

the early Greek bronze-caster. At any rate, all the large Greek bronze statues that have come down to us, from the Piraeus Apollo onwards, were in fact cast in parts. Thus the rise of monumental bronze statuary is in all probability to be connected with the discovery of a method of doing this. To cast a bronze in parts by the direct lost-wax process is virtually impossible, for it would be necessary to dissect the casting-model: to cut up, that is to say, a friable mass of baked clay incorporating a ramifying armature of iron and covered with a vulnerable wax envelope. No bronze-caster in his senses would venture on such a risky procedure. But in the indirect process sectional casting presents no difficulty whatsoever. All the bronze-caster need do is to make a self-contained piece-mould for each of the parts he wishes to cast separately instead of including the whole of the figure in a single mould.¹⁷ Might it not have been the Samian bronze-casters with their previous experience in using the indirect process on a small scale who first recognized the possibility of exploiting it for the production of large-scale statuary, and might this not have been the 'invention' traditionally associated with the names of Rhoikos and Theodoros?

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though he personally found it a little nerve-racking. Camberwell students dug a thirteen-foot pit for the mould with a smaller pit nearby for the furnace. Four crucibles were used to pour in 300 lbs of molten bronze—a hazardous operation which took one and a half hours. "I certainly would not recommend it as a method to be generally used", he said. "As an experiment to see if it could be done, it was fascinating". (*The Guardian*, 7th July, 1962).

I know of no large Greek or Roman statue cast in one piece: casting in parts was certainly the normal practice throughout antiquity (cf. Philo Byz., *Septem Mirac.* 4 p. 14; Quintilian ii 1 12; vii 2). As for the Renaissance, Cellini (*Trattato*, ed. Rusconi and Valeri, 755) says of his Perseus, which was notoriously cast in one, that because of its size it was the most difficult casting ever attempted, thereby strongly implying that in his day figures on this scale were normally cast in parts. The great French equestrian statues—Girardon's *Louis XIV*, Bouchardon's *Louis XV*, Falconet's *Peter the Great*—were cast, as their descriptions boast, *d'un seul jet*, but in these royal command performances great technical difficulty was deliberately courted in order to be triumphantly overcome. The preparations for the casting of Bouchardon's statue took eight years.

¹⁷ Cf. *Arch. Anz.* 1962 806 f; 1970 452; *RevArch* 1968 107.

Thucydides and Oracles

'Thucydides does not himself speak the language of religion.' Thus K. J. Dover summarizes the *communis opinio*¹ about Thucydides' attitude towards religion. He is supposed to have been sceptical of oracles and to have rejected them as a form of superstition.² This view is

¹ K. J. Dover, *Thucydides*, G&R New Surveys vii (Oxford 1973) 42.

² Bockshammer, *Die sittlich-religiöse Anschauung des Thukydides* (Tübingen 1862) 19; J. Classen-J. Steup, *Thukydides* i⁵ (Berlin 1919) lxi-lxii; E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* ii. 1 (Berlin 1888) 24; H. Meuss, 'Thukydides und die religiöse Aufklärung', *Neue Jb. f. kl. Phil.* cxlv (1892) 226-7; Alfred and Maurice Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque* iv (Paris 1900) 110-11; Th. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, trans. L. Magnus, (London 1901) 510; J. B. Bury, *The Ancient Greek Historians* (New York 1909) 129; W. Nestle, 'Thukydides und die Sophistik', *Neue Jb. f. kl. Phil.* xxxiii (1914) = *Griechische Studien* (Stuttgart 1948) 335; W. Schmid-R. Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* i

not, in my opinion, warranted by the evidence. The object of this paper will be to show that Thucydides accepted oracles, like his pious contemporaries Herodotus and Sophocles, and indeed that he exhibited a consistent interest in oracular puzzles and their correct interpretation.

Of the references to oracles in the *History* some do not merit extensive discussion since they are neutral in tone, and it is evident that Thucydides reports these oracles without any intention of making a special point: no criticism is involved in any of these omitted passages.³

The oracles on which I will base my argument are united by having ambiguity as a common characteristic. Oracular ambiguity was 'an article of Delphic belief',⁴ and was accepted as a fact by the ancients. Herodotus' history abounds in examples that show that responsibility for correct interpretation lay with the person who received the prophecy: cf. the oracle received by Croesus (Hdt. i 91.1), or Themistocles' interpretation of the 'wooden walls' on the eve of the Persian invasion (Hdt. vii 142-3). There are numerous other examples from fifth-century Greek literature which testify that when there was misinterpretation of prophecy, the blame was attached to the person who misunderstood it.⁵ In fact, there is good evidence that ambiguity and riddles elicited from the ancients not scepticism but a

