

## Rewriting the history of the tyrannicides: Thucydides versus Herodotus?

**Melina Tamiolaki**\*

University of Crete

[tamiolaki@uoc.gr](mailto:tamiolaki@uoc.gr)

Grecia

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### Resumen

Este trabajo trata sobre la famosa digresión de Tucídides en el libro sexto de su historia acerca de la caída de la tiranía en Atenas (Tuc. 6.54-59) y su relación con el relato de Heródoto. La digresión de Tucídides (y más específicamente su tono polémico) ha provocado controversia entre los comentaristas, que han analizado a fondo las narrativas de los dos historiadores tanto desde una perspectiva histórica como historiográfica. Este estudio tiende a contribuir a esta discusión a través de tres sugerencias: la primera, Tucídides se mete no solo con la pequeña sección sobre los tiranidas de la Historia de Heródoto (esto es Hdt. 5.55-65), sino, más bien, con toda la narrativa de la Historia de Heródoto sobre la liberación de Atenas de la tiranía que se extiende hasta el discurso de Socles (esto es Hdt. 5.55-5.96.2); segunda, las correcciones de Tucídides al relato de Heródoto son menores, tercera, dado que las divergencias de Tucídides con respecto a Heródoto no son decisivas para la versión correcta de los hechos, el tono polémico de Tucídides en su digresión resulta todavía más difícil de explicar. En este trabajo se sugiere tentativamente que la actitud polémica de Tucídides tiene más sentido si es interpretada en el contexto de la rivalidad del historiador con Heródoto.

**Palabras Clave:** Tucídides; Heródoto; Tiranía; Historia

### Abstract

This paper deals with Thucydides' famous digression in the sixth book of his history about the fall of tyranny in Athens (Thuc. 6.54-59) and its relation to Herodotus' account. Thucydides' digression (and more specifically its polemical tone) has sparked controversy among commentators, who have analyzed extensively the narratives of the two historians both from a historical and from a historiographical perspective. This study aims to contribute to this discussion, by making three suggestions: first, Thucydides engages not only with the small section about the tyrannicides of Herodotus' history (that is Hdt. 5.55-65), but rather with the whole Herodotean narrative about the liberation of Athens from tyranny which extends up to Sokles' speech (that is Hdt. 5.55-5.96.2); second, Thucydides' corrections to Herodotus' account are minor; third, given that Thucydides' divergences from Herodotus are not so decisive for the correct version of the events, Thucydides' polemical tone in his digression becomes even more difficult to explain. In this paper will suggest tentatively that Thucydides' polemical stance makes better sense if it is interpreted in the context of the historian's rivalry with Herodotus.

**Keywords:** Thucydides; Herodotus; Tyranny; History



This study offers a reassessment of the famous narratives of the two classical historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, on the fall of tyranny in Athens.<sup>1</sup> Both historians treat this topic in digressions. The context of Herodotus' digression in the fifth book of his *Histories* is Aristagoras' call of the Athenians for help during the Ionian Revolution. Aristagoras turned to the Athenians because they were the most powerful city in Greece. The digression about the fall of tyranny in Athens thus functions as a detailed comment destined to show precisely how Athens became great: by overthrowing tyranny and by establishing democracy.<sup>2</sup> Thucydides also interrupts his main narrative of the Sicilian Expedition in the sixth book of his *History* and makes a flashback to the events of the previous century, with the apparent aim of explaining the origins of anti-tyrannical hatred in Athens and connecting it with the extreme suspicion of his contemporary Athenians about the possible tyrannical ambitions of Alcibiades (Thuc. 6.53.3).

The fall of tyranny in Athens, this crucial event of Athenian history, has attracted much scholarly attention: the narratives of the two historians have been analyzed both from a historical and from a historiographical perspective.<sup>3</sup> It is not the aim of this study to provide a comprehensive analysis of the various and controversial topics that the two narratives raise.<sup>4</sup> I will focus instead on three specific issues, which, in my opinion, are worth revisiting:

a) Herodotus' narrative as comparative material with Thucydides' digression. Scholars usually restrict themselves to the paragraphs 55-65 of the fifth book of Herodotus as a basis of comparison with Thucydides.<sup>5</sup> Although this is fair, since these paragraphs recount Hipparchos' murder, this study will suggest that Thucydides' narrative can be better illuminated, if the Herodotean spectrum of comparison is broadened: Thucydides seems to engage with the larger Herodotean section about the liberation from tyranny which extends up to Sokles' speech (Hdt. 5.55-5.96.2).<sup>6</sup>

b) The degree of thematic differentiation between Thucydides and Herodotus. Simon Hornblower rightly observes that Thucydides wishes to correct and refill Herodotus, with regards to the homosexual angle of Hipparchos' murder. He considers this addition important enough to justify Thucydides' polemical tone and he parts company from Felix Jacoby, who maintains that the two narratives are essentially in agreement.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation I will advance follows S. Hornblower on the issue of engagement of Thucydides with Herodotus, but I will also insist on the convergences between the two narratives, with the aim of showing that they are more complementary than contradictory.

c) Thucydides' polemical tone and his target(s). This is the most perplexing and controversial issue regarding Thucydides' digression. F. Jacoby's thesis about Hellanikos being Thucydides' target is no longer tenable.<sup>8</sup> Other interpretations (about the Athenians in general, or some Athenians, or Athenian oral tradition as possible targets) have been also proposed, while Antonis Tsakmakis has suggested that Thucydides' target may well be Herodotus.<sup>9</sup> In the third part of my paper I will put forth some more arguments, which give further justice to Tsakmakis' suggestion. My main contention will be that Thucydides' polemical stance makes better sense if it is interpreted in the context of the historian's rivalry with his predecessor.

