19 ‘Freedom Is the Sure Possession’: Modern Receptions of Pericles’ *Funeral Oration*

NEVILLE MORLEY

19.1 Introduction

Pericles’ funeral oration has played a significant public role, especially in Anglophone countries, over the last century. Renaissance humanists had valued it simply as a masterful piece of oratory, to be studied for its literary qualities. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was seen primarily as a source of historical information about Athenian culture, with no present significance. The great change came in the early nineteenth century, when radical and liberal thinkers in Britain, for whom ‘democracy’ was no longer a threat but a promise, focussed increasingly on the contents of the speech. Cultural achievement was, they argued, intimately bound up with the participation of the people in public life. For them, the proof was in Pericles’ praise of Athens and its institutions. Ancient and modern democracy were now elided, and the words of this *epitaphios logos* (‘funeral speech’) were thus made available for politicians seeking to celebrate their own societies, from the United States of America to the European Union.

Readers of the funeral oration as a celebration of democracy almost entirely ignored the original context of the speech. Developments in modern warfare, as well as the rise of the mass citizen army changed this. In World War One, passages from the funeral oration were deployed in both Britain and Germany in order to exhort men to fight to defend ‘civilisation’. Selected quotations were likewise used in English newspapers and on public transport in London to justify conscription. After this war, similar lines appeared on war memorials, commemorating and justifying soldiers’ sacrifice. Nearly all such memorials decline to credit Thucydides or Pericles, with the sentiment usually considered to be sufficient in itself. As the same lines from Pericles’ famous speech have been used to commemorate subsequent wars and to celebrate the military more generally, their historical content has diminished still further. Rather, their usefulness depends on the idea of timelessness. Social media has expanded the oration’s reach, but in an ever more etiolated form. Except in rare cases, the

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power and the usefulness of Thucydides' words now depend on their detachment from any connection to their original meaning or context.

19.2 A Contested Foundation for European Values

> χρώμεθα γὰρ πολιτείᾳ. . .καὶ ὄνομα μὲν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ὀλίγους ἀλλ' ἐς πλείονας οἰκεῖν δημοκρατία κέκληται.
>
> 'Our Constitution . . . is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the greatest number (Thucydides II.37).'
>
> Conscious that Europe is a continent that has brought forth civilisation; that its inhabitants, arriving in successive waves from earliest times, have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason,
>
> Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage, have embedded within the life of society the central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights . . .

This is the opening of the preamble to the ill-fated draft treaty for the constitution of Europe from 2003. The words of Pericles were assumed, at least by the drafting committee led by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, perfectly to encapsulate the values that they sought to establish as the foundation for the next phase of the European project. The choice of a quotation from Thucydides was, however, greeted with some derision by commentators and politicians. *The Economist* remarked that 'like an over ambitious student essay it starts with a quotation of Thucydides (in the original Greek)'. In Germany, *Die Zeit* noted the mismatch between Pericles' evocation of democracy and the fact that, according to Thucydides, it was really the rule of the first man – '*Quo vadis, Europa*?', if that is your blueprint for the future. In the United Kingdom's parliament, Conservative member of parliament, George Osborne, attacked the reference to 'the greatest number' as a plan to expand majority voting and thus reduce national sovereignty. In the final version of the constitution's text from 2004, the quotation from Thucydides was removed, together with references to other key moments in European history, in favour of a bland evocation of 'freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law as universal values', which met with loud protests from Greece and Cyprus.[1]

[1] Sawyer 2015: 541–2.

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Few other European-Union documents have included such rhetorical flourishes. The original preamble reflects the hopes vested in the constitutional project and the wish to establish norms and values for the future of Europe by mobilising the authority of ancient Athens.[2] As classical scholars pointed out, this rested on a questionable interpretation of Ancient History and its relation to the present, which offered an opportunity for such scholars to decry naïve modern conflations of ancient and modern political ideas.[3] In this document, democracy is universalised and presented as a distinctively European value, ignoring fundamental differences between ancient and modern democracies. It also passed over the fact that the European Union had no intention of making decisions by a simple majority of its members. The funeral oration is implicitly claimed as a statement, not of the values of Athens at a particular moment – let alone of the manipulative agenda of an individual politician or of a complex historiographical portrait of that politician – but of the foundations of Europe.[4]

