

Four ways to hate Corcyra
Thucydides 1.24-55 against the background of Odysseus 13, Herodotus 3.48-53, and 7.168¹

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I. The logical vs. the actual structure of Thucydides Book I

“Mir ist das erste Buch noch eben ein solches Chaos wie früher...Aber der Aufbau des ganzen Werkes ist klar and ist von Thukydides so berechnet.” (Wilamowitz 1969 [1908] 309)

Thucydides, unlike Herodotus, is not considered a craftsman of overall narrative structure. In the first place, he did not succeed in finishing his history, and it is a great sign of our respect for what he did complete that we forgive him this shortcoming. Secondly, Books II-VIII of his work are based on a pre-determined annalistic and seasonal structure which frees him from the complex and sometimes forced transitions that Herodotus must employ.² That is not to say that he does not show some artfulness in the way he manages to tell stories over several years within these constraints; but if we look at the structure of his work before he adopts the annalistic frame, namely book I, it makes one relieved that, after the war's beginning in book 2 onward, he was no longer free to structure the narrative himself. Indeed, the first book of his history is a focus of much criticism and disagreement: it is where Thucydides is thought by various critics to have been the most manipulative of the facts, most "early" or "late," or most discursive.³

I am preparing a commentary on Thucydides book I and in trying to account for its structure I have sometimes speculated on how I myself would edit what he left behind. Given the variety of authorial voices, of time periods covered and methodological issues treated, a sensible policy might have been 1) to concentrate together those sections in which he speaks directly to the reader before he launches the impersonal narrative; 2) to order chronologically all the different periods of time discussed; and 3) to concentrate statements on the each separate aspect of method (magnitude of subject, search for factual accuracy, composition of speeches, causes of the war, aims of history) together in one place. The result might be:

I. Comparison to all previous wars, including the Persian.

--1 Statement of Purpose and Topic

--2-19 “Archaeology,” on why previous wars were inferior

--1.21.1-2: The greater magnitude of T's war A (concludes 2-19 and asserts upcoming war will surpass it)

--1.23.1-3 greater magnitude of T's war B (specifically compares Persian war to T's war)

II. Increasing conflict between Athens and Sparta after the Persian war

--1.126-138: the fate of the Persian war leaders (Pausanias and Themistocles)

--1.88-118: “Pentekontaeteia” (sketch of events 480-430; Contrast between Spartan disengagement and Athenian expansion)

¹ This study owes much to the writings of conference participants Gregory Crane, Paula Debnar, Nino Luraghi and Hans-Peter Stahl, and to helpful comments from them as well as (among others) Jonathan Price, Peter Rhodes and Suzanne Said; in addition, I am especially grateful to Edith Foster and Simon Hornblower for letting me read their forthcoming work. Thanks most of all to Georg Rechenauer and Vassiliki Pothou for making possible such a pleasant and productive gathering of Thucydideans. But these scholars' assent to all of my conclusions below must not be assumed.

² For Thucydides' annalistic narrative see Dewald 2005, for Herodotus see the survey by de Jong 2002.

³ Schwartz 1929, Adcock 1951, Badian 1993.

III. Methods of the following narrative

- 1.23.4-6: methods of narrative A (causes narrated first; distinctions among causes)
- 1.22.1: methods of narrative B (composing speeches)
- 1.22.2-3 method of narrative C (composing events)
- 1.20: unreliability of oral traditions
- 1.22.4: statement of purpose

IV. Narrative of the immediate causes of war

- 1.24-55: Corcyra (and Athens) vs. Corinth for Epidamnus
- 1.56-65: Rebellion at Potidaea (Athens vs. Corinth)
- 1.66-87: First Meeting at Sparta (68-71: Speech of Corinthians; 73-78: Speech of Athenians; 80-85: Speech of Archidamus; 86: Speech of Sthenelaidas)
- 1.119-125: Second meeting at Sparta (120-124: Speech of Corinthians)
- 1.126-127: Pre-war negotiations: The Cylonian conspiracy
- 1.139-146: Athenians declare war (140-144: Speech of Pericles).

Unfortunately, my task as a commentator does not extend to re-structuring Book I—nor do I wish to be thought a modern-day Dionysius of Halicarnassus⁴--so the next best thing is to look at the differences between my ideal structure for book I and the one we really have, and try to discover what the actual structure achieves: the result is that Thucydides gives the statement of the war's magnitude in several places, makes his statement of method before the end of his preface, and allots the most important final position in his preface to the statement of the war's causes.⁵ Next, these multiple causes are presented in very different types of narrative (Corcyra-Corinth, Potidaea, Meetings at Sparta, Pentekontaeteia, Excurses on Pausanias and Themistocles).

Thus the biggest initial break in Book I is between chapters 23 and 24, the place where, as it were, Thucydides takes a deep breath and jumps from the comfort of his introduction into the deep water of his narrative.⁶ This section presents him with a special challenge: It is his first narrative after many pages of analysis, and after promising to narrate the entire complex of multiple causes for the war. If we are reading Thucydides for the first time, it is the very first narrative he will provide, and the reader will take it as in some way characteristic of all that is to follow. He does not disappoint us.