## 1. Structure of the two narratives

I begin with some observations about the internal structure of the two accounts. At first sight we notice an important structural difference between them. Although both narratives are digressions, Thucydides' digression is brief and clearly delineated, covering the chapters 54-59 of the sixth book. Thucydides provides markers about the beginning and end of his digression.

Beginning of the digression:

For the people, knowing through hearsay (ἐπιστάμενος γὰρ ὁ δῆμος ἀκοῆ) that the tyranny of Peisistratos and his sons had become harsh in its last stage, and furthermore that it had been overthrown not by themselves and Harmodios, but by the Lakedaimonians, were in constant fear and saw everything as suspicious (ἐφοβεῖτο αἰεὶ καὶ πάντα ὑπόπτως ἐλάμβανεν) (Thuc. 6.53.3).<sup>10</sup>

End of the digression:

Considering all this and recalling everything they knew about it from hearsay (Ὦν ἐνθυμούμενος ὁ δῆμος ὁ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ μιμνησκόμενος ὅσα ἀκοῆ περὶ αὐτῶν ἠπίστατο), the people of Athens were at this time bitter and suspicious (χαλεπὸς ἦν τότε καὶ ὑπόπτῃς) of anyone who stood accused over the Mysteries, and it seemed to them that it had all been done to further oligarchic and tyrannical conspiracy (Thuc. 6.60.1).

The repetition of central themes (hearsay of the *demos*, knowledge of the *demos*, fear of the Athenians) and the verbal echoes (ὑπόπτως ἐλάμβανεν-ὑπόπτῃς, ἐπιστάμενος-ἠπίστατο) create a ring composition and tight the digression together as a unified section.<sup>11</sup>

On the contrary, Herodotus' digression is much longer and more informative. Chapters 55-65 of the fifth book of his history, which are devoted to the events of Hipparchos' murder, give the impression of a coherent whole,<sup>12</sup> according to the markers that the historian provides.

Beginning of the section:

So Aristagoras, being driven out of Sparta, came to Athens, which at that time had been freed of its tyrants (Ἀπελαυνόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἦε ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας γενομένας τυράννων ᾧδε ἐλευθέρας) (Hdt. 5.55.1).

End of the section:

So in this way the Athenians got rid of the tyrants (Οὕτω μὲν Ἀθηναῖοι τυράννων ἀπαλλάχθησαν) (Hdt. 5.65.5).

Yet the following narrative, about the establishment of democracy and Kleisthenes' reforms, is also highly relevant to the topic of greatness of Athens, which motivated the first digression.<sup>13</sup> Herodotus introduces this second narrative as follows:

Athens had already been an important city, and now, that it got rid of the tyrants, it became even greater (Ἀθηναί, ἐοῦσαι καὶ πρὶν μεγάλαι, τότε ἀπαλλαχθεῖσαι τυράννων ἐγίνοντο μέζονες) (Hdt. 5.66.1).

In 5.78 he seems to resume his statement of 5.66:

So Athens became great (Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν νῦν ἠϋξήθητο). It is not only in respect of one thing, but of everything that equality as free speech (ἰσηγορίη) is an important thing. Take the case of Athens, which under the rule of the tyrants proved no better in war than any of her neighbors but, once rid of the tyrants, was far the first of all (ἀπαλλαχθέντες δὲ τυράννων μακρῶ πρῶτοι ἐγένοντο) (Hdt. 5.78).

However, the expression of Herodotus' opinion about the importance of *isegoria* represents rather a false closure, since the topics of greatness of Athens, in connection with the liberation from tyranny and the democratic constitution, emerge again prominently later, when the historian relates the Spartans' failed attempts to reinstall tyranny in Athens:

When the Lakedaimonians got these oracles and saw that the Athenians were increasing in power (καὶ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ὄρων αὐξομένους) and were not prompt to obey them, and when they realized that the Attic race, in its freedom (ὡς ἐλεύθερον), would be the equal of themselves, but, if controlled by a tyranny, would be weak and disposed to subjection (κατεχόμενον δὲ ὑπὸ τυραννίδος ἀσθενὲς καὶ πειθαρχέεσθαι ἔτοιμον) -when they understood all this, they sent Hippias, the son of Peisistratos, from Sigeion on the Hellespont... (Hdt. 5.91.1)

More tellingly, Herodotus' restatement in chapter 97 about Aristagoras being driven away by the Spartans, forms a ring composition with chapter 55 and thus compels us to examine this larger section (Hdt. 5.55.1-5.96.2) as a unified whole.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, we can discern three interconnected narratives in Herodotus' digression: first, about the fall of tyranny (Hdt. 5.55.1-5.65.5); second, about the establishment of democracy and the reforms of Kleisthenes (5.66.1-5.78); third, about the final rejection of tyranny and the definite liberation of Athens from tyrants (5.79-5.96.2). These narratives are connected with each other through the technique of amplification: in the first narrative Herodotus speaks only about tyranny, then he links the fall of tyranny with democracy and the increase of power of Athens and finally, in the third section, he further expands on all the previous topics: fall of tyranny, democracy, and *auxesis* of Athens.

