

**FROM THE COMMENTS IN THUCYDIDES  
ABOUT THE LIFE OF THE SAME THUCYDIDES  
AND THE FORM OF HIS SPEECH**

by **Marcellinus**

Translated by  
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After the mysteries of Demosthenes<sup>1</sup>, which have arisen from the speeches and struggles divine, and which made us full and satisfied us with enough deliberative and judicious thoughts, it is time in what remains<sup>2</sup> to arrange the initiation rites into Thucydides. For the man set down much, through noble speeches and accurate actions, in the arts of generalship, counsels, and panegyrics. It is necessary for us to speak first about the man, both with respect to his family and his life. For before the speeches these things must be examined nobly by the prudent.

Now, Thucydides, the writer, came forth from Olorus his father, who had his surname from Olorus, the king of the Thracians, and his mother, Hegeisipulas, who was a descendant of the most highly esteemed generals. I am speaking here to be sure of Miltiades and Cimon. For his household was founded in ancient times by the family of Miltiades the general, and Miltiades by Aeacus from Zeus. The writer boasts a family from above. Didymus offers proof of these things, while Pherecydes was among the first of the historians speaking in this manner to say, "The beloved friends of Aeacus have established a household in Athens. From him comes Daiclus, from him Epilycus, from him Acestor, from him Agenor, from him Olius, from him Lukas, from him Iophon, from him Laius, from him Agamestor, from him Tissander (by means of whom they ruled in Athens), from him Hippocleides (by whom the Panathenaia was established); from him Miltiades, who lived in the Chersonese." There is proof of these things from Hellanicus in the inscriptions of Asopus.

Should not one ask, "What is Miltiades's (relationship) to Thucydides?" He is related in this manner.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay obviously succeeds Marcellinus's lost essay on the orator, Demosthenes.

<sup>2</sup> *To loipon*, also "for the future."

The Thracians and the Dolonkians waged war against the Apsinthians, who were their neighbors.<sup>3</sup> When [the Thracians and the Dolonkians] were distressed by war and **5** suffered not a little evil from the *continuous* hostilities, they took refuge in the oracle of a god. For they saw that a god alone discovers to them a passage out of their impractical situation because the strength of a god is above all, according to Aeschylus. Frequently, [when we are] amidst evils, during the impracticability and difficulty of our situation, [the god] corrects the cloud which is suspended over our eyes. They were not deceived in their hopes. For they were given **6** an oracle that the most able man would be their leader, who would call to them with hospitality as they were wandering. (In any case, at that time Croesus possessed Lydia and Peisistratus was tyrant of Athens.)

After they were dismissed from the oracle, they chanced upon Miltiades, who was seated before the mountains of Attica. He was vexed at the tyranny [in Athens] and was seeking a just escape (for himself] from Attica. For these things the oracle dispensed to them. When he saw them wandering, while they were on expedition, and **7** became acquainted with what accounted for their wandering, he called to the men hospitably. But that they were servants of the oracle, they concealed from him. Once they perceived their leader and received his [gestures] of hospitality,<sup>4</sup> they sat down with him. After they also described in detail everything to him, they elected him their general. While they say that he asked the god to get them out [of Attica], it was not without a plan in mind that they had made their escape from the tyrant. They got away by using force, as the narrative of the Thracians' challenge describes in detail. When he had been given power and returned, **8** they perceived that he was a great and powerful man and drove him out of Athens. At any rate, once this [man] became [the Thracians'] leader, he fulfilled the things that had been prophesied. After the victory [over the Apsinthians], he even became the founder of the Chersonese. When he died **9** without a child, Steisagorus succeeded him in office in the Chersonese, who was his brother by the same mother.

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<sup>3</sup> See Herodotus, VI.34-38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ton xsenon*, also “from among the strangers.”

