atreus want us to share with them.


The centre of Thucydides’ ‘History’ lies at the periphery; his portrait of Pericles. It serves as the gateway to an understanding of the personality of the historian and of his view of events. Thucydides concentrated his entire attention on his portrait of Pericles, and worked on it until his death. It contains his ultimate explanation of events (183). So runs the bold thesis of Will’s book! And so also opens the second major section of the work.

This Habilitationsschrift is written by a scholar who demonstrates not only masterly command of the ancient sources and modern research, but also exudes supreme self-confidence. It provides much more than the title suggests and teems with original ideas and bold theses.

Given the unusual format of the book, it will be useful to give an overview of its organisation. It actually falls into two major parts – ‘Thucydides’ (3–241) and ‘Pericles’ (245–367). Part 1 itself breaks down into four sections. The first of these, ‘Thucydides and Sparta’, is sub-divided into three further parts: the first, the Spartans in the early work, includes Archidamus, Brasidas, Gyllippus, the conflict over Pylos and the third pro-oemium; the second, the Spartans in the late work, covers the speech of the Corinthians at the Congress at Sparta in 432, the speech of Archidamus in the same context, Pericles’ Funeral Oration, the first speech of the Athenians at Sparta in 432 and the Melian Dialogue, and the Pausanias episode; the sub-section concludes with an excursus on Lysander in terms of the unwritten portrait; the third consists of a discussion of events from Archidamus to Lysander.

The second section, ‘Dramatis personae’, pre-portraits and counter-portraits of Pericles, is also sub-divided into three further parts: the first, on Cleon, consists of Pylos, Sicone, Amphipolis and Mytilene; the second, on Nicias, comprises Athens, from Athens to Sicily and Sicily; the third, on Alcibiades, in terms of the fifth, sixth and eighth books, the ultimate assessment, and ends with an excursus on Hermocrates.

The third section brings us to the portrait of Pericles: the first, a picture without contours, namely the Megarian Pericles, is also sub-divided into two parts: the non-Thucydidean sources, and Thucydides and Megara; the second, the portrait in the ‘Erga’: Pericles as προάστης, is sub-divided into three parts: the prelude in the ‘Pentecontaetia’ (454–439), the year of peace (432/431), the year of war (431/0); the third, the portrait in the Speeches: Pericles as statesman, is sub-divided into three parts: the first speech (the Kriegsrede), the Funeral Oration and the last speech (the Trostrede); the fourth, in a single part, covers the ‘final chapter’ (2.65).

The fourth, and final, section breaks down into two sub-sections – the historian and the hero.

The best way to approach this book is to start at the end rather than at the beginning. In a long Appendix (319–367), Will tackles with great thoroughness that old (and seemingly still insoluble) chestnut, the so-called ‘thukydideische Frage’.

Here he comes down emphatically on the side of the ‘analytical’ school. This affords him, among other things, the luxury of being able to decide which parts of the ‘History’ were written early and which later, especially after 404. And decide
he does—often, and with distinct confidence. His principal thesis here is that, upon observing the entire course of the war, Thucydides came to the conclusion that the 27 years formed a unit, hence the second Introduction (5.26). This demanded a revision of what he had written to date, to reflect the development of his own thought, especially his views on the outcome of the war with Athens’ total defeat in 404. He never succeeded in producing an organic new edition by re-writing the text from scratch—rather, inserted into the existing text passages reflecting his later change of mind. Paramount here are the speeches. Within this context, virtually every major conclusion depends on determining when any given passage was written.

By adopting this approach, W. sets out on the major venture (and the principal thesis of the book) of reconstructing, not the historical Pericles, but the Thucydidean Pericles, and answering the question just why Thucydides ‘created’ this Pericles.