It is obvious then that Herodotus' preoccupation with the liberation of Athens from tyranny essentially covers much wider space than in Thucydides' history: chapters 55-96, which are of course interrupted and embellished by other (smaller or greater) digressions.<sup>15</sup> What can this structural difference tell us about the treatment reserved to this topic by the two authors? Acknowledging the wider context of the Herodotean version is necessary, in order to better assess Thucydides' account, since Thucydides, as we will see below, does not engage only with the first part of Herodotus' narrative (that is, chs. 55-65), but rather responds to the whole Herodotean section about the liberation from tyrants. On the other hand, the evidently limited space Thucydides devotes to the fall of tyranny could indicate that he does not share Herodotus' great interest in this significant event of Athenian history. But is this just a lack of interest or rather an indirect recognition that his predecessor has said more than enough on the topic? I will return to this question later, after having examined the versions of the two historians also in terms of content.

## 2. Content of the two narratives

The two narratives contain important convergences, some of which have not been fully evaluated by modern critics. The most pronounced one is that Herodotus too makes the clarification that Harmodios and Aristogeiton killed Hipparchos, the brother of the tyrant

Hippias. He also mentions that the murder took place during the procession of the Panathenaia and states, again in accordance with Thucydides, that after the murder of Hipparchos, tyranny became harsher:

Hipparchos, the son of Peisistratos, had been killed by Harmodios and Aristogeiton, who were distantly of the race of the Gephyraioi. This Hipparchos was the brother of the tyrant, Hippias (Ἰππαρχον τὸν Πεισιστράτου, Ἰππίεω δὲ τοῦ τυράννου ἀδελφεόν), and he had indeed seen a vision in his dream that very clearly foretold what would befall him. After the murder, for the following four years, Athens was ruled even more tyrannically than before (μετὰ ταῦτα ἐτυραννεύοντο Ἀθηναῖοι ἐπ' ἔτεα τέσσερα οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸ τοῦ). The dream vision that Hipparchos had seen was this: it was the night before the Panathenaia, and Hipparchos dreamed that a great, handsome man stood above him and spoke to him... As soon as day dawned, he openly entrusted the matter to the dream interpreters; but after that he would have done none of it and went on to conduct the procession, in the course of which he died (ἔπεμπε τὴν πομπήν, ἐν τῇ δὴ τελευτᾷ) (Hdt. 5.55.1).<sup>16</sup>

Distinctive elements in Herodotus' narrative are the description of Hipparchos' dream and the emphasis on the connections of the two murderers with the Gephyraioi.<sup>17</sup> Overall, however, although Herodotus does not elaborate, like Thucydides, on the exact conditions and motivations of Hipparchos' murder, *he does show awareness* of the correct version of the events. More importantly, his clarification about the brother of the tyrant being killed allows for thinking that he was motivated by the same concern with Thucydides, that is to correct Athenian misconceptions.

Other convergences, which have not attracted much scholarly attention, can be also discerned. For instance, an element surfacing rather incidentally in the Herodotean narrative is that some people in Athens were sympathetic to the tyrants. This is especially evident in the second section of Herodotus' digression: the historian remarks that the Spartan king Kleomenes fought "with those of the Athenians who wanted to be free" (τοῖσι βουλομένοισι εἶναι ἐλευθέροισι, Hdt. 5.64.2), thus implying that other people preferred being ruled by the tyrants.<sup>18</sup> This description brings him again close to Thucydides, who characterizes the tyrants' rule as "not oppressive" (οὐκ ἐπαχθής) and devotes some considerable space to the laudable achievements of the Peisistratidai.<sup>19</sup>

Both authors also seem to share a kind of embarrassment for the implication of the Lakedaimonians in Athenian political affairs. Herodotus underlines the contribution of the Alkmeonidai and dwells on their glorious background, but when he is about to narrate the participation of the Lakedaimonians in the process of liberation, he shows some detachment, by adding the expression "as the Athenians say":

As the Athenians say (Ὡς ὧν δὴ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι λέγουσι), these men sat as suppliants in Delphi and bribed the Pythia, whenever Spartiates, either privately or as part of a public delegation, came to consult the oracle, to urge on them the liberation of Athens (Hdt. 5.63.1-2).

Moreover, he attributes the victory of the Lakedaimonians over the tyrants to good luck (Hdt. 5.65.1: συντυχίη). Thucydides' narrative also reveals some oscillation: when he describes the perceptions of the Athenians at the beginning of his digression, he admits that the Athenians didn't feel at ease with the fact that the Lakedaimonians played a more important role for their liberation from tyranny than themselves or Harmodios (Thuc. 6.53.3:

προσέτι οὐδ' ὑφ' ἑαυτῶν καὶ Ἀρμοδίου καταλυθεῖσαν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων). However, when he resumes himself his narrative at the end of his digression, he makes a brief and passing reference to *both the Lakedaimonians and the exiled Alkmeonidai* as agents of the final liberation (Thuc. 6.59.4: τυραννεύσας δὲ ἔτη τρία Ἰππίας ἔτι Ἀθηναίων καὶ παυθεῖς ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ ὑπὸ Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ Ἀλκμεωνιδῶν τῶν φευγόντων). Of course, Herodotus' long account must have rendered redundant a detailed treatment from Thucydides' part. But Thucydides' not expanding on the participation of the Alkmeonidai and the Lakedaimonians in the liberation may also testify to his reluctance to take sides on the controversial question of defining whose assistance was the most decisive (a question, however, which had been amply problematized by Herodotus).