(München 1920) 115; K. Latte, 'Orakel', *RE* xviii. 1 (1939) 852; J. Notopoulos, 'Thucydides' *Prognosis* and the Oracles', *CW* (1945) 29-30; H. Strasburger, 'Die Entdeckung der politischen Geschichte durch Thukydides', *Saeculum* v (1954) = *Wege der Forschung*, *Thukydides*, ed. H. Herter, (Darmstadt 1968) 453 n. 85; H. W. Parke-D. F. W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* i (Oxford 1956) 180; M. Finley, 'Thucydides the Moralizer', in *Aspects of Antiquity* (New York 1950) 49; J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (Oxford 1972) 288. Exceptions are L. Strauss, 'Preliminary Observations on the Gods in Thucydides' Work', *Interpretation* iv (1974) 3 and S. I. Oost, 'Thucydides and the Irrational: Sundry Passages', *CPh* lxx (1975) 188 ff.

³ The oracles not discussed are (1) i 25.1: The Epidamnians ask Delphi what to do, and (2) i 25.2 give their city to the Corinthians following the oracle's advice. (3) i 28.2: The Corcyreans and the Corinthians refer their dispute to Delphi. (4) i 103.2: The helots surrender to the Spartans who had received an oracle to let the suppliant of Zeus at Ithome go. One could argue that Thucydides implies that the oracle was fulfilled; at any rate there is no criticism. (5) i 134.4: Apollo orders the Spartans to make amends for the death of Pausanias. (6) iii 92.5: The Spartans ask Delphi about the colonization of Herakleia. Thucydides does not accuse Delphi for the failure of the colony but rather the harsh Spartan leadership. See also Strauss (n. 2) 4. (7) i 118.3: Apollo told the Spartans that if they put all their strength into war they would win. Although Nestle (n. 2) 335 and others assume that Thucydides is being critical of Delphi, there is no criticism in the wording of the passage. (8) v 16.2: The enemies of the Spartan king Pleistoanax accuse him of bribing the Pythia. Thucydides makes no comment. (9) iii 104.1: Thucydides relates how the Athenians purified Delos in compliance with 'a certain oracle'. The vagueness of the expression, especially when contrasted with 'by the god's command' (v 32.1) implies that Thucydides did not vouch for the genuineness of the oracle which ordered a sacrilegious purification. See W. Roscher, *Leben, Werk und Zeitalter des Thukydides* (Göttingen 1842) 219-20, and G. Klix, *Thukydides und die Volksreligion* (Zülichau 1854) 28.

⁴ J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley 1978) 236. Fontenrose argues that obscure oracles were not genuine but agrees that ambiguity was 'an article of Delphic belief'. Herodotus makes a big point because one particular oracle was clear (viii 77). The epithet *Loxias* may have been given to Apollo because of his 'crooked', that is ambiguous oracles. See LSJ.

⁵ Hdt. iii 58, 65; Soph. *Trach.* 1145-78, etc.

readiness to give these phenomena a positive function.⁶ I will try to show that Thucydides had a similar attitude and that, when citing ambiguous oracles, his attention is focused on their interpretation more than their content.

(a) i 126. 5–6 Cylon inquired at Delphi how he could be tyrant of Athens and received the answer ‘during the great festival of Zeus’. (*χρωμένω δὲ τῷ Κύλωνι ἐν Δελφοῖς ἀνείλεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τῇ μεγίστῃ ἑορτῇ καταλαβεῖν τὴν Ἀθηναίων ἀκρόπολιν.*) Cylon assumed (*νομίσας*) that the festival in question was the Olympia in the Peloponnese, and his attempt failed. Thucydides comments: ‘Whether the great festival that was meant was in Attica or elsewhere he did not understand, and the oracle did not make clear (for the Athenians have a festival called Diasia outside the city, which is called the great festival of Zeus Meilichios . . .); thinking that he had understood correctly, he undertook the task.’ (*εἰ δὲ ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ ἢ ἄλλοθί που ἡ μεγίστη ἑορτὴ εἴρητο, οὔτε ἐκεῖνος ἔτι κατενόησε τό τε μαντεῖον οὐκ ἐδήλου (ἔστι γὰρ καὶ Ἀθηναίους Διάσια ἃ καλεῖται Διὸς ἑορτὴ Μειλιχίου μεγίστη ἔξω τῆς πόλεως . . .) δοκῶν δὲ ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν ἐπεχείρησε τῷ ἔργῳ.*)

While the ambiguity is clearly indicated⁷ (*τό τε μαντεῖον οὐκ ἐδήλου*), it seems to me that Thucydides is defending the oracle here. Otherwise why mention the alternative interpretation that the festival in question was in Attica?⁸ At the same time he is implying that Cylon misunderstood the oracle (*νομίσας . . . οὔτε κατενόησε*).