Accordingly, in Part 1 (3–158), Pericles in his essential personality and character emerges through a process of comparison and contrast with others—Thucydides’ portraits of other important personalities in the Peloponnesian War: ‘pre-portraits’ and ‘counter-portraits’. Brasidas and Nicias could be regarded as ‘pre-portraits’. Cleon is certainly a ‘counter-portrait’, drawn in the starkest of terms. The first section on Sparta is important also for another reason. One of the areas in which Thucydides underwent a change of mind, according to W., was in respect of Sparta. In the initial draft one can detect a distinct pro-Spartan sympathy, articulated most specifically in the treatment of Brasidas. But Sparta’s victory and post-war conduct changed all that, above all the behaviour of Lysander. In the passages written after 404 and inserted into the existing text there is a distinct anti-Spartan tone. Chief here is, according to W., ‘Lysander: the unwritten portrait’ (16–61), which, if Thucydides had written, would probably have been as scathing as his portrait of Cleon (231–32). In his excursus on Pausanias (also a later composition), Thucydides portrays the victor of Platea as the image of Lysander (47–57, cf. 186).

In Section 3 of Part 1, Alcibiades, for whom W. appears to have not a little sympathy, is particularly interesting, for he emerges as neither a ‘pre-portrait’ nor a ‘counter-portrait’ but as an actual portrait—with, as it were, Pericles on the obverse and Alcibiades on the reverse of the same coin.

Book 6 allegedly contains Thucydides’ early view of the earlier Alcibiades (the years 420–412), during which he did not achieve anything noteworthy, in particular not in military terms. But on the basis of Alcibiades’ activities between 412 and 408, most especially his great military victories, Thucydides changed his mind.1 This permits one to conclude that the historian saw in Alcibiades the military specialist, the general, the στρατηγός (the same conclusion he will reach later about Pericles). This is demonstrated in 8.86, attested in 6.15 and confirmed above all in 2.65.11.2 After such pieces of ‘evidence’, proof in the form of concrete description of great naval victories would be superfluous (101–49). Although Thucydides does not say so specifically, W. detects in his later statements the strong implication, that, had Alcibiades not been banished the first time, the Athenians could have been successful in Syracuse. More than that—Thucydides indulges in even greater flights of fantasy: had the Athenians not engaged in a renewed

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1 W., notably, does not refer to any specific military victory by Alcibiades.
2 According to W., these three passages were all written after 404.
conflict over Alcibiades and banished him for a second time, he could have rescued the city from the depths of the Sicilian disaster, and saved Athens from final defeat. W. concludes his ‘final assessment’ on Alcibiades with the following claim: ‘What Thucydides maintained about Pericles after 404, is also his verdict on the late Alcibiades: one man could have rescued Athens’ (149).

Alcibiades leads into Hermocrates. Although Hermocrates is hailed by Thucydides as one of the very few who possessed ξύνομος [‘intelligence’], the historian never refers to him in terms of any specific action, especially military, but portrays him as a great advisor and effective orator. Although Thucydides delights in antithesis, when it comes to Alcibiades and Hermocrates it is not a case of opposites but of Hermocrates complementing Alcibiades. Consequently, while Alcibiades is portrayed as a military expert, the qualities which he did not possess, ἀλας, display as a statesman, these shine forth in Hermocrates. In short, ‘Alcibiades and Hermocrates are ‘great’ in their respective virtues, but they both remain uni-dimensional. It is only when their virtues are combined in one individual that we get the ideal statesman and military general: a Pericles’ (158).

All the above is but an important prelude to Pericles himself. As noted at the outset, according to W., Pericles forms the centre of Thucydides’ ‘History’. This emerges from the historian’s reflection on events over the course of the war, and especially after Athens’ final defeat. Looking back over the 27 years of the conflict and events leading up to it, Thucydides allegedly saw the war as inevitable. In his view, Pericles was the only individual capable of conducting this war, and so becomes the focal point of the ‘History’. Accordingly, the famous passage, 2.65, ‘forms a unit, a kind of testament of the historian, the final chapter of the unfinished work, and constitutes the actual centre of the ‘History’ (215). Or, to put it slightly differently, ‘Thucydides stages a drama which is expounded in 1.126, reaches its climax in the Funeral Oration, reaches its peripe tieia in the account of the plague and ends with the death of the hero. From the perspective of 2.65 the subsequent years of the war appear as footnotes to Thucydides’ account of Pericles’ (186).