If the two narratives contain considerable convergences, where does Thucydides' "originality" lie? What is his contribution to the topic of the fall of tyranny in Athens? Thucydides distances himself from Herodotus in two instances: firstly, he seems to tacitly correct his predecessor, when he mentions the military achievements of the tyrants, a description which is not compatible with Herodotus' image of Athens as weak under the tyrants.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, contrary to Herodotus, who explicitly associates (especially in the second and third section of his digression) the fall of tyranny with freedom and democracy, Thucydides does not establish such a connection. Interestingly, freedom vocabulary is prevalent in Herodotus' digression,<sup>21</sup> but occurs only once in Thucydides:

The members of the conspiracy were not many for reasons of security; they hoped that even if a few acted boldly, those with no advance knowledge, since they even had weapons, would want to take part in their own liberation then and there (σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ξυνελευθεροῦν) (Thuc. 6.56.3).

It is noteworthy that, although Thucydides' corrections are important and could have become the object of a detailed (and polemic) narrative, the historian chooses to adopt a polemical tone regarding other matters: the homosexual angle of Hipparchos' murder and the adducing of more evidence, which proves that Hippias was the eldest brother. However, *both these issues are minor*: the homosexual angle does not preclude political motivation, which emerges, even indirectly, in Thucydides' account,<sup>22</sup> as for Thucydides' insistence on the seniority of Hippias, this issue was not very decisive for the correct version of the events, given that tyranny in ancient Greece was most of the times a family business.<sup>23</sup> More significantly, we have no indication that Herodotus was not aware of these topics too: he had also mentioned that it was Hipparchos, the tyrant's brother, who was killed. It is not improbable that he was also aware of the homosexual affair, but chose to suppress it, giving prominence to other factors.<sup>24</sup> Overall then, it would not be far-fetched to maintain that Thucydides' narrative in reality serves as a footnote to Herodotus' account. This conclusion can be further corroborated by the fact that the later text of the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* draws heavily on Herodotus and cites him (not Thucydides) when it describes the events of Peisistratos' tyranny in Athens.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Thucydides' polemical tone

We can now turn to the most intriguing topic concerning Thucydides' digression, its strongly polemical tone. If we admit, as I have suggested in the previous two sections of this paper, that Thucydides interacts with the larger Herodotean section about the liberation of Athens from tyranny and that his additions (or qualifications) are not so decisive for the correct version of the events, his polemical stance can be seen under a new light. In this

section of my paper I will argue for two points: firstly, that Herodotus could be considered a primary target of attack (and not merely one among others); secondly, and more tentatively, that Thucydides' aggressive tone might be interpreted as a sign of uneasiness: it may derive from the historian's awareness that his version of the events cannot essentially replace the account of his predecessor.

Let us begin with Thucydides' polemical statements and possible targets. Thucydides states emphatically:

The exploit of Harmodios and Aristogeiton was undertaken because of an incident of love affair (δι' ἐρωτικὴν ξυντυχίαν); by offering an additional account to the preexisting ones, I will show that neither the Athenians nor anybody else say anything accurate about their own tyrants or about this event (ἦν ἐγὼ ἐπὶ πλεόν διηγησάμενος ἀποφανῶ οὔτε τοὺς ἄλλους οὔτε αὐτοὺς Ἀθηναίους περὶ τῶν σφετέρων τυράννων οὐδὲ περὶ τοῦ γενομένου ἀκριβῆς οὐδὲν λέγοντας) (Thuc. 6.54.1).

At the end of his narrative he resumes again forcefully the issues of love grievance and daring which were crucial to his version of the events:

It was in this way, because of a lover's grievance (δι' ἐρωτικὴν λύπην), that both the original plot and the heedless daring (ἡ ἀλόγιστος τόλμα) of Harmodios and Aristogeiton, in the alarm of the moment, came about (Thuc. 6.59.1).

These formulations have caused some bewilderment: it is odd that in two other instances Thucydides makes a contrary statement: he mentions that the Athenian demos *knew and/or remembered* the events about the fall of tyranny by hearsay (Thuc. 6.53.3: ἐπιστάμενος γὰρ ὁ δῆμος ἀκοῆ, Thuc. 6.60.1: Ὡν ἐνθυμούμενος ὁ δῆμος ὁ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ μιμησκόμενος ὅσα ἀκοῆ περὶ αὐτῶν ἠπίστατο).

