

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION IN THE EUROPEAN HISTORICAL THOUGHT

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**Abstract.** *Thucydides' exaltation of the democratic principles, as eloquently reflected in Pericles' Funeral Oration, pertains to the overwhelming opposition of distinguished historians and philologists in the authentic substance of this incomparable funeral speech. Reliable and interpretive attempts, founded on assiduous studies, detailed and intense investigation, indisputably demonstrate the unique, diachronic resonance that the Athenian intellectual and political formation of the fifth century BC has for the European historical thought.*

**Key words:** *Thucydides, Pericles, theories, authenticity, funeral oration.*

### 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Undoubtedly the incomparable praising of the fundamental principles relevant to the democratic regime during the glorious Golden Age (fifth century BC), the idealized identification of the Athenian cultural achievements with the impressive maritime hegemony, arguably occupy a dominant position in Pericles' Funeral Oration. However, Thucydides' unprecedented deviation from the established, typical form of funeral orations constitutes the essential springboard, the crucial argument of all the distinguished researchers who raise reasonable objections regarding the authenticity and the exact time when this intellectual masterpiece was composed.

### 2. THE PATERNITY ISSUE OF PERICLES' ORATION

The controversial genuineness of Pericles' declaration is included in the general genetic problem related to Thucydides' work and especially to his orations.<sup>1</sup> It is eagerly believed that this speech was not presented by Pericles in the autumn of 431 BC in honor of the first Athenian warriors who were casualties of war, but that it is an excellent of crea-

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<sup>1</sup> Γεωργοπαδάκος 1974:25

tion of Thucydides, which dated after the fall and the destruction of Athenian democracy in 404 BC<sup>2</sup>. The historian attempted to face the pusillanimous and dubious Athenians who aimed to bring about the depreciation of Pericles' personality and policy.

The basic arguments of those studious investigators who consider that Pericles' Oration is a fully counterfeit text or that it was dramatically distorted by Thucydides include the following:

- a) During this period of the Peloponnesian War, a great number of fighters<sup>3</sup> had not been killed, nor had any admirable achievement taken place because of such a brilliant public burial or a dithyrambic praise for the first dead Athenians could be justified.
- b) The praise of ancestors is limited to only one phrase (36.1)<sup>4</sup>, while in the other preserved funeral orations the orator extensively commends the mythic heroes and the Greek-Persian fighters.<sup>5</sup>
- c) No reference is made to previous or present war facts, nor are there any allusions to the portended merciless and unremitting conflict between Athens and Sparta.
- d) The orator does not praise the Athenians' indigenous character except for an allusion (36.1)<sup>6</sup> unlike other orators<sup>7</sup>
- e) In the foreword of the Funeral Oration, we find mention of auditors that ignore the facts regarding the battle in which the dead warriors had stood out, and they do not seem to be willing to believe.
- f) In this declaration, the city of Athens is more praised than the dead fighters. The oration is impersonal, so it would be delivered in honor of any dead warriors, any combat.
- g) We can admit that Pericles should perform the activities of the newer generations in a more emphatic way than the ancestors' impressive accomplishment, although the Greeks had regarded them as unreachable ideal figures.
- h) It is very odd that Pericles presents the dead Athenians more as defeated than as victors (43.1)<sup>8</sup> and he also recommends to the living that they should wish they had a better fortune<sup>9</sup>, though during these unimportant combats of the first year they had not experienced any serious defeat.
- i) In fact it is amazing that Pericles<sup>10</sup>, the husband of Aspasia, a broad-minded woman of great intellect, liberal principles and progressive ideas would advise the

<sup>2</sup> Usener-Radermacher 1965:350

<sup>3</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims that only 10-15 equestrians were killed..

<sup>4</sup> Ἄρξομαι δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν προγόνων πρῶτον· δίκαιον γάρ αὐτοῖς καὶ πρέπον δὲ ἅμα ἐν τῷ τοιῷδε τὴν τιμὴν ταύτην τῆς μνήμης δίδοσθαι.

<sup>5</sup> Lysias, Funeral Oration 4 and 20; Demosthenes, Funeral Oration 8 and 20; Plato Menexenus 239 B and 239 C.

<sup>6</sup> Τὴν γὰρ χώραν οἱ αὐτοὶ ἀεὶ οἰκοῦντες διαδοχῆ τῶν ἐπιγινόμενων μέχρι τοῦδε ἐλευθέραν διὰ ἀρετὴν παρέδοσαν.

<sup>7</sup> Lysias, Funeral Oration 17; Demosthenes, Funeral Oration 4; Plato, Menexenus 237 D; Hypereides, Funeral Oration 7.