Thus the story of the dispute between Corcyra and Corinth over Epidamnus, and of Corinth and Athens over Corcyra in I.24-55, in many ways constitutes the true beginning of his story. There are several fine studies of this narrative that relieve me of the obligation of discussing every aspect of it: Paula Debnar's paper in this volume deals with the Corcyreans' rhetoric in Athens; Hans-Peter Stahl (2006, 301-320) has discussed the stopping-points which build suspense in the narrative and shown how this conflict escalates to a higher and higher level; and Gregory Crane (1998) has shown how Corinth's complaints evoke a traditional system of values based on hierarchy, symbolic exchange and past services that is now a thing of the past; and Edith Foster (chapter 2, forthcoming) elucidates the heated competition for the materials of war, in this case ships, Corcyra and Corinth its disappointing outcome for both at the battle of Sybota.

⁴ For Dionysius' criticisms of the structure of Book I see *Letter to Pompeius* 3.9 and *On Thucydides* 10.

⁵ As often noted, the three words expressing causality for the war in Thucydides I.23 also have specific meanings that are pre-causal: αἰτία = "accusation", διαφορά = "rift" or "estrangement", πρόφασις (from προ-φαίνω) = "manifestation." In general, see most recently Vegetti 1999 276-279, and n. 1 below.

⁶ Thucydides devises similarly unexpected breaks at two subsequent points in book I: at I.88 we move again backward in time, and the voice of the author intervenes once more, to supplement the story with the deeper background of Athenian expansion at Sparta's expense 480-431; and at I.138, when he breaks off his flashback on Pausanias and Themistocles to return to pre-war Sparta.

I can therefore take those points as a given, and focus instead on what sets this narrative apart from the rest of book I; rather than belonging together with the narrative of the dispute over Potidaea in 1.56-65, or even being connected with the tetralogy of speeches in 1.66-87 (which it partly motivates), it should be considered a whole narrative complete in itself, in the Aristotelian sense (*Poetics* 1450b) of having a beginning, middle and an end. The formal and most decisive indication of its unity is the ring-sentence that introduces the section and concludes it:

1.23.6 αἱ δ' ἐς τὸ φανερόν λεγόμεναι αἰτίαι αἰδ' ἦσαν ἐκατέρων, ἀφ' ὧν λύσαντες τὰς σπονδὰς ἐς τὸν πόλεμον κατέστησαν.

1.55.2 αἰτία δὲ αὕτη πρώτη ἐγένετο τοῦ πολέμου τοῖς Κορινθίοις ἐς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους, ὅτι σφίσις ἐν σπονδαῖς μετὰ Κερκυραίων ἐναυμάχουν.

It has long been recognized (Katicic 1957) that rings are used for this purpose especially in the pre-annalistic narrative of book I; there is another such ring-sentence at the end of the Potidaea narrative which binds the two narratives together (I.66), and one final ring at the end of Book I (I.146), but that does not diminish the force of the initial boundary at chapter 55.

Another clear sign that an essentially new element of Thucydides' work begins at chapter 24 is, as has often been recognized, the narrative style of that chapter in itself, which is completely independent of the sentence that introduced it, marked with asyndeton and a copulative verb,⁷ which calls into existence a new concept, in this case the city Epidamnus, which leads to a series of simple and concise explanatory sentences that use links to generate the story to come: (1.24.2-1.25.2):

Ἐπίδαμνος ἐστὶ πόλις...

ταύτην ἀπώικισαν μὲν Κερκυραῖοι...

προελθόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου...

στασιάσαντες δὲ...ἐφθάρησαν ...

τὰ δὲ τελευταῖα...

πέμπουσιν ἐς τὴν Κέρκυραν...

οἱ δὲ Κερκυραῖοι τὴν ἰκετείαν οὐκ ἐδέξαντο, ἀλλ' ἀπράκτους ἀπέπεμψαν

Epidamnus exists, a colony with links to both Corcyra and also Corinth; it undergoes stasis and outside attack, and asks the help of Corcyra, which refuses; with Delphi's permission, it approaches Corinth, which decides to assist it.

To make this opening so simple and natural, Thucydides has made a number of decisions about what to foreground, what to omit and how to present the action. We can be better informed about these decisions because they relate to Corcyra, with its rich tradition of getting into mythological and historical trouble.

⁷ Closely comparable is Herodotus' narrative opening (1.6) Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δὲ Ἄλυάττεω...τύραννος δὲ... or Iliad 6.152 ἔστι πόλις Ἐφύρη (on the pattern see Fraenkel 1912 45-47, Flower and Marincola on Herodotus 9.93.1), or the opening of Xenophon's *Anabasis* (which is quite literally "generative," giving birth to Cyrus who will set the story in motion): Δαρείου καὶ Παρυσάτιδος γίνονται παῖδες δύο, πρεσβύτερος μὲν Ἀρταξέρξης, νεώτερος δὲ Κύρος.