If we tried to reconcile these contradictory statements, we could concede that Thucydides' focus in passage 6.54 is on the homosexual angle of the murder, which has not been presented in detail by his predecessors, while the knowledge of the *demos* could refer to the more general beliefs about the fall of tyranny in Athens.<sup>26</sup> Simon Hornblower makes the attractive suggestion that the section from 6.54 onwards was written as a recitation unit for a sympotic context, a scenario that would explain what he calls a "flamboyantly polemical opening".<sup>27</sup> But still, some questions remain open: Thucydides' formulation (marked by four negations: οὔτε, οὔτε, οὐδέ, οὐδέν) is clearly exaggerated.<sup>28</sup> Why is he so aggressive? Who is his target in this passage? Who are the "Athenians and the others"? Since Thucydides does not essentially contradict Herodotus, but rather completes his narrative, should we exclude Herodotus as a possible target?

I believe this is not the case. Thucydides obviously wishes to criticize (among other things) the contemporary perceptions of (some?) Athenians. Harmodios and Aristogeiton were honored as tyrannicides. Their statues in the Athenian *agora* pointed to their glorification.<sup>29</sup> Skolia also presented them as liberators.<sup>30</sup> But these false perceptions are reflected in Herodotus as well, though not in the section about the liberation of Athens from tyranny. In the narrative about the battle of Marathon, Miltiades urges the polemarch Kallimachos to place himself into the tradition of liberators to which Harmodios and Aristogeiton belong: "It lies in your hands, Kallimachos, whether to enslave Athens or keep her free and thereby leave a memorial for all the life of mankind, such as not even Harmodios

and Aristogeiton left behind them (μνημόσυνον λιπέσθαι ἐς τὸν ἅπαντα ἀνθρώπων βίον οἶον οὐδὲ Ἀρμόδιός τε καὶ Ἀριστογεΐτων) (Hdt. 6.109). Of course, this exhortation is placed in a rhetorical context of emotional appeal and does not represent Herodotus' view about the liberation from tyranny in Athens.<sup>31</sup> But this should not lead us to assume that Thucydides does not consider Herodotus, when he refers to “the Athenians and the others”.

In fact, merging Herodotus with “the others who hold false perceptions” is a technique that Thucydides employs in his prologue in order to underestimate his predecessor.<sup>32</sup> Thucydides' prologue and the digression of the sixth book share some common elements, which justify their joint examination: the topic of Hipparchos' murder appears for the first time in the prologue, but in a condensed form (Thuc. 1.20); Thucydides' disdain for the masses (whom he names as οἱ πολλοί, τὸ πλῆθος, οἱ ἄλλοι, ὁ δῆμος, or more neutrally, οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, Thuc. 1.20.2, 6.54.1), the distinction between hearsay and factual evidence (1.22.4, 6.53.3, 6.54.1, 6.60.1), and the emphasis on historical accuracy (Thuc. 1.22.4: ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν; cf. 6.54.1: ἀκριβὲς οὐδέν, 6.55.1: ἀκριβέστερον ἄλλων ἰσχυρίζομαι) constitute additional common features between the two sections of Thucydides' history.<sup>33</sup> Concerning Thucydides' attitude towards Herodotus, more specifically, in his prologue Thucydides stigmatizes the ignorance of the Athenians about the tyrannicides (a passage which looks forward to the digression) and proceeds to highlight other false perceptions, by mentioning two examples from Herodotus regarding Spartan affairs (the votes of Spartan kings and the Pitane army division):

The mass of the Athenians believe that Hipparchos was tyrant when he was killed by Harmodios and Aristogeiton and not know (Ἀθηναίων γοῦν τὸ πλῆθος Ἴππαρχον οἶονται ὑφ' Ἀρμοδίου καὶ Ἀριστογεΐτονος τύραννον ὄντα ἀποθανεῖν, καὶ οὐκ ἴσασιν; cf. Thuc. 6.54.1) that Hippias as the eldest son of Peisistratos was the ruler, Hipparchos and Thessalos being his brothers, but Harmodios and Aristogeiton, suspecting at the last minute on that day that Hippias had received some information from their fellow conspirators, kept away from him as forewarned, but since they could accept their danger only if they accomplished something before being arrested, when they found Hipparchos by the sanctuary called Leokoreion organizing the Panathenaic procession, they killed him. And there is a great deal more, from the present, as well as the dimly remembered past, on which the other Greeks too hold false perceptions (καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι Ἕλληνας οὐκ ὀρθῶς οἶονται), such as that each king of the Lakedaimonians casts two votes instead of one, or that they have a Pitane army division, which never existed (cf. Hdt. 6.57.5, 9.53.2). So devoid of effort is for the many the search for the truth (οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας), and they would rather turn to what is readily available (Thuc. 1.20).

Herodotus is not named here, but he is blurred with the other Greeks and the πολλοί who hold false perceptions.<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, it is perfectly possible that when Thucydides refers to “the Athenians and the others” in the sixth book, he can include Herodotus among them as well.