(b) ii 102.5 Alcmaeon, who had murdered his mother, was told by Apollo that he would find no release from his troubles until he discovered a place which had not yet been seen by the sun at the time of the murder. Observing the deposit of the river Achelous, Alcmaeon realized that this was the place meant by the oracle and settled there with great success.⁹ (*ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν, ὡς φασι, μόλις κατενόησε τὴν πρόσχωσιν ταύτην τοῦ Ἀχελώου, καὶ ἐδόκει αὐτῷ ἰκανὴ ἀν κεχώσθαι δίατα τῷ σώματι ἀφ’ οὐπερ κτείνας τὴν μητέρα οὐκ ὀλίγον χρόνον ἐπλανάτο. καὶ κατοικισθεὶς ἐς τοὺς περὶ Οἰνιάδας τόπους ἐδυνάστευσέ τε καὶ ἀπὸ Ἀκαρναῶν παιδὸς ἑαυτοῦ τῆς χώρας τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἐγκατέλιπεν.*)

Thucydides’ language is very important here. He says that Alcmaeon understood (*κατενόησε*) the place meant by the oracle, which implies that *there was a meaning to be discovered*, and that Alcmaeon was intelligent enough to discover it.¹⁰ The passage invites comparison with the one on Cylon (above). The same word *κατενόησε* is used in both cases. It is also used in connection with Themistocles (i 138. 1), for whom the admiration of Thucydides is well known.

(c) ii 54 During the Plague people remembered an old prophecy that ‘a Dorian war shall come and with it death’. *ἐν δὲ τῷ κακῷ οἶα εἰκὸς ἀνεμνήσθησαν καὶ*

⁶ S. E. Basset, ‘1 COR. 13. 12, βλέποντες γὰρ ἄρτι δι’ ἐσώπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι’, *J. Biblical Lit.* (1928) 233.

⁷ Meuss (n. 2) 226 thinks that Thucydides is being critical.

⁸ Roscher (n. 3) 224; Classen-Steup⁵ (n. 2) lxii n. 86.

⁹ A. W. Gomme, *HCT ad loc.*, was puzzled at the digression and concluded that Thucydides included the story because he was interested in the natural phenomenon of silting.

¹⁰ Strauss (n. 2) 10 Cf. also Hdt. i 68: Lichas discovers the true meaning of the oracle concerning the tomb of Orestes.

τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους, φάσκοντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάλαι ἄδεσθαι ἡξεί Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς αὐτῷ. ἐγένετο μὲν οὖν ἔρις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ λοιμὸν ὠνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει ἀλλὰ λιμὸν, ἐνίκησε δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰκότως λοιμὸν εἰρησθαι: οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο.

Some have seen Thucydides’ emphasis on the oracle’s lack of clarity as evidence for scepticism;¹¹ but, as I have argued, oracular ambiguity did not have solely negative connotations for the ancients. Rather, as some commentators have suggested, Thucydides is not questioning oracles here, but is merely stating that people make them fit their current circumstances.¹² Thucydides makes ‘the people’ (*ἄνθρωποι*) the subject of his sentence, and thus directs his attack against *ἄνθρωποι* without going so far as to say ‘oracles are of such a nature that they fit all circumstances’. This critical attitude towards *οἱ ἄνθρωποι* fits well with an earlier statement that *οἱ πολλοί* do not take the trouble to investigate the truth (i 20.3).

(d) iii 96 The poet Hesiod was killed in the precinct of Nemea Zeus in Locris although he had received a prophecy that he would die in Nemea. Again commentators have assumed that Thucydides tells the story to attack oracles by stressing their ambiguity.¹³ Yet the phrasing of the Greek does not emphasize the discrepancy (Nemea–Locris) but the coincidence (Nemea–Nemea Zeus): . . . *ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Νεμείου τῷ ἱερῷ, ἐν ᾧ Ἡσίοδος ὁ ποιητὴς λέγεται . . . ἀποθανεῖν, χρησθὲν αὐτῷ ἐν Νεμέᾳ τοῦτο παθεῖν. . .* The oracle was fulfilled, albeit in an unexpected manner. In fact, this particular type of prophecy based on identical names is not uncommon. Compare Hdt iii 64: Cambyses had received a prophecy that he would die in Agbatana. Although he assumed that this was the large city in Persia, the oracle prophesied his death at Agbatana in Syria.