II. How Thucydides' Corinthians Hate Corcyra (I.25.3-4)

Let us look first at 1.25.3-4: Corinth's nominal motivation for assisting Epidamnus is justice, but behind this lurks a prior hatred or grudge against the Corcyreans:

Κορίνθιοι δὲ κατὰ τε τὸ δίκαιον ὑπεδέξαντο τὴν τιμωρίαν... ἅμα δὲ καὶ μίσει τῶν Κερκυραίων...
The Corinthians undertook to punish them in accordance with justice... but also because of their grudge against the Corcyreans...

This hatred is due not only to a lack of religious and traditional respect owed to a metropolis (see especially Crane 1998), but that behind their arrogance is their pride in the tradition of the Phaeacians,⁸ and their current naval power:

ναυτικῶι δὲ καὶ πολὺ προύχειν ἔστιν ὅτε ἐπαιρόμενοι καὶ κατὰ τὴν Φαιάκων προενοίκησιν τῆς Κερκύρας κλέος ἔχόντων τὰ περὶ τὰς ναῦς.
“and because they were arrogant because of their frequent naval superiority, as well as because Corcyra was previously the home of the Phaeacians, famous for their ships.”

Although he has just been using Homer as historical evidence in the *Archaeology*, Thucydides says nothing more here about these mythical people of *Odyssey* 8 and 13, but his remark can prompt us to examine the ambiguities and complexities of what being a successor of the Phaeacians involves.

III. How Homer's Poseidon Hates (Corcyra's Predecessors) the Phaeacians

Homer's Phaeacians are clearly a people to conjure with: they have been variously interpreted as utopians, a semi-magical fantasy of the nascent Greek colonial system, or, more sinisterly, as a selfish and deluded monarchy about to collapse.⁹ The one thing that is clear about them is that their nautical prowess is supernatural, their ships travel safely without human guidance (*Odyssey* 8.557-563).

But along with this gift comes a responsibility not to abuse it, as Alcinoos makes clear in an apparently unmotivated but of course foreshadowing observation to the newly-arrived Odysseus (*Odyssey* 8.564-571):

“But even so, I once heard my father say this,
Nausithoos, who told that Poseidon took exception
To us, because we gave all men passage and did not suffer.
He said that one day, when a beautiful ship of Phaeacian men
Was returning from a passage, on a smooth sea,
He would shatter it, and cover our city all around with a great mountain.
That is what the old man said; these things either the God will accomplish

⁸ As Stahl 2006 303 points out, they should be taking their heritage from their mother city Corinth instead.

⁹ Utopian according to Mackie 1996, colonization-based in Kalligas 1982 and Dougherty 2006, sinister in Rose 1969, most nuanced and detailed in Howie 1989 (a reference I owe to Nagy 2002). As for government, the Phaeacians are no model of stability: clearly the most authoritative person is Arete, whose marriage in widowhood to her husband's brother has averted a crisis of succession, and of whom Homer says that she “resolves the hostilities” (νείκεα λύει, *Odyssey* 7.74) of the highly competitive Phaeacian aristocrats. I would agree with those who find life in the kingdom of Alcinoos to be somewhat tense, even between king and queen. For the political tensions in Scheria (and marital tensions between Arete and Alcinoos), see Ahl and Roisman 1996, and Skempis and Ziogas forthcoming.

Or they will not come to pass, as it suits his temper.”

Alcinoos unfortunately forgets this possible danger until after he has agreed to ferry Odysseus home with sumptuous gifts, even though Odysseus has gone on in books 9-12 to narrate the great hostility Poseidon has for him personally—unfortunately, Alcinoos does not put two and two together.¹⁰ And so, at the very moment of Odysseus' homecoming, Homer moves to Poseidon's bitter complaint about the Phaeacians to Zeus (*Odyssey* 13.128-130). The God's anger has deflected away from Odysseus and toward the people who helped him, and he asks Zeus for permission to carry out the same punishment Nausithoos had prophesied (*Odyssey* 13.128-149).

Zeus gives a positive response to this plan (13.154-158):

“ὦ πέπον, ὡς μὲν ἐμῶ θυμῶ δοκεῖ εἶναι ἄριστα·
ὀππότε κεν δὴ πάντες ἐλαυνομένην προΐδωνται
λαοὶ ἀπὸ πτόλιος, θεῖναι λίθον ἐγγύθι γαίης
νηῖ θοῆ ἴκελον, ἵνα θαυμάζωσιν ἅπαντες
ἄνθρωποι, μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι.”

“Brother, this is what seems best to my temper:
When all the people of the city are watching
It sailing in, make it a rock resembling a swift ship
Near the shore, and cover their city all around with a great mountain.”

So, with Zeus' approval, Poseidon proceeds to carry out his punishment (*Odyssey* 13.159-164). But mysteriously, he only carries out the first part (turning the ship to stone); ὁ δὲ νόσφι βεβήκει, “and then he was gone.”