Why was the funeral oration chosen, and why was it attributed to Thucydides rather than Pericles? One suggestion was that the framers of the document had simply learned a simplistic account of 'the Greek invention of democracy' at school and so cast around for a suitable classical quotation.[5] They eventually settled on Pericles and Thucydides when they discovered that Plato and Aristotle had nothing appropriate to say on the subject. However, it is more likely that this was a deliberate and positive choice, reflecting the influence in recent centuries of reading this funeral oration as an anticipation of the values of the modern West and of the growing authority of Thucydides as historian and political thinker.[6] The framers of the constitution sought to ground its claims to universal values and validity by calling on a higher power: not god, in this day and age, or the spirit of the people, but the founder of critical historiography, whose name stands for the indisputable excellence and greatness of Western culture.[7] At least as important was the power of the oration's language – once translators had rendered choice extracts into quotable phrases – and the ease with which these quotations can be removed from their original context and deployed for modern political purposes.[8]

This episode exemplifies the way in which Pericles' *epitaphios logos* has been received over the last few centuries, not only in Europe, but also in the United States of America and other Anglophone countries.[9] Of course, this is not the only example of Thucydides' words being taken out of context

[2] Patel 2017. [3] Canfora 2006; Nippel 2005. [4] Nippel 2005: 24–5. [5] Canfora 2006: 10.
[6] See generally Lee and Morley 2015. [7] Budelacci 2005: 185–6. [8] Collins 2017: 89–99.
[9] Sawyer 2015: 531–7 on citations in the United-States Senate.

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and laden with contemporary political resonances; his modern reception and influence are dominated by such partial and ideological readings. But, in at least one significant respect, this reception of the funeral oration is different. Most modern non-academic readings of Thucydides present him in similar terms to Friedrich Nietzsche's account, as the pitiless and illusion-less observer of the world as it really is.[10] In citations of the funeral oration, we are instead offered Thucydides 'the idealist', expressing 'beautiful ideas' that must be defended, and which will inspire people to defend them. All political systems – including the European Union – want to be celebrated in the way that Thucydides celebrated Athens and to inspire the civic loyalty and self-sacrifice that Pericles expected from his fellow citizens. It is scarcely surprising, then, that modern politicians continue to make use of the funeral oration as an apparently timeless political resource rather than as a historical document.

19.3 From Rhetorical Model to Historical Record

The practice of reading and citing the funeral oration in isolation, removed from its original context, long predates its deployment as a key text of liberal democracy. Ever since his work was re-introduced into western Europe in the fourteenth century, Thucydides has been read in excerpts, especially from his speeches. The first translation, made for the Aragonese statesman, Juan Fernández de Heredia, was a collection of thirty-eight speeches, including the funeral oration, and it is plausible that this was a direct translation of a Byzantine collection.[11] Even after a Latin translation of the full work was produced by the Italian humanist, Lorenzo Valla, in 1452, the practice continued: sometimes collections of speeches just from Thucydides, sometimes substantial Thucydidean sections within collections of speeches from a range of ancient authors, such as the 1570 *Conciones* of the French historian, Henri Estienne.[12] Pericles' funeral speech was included in almost every one of these collections. The reason for this practice is clear: in the early modern period, there was a general interest in ancient speeches as models for rhetoric and reasoning, and those found in Thucydides were especially praised for their rhetorical qualities.[13] The funeral oration was, together with the Mytilene debate, the most highly praised of them. Criticism was limited to the question of whether a funeral

[10] Nietzsche 1988 [1889]: 156; cf. Morley 2018b.
[11] Iglesias-Zoido 2015. On Thucydides in Byzantium see e.g. Kennedy 2018. [12] Pade 2015.
[13] Iori 2019.