<sup>8</sup> [...]καὶ ὅταν ὑμῖν μεγάλη δόξη εἶναι, ἐνθυμουμένους ὅτι τολμώντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις αἰσχυρόμενοι ἄνδρες αὐτὰ ἐκτίσαντο, καὶ ὅποτε καὶ πείρα του σφαλεῖεν, οὐκ οὖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν γε τῆς σφετέρως ἀρετῆς ἀξιούντες στερίσκουν, κάλλιστον δὲ ἔρανον αὐτῆ προίεμενοι.

<sup>9</sup> [...]τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς χρηρὴ ἀσφαλεστέραν μὲν εὐχεσθαι, ἀτολμοτέραν δὲ μηδὲν ἀξιούν τὴν ἐς τοὺς πολέμιους διάνοιαν ἔχειν.

<sup>10</sup> Κακριδῆς 1985: 113-114

mothers, the widows and the sisters of the dead heroes to be closed in their rooms and be careful in order to avoid any comment, either of praise or of blame.

- j) Despite the fact that Thucydides' other orations aim at illustrating the narrated facts, Pericles' funeral declaration has little to do with the historic recount of the events which frame it, that we almost forget the described devastating civil war.
- k) It seems to be unexplained how Pericles mentions the private abodes, but at the same time he entirely ignores the resplendent public buildings whose main creator was he himself.
- 3) The word «θεός» (god) is not used on any occasion, neither is the divine power mentioned, even if in its obvious catalytic interventions.

### 3. THE BASIC THEORIES<sup>11</sup>

The exact creator's identity and the essential parameters of this complicated oration led researchers to adopt three basic theories:

#### **I The theory about the apology for Pericles' policy (Periklesapologientheorie)**

According to this theory whose creator was Eduard Schwarz, the Epitaph, as Pericles' last speech, is integrated into Thucydides' desire to protect the great politician's posthumous fame from the severe attacks which happened after 404 BC. «It is clear that the attacks against Pericles' policy concerning the war could arise from an Athenian viewpoint. Since Thucydides' Pericles turns not only against them, but also the moral conviction of the Athenian hegemonic and violent policy, we can't avoid concluding that someone had to defend Athens not from the public Spartan or allies' accusations, but for the political beliefs and assessments expressed by the Athenian leading and intellectual circles as a result of the unsuccessful war.»<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, Pericles' Epitaph is an original creation of Thucydides, who composed it after the Peloponnesian War. As variations of Schwarz's theory, we could consider the opinions of other researchers:

- a) Schadewaldt argues that the processing of the first four chapters was done by Thucydides after 404 BC in order to justify the Pericles' policy and to pass the real and authentic image of Athens adorned by the glory on the descendents.<sup>13</sup> The philologist also believes that Thucydides' work is composed of two main parts: the

<sup>11</sup> We present the most systematically mentioned theories, because almost all the distinguished researchers have expressed their opinions regarding this problem: Jacoby doubts if at least an idea of the oration in 431 BC has been saved (Jacoby, 1956: 229); Fritz argues that the oration content saved by Thucydides is identical to Pericles' declaration (Fritz, 1967: 621); according to Oppenheimer's opinion the oration was composed by Thucydides after 404 in order to support the defeated generation with the ideals of the past (Oppenheimer, 1933: 82); Herter believes that the Epitaph constitutes an ideal promoted by Thucydides (Herter, 1953: 29); Wilamovitz claims that Thucydides wrote this oration when the power of Athens had been destroyed (Wilamovitz, 1910: 137); Finley emphasizes that Thucydides wrote the orations at the end of the Peloponnesian War, but the orators' style, especially Pericles' characteristic style remained the same (Finley, 1980: 42); Adcock speculates that the oration reflects the real Pericles' thoughts (Adcock, 1963: 58).

<sup>12</sup> Schwarz, 1969: 146

<sup>13</sup> Schadewaldt, 1929: 39

- early part written after the peace of Nicias (421) and the later one composed after the catastrophe in 404 BC<sup>14</sup> when new changes in the first four chapters were made (Retraktation).
- b) Pohlenz considers that the Epitaph and the praise of Pericles were written after 404 BC<sup>15</sup>. The funeral oration is the Song of Songs for the Periclean ideal, an expression full of respect for his personality<sup>16,17</sup> and policy that was not imperialistic, though made the Athenian people more powerful and active. That is why Thucydides undertook the obligation to defend this policy against the moralizing voices that were condemning Athenian cruelty.
  - c) Vogt<sup>18</sup> accuses Thucydides of hushing the essential characteristics of Pericles' policy by idealizing him and he thinks that the Athenian leader in a despotic way compels his people to be extremely patient. According to Vogt, the problems and the difficulties of the Athenian policy did not appear after Pericles' death, but they were already evident during his hegemony.
  - d) Romilly analyzes the nature and the character of the Athenian imperialism. Her work has a fundamental meaning for the political history of Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>. It is clear that the Funeral oration was written as a highly sympathetic expression of Pericles' ideas.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the Epitaph can be interpreted as a double defense<sup>21</sup>. First of all, it speaks in favor of the Athenian hegemony and it is characterized by an anti-Spartan policy that inspires all of Thucydides' history. In addition, it answers to Sparta's allies.