(e) ii 17.2 The *Πελαργικόν* was inhabited in the crisis of 431 (*ὑπὸ τῆς παραχρήμα ἀνάγκης*). There was an oracle which forbade its inhabitation and predicted disaster for the day that it would be inhabited. Thucydides comments: ‘It appears to me that, as regards the oracle, the opposite happened to what people expected. It was not because of its unlawful inhabitation that disasters befell Athens, but the need for occupation arose because of the war which the oracle did not mention, but it *foresaw* that it would be an evil day for Athens when the plot was inhabited.’ (Italics mine) (*καί μοι δοκεῖ τὸ μαντεῖον τοῦναντίον ξυμβῆναι ἢ προσεδέχοντο: οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὴν παράνομον ἐνοίκησιν αἱ ξυμφοραὶ γενέσθαι τῇ πόλει ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἢ ἀνάγκη τῆς οἰκήσεως, ὃν οὐκ ὀνομάζον τὸ μαντεῖον προῆδει μὴ ἐπ’ ἀγαθῷ ποτὲ αὐτὸ κατοικισθησόμενον.*)

In this case, it is Thucydides himself who offers the correct interpretation of the oracle. On the contrary, ‘people’, like Cylon, mistake cause for effect. Thucydides’ reasoning, that the oracle foresaw the connection between war and the inhabitation of the Pelargikon, does not mean that the passage is ‘destructive satire’ on

¹¹ Nestle (n. 2) 336. Also F. B. Jevons, *A History of Greek Literature* (London 1886) 337. Gomme (*ad loc.*) detects irony.

¹² Oost (n. 2) 189, 194.

¹³ Gomme *ad loc.*; Classen-Steup⁵ lxiii.

oracles.¹⁴ Had Thucydides intended criticism, he would not have said τὸ μαντεῖον προῆδει, the clear implication of which is that he attributed prophetic powers to Delphi.¹⁵

But need προῆδει imply knowledge beforehand, or does it simply mean that the priests at Delphi foresaw that occupation of the Pelargikon would take place only through some calamity? A linguistic study of this word reveals that it means 'to know beforehand',¹⁶ sometimes in a prophetic context,¹⁷ and that it should not be confused with προοράω, 'to foresee rationally'. This is best illustrated from a passage in Herodotus concerning the fears of Chilon the Lacedaimonian that the island of Cythera would endanger Sparta's safety. Demaratus, who is quoting Chilon to Xerxes, says that Chilon expected (προσοδοκῶν) danger from Cythera although he did not have actual foreknowledge (προειδώς) of the Persian invasion (Hdt. vii 235). Thus, the Greek language distinguishes between foresight and foreknowledge. The idea that Thucydides could accept the oracle's prophetic power appeared so remarkable to all those convinced of his atheism, that some way around it had to be sought. The most radical solution was proposed by Cobet (*ad Hyper.* 70) who emended προῆδει to προῆδε, not to 'foreknow' but to 'foresing'. The emendation was accepted by Hude and Classen–Steup on the grounds that 'προῆδει passt nicht recht zu dem freien Standpunkt, den Thukydides sonst in Bezug auf das Orakel-wesen einnimmt'.¹⁸ The emendation can be rejected: (1) Not only does the word never appear in Thucydides, but we do not meet it before Aeschines. (2) Its usual meaning is 'to sing a prelude'¹⁹ which does not fit the context. In addition, note that *chresmoi* are elsewhere 'sung', not 'foresung' (Thuc. ii 21.3; 8.2; 54.2; Ar. *Knights* 61). Cobet's emendation is a striking illustration of how preconceptions influence interpretation. Reluctance to face the obvious resulted in the creation of a Thucydides far more rationalistic than he must have been in reality.

So far our results are quite unambiguous and show that Thucydides' criticism is directed not against oracles but against those who misinterpret them. There is, however, one passage which appears to contradict this thesis.²⁰

(f) v 26.3 Thucydides says that one can compute the war as having lasted twenty-seven years. Then he

continues: . . . καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ χρησμῶν τι ἰσχυρισσάμενοι μόνον δὴ τοῦτο ἐχυρώς ξυμβάν. On the surface, the historian seems to be saying that only one oracle's predictions had come to pass, and indeed this is what the passage is usually taken to mean.²¹ Actually, however, Thucydides is saying something different: 'for those who obstinately maintained (ἰσχυρισσάμενοι)²² something based on oracles, only this came to pass'. By ἰσχυρισσάμενοι Thucydides is diverting attention away from the oracle and instead focusing on those who made claims based on it. This is consistent with what we have seen previously, and the apparent counter-example to my thesis is removed.