What is ultra-astonishing, however, is the hyper-economy with which Thucydides tackles his subject. Without any treatment of Pericles’ ‘long rise to power’, Thucydides’ specific treatment of his hero covers less than three years. He has him step on the stage for the first time in the winter of 432/1, on the very eve of the Peloponnesian War, and has him leaving the stage again in the summer of

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1 At one point it seems (apparently unnoticed, and presumably unwanted, by W.) that Alcibiades was, at least by implication, even more intelligent than Pericles, certainly than Thucydides. According to W., it was not until after 404 that the historian perceived that the Peace of Nicias was merely a hollow peace and that there was really no break in the war, and sympathises with the view that determined opposition to Sparta was the only viable policy. Alcibiades was the only one who championed such a policy, and this may have been one of the further reasons why Thucydides later emphasised his role in this respect (114). In short, what Thucydides understood only after the end of the war, this Alcibiades perceived already in the very midst of events. For the same reason W. can reject the view which sees Alcibiades’ actions at the time as indicative of at most negative intelligence, i.e., as a piece of cleverness – consistent with the fact that Thucydides never explicitly attributes ξύνομος to Alcibiades while not hesitating to do so in at least seven other individuals.

2 This important point is open to discussion.
430. Or in his first appearance he attempts to persuade the Athenians to enter the war, and with his last appearance he tries to dissuade them from withdrawing from it. This ultra-compression only heightens the hero’s centrality and significance.

Over against this Thucydidean reconstruction of Pericles there stands a vast body of modern research which takes a very different view, one allegedly determined in large part by Plutarch. But when it comes to Pericles, most modern critics have it wrong. In contradistinction to Thucydides, the rest of antiquity (Plato, Isocrates, historians of the fourth century and writers in the Hellenistic and Roman period) did not share the Athenian’s picture of Pericles as a Kriegspolitiker. It was modern critics, starting with Hegel, who latched on to this and flogged it – and so an assiduous assessment of modern research is required (243–50; 282–318). Upon carrying out such an assessment, one can conclude that the Pericles who died in 429, two years into the war, is not the same Pericles whom Thucydides sets before the reader after 404; moreover, the Pericles of 454 has nothing in common with the Pericles whom modern critics purport to be able to rediscover. They merely borrow from Thucydides his stature as a historian, while tacitly revising his account. For Thucydides, Pericles is a war hero, whereas for modern critics he is a democrat, a ‘Prince of Peace’ and a patron of the arts. Thucydides’ delineation of the real Pericles is limited solely to masking his failure while advancing the historian’s own defence of the war. His ‘History’ actually runs counter to the idea of a democrat and champion of peace. These notions derive from other writers, who refused to see him as a great military general, and corrected Thucydides, who sought to cast him as an outstanding στρατηγός. Thucydides judges Pericles by successes he never achieved. If he were to be judged by what he actually did, and not by his potential capabilities, as Thucydides would have it, the veneer with which he coats his portrait in 2.65 would quickly vanish. The failure with which he charges Pericles’ successors actually redounds upon his own hero. For he it was who led Athens into a conflict of incalculable consequences and without having a viable exit strategy. Beneath this Thucydidean veneer of an apologetic glorification one can detect an individual whom other contemporaries identify as a determined imperialist. Apart from a few details, Thucydides has very little of a concrete nature to offer on Pericles (317–318).

Why did Thucydides create this Pericles? According to W., it was to enable the historian to defend his generation against the ‘Epigoni’ who were responsible...
for losing it.\(^1\) And so in his «Kriegsrede», ‘the strategy which Pericles develops in 431 under the force of circumstances, this Thucydides transforms, within the perspective of the experience of 404, into a strategy that was supposed to avoid all the mistakes which in his view were made over the 27-year war’ (234).