The Phaeacians realize what has happened and, not knowing Poseidon has left, begin in desperation to sacrifice to Poseidon to avert the loss of their harbor, which would destroy the basis of their livelihood (*Odyssey* 13.172-173, 184-187). While they are praying—and have resolved never again to carry men by sea—Homer leaves them and returns to Odysseus waking up in Ithaca (*Odyssey* 13.183-187):

ὡς οἱ μὲν ῥ' εὔχοντο Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι
δήμου Φαιήκων ἡγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες,
ἑσταότες περὶ βωμόν. ὁ δ' ἔγρετο δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς...

Thus the leaders and rulers of the people
of the Phaeacians prayed to Lord Poseidon
standing around the altar; but Odysseus woke up...

He never speaks of the Phaeacians again. Was it because Poseidon relented? Or did Homer simply wish to move the focus elsewhere, away from their impending doom?¹¹

¹⁰ For Alcinoos' ineptitude in general see Skempis and Ziogas forthcoming.

¹¹ For different aspects of the narrative tension see Erbsse 1972 146-147, Nagy 2002 82-91: the former notes how thoroughly we have been prepared for the second installment of the punishment; the latter observes that we have been reminded by Alcinoos and Zeus that everything depends on what suits Poseidon's temper, and that the Phaeacians have promised to end their passenger-service which was the god's goal.

One ancient interpreter of the *Odyssey*, Aristophanes of Byzantium, found the punishment unacceptable, and emended Zeus's statement in line 158 to forbid explicitly the destruction of the Phaeacians' harbor by Poseidon:¹²

ἄνθρωποι, μὴ (for μέγα) δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι.
 “but do not cover their city all around with a great mountain.”

Erbse and Nagy, with whom I agree, think that allowing the Phaeacians to escape this fate unambiguously, after emphasizing it so strongly in books 8 and 13, is inconsistent with both the narrative and the text; rather, Homer is content to leave the Phaeacians without disclosing us definitively their fate, and we are left in suspense about what became of them.¹³

And what, then, exactly, did the fifth century Greeks remember of the Phaeacians? Was it their seafaring skills, or Poseidon's hatred of them for misusing it? In one notable case, the Corcyreans' claim to be the heirs of the Phaeacians was used against them by the comic poet Hermippus (active from the mid-430's to the 410's), when in his play *Porters* he inserted a hexameter catalog of the various benefits brought to the Athenian empire by cities all around the world (PCG fr. 63):

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι,
 ἐξ οὗ ναυκληρεῖ Διόνυσος ἐπ' οἴνοπα πόντον,
 ὅσος ἀγάθ' ἀνθρώποις δεῦρ' ἤγαγε νηὶ μελαίνῃ.
 ἐκ μὲν Κυρήνης καυλὸν καὶ δέρμα βόειον...

Muses who live on Olympus, tell me now about
 all the good things that Dionysus brought here to men on his black ship
 ever since he first set out over the wine-dark sea.
 From Cyrene he brought the cabbage and the leather of an ox...

Some of the benefits are satirical (Perdiccas sends shiploads of lies), but there is only one complete departure from the catalog-style, relating to Corcyra:

καὶ Κερκυραίους ὁ Ποσειδῶν ἐξολέσειε
 ναυσὶν ἐπὶ γλαφυραῖς, ὅτι δὶ δίχα θυμὸν ἔχουσι.
 ταῦτα μὲν ἐντεῦθεν·

and may Poseidon destroy the Corcyreans
 along with their hollow ships, since they are of two minds.
 So much for that part of the world.

Hermippus was active as early as the 430's and as late as the 410's, so the occasion for this curse—since “being of two minds” can be taken in several ways-- might have been their internal *stasis* in 425 or their (deceptive?) request for an alliance in the 430's, or even their two-faced behavior at Salamis, in which

¹² The emendation is adopted without comment in the translation of Richmond Lattimore, which seems to have led several scholars astray.

¹³ Perhaps the fact that the Corcyreans have a shrine to Alcinoos and Zeus together (Thucydides 3.70.4, cf. Homer *Odyssey* 8.245) suggests that they had already more or less come up with the emendation of Aristophanes.

see part IV below. But the nature of the curse clearly reminds us, in a threatening way, of the link with Homer's Phaeacians.¹⁴

IV. How Herodotus Hates Corcyra: the battle of Salamis (VII.168)

In the speech of the Corcyreans in Athens, they lament -- with apparent humility and self-criticism -- their earlier non-alignment as a mistake, which they must now rectify as they are in danger (Thucydides I.32.3):

τετύχηκε δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπιτήδευμα πρὸς τε ὑμᾶς ἐς τὴν χρεῖαν ἡμῖν ἄλογον καὶ ἐς τὰ ἡμέτερα αὐτῶν ἐν τῶι παρόντι ἀξύμφορον. ξύμμαχοί τε γὰρ οὐδενός πω ἐν τῶι πρὸ τοῦ χρόνῳ ἐκούσιοι γενόμενοι νῦν ἄλλων τοῦτο δεησόμενοι ἤκομεν, καὶ ἅμα ἐς τὸν παρόντα πόλεμον Κορινθίων ἐρήμοι δι' αὐτὸ καθέσταμεν. καὶ περιέστηκεν ἡ δοκοῦσα ἡμῶν πρότερον σωφροσύνη, τὸ μὴ ἐν ἀλλοτρίαι ξυμμαχίαι τῆι τοῦ πέλας γνώμη ξυγκινδυνεύειν, νῦν ἀβουλία καὶ ἀσθένεια φαινομένη.

