

BOOK REVIEW

Thucydides, Pericles, and Periclean Imperialism. By Edith FOSTER. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 256. Hardcover, £50.00/\$85.00. ISBN: 978-0-521-19266-8.

Thucydides stands like a champion wrestler, challenging all opponents to interpret his *History*. Each new reader enters the ring, confident that some new and better hold will pin the historian down, only to find him slip from his or her grasp. In recent years a major issue has been Thucydides' position on Athenian imperial policy, in particular whether and to what extent he sees a difference between Pericles and his successors. In *Thucydides, Pericles, and Periclean Imperialism*, Edith Foster presents a sensitive reading of the text that builds especially on the observations of Strasburger and Stahl. Foster's principal "new hold" is an analysis of references to materials of war (collectively, *paraskeuê*), which she studies exhaustively in the Archaeology and more selectively thereafter. Using contrasting close readings of the narrative and the speeches from the beginning of the history to 2.65, Foster argues that the differences indicate that Pericles is not a spokesman for the author, nor does Thucydides the narrator share the chauvinism, imperialism, and materialism displayed in Pericles' speeches as reported. On the contrary, Thucydides writes partly "to show the price of Periclean materialism and imperialism" (3).

In the first chapter, Foster's analysis of the Archaeology, including the thalassocracy of Minos, the Trojan War, and the later increase in naval power of Corinth and other cities, focuses on the destructive effects of the growth of resources for war. Sparta and Athens were able initially to become stronger without "the acquisitive habit," but they too succumbed after the Persian Wars. Foster concludes, "The Archaeology in fact shows that each successive phase of Greek history wrecks itself on warfare and the attempt to exploit others and showcases the psychologies (the love of gain and glory, the desire to be free of labor, the fear of domination) that motivate the continuous appearance of the imperialistic drive" (43). The next chapter on the conflict between Corinth and Corcyra illustrates further how "the mere possession of a navy moves human beings to irrational recklessness" (78) and how events quickly escape human control. Moreover, the revolt of Potidaea put Athens under an enormous strain, which revealed a serious

weakness in the imperial ideal: *archê* did not guarantee security. In the *Pentacontaetia* Thucydides displays the acme of Athenian power, but, for Foster, here too the Egyptian disaster and the revolts of the allies illustrate Athens' precarious hold on empire.

In chapter four, Foster turns to the character Pericles, commenting, "Thucydides makes him symbolic for the tragedy of Athens and his age" (121). Here, exceptionally, Foster's analysis moves beyond Thucydides' text to speculate, following Davies, on the possible effect of the Alcmeonid curse on Pericles' psychology and politics, especially the intransigence of the first speech (129). Foster's own anti-Periclean bias may lay behind her criticism of Pericles for misleadingly speaking of the Spartans as *autourgoi*, ignoring the fact that farm work was done by Helots, not Spartans (142-43). In fact, Pericles speaks of *Peloponnêsioi*, not Spartiates, at 1.141.3. Turning in the following chapter to Pericles' indirect speech at 2.13, Foster demonstrates the effectiveness of *oratio obliqua* here. Thucydides can foreground Pericles' relentless attention to money and his readiness to count temple dedications and even the statue of Athena as wealth available to support the war, while adding authorial comments. However, whether Thucydides consciously distanced himself from Pericles here, as Foster argues, is less certain: the *gar* clause at 2.13.3, for instance, which Foster reads as a Thucydidean comment revealing the shaky underpinnings of imperial wealth (168), could equally be a clarification by Pericles himself. However Foster rightly insists that the vivid, highly emotional description of the abandonment of Attica (2.14-17) illustrates the non-monetary cost, minimized in Pericles' speeches, of the divorce of the city from its land. Finally, in considering Pericles' last two speeches and the account of the plague, Foster contrasts the speeches, seen as an "idealized and evasive presentation of Athenian imperial rule" with Thucydides' "inexorably precise" description of the war and the plague's effects on the human body and on Athenian society (183). Pericles speaks of dreams of glory and power, disregarding the effect of empire on both subject allies and the Athenians themselves; Thucydides observes the suffering of the Athenians with compassion. When the historian writes that he cannot explain, but only describe, the plague (2.48.3), he "enacts the opposite of a Periclean mastery over nature" (206). The imperial dream must yield to reality.

This reader hesitates to separate Thucydides so completely from the character Pericles, the author from his creation—or from the prerogatives of Athenian power. The fact that reader response has differed so widely over the years sug-

gests that different personal experience and cultural climate lead readers toward one interpretation or another. At present the delusions of power are all too clear. But Thucydides is not easy to pin down, and knows how to project both the glory and the pain of empire. As Foster realizes, Pericles and Athens are tragic figures, but for Thucydides, I think, all the more tragic for the greatness of their aspirations, the success won (for a moment) by their sufferings. The disturbing attraction of power, of mastery over the world, is a human failing. Foster's book succeeds admirably in demonstrating that Thucydides provides precise details and vivid enactments of how dangerous that attraction can be.

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