But the most crucial indication that Thucydides wrote his digression having Herodotus in mind is the presence of Herodotean features in it. Thucydides' digression is marked by important Herodotean elements: he mentions ἄκοή (hearsay) as a source of information, for the *demos*, as well as for himself (Thuc. 6.53.3, 6.55.1, 6.60.1); again in a Herodotean manner, he includes inscriptions in his narrative (Thuc. 6.54.7, 6.55.1, 6.59.3); he emphasizes



individual emotions (Thuc. 6.54.3, 6.55.4, 6.57.3, 6.58.1, 6.59.1); he states that Peisistratos had the name of his grand-father, a statement which evokes the Herodotean Kleisthenes who also had the name of his grand-father, Kleisthenes of Sikyon.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the term διηγησάμενος (Thuc. 6.54.1) is a Herodotean way of introducing a narrative, while the word ξυντυχίη again picks up the Herodotean account (Thuc. 6.54.1; Hdt. 5.65.1).<sup>36</sup> Even in terms of structure, Thucydides' digression follows a Herodotean model: it contains in it two other smaller digressions.<sup>37</sup> The accumulation of Herodotean elements points to a conscious and consistent engagement with the Herodotean narrative and strengthens the hypothesis that the digression was written in a context of rivalry with Herodotus.<sup>38</sup>

Having established the Herodotean overtones of Thucydides' digression and its connections with the prologue of the *History*, some interesting implications concerning Thucydides' digression can arise. Thucydides' narrative on the tyrannicides could be viewed as a "show off of method", a kind of supplement to the prologue. At the same time, Thucydides wishes to show that he can both imitate his predecessor's method and phrasing and produce a better narrative than him. But is Thucydides' narrative really "better"? In fact, Thucydides seems to act like a scholar who has recourse to all possible strategies in order to prove that his contribution (even if this consists in minor additions) is the most important. This assertion can gain further confirmation, if we compare the digression on the tyrannicides with the digression of the Pentakontaetia, which represents another flashback from the main narrative of the first book. In the Pentakontaetia Thucydides fills a significant gap, by recounting, even elliptically, the events after 478 BC, which had not been narrated by Herodotus. He also explicitly states, again polemically, that his predecessors had not treated this period and that Hellanikos' account was too brief and insufficient (Thuc. 1.97). In the digression of the sixth book, on the contrary, he cannot claim that he wishes to complete his predecessors, since Herodotus' account is not only largely in accordance with his, but also more thorough. That's why he opts for a more covert way of attack: by imitating Herodotus' method and phrasing and by striving to create, at the same time, the impression, through his polemical expressions, that his contribution is the most valuable and compelling. Overall, Thucydides' polemical stance lacks sufficient justification and his narrative is eventually not convincing. It reveals a tension between an unnecessarily harsh tone and an insistence on minor corrections; and it ultimately reminds the reader that the account of his predecessor is capable not only of rivaling his, but also of surpassing it.

## Conclusion

This study has suggested that the degree of interaction between Thucydides and Herodotus on the topic of the fall of tyranny in Athens is wider than is usually assumed. Thucydides' digression on the tyrannicides makes better sense if it is interpreted in the background of the whole Herodotean section about the liberation of Athens from tyranny (Hdt. 5.55.1-5.96.2). Three main findings emerge from this investigation: first, the broadened comparison of the narratives of the two authors reveals that the issues on which Thucydides chooses to dwell in his digression are rather insignificant; second, despite the accuracy of Herodotus' account, the hypothesis cannot be excluded that Thucydides considers him (unjustly) a primary target of attack and somebody who holds false perceptions; finally, the awareness from Thucydides' part that his narrative is not necessarily superior to that of Herodotus could be viewed as an additional factor, which accounts for the historian's polemical tone and triggers inconsistencies in his version of the events.

## Notas

\* *Melina Tamiolaki* es Assistant Professor en la Universidad de Creta (Departamento de Filología). Sus intereses en investigación se centran en la historiografía griega, el pensamiento político griego y la teoría de la historia. Es autora del libro *Liberté et esclavage chez les historiens grecs classiques*, Paris, PUPS 2010 (que obtuvo el premio Zappas de la Association des Études grecques de París, 2011), coeditora (con Antonis Tsakmakis) de *Thucydides Between History and Literature*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2013) y editora de *Comic Wreath. New Trends in the Study of Ancient Greek Comedy*, Rethymnon, Ediciones de la Facultad de Filosofía de la Universidad de Creta, 2014 (en griego moderno).

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2 Interestingly, however, Herodotus does not mention explicitly the greatness of Athens at the beginning of his account. He introduces his digression as follows: Ἀπελαυνόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἦε ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας γενομένας τυράννων ὧδε ἐλευθέρας (Hdt. 5.55.1); yet at the end of his digression the link between freedom from tyranny and the power of Athens becomes all the more explicit: αὕτη γὰρ ἡ πόλις τῶν λοιπέων ἐδυνάστευε μέγιστον (Hdt. 5.97.1).

3 For the events surrounding the fall of tyranny in Athens, see indicatively Lewis D. M. (1988), Smith (1989: 80-89), Giorgini (1993: 107-132), McGlew (1993: 150-156), de Libero (1996: 131-132), Lavelle (1993) Lewis, S. (2009: 35-57). For a historiographical analysis of Herodotus' narrative, see Dewald (2003), Gray (2007) and Hornblower (2013: *ad loc.*). Concerning Thucydides, see Connor (1984: 176-180), Rood (1998: 180-181), Hunter (1973/4), Stahl (2003: 1-11), Meyer (2008), Pothou (2009: 144-151), Grethlein (2010: 214-220). In this paper I eschew discussion of the place of Thucydides' digression in the narrative of the Peloponnesian War, but I hope that my interpretation can give rise to further reflections on this topic.