“But our behavior is, at one and the same time, both illogical for what we are requesting of you and disadvantageous for our current situation. Despite never yet having voluntarily been any one's allies previously we have now come to ask an alliance from others, and because of past policy we find ourselves facing Corinth in the current war. So that what earlier seemed to us to be caution, to refrain from risk in a foreign alliance dependent on someone else's policy, now looks like a bad plan and weakness.”

To a reader of Herodotus, this statement is an outrage. In his rogues' gallery of Greeks (Argos, Sicily, Corcyra and Crete) that declined to fight at Salamis (Herodotus 7.148-170), the Corcyreans are the most guileful. They agree to send a fleet, but they are lying:

Οἱ δὲ παραυτίκα μὲν ὑπίσχοντο πέμψειν τε καὶ ἀμυνέειν, φράζοντες ὡς οὐ σφι περιοπτὴ ἐστὶ ἡ Ἑλλάς ἀπολλυμένη· ἦν γὰρ σφαλῆ, σφεῖς γε οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ δουλεύσουσι τῆ πρώτῃ τῶν ἡμερέων· ἀλλὰ τιμωρητέον εἶη ἐς τὸ δυνατώτατον. Ὑπεκρίναντο μὲν οὕτω εὐπρόσωπα· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔδεε βοηθεῖν, ἄλλα νοεῦντες ἐπλήρωσαν νέας ἐξήκοντα, μόγις δὲ ἀναχθέντες προσέμειξαν τῆ Πελοποννήσῳ, καὶ περὶ Πύλον καὶ Ταίναρον γῆς τῆς Λακεδαιμονίων ἀνεκώχουον τὰς νέας, καταδοκέοντες καὶ οὗτοι τὸν πόλεμον τῆ πεσέεται, ἀελπτέοντες μὲν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ὑπερβαλέεσθαι, δοκέοντες δὲ τὸν Πέρσην κατακρατήσαντα πολλὸν ἄρξειν πάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος.

They immediately promised that they would send forces and join in the defense, stating that they could not look on while Greece was destroyed; for if it fell, they themselves would surely be enslaved the very next day; instead, they must take offensive action as forcefully as possible. This was their specious answer, but when the time came to send help, they had other things in mind and manned 60 ships but scarcely set sail and hugged the coast of the Peloponnese and kept their ships at anchor near Pylos and Taenarus in Peloponnesian territory, waiting to see for themselves how the war would play out, since they doubted that the Greeks would prevail, but expected that the Persians would win a great victory and rule over all of Greece.

The malignant Herodotus even goes so far as to transcribe the speech that they intended to give to the victorious Xerxes (7.168).

¹⁴ Adcock 1951 5 notes the Hermippus-fragment, but not the connection with the Phaeacians. For what it is worth, the Athenian politician “Phaiax” (evidently the first such name in his family), active in the 420's, is evidently named after an Athenian minor hero, see Davies 1971 521.

Ἐποίεον (the Corcyreans) ὧν ἐπίτηδες, ἵνα ἔχωσι πρὸς τὸν Πέρσῃν λέγειν τοιάδε· "ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἡμεῖς παραλαμβανόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡμέας ἐς τὸν πόλεμον τοῦτον, ἔχοντες δύναμιν οὐκ ἐλαχίστην οὐδὲ νέας ἐλαχίστας παρασχόντες ἂν ἀλλὰ πλείστας μετὰ γε Ἀθηναίους, οὐκ ἠθελήσαμεν τοι ἀντιοῦσθαι οὐδέ τι ἀποθύμιον ποιῆσαι." Τοιαῦτα λέγοντες ἤλπιζον πλεόν τι τῶν ἄλλων οἴσεσθαι· τὰ περ ἂν καὶ ἐγένετο, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέει.

They did this deliberately so that they could say to the Persian as follows: "O King, we, when the Greeks invited us into this war, possessors of not the least power nor providers of the fewest ships, but more than any others after the Athenians, we refused to oppose you or to do anything against your wish." They hope by saying these things to gain an advantage over the others, which, I think, would have happened.