After [the latter] died, [another] Miltiades **10** succeeded to office, who had the same name as the first founder and was a brother of Steisagoras by the same mother and father. This Miltiades, who was the son of an Attic **11** woman, nevertheless desired the dynasty. He took from King Olorus of the Thracians his daughter Hegeisipulas for a wife, from whom a son was born to him. Returning to Greece from [among] the Persians and preparing his own things, **12** he sent them to Athens and dispatched most of his family. However, the ship was seized, where his children were, but not those from his Thracian wife. They were released by the influence of the king (Darius), if indeed Herodotus does not lie.<sup>5</sup> Miltiades was saved and escaped to Attica from Thrace. But he did not run away from the slanderous prosecution **13** of his enemies. The accusations of tyranny they brought against his [family], they went through in succession. But the general [Miltiades] was acquitted both on these counts and on that of the war he brought against the barbarians. From this, Didymus says that they restored the family **14** of Thucydides. They believe the greatest proof of this to be (Thucydides's) considerable substance, both the possessions in Thrace and the gold mines in Skapte Hyle.

At all events, on the basis of these things he seems **15** to be the grandson of Miltiades or Miltiades' daughter's son. He produced an empty search for us because he made nothing as a memoir of his family. However, we should not ignore this [fact]. Olorus, and not Orolus, is his father, **16** because the first syllable of the one has the "rho," while the second has the "lambda." For the latter spelling is erroneous, as it seems even to Didymus. For that it is Olorus, the gravestone evidences about the one laid in his own grave; and thereon it has been inscribed, "Thucydides, son of Olorus, a Halimousian."

Now beside what are called the gates of Militus **17** in Koilei, there are what are called the Cimonian monuments, where the tombs of both Herodotus and Thucydides are displayed. There it can be clearly discovered that he is of the family of Miltiades. For no stranger is entombed there. On the Monuments of the Wars around the Acropolis, he offers testimony of these things, for there he provides a history that Timotheus was his son.

Hermippus says of him that his family drew **18** [power] from the Peisistratid tyrants. On account of this, he

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<sup>5</sup> See Herodotus, VI.41. 20

says that [Thucydides] bore a grudge in his writing for the [deeds] of Harmodius and Aristogeiton by saying that they were not tyrant-killers. For [he did say] that they did not slay the tyrant, but rather his brother, Hipparchus.

He took a wife from Skapte Hyle of Thrace, who **19** was exceedingly wealthy and possessed mines in Thrace. Once he received his wealth, he did not squander it on **20** luxuries. Before the Peloponnesian War, since he had perceived that the war was about to be set in motion, he chose beforehand to write [an account of it]. He furnished himself with many [facts] concerning the Athenian and Lacedaemonian soldiers, as well as many other things, so that he might be [well] informed, because he wished to write exactly about what occurred and what was said in the war itself. But it must be inquired why he furnished what [he **21** did] concerning the Lacedaemonians and others. It is possible that [he did it in this way] to render [accurately] the Athenians alone and to teach his lessons through them.<sup>6</sup> Although we also say that he did not furnish the other things inconsiderately.<sup>7</sup> For he had an eye for the truth when he wrote about the actions. It is likely that the Athenians were lying with respect to the good that they proclaimed for themselves. Frequently, they spoke as if “we have the victory,” when [in fact] they did not have the victory. On the basis of all the things that he furnished, and from the harmony of the many things, he searched for a grasp of the truth. The unclarity [of his writing] is refuted by the harmonious concord of the several [parts of it].

He listened to the teachings of Anaxagoras among **22** the philosophers, from which, Antyllus says, he was believed to be calmly godless, and thereafter was satisfied [only] by speculation. [He also listened to the teachings] of Antiphon the rhetorician, a clever man with rhetoric, who was remembered in the eighth book as the cause of the

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<sup>6</sup> Marcellinus seems to be commenting here on the great detail with which Thucydides presented the Athenians – especially in regard to their internal politics – and the relative scarcity of detail with which he presented the Lacedaemonians.

<sup>7</sup> *Askopos*, also “unobservantly” or “without scope.” In the next sentence Marcellinus points out that “*skopos ... hen auto*” – literally, “he was a scope in himself ...” or as we have rendered it, “he had an eye ... “

dissolution of the democracy and of the establishment of the Four Hundred (oligarchs). That the Athenians took revenge with the death of Antiphon and threw his body outside of the city, he had kept silent about it in order to be gracious to his teacher. For it is said that the Athenians threw his body out because he caused the change from the democracy.