Although we cannot be certain to whom ἰσχυρισσάμενοι refers, a case can be made if we read the following lines: αἰεὶ γὰρ ἔγωγε μέμνημαι, καὶ ἀρχομένου τοῦ πολέμου καὶ μέχρι οὐ ἐτελεύτησε, προφερόμενον ὑπὸ πολλῶν ὅτι τρεῖς ἑννέα ἔτη γενέσθαι αὐτόν. Πολλῶν is strongly reminiscent of the οἱ πολλοί mentioned in i 20.3 and again suggested in ii 54.3 by ἄνθρωποι. It is the πολλοί who accept the interpretations of the *chresmologoi* and *manteis*, notorious frauds in the fifth century²³ and objects of ridicule by many intellectuals²⁴ including Thucydides himself (ii 8.2; 21.3; viii 1). Since he mentions them in a context of turmoil and distress, it is natural to assume that they made obstinate claims based on oracles and that these were accepted by 'the many'. Thucydides, however, is making a distinction between the *chresmoi* of the god and the incantations of the *chresmologoi*²⁵ just as Sophocles and Plato did.²⁶

In conclusion, I have tried to argue that oracular ambiguity was accepted by the ancients, and that there is no indication that Thucydides' attitude was different. He must have agreed with Heraclitus' dictum:²⁷ ὁ ἀναξ οὐδὲ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (the god neither speaks clearly, nor conceals, but indicates the truth for whomever can understand it). Thucydides was interested in the truth, as he states in his introduction (i 22.3), and as is shown by his approval of Alcmaeon, indicated by κατενόησε (passage (b) above). Thus, he is hardly the irreverent atheist that he is often made to be, but in some respects stands in the mainstream of fifth century tradition.

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¹⁴ Thus Gomperz (n. 2) 510. See also Roscher (n. 3) 336; Parke and Wormell (n. 2) 190.

¹⁵ Gomme *ad loc.*

¹⁶ Lys. xvi 15; Pl. *Gorg.* 459e; Isoc. xii 127; Dio Cass. lxxix 4.

¹⁷ See Hdt ix 16.2 for example. In a recent article, (*BICS* xxvi [1979] 45 ff.) A. Powell concludes that *πρόοιδα* means 'secularly based knowledge' and not prophecy. He adduces a number of parallels which, however, prove that in *all cases* *πρόοιδα* means knowledge acquired beforehand: future generations will have knowledge of the symptoms of the Plague beforehand (ii 48.3); Alcibiades had knowledge of the enemy's plans (viii 51.3) etc. This shows that although the knowledge is secularly based, it is fore-knowledge, not foresight. Thus, the possibility that *πρόοιδα* implies rational calculation has to be given up in favour of knowledge based on a divine source.

¹⁸ Classen–Steup⁵ *ad loc.* Gomme (*ad loc.*) rejected the emendation because even *προῆδω* implies knowledge beforehand.

¹⁹ Aesch. ii 163.

²⁰ Oost (n. 2) 194 concludes that Thucydides contradicts himself in what he says about oracles.

²¹ Classen–Steup⁵ lxi; Schmid–Stählin (n. 2) 115; Croiset (n. 2) 11; Meuss (n. 2) 227; K. von Fritz *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* i (Berlin 1967) 542; Oost (n. 2) 192 thinks that Thucydides may have disbelieved the oracle at first but then become convinced of its veracity. R. Crawley's translation is typical of the above attitudes: '... an instance of faith in oracles being for once justified by the event'.

²² 'To maintain obstinately' is a more proper translation of the word than 'to have faith in'. See LSJ which gives this meaning as one of the primary ones. See also Thuc. ii 44.3, iv 23.1, vii 49.4 for the same use of the word.

²³ Parke and Wormell (n. 2) ii xx; K. Latte (n. 2) 852; H. D. Oliver, *The Athenian Expounders of the Sacred and Ancestral Law* (Baltimore 1950) 9–10; Fontenrose (n. 4) 145 ff.

²⁴ Ar. *Birds* 959–91, *Knights* 109–10.

²⁵ Denied by Nestle (n. 2) 335.

²⁶ Soph. *OT* 711–12; Pl. *Rep.* 427c.

²⁷ Fr. 93 DK, *ap.* Plut. *Mor.* 404d.

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