Edith Foster (forthcoming, chapter 2) has observed that the Corcyreans are depicted by Herodotus as making to Xerxes much the same argument they will make to the Athenians in Thucydides I, that their ships make them a valuable addition to the victorious conqueror.¹⁵ Truly, the Corcyreans are some of the most loathsome characters of Herodotus' Persian war.¹⁶

V. How Herodotus' Corinthians Hate Corcyra

For my final example of Corcyra's unpopularity-- and here I am developing a suggestion made by Nino Luraghi (2005 84-85) about a Herodotean allusion to the Peloponnesian War -- I begin with the statement made by the Corinthians in their speech arguing that Athens should reject an alliance with Corcyra: they claim that Athens should stay out of their internal affairs on the same principle that Corinth itself once followed, when it opposed a Spartan plan of the Peloponnesian league to intervene when Athens suppressed the revolt of Samos in the 440's (Thuc. 1. 40.5):

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡμεῖς Σαμίων ἀποστάντων ψῆφον προσεθέμεθα ἐναντίαν ὑμῖν, τῶν ἄλλων Πελοποννησίων δίχα ἐψηφισμένων εἰ χρὴ αὐτοῖς ἀμύνειν, φανερώς δὲ ἀντείομεν τοὺς προσήκοντας ξυμμάχους αὐτόν τινα κολάζειν. νῦν παρ' ὑμῶν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀξιοῦμεν κομίζεσθαι, καὶ μὴ τῇ ἡμετέροι ψήφῳ ὠφεληθέντας τῇ ὑμετέροι ἡμᾶς βλάψαι.

"For when the Samians revolted and the rest of the Peloponnesians had a split vote on whether they should come to their defence, we for our part did not cast our ballot in opposition to you, but said in opposition that anyone should punish those in its sphere himself. On the present occasion we insist on receiving the same from you, and that you, after being aided by our vote, not harm us with yours."

If the Athenian audience had read Herodotus 3.48-53, they would have known that when it came to Samos, the Corinthians could hardly claim impartiality; in the 520's they had eagerly joined a Spartan attack on Samos because of a still earlier injury (*hybrisma*), in the days of Periander's tyranny at

¹⁵ But she also points out several differences, the most important of which is that in Thucydides they no longer have the option of biding their time, but must commit in advance to who will win the upcoming conflict.

¹⁶ How and Wells on Herodotus 7.168: "...the dislike and suspicion felt by the rest of Greece for the western island is patent." As Herodotus tells it, the legitimate point in their defence that, of the western islands, they were not directly affected by Greek cause (Thiry 2001 133-134) is vitiated by their duplicity. The scholia on Thucydides I.139.6 speculate that the Corcyreans' debt to Themistocles (which they did not repay, I.136.1), relates to post-Persian-war recriminations against them.

Corinth, when the Samians had saved from the Corinthians three hundred Corcyrean captives on their way to Sardis to be castrated, and returned them all to Corcyra.

Herodotus tells us the background of this story at some length, in an elaborately structured digression (3.49.2-53).¹⁷

Corinthians join the Spartan expedition against Samos
 ----Samian interception of Corcyrean boys to be castrated
 -----Periander hates Corcyra for a πρῆγμα ἀτάσθαλον
 -----Periander's son hates Periander
 -----Corcyreans' *hybrisma* against Periander (killing his son)
 -----Periander hates Corcyra
 Corinthians hate Samos

Plutarch, *De malignitate Herodoti* 22, 859F-860B, finds this explanation of Corinthian hostility to Samos implausible, coming as it does many decades after the death of a hated tyrant. But he overlooks the way Herodotus prefaces the story (3.49.1):

Εἰ μὲν νῦν Περιάνδρου τελευτήσαντος τοῖσι Κορινθίοισι φίλια ἦν πρὸς τοὺς Κερκυραίους, οἱ δὲ οὐκ ἂν συνελάβοντο τοῦ στρατεύματος τοῦ ἐπὶ Σάμον ταύτης εἵνεκεν τῆς αἰτίας· νῦν δὲ αἰεὶ ἐπεῖτε ἔκτισαν τὴν νῆσον εἰσὶ ἀλλήλοισι διάφοροι ἐόντες ἑωυτοῖσι (ὄμαιμοι)¹⁸.

If the Corinthians had been on friendly terms with the Corcyreans when Periander died, they would not have joined the expedition against Samos because of this reason [or “accusation”].¹⁹ But the truth is that ever since they colonized the island they have always been in dispute with each other, though <kinsmen>.

The Periander-connection is just a pretext, the real basis is the eternal grudge against Corcyra, which is simply a given. Sourvinou-Inwood 1991 argued that the entire digression explaining Corinth's hostility is mythical rather than historical, and that Corcyra serves a structural rather than a historical function -- one cannot, for instance, infer that Periander actually ruled Corcyra. Rather “the historical relationship between Corinth and Corcyra...made Corcyra the obvious selection for filling the space of “the outside community” in the narrative.”

Similarly, the allegation of the Corinthians in Thucydides that they cast a vote on principle against Peloponnesian intervention to assist Samos can hardly be treated as a solid fact either, and it was over-credulous of A. H. M. Jones 1952 to use it to reconstruct the procedures of the Peloponnesian league. But it is easy to think of a famous (non-factual) narrative model of a Corinthian speaker formally resisting a planned Peloponnesian expedition for reasons of conscience, namely the speech of Soclees in Herodotus book 5, where he tells of the evils tyranny has brought to his own country and excoriates the Spartans for planning to reinstate the tyranny in Athens (5.92.8):

¹⁷ Note the strong emotional motivations: Τούτων ὧν εἵνεκεν ἀπεμνησικάκεον (Corinth-Samos); τιμωρέμενος· πρότεροι γὰρ οἱ Κερκυραῖοι ἦρξαν ἐς αὐτὸν πρῆγμα ἀτάσθαλον ποιήσαντες (Periander against Corcyra); ἤλγησε, ὀργῇ χρεώμενος, περιθύμως ἔχων (Lycophron and Periander); Ἀντὶ τούτων μὲν Περιάνδρος Κερκυραίους ἐτιμωρέετο.