Now [Thucydides], the writer, when he was in **23** the prime of his life, was not political nor had he come before the rostrum.<sup>8</sup> He was a general, taking the office at the beginning of the evils. For the following reasons he was driven into exile. When he was sent to Amphipolis, because Brasidas was in advance him and seized it first, he was blamed for it. Nevertheless, not everything he did was in vain.<sup>9</sup> For while he failed at Amphipolis, he did seize Eion near the Strymon. But for this first unfortunate misstep, he shared thus in the failure and they drove him into exile. While he was in Aegina during his exile, in order that **24** he might become wealthy, he would lend most of his money [for profit]. After a while, he migrated and spent time in Skapte Hyle, where he wrote under a plane tree. We should surely not be persuaded by Timaeus, who said that after **25** he fled, [Thucydides] dwelt in Italy. However, he did not write in such a manner as to bear malice toward the **26** Athenians. Since he was a lover of truth and measured in his habits, [he wrote] as though he did not delight at all in a reproach of either Cleon or Brasidas, who were the causes of his misfortune, and as though the writer might be [more] angry at himself.

Indeed, since most [of the historians] have **27** composed their histories under [the influence of] their private passions, they cared least of all for the truth in them. [For example], Herodotus, they say, took no notice of the fact that the Corinthians themselves ran away from the naval battle at Salamis. Timaeus, the Tauromenitaeon, praised Timoleon beyond measure for the manner in which he did not dismiss Andromachus, his father, from the monarchy. Philistus also made war with speeches on the young Dionysius; and Xenophon reproached Meno, the comrade of Plato, because of his (Xenophon's) jealousy for Plato. The

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<sup>8</sup> *To bemati*; a platform from which one spoke when addressing the Athenian assembly. The passage may also be rendered a little less literally, "he was not political and did not enter into public life."

<sup>9</sup> *Anonetos*, also "unprofitable."

measured and comely appearance of them is less than the truth.

Lest we be ignorant of the fact that there were **28** many Thucydideses, there was this one, the child of Olorus; and a second, the demagogue son of Meleisias, who was a political rival to Pericles; a third is of the family of Pharsalius, who is memorialized on the Monuments of the Wars around the Acropolis (it says that he was the father of Meno); another Thucydides, a poet, is fourth, from the *deme* of Acherdos, whom Androtius remembers in his *Attic Histories*, where he says that he was a son of Ariston. He **29** was a contemporary, just as Praxiphanes says in his histories, to the comedian Plato, the tragedian Agathon, and to Niceratus, Chorilus, and Melanippides in epic poetry. While Archelaus lived for the most part [this Thucydides] was **30** disreputable, as Praxiphanes himself makes clear, but afterwards he was admired as though he were *daimonic*.

At all events, they say there that [Thucydides] **31** died there and wasted away when he was in exile. They also bear witness to this because his body was not laid in Attic soil. For a scaffold lays across his tomb. This is also a recognition of the fact that it is an empty tomb, in accord with the Attic tradition and law, for those who have come to their end in such an unlucky manner and are unable to be entombed in Athens.

Didymus says that he died a violent death because **32** he returned from his exile to Athens. They say that Sopirus narrated the following. The Athenians permitted a return for their exiles, except for the Peisistratids, after their defeat in Sicily. But as he was coming back, [Thucydides] died violently and was laid among the Cimonian monuments. To acknowledge their good will toward him, [Sopirus] said that because of these laws, while [Thucydides] had come to his end outside Attica, he had been entombed in the soil of Attica. However, he was either not laid among the monuments of his fathers or he was laid there secretly and did not chance to have either a gravestone or an epitaph (which is laid upon the tomb and would disclose the name of the writer). It is clear, though, that a return was granted to the exiles, as both Philochorus and Demetrius say at the beginning [of their works].

I believe that Sopirus is foolish when he says that **33** Thucydides had come to his [end in this way], even though Cratippus may believe that it was true. Was it not

exceedingly laughable for Timaeus and others to say that his [body] lies in Italy?