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was a fitting occasion for such an oration, which should have been confined to deliberations over war and peace. As the Jesuit poet and scholar, Pierre Le Moyne, remarked: 'Is this not precisely an abuse of his flashes of lightning and thunder, to employ them in so little a thing?'[14]

Early modern commentators were apparently uninterested in the question of whether the speech should be credited to Thucydides or Pericles. Heredia's collection did not name the speaker of any of the speeches, attributing everything to Thucydides. Later collections normally included the preamble to the funeral oration, setting the scene and so identifying Pericles as the man chosen for the occasion, but are equally happy to discuss its language and construction in terms of Thucydides' composition. Discussions of Pericles as a historical figure sometimes raised the question of how far the speeches attributed to him were transcribed or embellished, but without this being a major issue of concern.[15] The remarks of the popular historian, Charles Rollin, may be taken as typical:

> Thucydides gives it [the funeral oration] to us in full. Whether it is effectively that of Pericles, or whether it must be attributed to his historian, one can say that it is truly worthy of the reputation of these two great men through the noble simplicity of the style, the solid beauty of the thoughts and the grandeur of the sentiments that reign throughout.[16]

The comments of Le Moyne and Rollin reflected the conventional humanist view, widespread before the mid-eighteenth century, that history was a branch of rhetoric, whose value lay primarily in its exemplary and didactic function.[17] The funeral oration mattered to early modern readers primarily as a great speech, whose value and qualities, as well as its suitability as a school and university text, would not be in any way lessened if it were entirely the composition of Thucydides rather than something that was actually delivered by Pericles in the circumstances described. In the fullness of time, however, such a position came to seem problematic to those developing a new self-consciously critical approach to the study of the past.[18] If history aims to provide a true account of past events, then, it is not legitimate for the historian to put invented words into the mouths of past individuals. This practice was progressively abandoned by historians from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, who took it as evidence for the

[14] Le Moyne 1670: 254.
[15] Azoulay 2014: 157–91, which emphasises how rarely Pericles was seen in positive terms before the eighteenth century.
[16] Rollin 1729: 417. [17] Grafton 2007. [18] Morley 2014: 98–100.

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un-modern humanistic and hence insufficiently critical approach of their predecessors.[19]

Thucydides was excepted from this general disdain for pre-modern historiography, above all because his work, especially the methodological comments in his book 1, was so important as a source of inspiration and legitimation for the new critical historians.[20] However, the fact that he too included speeches threatened, at times, to undermine his status as a precursor of modern approaches, while his own account of his practice at 1.22 muddied the waters by implying the possibility of a defence of the speeches on historical grounds. The problem was deciding exactly what Thucydides meant in those comments and how much weight to place on his claim to have got as close as possible to what was actually said.[21] The funeral oration was an especially important example for this debate, in part, because of its importance in establishing the nature and the values of Athenian society, which meant that historians of ancient Greece had a further motive to establish its historical veracity, and, in part, because it represented the strongest example on the side of Thucydides' reliability. The arguments offered by modern defenders of the veracity of Thucydides' speeches, such as Donald Kagan, had already been anticipated by writers such as J. D. Heilmann in 1758.[22] Heilmann wrote:

> For whatever one may now think of the speeches that the ancient historians strewed around, which in many, indeed in most cases indisputably are merely the invention of the history writer, and as a consequence certainly amount to no more than his caprice, or his correct judgement of decorum; nevertheless I believe that here we may make an exception, and that this speech really was given by Pericles... It is very probable in itself that Pericles gave such a speech at that time; it is then equally probable that Thucydides, who could have been present, carefully memorised the contents for his enterprise; indeed it is quite possible that he had the whole speech as delivered by Pericles in front of him... At the very least it seems to me that the spirit of this orator, as he is described to us by the ancients, that urgent, unsettling and powerful spirit, is clearly to be found in this speech.[23]

We should be sceptical of most speeches in ancient historians, Heilmann suggested, but Thucydides is different, and the funeral oration is certainly different. His argument on this point was echoed by many later scholars,

[19] Reill 1975: 31–47; Megill and McCloskey 1987. [20] Murari Pires 2006; Muhlack 2011.
[21] Morley 2014: 97–137 and pp. 119–21. [22] Kagan 1975: 119–21. [23] Heilmann 1778: 98.