4 For the various issues posed by the two narratives, see Hornblower (2008: 433-453).

5 See Hornblower (2008: 435-437) (with previous bibliography).

6 Herodotus introduces the reader to the history of archaic Athens and the rise of Peisistratos in the first book (1.59-64). Thucydides probably has this section in mind as well, but he seems to engage more directly with the narrative about the fall of tyranny of the fifth book.

7 Hornblower (2008: 437), correcting Jacoby (1949: 158): “If we say that Thucydides and Herodotus are in agreement, that is true, if we confine ourselves to such questions as, ‘did the murder of Hipparchos end the tyranny?’ [...]. But Th. surely wished to fill in and correct Hdt.’s silence about the sexual side...”

8 See Tsakmakis (1996) and Hornblower (2008: 439-440).

9 Tsakmakis (1996).

[10](#) For the translation of Thucydides and Herodotus, I use Lattimore (1998) and Grene (1987), often with modifications. In this paper all italics are mine.

[11](#) For ring-composition in this section, see Connor (1984: 256).

[12](#) See Gray (2007) for an analysis of this section.

[13](#) For the centrality of the topic of greatness of Athens in Herodotus and Thucydides, see Węcowski (2000: 287-468).

[14](#) Ring composition: Hdt. 5.55.1: Ἀπελαυνόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἦιε ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας. Cf. Hdt. 5.97.1: ἐν τούτῳ δὴ τῷ καιρῷ ὁ Μιλήσιος Ἀρισταγόρης ὑπὸ Κλεομένεος τοῦ Λακεδαιμονίου ἐξελασθεὶς ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἀπὶκετο ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας. See also Immerwahr (1966: 116-120), who considers this whole section a “*logos on the History of Athens*”.

[15](#) The smaller digressions are dispersed throughout the bigger digression as follows (in italics):

5.55-65: the killing of the “tyrant” in Athens

5.57.1-62: *digression about the Gephyraioi*

5.66.1-5.78: establishment of democracy, Kleisthenes’ reforms

5.67.1-68: *digression about the reforms of Kleisthenes of Sikyon*

5.79-97: the failed attempt of the Spartans to reinstall tyranny in Athens, Sokles’ speech.

5.82-88: *digression about the hostility of Aegina towards Athens*

[16](#) Cf. Thuc. 6.55.1: ὅτι δὲ πρεσβύτατος ὢν Ἰππίας ἤρξεν, εἰδὼς μὲν καὶ ἀκοῆ ἀκριβέστερον ἄλλων ἰσχυρίζομαι, γνοίη δ’ ἄν τις καὶ αὐτῷ τούτῳ; Thuc. 6.56.2: καὶ αὐτοῖς τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πρὸς τοὺς ξυνεπιθησομένους τῷ ἔργῳ ἐπέπρακτο, περιέμενον δὲ Παναθήναια τὰ μεγάλα; Thuc. 6.59.2: τοῖς δ’ Ἀθηναίοις χαλεπωτέρα μετὰ τοῦτο ἢ τυραννὶς κατέστη.

[17](#) See in more detail Hornblower (2008: 435-436).

[18](#) Herodotus implies a similar division between supporters and detractors of tyranny in Athens also in the narrative of the first book, about the rise of Peisistratos to power: Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τῷ χώρῳ σφί στρατοπεδευομένοισι οἳ τε ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεος στασιῶται ἀπὶκοντο, ἄλλοι τε ἐκ τῶν δήμων προσέρρεον, τοῖσι ἢ τυραννὶς πρὸ ἐλευθερίας ἦν ἀσπαστότερον. See Lavelle (1993: 59-61), for the complacency of the Athenians regarding tyranny and their efforts to conceal it.

[19](#) οὐδὲ γὰρ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρχὴν ἐπαχθῆς ἦν ἐς τοὺς πολλούς, ἀλλ’ ἀνεπιφθόνως κατεστήσατο· καὶ ἐπετήδευσαν ἐπὶ πλείστον δὴ τύραννοι οὗτοι ἀρετὴν καὶ ζύνεσιν...(Thuc. 6.54.5). For the textual problem of the first phrase, see Dover (1970: *ad loc.*) and Hornblower (2008: *ad loc.*). More interestingly, Thucydides seems here to be compatible with Herodotus’ assessment of Peisistratos’ tyranny in Book I (Hdt. 1.59.6):

Ἐνθα δὴ ὁ Πεισίστρατος ἦρχε Ἀθηναίων, οὔτε τιμὰς τὰς ἐούσας συνταράξας οὔτε θέσμια μεταλλάξας, ἐπὶ τε τοῖσι κατεστεῶσι ἔνεμε τὴν πόλιν κοσμέων καλῶς τε καὶ εὖ.

[20](#) Thuc. 6.54.5: καὶ ἐπετήδευσαν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον δὴ τύραννοι οὔτοι ἀρετὴν καὶ ξύνεσιν, καὶ Ἀθηναίους εἰκοστὴν μόνον πρᾶσσόμενοι τῶν γιγνομένων τὴν τε πόλιν αὐτῶν καλῶς διεκόσμησαν καὶ τοὺς πολέμους διέφερον καὶ ἐς τὰ ἱερά ἔθουον. Contrast Hdt. 5.78: εἰ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι τυραννευόμενοι μὲν οὐδαμῶν τῶν σφέας περικοκόντων ἦσαν τὰ πολέμια ἀμείνονες, ἀπαλλαχθέντες δὲ τυράννων μακροῦ πρῶτοι ἐγένοντο. For the military achievements of Peisistratos, see in detail Lavelle (2005).