It is said that his face had a thoughtful look, while **34** his head and beard had been sharply formed by nature, and the rest of his disposition was formed by nature for the task of writing. His life ceased during his fiftieth year; and so he did not have the time period to complete the writing.

Thucydides has become Homer's rival in **35** economy [of style] and Pindar's in greatness of nature and loftiness of character. He was a man who speaks properly, but indistinctly, in order that he would not be a thorn to everyone nor would appear to be cheap and to be understood recklessly by everyone who desired it, but rather in order that he would be admired and commended by the very wise. For this reason he has been praised by the best, and takes a place of distinguished reputation among them, because he has acquired honor by recording [the war] for future time and did not risk having it obliterated by those judging it after him. He emulated a little, as Antyllus says, the **36** close-balancing and the antithetical style of Gorgias, which was in good repute at that time among the Greeks, and also surely the accuracy of speech in word-usage of Prodicus, the Keian. But most of all, the very thing which we say, **37** he emulated Homer both in the catalogues of names and the accuracy of composition, as well as in the strength, beauty and brevity of expression of his [style].

The writers and historians before him, who for **38** instance introduce soulless things into their writings and make use of bare narrative alone for the most part, did not surround the surface characters with some speeches and did not have them make political speeches before the assemblies. However, Herodotus did attempt it, but he was surely not strong enough to do it. (Because of the shortness of them, he made the speeches more like dramatic affectations than assembly speeches.) [Thucydides], the writer, alone discovered the assembly speeches and made them so complete and distinct on the basis of a summary that the assembly speeches would fall out in accord with [the views of each] faction, which is the perfect image of speeches.

Of the three expressions of character that exist – **39** the lofty, the low, and the middling – by-passing the others for the moment, he emulated the lofty inasmuch as it was consistent with his private nature and befitting the magnitude of such a war. For this reason there were great actions in [his

writing], and he fit the speeches around the actions to suit the deeds. So that you should not be ignorant of the other **40** characters, you must know that Herodotus made use of the middle, which is neither lofty nor low, while Xenophon made use of the low.

At all events, with a view to the very lofty, **41** Thucydides frequently made use of poetic speeches and some metaphors. Concerning the whole writing, some dared to declare that the form itself of the writing is not rhetoric but poetry. That it is not poetry is clear from the fact that it does not fall into any meter. But if anyone should dispute us [by saying] that the form is not entirely the speech of rhetoric, just as neither Plato's books nor the physicians' are, we say not only that his writing is distinguished in principle and that it is reducible to the form of rhetoric, but also that the whole writing is uniformly of the deliberative character. (Still others reduce it to the panegyric art, saying that he **42** eulogizes the best occurrences in the war).

The writing of Thucydides selectively falls into the three forms: the deliberative on account of the complete assembly speeches, except for that of the Plataeans and that of the Thebans in the third book; the panegyric on account of the Funeral Oration; and the judicial on account of the Plataean and Theban assembly speeches, which I say that we must place above the others. For the judges, who were present from the Lacedaemonians, judge and the Plataean answers and makes his defense concerning what is asked him by making long arguments. Then the Thebans dispute these [arguments] in anger by summoning the Lacedaemonians. The order, method, and arrangement of his account appears to be purely the judicial form.

Some say that the eighth book is spurious. For **43** [they say] that it is not by Thucydides, but rather it is by his daughter; while still others say it is by Xenophon. With respect to these, we say that it is clearly not by his daughter. For it was not in the womanly nature to have imitated such virtue and art as this because, if there were some such [woman], she would not have so zealously concealed herself nor would she have written the eighth book alone. She would have bequeathed many other things by making clear her private nature. That it is not Xenophon, does not the character of it cry out? For there is much of the middle, the low, and the lofty character. Nor, indeed, is it Theopompus, according to what some have claimed. To some – the **44** rather more refined than these – it seems to be by

Thucydides, but otherwise unadorned, and to have been written in the manner of an outline. It was embellished with a full measure of many actions in a summary and took the full extent of his powers. Whence also we say that it has been phrased a little more weakly. Accordingly, it appears to have been composed during illness. Reason is wont to be more slack in any short period of bodily weakness because, to a small extent, reason and the body sympathize with each other.