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who claimed that, for example, there is no doubt that such a speech was delivered, that Thucydides could certainly have been present, as was not the case for other speeches, that he could easily also have talked to other Athenians who were present and that he would certainly have been heavily criticised by them if he had deviated too far from the original. Even when they hedged their bets on one of these claims, historians could draw on the others to argue for accepting Thucydides' own assurances. William Mitford's simultaneously cautious and confident assertion exemplifies the approach: 'That oration, of which at least Thucydides, who was probably present, has, it is from his own professions to be presumed, faithfully collected, preserving in a great degree even the manner in which it was spoken.'[24]

These explanations became progressively more detailed and elaborate over time – perhaps because the issue of the relationship between history and fiction, as well as the anxiety surrounding the question of Thucydides' reliability, became increasingly pressing. The nineteenth-century churchman and historian, Connop Thirlwall, agreed with Mitford on this matter, if on little else, and continued:

> On this occasion the historian Thucydides, then in the prime of life, and already intent on collecting materials for his great work, was most probably among the bystanders. The speech was among the most celebrated compositions of Pericles; though Plato satirically ascribed it to Aspasia. That which Thucydides puts into his mouth may be pretty safely considered as representing the substance of the one really pronounced, with more than the historian's usual fidelity; and, among the topics it embraces, there are some which belong to history as much as any part of his narrative.[25]

George Grote likewise asserted that Thucydides probably heard the speech in person and argued further that it is the speech's most unusual features, the ways in which it deviates from other examples of funeral orations, that offer a stamp of Periclean authenticity. Similarly, the fact that the oration's style differs from the rest of Thucydides' work is taken as a sign of veracity rather than of the historian's literary skill. Grote explained:

> . . . under the language and arrangement of the historian – always impressive, though sometimes harsh and peculiar, like the workmanship of a powerful mind misled by a bad or an unattainable model – we possess the substance and thoughts of the illustrious statesman. A portion of it, of

[24] Mitford 1820: 107–8. [25] Thirlwall 1836: 131–2.

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> course, is and must be commonplace, belonging to all discourses composed for a similar occasion. Yet this is true only of a comparatively small portion. Much of it is peculiar, and every way worthy of Perikles – comprehensive, rational, and full not less of sense and substance than of earnest patriotism. It thus forms a strong contrast with the jejune, though elegant, rhetoric of other harangues, mostly not composed for actual delivery. And it deserves, in comparison with the funeral discourses remaining to us from Plato, and the pseudo-Demosthenes, and even Lysias, the honourable distinction which Thucydides claims for his own history – an ever-living possession, not a mere show-piece for the moment.[26]

This was never a universally accepted position, even when it came with the imprimatur of a heavyweight, such as Grote. 'It seems to me that this speech is a fiction of the historian, and it bears the imprint of his heavy and severe style', remarked the French classicist, A. F. Villemain, in his 'Essai sur l'oraison funèbre' from 1827. In his ambitious and idiosyncratic account of Thucydides as an exemplar for modern historiography, the German historical theorist, Wilhelm Roscher, abandoned any attempt at claiming that Thucydides' speeches were not literary compositions. He argued instead that such rhetorical set pieces were essential means for Thucydides to convey scientific insights to his audience, representing 'the most elegant means whereby he traces back the external facts to their intellectual motives'.[27] The funeral oration, Roscher suggested, was designed to showcase the values that drove Athenian decisions in the early years of the war.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the then classicist, Alfred Zimmern, combined the two arguments.[28] He reiterated the possibility that Thucydides did indeed hear the speech, but had no hesitation in ascribing as much credit to him as to Pericles for its language and sentiments:

> It is not, of course, the speech which Pericles delivered, or even, as the speaker hints, the kind of speech usually given on such occasions. There is too little in it about noble ancestors, and too much about the present day. But there is no reason to doubt that Thucydides had heard his hero speak, most probably more than once, over the city's fallen soldiers, and could recall in after years among his most sacred recollections, 'the cadence of his voice, the movement of his hand', and the solemn hush of the vast audience, broken only by 'the sobbing of some mother of the dead.' We may feel with confidence that he has given us, with the added colour of his

[26] Grote 1851: 65–6. [27] Roscher 1842: 154. [28] On Zimmern see now Earley 2020: 53–63.