As far as the time of writing, Romilly is of the opinion that the Epitaph was written at a later period, because it is difficult to explain in an earlier edition<sup>22</sup> the presence of the expressed ideas. The famous French researcher also thinks that Thucydides chose a detailed and high quality analysis in order to glorify the real nature of the Athenian civilization. «Indeed, Thucydides is not setting out to contrast Athens with Sparta in their actual history and development, but to defend the glory and ideals of Athens against the glory and the ideals of Sparta. It is thus natural enough to assume that he would do this at a time when Athens is being scorned and spurned, when Sparta is in fashion and when her friends have every reason to attack Athens: that is to say, after the defeat of 404»<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Die Entstehung des Werkes in zwei Hauptetappen: dem frühen «Plan» nach dem Nikiasfrieden von 421 und dem späteren «Plan» nach der vollendeten Katastrophe von 404, nebst einer «Retraktation» der ersten vier Bücher des frühen «Plans», scheint mir auch nach den Einwendungen Harold Patzers und anderer nicht widerlegt zu sein. (Schadewaldt 1971: 101)

<sup>15</sup> Pohlenz, 1965:240

<sup>16</sup> *ibid* 241

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* 252

<sup>18</sup> Vogt, 1956:17

<sup>19</sup> Romilly, 1963:131

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*: 137

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*: 13

<sup>22</sup> «...it is on the contrary quite possible for the Funeral Oration to belong, as a whole, to a later period...For if the ideas are certainly those of Pericles and could normally have been expressed in the course of the war of Archidamus, the manner in which they are put forward and their presence in Thucydides' work are difficult to explain in any early version».

<sup>23</sup> Romilly, 1963: 146

## II The theory of the ideal model (Modelltheorie)

The main representative of this theory is Gaiser who considers the Epitaph to be an original work based on quotation 37, 1<sup>24</sup>. The time of writing is not determined by Gaiser, since the function of the Epitaph is more important than its composition time. This funeral oration contains more utopian elements. The evident discrepancies related to the concrete historic reality (the Athenian mania for legal proceedings, sycophants) can easily be justified by the praising character of the text. The crucial aim of the oration is not the presentation of the state systems, but the helpful information about the later political form. However this aim is not perceptible, as Thucydides' attempt was not completed.

Interwoven with this theory is John Kakrides' opinion according to which this oration is authentic, Thucydides' creation, his attempt to dedicate a great hymn to his favorite homeland. Therefore, this oration addresses a humiliated and resentful generation of Athenians who doubted not only the correctness of Pericles' foreign policy, but also the power of the Athenian civilization as it was created by the previous generation. For this reason, Kakridis argues that the historian separates listeners into those who are aware of the events, so they approve these thoughts, and those who are not informed and are consequently envious.

Meyer has a similar attitude regarding the aim and time of writing of the Epitaph.<sup>25</sup>

## III The theory of demystification (Entlarvungstheorie)

Flashar in his monograph attempts to illustrate the function of the Epitaph in Thucydides' narration. He is of the opinion that the Funeral Oration was written after 404 BC and that some ideas or thoughts expressed by Pericles in the Epitaph of 431 BC might have been used by Thucydides in his oration.<sup>26</sup> «Es ist dabei durchaus möglich, dass einzelne Gedanken und Wendungen, die Perikles tatsächlich in dem Epitaphios von 431 gebraucht hat, in die von Thucydides gestaltere Rede eingeflossen sind – obwohl sich kaum etwas Sicheres nachweisen lässt – aber das ist nicht von entscheidender Bedeutung... Dabei ist zu bedenken, dass Thucydides wohl auch den Epitaphios wie die meisten anderen grossen Reden erst nach dem Ende des Krieges, also nach 404, geschrieben hat». In addition, «Es handelt sich um eine von Thucydides komponierte Rede – möglicherweise unter Verwendung einiger perikleischer Argumentationen-, mit der er die Politik und die Denkweise des Perikles auf dem Hohenpunkt der Macht Athens nach dem ersten Kriegsjahr durch den Mund des Perikles selbst zum Ausdruck bringen wollte.»<sup>27</sup> In all the Periclean speeches, Thucydides clearly represents the ideology of the Periclean authority without externalizing his own opinion, because he wants to keep a distance. «Halt man nun darn fernst, dass Thucydides den Epitaphios erst nach 404 geschrieben hat, so kann man unmöglich annehmen, er selbst preise die athenische Macht, sie war ja gerade zerbrochen, Also wollte er nur die Ideologie des Perikles zur Darstellung bringen, und indem er dabei dem Perikles einen derart hinreissenden Hymnus auf die Macht Athens in dem Mund legt, legt er nicht nur eine Distanz zu seinen eigenen Erfahrungen und Meinungen,