He died in Thrace after the Peloponnesian War, **45** after he had written the actions of the twenty-first year [of the war]. For the war occupied twenty-seven years. The actions of the other six years Theopompus and Xenophon filled in, which joined together the Grecian history.

Let it be understood that Thucydides was a **46** general at Amphipolis. Since he seemed to have arrived there slowly, and Brasidas seized it [Amphipolis] in advance of him, he was exiled by the Athenians on the basis of Cleon's slanders against him. For this reason, he had a mortal hatred of Cleon because everywhere that he introduces him there is madness and lack of substance. After he went away, as they say, into Thrace, he composed the beauty of his writing there.

From the point at which the war began, all the **47** speeches and deeds were significant not indeed because he thought the beginning beautiful, but only because he might preserve the significant actions. After the banishment in Skapte Hyle in the country of Thrace, he ordered his way of life according to the beautiful things, which at the beginning had been signified on his monument. [His writing] is the **48** opposite of myths because he was favorable to the truth. For he did not deem it proper to write the same way as the other writers nor as the historians, who mixed into their own histories myths and created them more for delight instead of the truth. While they [wrote] in this manner, in his writing he did not pay attention to the listener's delight, but wrote with precision of the lessons to be learned. Therefore, he even named his writing a "possession forever rather than a contest prize."<sup>10</sup> For this reason, he generally fled from the things

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<sup>10</sup> The manuscript has only "contest-prize" (*agonisma*) here. In light of I.22.4 from Thucydides, the addition of *ktema es aei mallon* ("a possession forever rather than ..."), which is suggested in the critical apparatus, seems correct.

involved with pleasure and the parenthetical slip-ups, which the majority [of writers] are accustomed to make. Whence, at least for Herodotus, there is the dolphin which is a lover **49** of hearing and Arion who steers while making music; and the second book of his history entirely falsifies the foundation.

This writer, [Thucydides], should be remembered as someone extraordinary because he says only what is necessary and he narrates only to reach the mind of the [individual] hearer. For the account of Tereus is phrased by him only for the passions of women, and the history of the Cyclopean places has been recalled gracefully, as is the account of Alcmaeon. When [Alcmaeon] is reminded to be moderate he makes islands there because of his moderation.<sup>11</sup> In a few other things, he also could not be precise. At any rate, concerning the myths [in the work] **50** such [a man] is clever [to use them] to outline character. In some places seems to be clear, while in others he seems to be unclear in his [use of them in the] arrangement for the purpose of heightening his expression.

[His writing] has a grave and great character also. It is full of harshness of composition, ponderousness, and transpositions, as well as some obscurity. The brevity of things is amazing, as are the many intentions of his plan. His science of the mind is also altogether praiseworthy. He **51** is exceedingly able in the narrative when he relates naval battles and sieges, diseases and factions. He was a man of many forms in his style, and in many ways was an imitator of Gorgias of Leontini. He was quick in his interpretations of signs, pointed in relating the austere things, and an imitator of the best habits of writers. Moreover, he surely presented a view into the minds of Pericles and Cleon – in a way that he knew he could not speak of directly – and into the mind of the youthful Alcibiades, of the many-faceted<sup>12</sup> Themistocles,

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<sup>11</sup> There seems to be a problem with the text here because Thucydides does not mention islands in his account of Alcmaeon at II.102.5-6. It is possible that Marcellinus is referring to the “silting process” of the river Achelous, which was connecting the Echinades islands to the mainland at the mouth of the river. Hude, however, suggests in the critical apparatus that *mnesin poieitai* (“a memorial is being made”) should be substituted for *nesous poiei* (“makes islands”). Thus the passage might read, “when [Alcmaeon] is reminded to be moderate, a memorial is being made [by Thucydides] there to the [deeds] of his moderation.”