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> own experience, not merely the inner thought but much of the language of Pericles. So that here we can listen, as in all fine works of interpretation, to two great spirits at once; and when we have learnt to use our ears we can sometimes hear them both, Pericles' voice coming through, a little faint and thin after the lapse of years, above the deep tones of the historian.[29]

19.4 The Self-Portrait of Athenian Democracy

Zimmern's primary concern was to reconstruct the communal spirit of democratic Athens. It was immaterial to him, unlike the majority of historical and philological commentators, whether Thucydides was transcribing Pericles or offering his own perspective, as in either case the text expressed the sentiments of an Athenian citizen. This reflects the most important change in the way in which the funeral oration was read from the early nineteenth century compared with earlier periods: a focus on the content of the speech rather than just its rhetorical or historiographical aspects, with the aim of relating it directly to contemporary political values.

Pervasive suspicion of the idea of 'democracy' meant that, in the Renaissance and early modern period, the main themes of the funeral oration, its praise of Athenian society and institutions, were little discussed.[30] The true character of Athens was revealed by later events like Mytilene and the trial of Socrates, according to this view, while Thucydides was assumed to be hostile to democracy in general. This attitude persisted into the eighteenth century, even as interest in Greek history in general increased. In his account of fifth-century Athens, William Mitford, intermittently a Tory member of parliament as well as an ancient historian, who was thoroughly conservative in his political outlook, focussed solely on the oration's rhetorical style, with barely any mention of its purpose or ideas:

> It remains, in its original language, a finished model of the simple and severe sublime in oratory, which has been the admiration of all succeeding ages; but which must sink in any translation, denies abridgement, and defies either imitation or paraphrase, perhaps beyond any composition that ever was committed to writing.[31]

Despite this praise, or because of his disparagement of translations, he did not quote any of it directly, presumably assuming that his readers would encounter it elsewhere.

[29] Zimmern 1914: 200. [30] Liddel 2008; Nippel 2015; Cartledge 2016. [31] Mitford 1820: 106.

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Connop Thirlwall, more favourable to liberal causes than Mitford, nevertheless offered only a paraphrase of the oration rather than a substantial excerpt. He had more to say about the praise of Athens: 'These were some of the advantages which entitled Athens to be called the school of Greece.'[32] However, Thirlwall spent as much time discussing the darker side of Athenian imperialism, 'which the orator did not wish to exhibit, but which the historian displays in the events of his history'. The idea that the funeral oration is important above all as a paeon to a democratic culture, which dominates modern receptions, especially non-academic ones, is nowhere to be seen. Indeed, the way in which the critical phrase from Thucydides 2.37.1 was translated had long worked to play down the idea of democracy as the self-rule of the majority. Thomas Hobbes' translation of 1629 had represented Pericles as praising Athens' constitution as government for the benefit of the multitude, while William Smith's version of 1753 had claimed that it was government on behalf of society as a whole, rather than government *of* the majority.[33]

In the early nineteenth century, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, a new interest in Pericles' words developed among some more radical thinkers. It is impossible for the moment to determine whether Shelley's line in 'The Masque of Anarchy', namely 'we are many, they are few', derives from Thucydides.[34] (For this, what is needed is a proper search of Shelley's private papers, as the phrase is not found in any translation extant at the time). Shelley wrote this poem in the aftermath of the 'Peterloo' massacre in 1819. But contemporaries of his knew the funeral oration well enough to deploy it in debates about the extension of the franchise or the capacity of the working classes to share in 'higher' culture. This might be taken as evidence for Shelley's likely familiarity with it in a political context, beyond his general interest in the ancient Greeks.[35]

In 1822, the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society was founded with the ambition of spreading culture and knowledge in the local area – despite the sneers of the metropolitan elite and the scholars of Oxbridge. Lord Byron had sarcastically talked of '*classic* Sheffield'. James Montgomery, a local poet and amateur scholar, sought to answer his condescension. In a speech, he disparaged Pericles as 'another tyrant and munificent patron of the fine arts', but argued forcefully, riffing on the picture of Athens offered by the *Funeral Oration*, that 'the people of

[32] Thirlwall 1836: 132. [33] Lianeri 2002: 7–8.