¹⁸ The supplement is from Stein (οἰκίηοι Reiske, συγγενές Godley)

¹⁹ Note the use of two of Thucydides' cause-words from I.23.5-6 (n. 5 above): the Corinthians have an αἰτία against Samos, but there is a διαφορά between them and Corcyra.

“Ἐπιμαρτυρόμεθά τε ἐπικαλούμενοι ὑμῖν θεοὺς τοὺς Ἑλληνίους μὴ κατιστάναι τυραννίδας ἐς τὰς πόλεις. Οὐκὼν παύσεσθε ἀλλὰ πειρήσεσθε παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον κατάγοντες Ἴππίην; Ἴστε ὑμῖν Κορινθίους γε οὐ συναινέοντας.”

“We beseech you, invoking the gods of Greece, not to establish tyrannies in the cities. Will you not cease, then, but still attempt to restore Hippias contrary to justice? Rest assured that the Corinthians at least do not approve.”

After the end of Soclees’ speech, the tyrant Hippias responds by promising the Corinthians that the Athenians will do things to them someday that will make them regret their decision (5.93.1):

Ἴππίης δὲ αὐτὸν ἀμείβετο τοὺς αὐτοὺς θεοὺς ἐπικαλέσας ἐκείνῳ, ἧ μὲν Κορινθίους μάλιστα πάντων ἐπιποθήσειν Πεισιστρατίδας, ὅταν σφι ἦκωσι ἡμέραι αἱ κύριαι ἀνιᾶσθαι ὑπ’ Ἀθηναίων. Hippias answered him by invoking the same gods that he had, that the Corinthians would miss the Peisistratids most of them all, when the appointed days arrived for them to be tormented by Athens.

The days predicted by Hippias are precisely what Thucydides is describing in Book I, and it is tempting to see in the Corinthians’ first speech at Sparta (I.68-71) Soclees as an ironic model: once again there is a highly emotional Corinthian harangue to the Peloponnesians, alleging that Sparta lacks the experience to appreciate the impending danger—from Athens.²⁰

VI. Thucydides I.24-55 as a beginning and as a whole

With all this Corcyrean background in mind, let us return to the narrative of Thucydides. We can see that he has given the notorious Corcyreans an amnesty at the start: he mentions their pride in the island’s Phaeacian past, but not that people’s questionable end; he lets the Corcyreans in Athens admit that their previous non-alignment might have been a mistake, without reminding us of their reputation for cowardice and duplicity at Salamis; he mentions Corinth’s hatred of them and attitude to Samos, but not the complex story of grievances dating back beyond Periander, nor does he even remind us of his own earlier statement (I.13.4) that Corinth and Corcyra had fought the first known sea-battle in the 7th century.

That silence is owing to the fact that he is presenting his first cause-- Thucydides surely knows that even first historical causes have causes too, but to point that out is not a good opening narrative strategy. His selectivity is part of his strategy of *simplification*, of *avoiding* digressions and cross-references, in favor of making the Corinth-Corcyra conflict grow seemingly from nothing in front of our eyes. In narrative terms, it gives the sense of a beginning:²¹ it follows directly the statement announcing the narrative of the causes; the outcome is not given away in advance; its opening sentence is, as we have seen, “generative”, and assumes no prior knowledge, indeed it might be called a “mini-

²⁰ A reader of Soclees’ speech against the background of Thucydides will find in his story of the survival of the baby Cypselus (5.92.b-d), who will grow up to be a tyrant, an unintended refutation of his insistence on sparing the nascent Athenian democracy, whose future harm to the Peloponnesians has also been prophesied (Herodotus 5.90.2), and whose tyranny will be alleged by speakers in Thucydides (Thucydides I.122.3, II. 63.2, III.37.2, VI.85.1); see Dewald 2003 31 and Moles 2007 261-268.

²¹ In addition to Aristotle’s *Poetics* 1450b27-28 (“A beginning is that which does not itself exist necessarily after anything else, but after it something naturally exists or comes into being...”) see Said 1975.

archaeology” of Epidamnus,²² which also introduces Corcyra and Corinth in relation to it; and it avoids digressions or back-references, especially to any specifics of prior hostility to Corcyra.