[21](#) Hdt. 5.55.1, 5.62.1-2, 5.63.2, 5.64.2, 5.65.5, 5.78, 5.91.1, 5.91.2, 5.93.2: freedom vocabulary. For the connection of freedom with democracy, see Raaflaub (2004: 203-225). For the role of freedom in the narratives of the two historians, see Tamiolaki (2010: 223-228, 233-238).

[22](#) Hornblower (2008: 443), commenting on the expression ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπαρχούσης ἀξιώσεως (as far as his class allowed, Thuc. 6.54.2): “Th. Here suggests that an ideological motive was present after all.”

[23](#) See Sancisi-Weerdenburg (2000) for the idea that Thucydides’ emphasis results from an anachronistic effort to provide tyranny with a “constitutional” dimension. Cf. also Rhodes (2006: 528): “In making Hippias the sole ruler, Thucydides perhaps mistakes the nature of a family tyranny and it may be better to think of a joint rule but with Hippias playing the leading part.” Lavelle (1993: 63-64) acutely remarks that Thucydides relies on the εἰκός to prove that Hippias was the eldest brother, which is, however, according to Thucydides’ own methodology, the second best way to prove a thesis (if compared with τεκμήρια or σημεία).

[24](#) For Herodotus’ reticence on Greek homosexuality, see Hornblower (2008: 436-437).

[25](#) Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 14.4, with Dover (1970: 320). Cf. Thomas (1989: 282): “He (*scil.* Herodotus) succeeded in producing a far more complex and detailed account of the ‘liberation’ itself than we would expect from any one source.”

[26](#) For other attempts to interpret these contradictions, see Dover (1970: 326-329).

[27](#) Hornblower (2008: 434), who minimizes the polemical tone, by noting that it emerges only at the beginning and end of the digression, the rest of the narrative being rather entertaining. However, the fact that Thucydides resumes again vehemently reminds the reader of his polemical stance.

[28](#) That’s why Dover’s assertion (Dover 1970: 328) that “what Thucydides meant by ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν λέγοντας was that *some* elements in Athenian opinion on the Peisistratidai were false...” does not solve the problem, since the question remains: if Thucydides did not mean this, why did he write it?

[29](#) See now Azoulay (2014).

[30](#) The most famous skolion about the tyrannicides is transmitted by Athenaios: ἐν μύρτου κλαδί τὸ ξίφος φορήσω,/ὥσπερ Ἀρμόδιος καὶ Ἀριστογείτων,/ὄτε τὸν τύραννον κτανέτην/ισονόμους τ' Ἀθήνας ἐποίησάτην (Ath. *Deipn.* 15.50.60-62, *PMG* 895). For the various traditions on the tyrannicides circulating in Athens, see Thomas (1989: 238-282).

[31](#) Herodotus overtly expresses his own opinion about the liberation of Athens from tyranny, by attributing it (though with some reserve) to the Alkmeonidai (Hdt. 6.123.2), an opinion which parallels his description of the events.

[32](#) In this part of my paper I propose the *joint examination* of two issues, which have thus far been treated separately in modern scholarship: a) the connections of the prologue with the digression of the sixth book and b) the Herodotean features of Thucydides' digression. Scholars who have treated the first topic (such as Tsakmakis, Meyer and Grethlein) have overlooked the second, while Simon Hornblower, who has analyzed in detail the Herodotean features of Thucydides' digression, has not dwelt on the connections with the prologue. In my opinion, Thucydides' digression can be better evaluated only when *the implications of both these topics* are born in mind.

[33](#) See further Meyer (2008: 26-34), Grethlein (2010: 228-220).

[34](#) See also Tsakmakis (1996: 211).

[35](#) Thuc. 6.54.6: καὶ ἄλλοι τε αὐτῶν ἤρξαν τὴν ἐνιαύσιον Ἀθηναίοις ἀρχὴν καὶ Πεισίστρατος ὁ Ἰππίου τοῦ τυραννεύσαντος υἱός, τοῦ πάππου ἔχων τοῦνομα...; cf. Hdt. 5.67.1: Ταῦτα δέ, δοκέειν ἐμοί, ἐμιμέετο ὁ Κλεισθένης οὗτος τὸν ἐωυτοῦ μητροπάτορα Κλεισθένεα τὸν Σικυῶνος τύραννον.). Hornblower (2008) notes that this is a general technique of naming in Herodotus. But it is interesting that this technique is also used in the narrative about the liberation from tyranny.

[36](#) For these elements, see in more detail Hornblower (2008: 435-436).

[37](#) Again, I note the smaller digressions in italics.

6.54-59: the killing of the “tyrant” in Athens

6.54.5-7: *digression about the achievements of the tyrants*

6.55.1-4: *digression about Hippias being the eldest of the two brothers*

[38](#) For the importance of rivalry and polemic in historiography, see Marincola (1997).

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