<sup>24</sup> Pericles' Epitaph: «παράδειγμα δὲ μᾶλλον αὐτοὶ ὄντες τισὶν ἢ μιμούμενοι ἑτέρους...»

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, 1899: 397

<sup>26</sup> Flashar, 1969: 6-7

<sup>27</sup> Flashar, 1969: 33

sondern erzeugt eine fast ironische Spannung zur Wirklichkeit. Auch darin zeigt sich Thucydides als desillusionierender Entlarver menschlicher Denkweisen, wenn auch hier nur in indirekter Form.»<sup>28</sup> Everything mentioned about Athenian sufficiency during peacetime and war was not valid when this oration was written. Thus, there is a serious divergence between the Funeral Oration and reality. Thucydides, by describing the events of the Peloponnesian War and having Pericles speak about a non-existing hegemony, distances himself from the Periclean ideology and acrimoniously taunts it. «Daher Klingen die auf Macht gegründeten Beweise für die Gesinnung der Athener hohl, der Ausblick auf Mit – und Nachwelt fast gespenstisch, weist die durchgehende Diskrepanz der Darstellung zur Wirklichkeit nicht nur auf eine Distanzierung durch Thucydides, sondern zum Teil auf geradezu bittere Ironie. Dass dies eine Apologie des Thucydides für Perikles sein soll, ist daher ganz unwahrscheinlich.»<sup>29</sup> In this way he debunks the severe Periclean imperialistic policy and the theory concerned with power and sufficiency. The plague, which happened later and functions as a riposte to the Epitaph, just how unrealistic were the extremely promoted Periclean declarations in the Funeral Oration regarding the Athenians' corporal strength<sup>30</sup>, their moral principles<sup>31</sup>. Flashar also believes that this oration does not address the postwar generation of Athenians, but a future reader, not an Athenian one.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In spite of the opposition and the malevolent comments regarding the postwar period, Thucydides was scientifically attempting to erect Pericles' Athens on its appropriate pedestal and to defend the policy of this great leader whom he admired regardless of their evident differences in ideology.<sup>33</sup> In this way, this oration is designed as the Epitaph of the Athenian state in its more classic form, as a stunning and immortal monument of its eternal glory. At the same time, Thucydides succeeded in encouraging the disappointed generation of 404 BC, by raising its spirit and soul up to the ideals of the most perfect human state, Athenian democracy. Therefore, he consciously takes advantage of the excellent patriot whose sudden death (429 BC) caused distressing consequences for Athens.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*: 28-29

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*: 34

<sup>30</sup> Pericles' Epitaph, II 51, 3: «σῶμά τε αὐταρκές ὄν οὐδὲν διεφάνη...»

<sup>31</sup> Pericles' Epitaph, II 53, 1: «ἤρξε [...] ἐπὶ πλέον ἀνομίας τὸ νόσημα»

<sup>32</sup> «Vielmehr weist die ganze Schluderung nach Inhalt und Stil (vgl. Z.B. das distanzierende ὧδε μὲν θάπτονσι: Pericles' Epitaph, II 34) darauf, dass Thucydides zukünftige und auch ausserathenische Lesern Sinn hatte».

<sup>33</sup> Jaeger 1965: 406

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## AUTENTIČNOST PERIKLOVOG NADGROBNOG GOVORA U EVROPSKOJ ISTORIJSKOJ MISLI

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*Tukididovo uzdizanje demokratskih principa, kao što se elokventno ogledaju u Periklovom nadgrobnom govoru odnosi se na veliku opoziciju istaknutih istoročara i filologa u autentičnoj suštini ovog neuporedivog nadgrobnog govora. Pouzdani i interpretativni pokušaji zasnovani na istrajnim studijama, detaljnoj i intenzivnoj istrazi nesumnjivo pokazuju jedinstvenu, dijahroničnu rezonanciju koju atinsko intelektualno i političko formiranje petog veka p.n.e ima u evropskoj istorijskoj misli.*

Ključne reči: *Tukidid, Perikle, teorije, autentičnost, pogrebni govor.*