<sup>12</sup> *Polueides*, literally, “the many-forms” or “the many ideas.”

of the upright, superstitious and lucky (until Sicily) Nicias, and ten thousand other things, which we should attempt to look at in part.

Now for the most part, he used the ancient Attic **52** dialect, where he chooses the “xsi” instead of the “sigma,” so that when he wrote, he might also say *xsummaxia* (“alliance”) [instead of “*summaxia*”], and he might write the dipthong “ai” instead of “a” (long), where he says (for example) “*aiei*” (“always”) [instead of *aei*]. He is also a discoverer of entirely new nouns. For there are the things “more ancient” (*archaiotera*) than his own time, and the “simple shout” (*autoboiei*), the “war-mongers” (*polemeiseiontes*), the “severe thing” (*panchalepon*), the “chariots” (*harmatada*), and the “bundles of wood” (*hules phakelous*). Again he pays attention to poetic forms, such as *to epilunxsai* (“disguise”), *to epelutai* (“foreigner”), and *to anakoos* (“carefully”), and other such things. The private matters and other things of this sort, he has not mentioned, but such matters as diversions, obstructions, and sieges were set down by him.

He particularly pays attention in it to the massive **53** quantity of names, the extreme cleverness of the enthymemes, and, just as we mentioned before, the brevity of the syntax. For he displays most of the actions in a phrase. He frequently set down passions and actions instead of men, as for example the rivalry of fear [on both sides]. He also has something of the panegyrist [in him], where he speaks of the Funeral Oration, introduces subtle irony, creates questions, and puts the assembly speeches in philosophical forms. For in those where there are exchanges, he philosophizes. Nevertheless, the majority have blamed the form and composition of his speeches, among whom one is Dionysius, the Halicarnassian. For he reproached him as though he did not have the ability to make use of foot-meter also in his political speeches. [Dionysius] did not know that all these things are all possibly habits of excess and greed.

It appears that he existed during Herodotus’s time, **54** if indeed Herodotus had recalled to him the Theban invasion of Plataea, about which Thucydides inquires in the second book. And something such as this is said. Once Thucydides was present when Herodotus gave a private display of his history; and after hearing it, he wept. Afterward, they say that Herodotus, when he contemplated this, said to his father

Olorus, “Olorus, your son’s nature has the passion for learning.”

He came to his end in Thrace, and some say that **55** he was entombed there, while others say that his bones were secretly borne among the Athenians by his kinsmen; and thus was he entombed. For it was clearly impossible at Athens to bury someone who went into exile after treason. His tomb is nearby the gates, in a place in Attica called “Koilei,” just as they say that Antyllus, a man worthy of trust, witnessed. For he was a clever man, who understood history and instructed cleverly. A stone marker, they say, was also set up in Koilei, which had the epigram, “Thucydides, son of Olorus, the Halimousian.” Some others also added to it, “He lies here.” But we say that this is intended and implied; for it is not set down in the epigram.

He is magnificent in his form and character, since **56** to his sympathizers nothing departs from the magnificent: the weightiness of his expression; the obscurity of his intention because of his grace in transposition; his ability to make clear many actions with a few words; his great subtlety in the plan of his style, which [appears] to be most unpleasant to the opposite intellect. For he has not made use of irony, criticism, indirect messages, nor any other trickery directed at the hearer. Demosthenes most displayed the greatest cleverness in these things.

I think that Thucydides was not ignorant of such a **57** plan in accord with this purpose. But rather he composed proper and harmonious speeches by using the basic appearances of things. For this reason he did not deem it proper to invest Pericles, Archidamus, Nicias and Brasidas, who were human beings with a heroic reputation for greatness of mind and nobility, with ironic and contrived speeches, as though they did not have the frankness to dispute openly and to say whatever they wished. On account of this, he practiced sincerity and the opposite of poetry, so that also he might seem to preserve the events and his art with propriety. For the artistic man guards the reputation, which belongs to his character and the attendant orderliness of his actions.

Let it be known that some have cut up his work **58** into thirteen histories, while others do otherwise. Nevertheless, it has prevailed most commonly that the work should be divided up into eight books, just as Asclepiades decided.