A bold and provocative thesis! How well will it stand up to scrutiny? To test it in part, I shall, for reasons of space, take only three instances for observation here, selected more or less at random.

In the «Rüstungskatalog» (2.13.3–8), Thucydides’ Pericles allegedly offers a grand overview of Athenian achievements, most specifically, a meticulous account of preparations for the war. ‘It is a paean on Athens’ economic strength’. Thucydides’ objective in this speech by Pericles (in oratio obliqua) is ‘to emphasise that Athens’ optimal readiness for the war is due solely to Pericles, and at the same time offer proof of the most important virtue of a statesman – pronoia’ (194–95).

Does Thucydides, however, present such a one-sided rosy financial picture of Athens at the beginning of the war? In a footnote to the same speech, he points out that the Reserve Fund had, already before Archidamus had actually invaded Attica for the first time, been drained by 1700 talents from a previous maximum of 9700 – spent on the Propylaea and other public buildings, and on Potidaea (2.13.3). Moreover, a little later he points out that by the end of the second year of the war Athens had already spent 2000 talents on the siege [of Potidaea] (2.70.2). For one thing, this does not look like very impressive πολεμικός. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude (chiefly on the basis of Thucydides) that ‘in two areas the internal policy of Pericles was to prove dangerous, in fact even disastrous: in his policy dealing with the franchise and his administration of finance’.\(^2\) And should not anyone with even a modicum of πολεμικός have been able to predict that Athens’ dictates to Potidaea following on the heels of the Corcyra affair would have resulted in, not preventing the ally from revolting, but in almost certainly precipitating such a revolt? (That Pericles did not have significant input in the dictates, seems difficult to believe.) But W. would like to see the revolt as an «unvorhergesehenes Ereigniss» (235).

Secondly, one of the by-products of Thucydides’ post-404 reflections is allegedly, as noted above, a change of view about Sparta. Accordingly, one of the ways in which Thucydides expresses this is to cast Pericles in one of his chief roles as obstinately and vehemently anti-Spartan (331–2). But, again, does Thucydides give such a one-sided picture? One has to ask why Thucydides then also reports that Pericles and Archidamus were personal friends, so much so that Pericles felt it necessary to turn over his estates to the πολιτικός (2.13.1). Pericles as the arch «Spaßfeind» and a personal friend of Archidamus, the arch-invader of Attica, strikes one as incongruous.

Thirdly, according to W., Thucydides regarded «unkontrollierte Expansion zur Unzeit» as the first mistake that ultimately led to Athens’ final defeat, and that Thucydides warns against this in his first speech (237). True, but at the same time, in his last speech, Pericles, in a desperate moment, tantalises the Athenians (one can visualise Alcibiades as a member of the audience) with the possibility of embarking on just such an ‘Expansion’ (2.62.1–2). Here too, then, instead of a strictly one-sided portrait, we appear to have a more nuanced Pericles.

\(^1\) Earlier W. argues that when Thucydides looked back over events from the post-eventum perspective of 404, it was the historian’s conviction that it was the ‘Epigoni’ who were responsible for losing the war. Pericles and his generation would have won the war:Thucydides belongs to that generation — hence his defensive attitude when writing after 404 (250).

In conclusion, in addition to problems of composition (i.e., just when precisely any given passage was written),¹ some chinks begin to show in the armour.

Despite these observations, one is compelled to conclude that W.’s is a major work, teeming with stimulating and provocative conclusions, based on rigorous, sober and penetrating analysis. Even if its principal thesis may require modification, no reader will go away from this book unrewarded.²

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Il libro, preceduto dalla lista delle abbreviazioni (XI sg.), dagli Acknowledgements (XIII sg.) e da una breve introduzione descrittiva (1–6), si compone di sei capitoli: 1. Proclus, John Chrysostom, and Atticus of Constantinople (7–39);