More surprisingly, since we are just at the beginning of Thucydides’ work, the narrative of I.24-55 gives us the sense of a whole,²³ since it has an eventful “middle” with a variety of conflicts both discursive (supplication, oracle, indirect-statement speeches, direct speeches) and military (siege, two sea-battles) accompanied by much detail, and also a sense of closure, without loose ends, in chapter 55: Corcyra is firmly pro-Athenian; Corinth has retired from the region; Athens has succeeded in defending Corcyra while preserving the peace. Not that the story will not have further ramifications, but even without the ring in I.55.2 we sense that after the battle of Sybota a particular *praxis* has reached its *telos*.²⁴

Thucydides will occasionally be able to produce such narrative units again within the annalistic sections. For example, the attack on Plataea, the siege of Plataea and the speeches after its capture can be viewed as three episodes of a progression, but the first installment (II.2-6) is itself a similarly complete story (Stahl 2003 65-73). Yet here in Book I, in the immediately following narrative of Potidaea (I.56-65) he was unwilling or unable to structure it in the same way, since that story, despite an initial structural symmetry between Epidamnus and Potidaea,²⁵ develops quite differently from it, as the real contrast is between Potidaea and Corcyra, each having to choose between Corinth and Athens:

--Corcyra is anti-Corinth and pro-Athens, Potidaea is the reverse;

--The Corcyrean embassy to Athens succeeds despite opposition, that of the Potidaeans to Athens is unanswered but fails;

--Corcyra’s siege of Epidamnus is successful and followed by a sea-battle, at Potidaea an initial land-battle is succeeded by a siege;

--the Athenians accomplish their aim of defending Corcyra without loss, but accomplishing their offensive aim in the siege of Plataea is extremely expensive and takes many lives (Foster, forthcoming Chapter 2);

--In the Corcyra narrative, although the names of many commanders are listed, motivations, decisions or outcomes are never attributed to individuals, whereas at Potidaea the Corinthian Aristaeus takes over the narrative, and his Athenian counterpart Callias dies in battle.

--At I.55 the ring is confirmed by a sense of completion, at I.65, despite another ring, the siege and fate of Potidaea are in no way resolved.²⁶

Thus the war’s second “cause-narrative” is neither a continuation of 24-55, nor a parallel “whole,” but a departure from it both structurally and narratively.

²² Cf. Bowie 1993 142, who also suggests that I.24 recalls the opening of the Iliad.

²³ In addition to *Poetics* 1450b25-31 (“A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and an end...an end is that which itself exists naturally after something else either necessarily or by and large, but nothing (exists naturally) after it”) see also Kermode 2000.

²⁴ If only Thucydides I.24-55 had survived, we might compare it to the Sallustian narratives of *Catiline* and *Iugurtha*; they are of course parts of much larger stories, but still complete.

²⁵ Corcyra (Athens) besieges Epidamnus (Potidaea), whose sympathies lie with Corinth and from whom it receives aid.

²⁶ To this list of differences one might add that Poseidon hated Corcyra’s ancestors (and is invoked against them by Hermippus), but Potidaea is named after him.

VII. Resonances and Foreshadowing

The main narrative accomplishment of both I.24-55 and I.56-68 is that the anger of Corinth is transferred directly to Athens, which will motivate Corinth's vigorous agitation for the Peloponnesians to declare war (I.68-71, 120-124). Accordingly, Epidamnus immediately and Potidaea soon after will disappear from the narrative; but Corcyra will not. As Sourvinou-Inwood determined above, Corcyra can conveniently fill a gap: again and again, its island status, its mythological tradition of Poseidon's hostility, its non-alignment until it knows who will win, its arrogance and ambition, and its scheming to ingratiate itself with outsiders for its own advantage, has led to no good.

Thucydides forgets all this; as we saw, he gives Corcyra a complete amnesty. And so, what will it do? It will incriminate and destroy itself once again.²⁷ Even though I.24-55 is, I believe, complete in itself, there are foreshadowings of the other narrative to come, especially in the description of the Athenians' actual intention in making the defensive alliance, which is to weaken both sides and reap the benefit (I.44.2), and especially of the 250 high-ranking prisoners that Corinth has taken back to indoctrinate (I.55.1) and sow the seeds of stasis in III.70.1.

So when the story continues in Book 3, Corcyra will be punished terribly -- no other non-Athenian state undergoes such lurid trauma. Thucydides has spared the Corcyreans their history of guilt, but he will give them a much worse punishment than any author before, especially because it is self-inflicted. As the island collapses in self-destruction in 427 (III.70-81, 85), Herodotus, the Corinthians and Poseidon can be imagined as smiling;²⁸ while the Athenians, like Odysseus in *Odyssey* 13, merely wake up, go about their business, and scarcely give the people they have seduced into self-destruction a second thought.²⁹

²⁷ For the abundant pleonexia of the Corcyreans and their accumulation of local enemies even within a few short chapters of Thucydides I, see Foster forthcoming chapter 2. One might contrast the enduring prudence of the Chians, praised by Thucydides VIII.24 (see the paper of Nino Luraghi in this volume).

²⁸ The comparative study of hatred for Corcyra is structurally illuminating as well: For Homer, anger is the prerogative of the gods, for Herodotus of tyrants; in Thucydides, it belongs to the polis. Speakers in Homer (Poseidon) and Herodotus (Socleas) are individuals; in Thucydides they are cities, but no less strongly characterized.

²⁹ For the Athenians as the *tertius gaudens* in the Corcyra-Corinth conflict see the appendix "1.44-56, The Kerkyraika" in Hornblower forthcoming, and Stadter 1983..

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