[34] As became clear in recent debates about whether Shelley or Thucydides is the origin of the recent slogan of Britain's Labour Party, 'for the many, not the few' (Morley 2017).

[35] Generally on Shelley and Classics see Harding 2012.

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Sheffield, therefore, in respect to elementary literature, moral feeling, and intellectual discernment, are as classic as were the people of Athens, when Athens was the city of Minerva'.[36] This drew an angry response from a certain Reverend Francis Hodgson of Bakewell, who argued for the superiority of the Athenians over any of today's vulgar and unlettered masses on the grounds that *they* could understand the words of Pericles and Thucydides:

> Only for a moment imagine a multitude capable of understanding and appreciating a speech of Pericles, as recorded by Thucydides, – the general fidelity of whose report there can be no reason to doubt – I speak from experience, when I say that few British youths, without labour as well as genius, can thoroughly estimate the whole ingenuity and adroitness of the reasoning, and the adaptation of the orator's turn of argument to the immediate occasion; setting aside, of course, the difficulties of the language, and supposing them overcome.[37]

There seems little doubt that Hodgson was thinking above all of the funeral oration as being a speech for a specific occasion. Montgomery's reply perhaps echoed the disparaging remarks of Cleon in the Mytilene debate about the pleasure the Athenians took in listening to oratory:

> Now, I have witnessed, formerly in political and latterly in religious assemblies, nearly similar effects of popular eloquence on the minds of all gradations of our artisans as you refer to in the case of the Athenians under Pericles. It is not so uncommon a thing as mere scholars imagine, for men in middling and humble life to enjoy and to understand intellectual displays far above their own power of imitating, particularly when they come in the captivating form of eloquence, with all its adventitious accompaniments at once speaking to the eye, and the ear, and the mind. . . The meaning of the finest argument may be perfectly comprehended by ordinary minds accustomed to thinking.

By the 1820s, therefore, Pericles' funeral oration was taken at face value as expressing and exemplifying Athenian culture. Its rhetorical qualities were noted, not primarily in their own right, but as evidence of the high level of Athenian public discourse. The idea that the citizen population would have listened to, and applauded, such a speech is the clearest evidence needed of the intelligence and culture of the Athenian populace. The crucial question is whether such discernment was a specifically classical attribute, now able to be appreciated only by those few who

[36] Holland and Everett 1855: 341–2, 344, 347. [37] Holland and Everett 1855: 351.

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enjoyed the privilege of extensive classical learning. On the contrary, Montgomery argued, the funeral oration should be understood as reflecting a specifically *popular* culture, which was therefore not only within the reach of the ordinary worker but arguably more his rightful inheritance than that of the upper classes.

Such ideas underpinned George Grote's revival, in his *History of Greece*, of Pericles' claim that the cultural and intellectual achievements of Athens were founded on the democratic nature of its constitution.[38] To make this case, Grote relied heavily on the words of Pericles himself, quoting the whole of the first part of the funeral oration in full over three-and-a-half pages rather than simply offering brief paraphrases as his predecessors had done.[39] On reaching the end of the section characterising and praising Athenian political culture, he continued:

> The extract which I have already made is so long that no further addition would be admissible; yet it was impossible to pass over lightly the picture of the Athenian commonwealth in its glory, as delivered by the ablest citizen of the age. The effect of the democratical constitution, with its diffused and equal citizenship, in calling forth not merely strong attachment, but painful self-sacrifice, on the part of all Athenians, is nowhere more forcibly insisted upon than in the words above cited of Perikles.[40]

Grote represented Athenian democracy, culture and patriotism as inextricably connected. A few pages later, he insisted on the historical reality of this conjunction, of Athens' 'many-sided social development' and the full development of human capacities, which 'would be sufficiently remarkable, even if we supposed it only existing in the imagination of a philosopher'.[41] True, it was limited to a specific phase of Athenian history. According to Grote, Athens, before the Persian Wars, lacked this level of cultural development when the 'active energy and democratical stimulus' of its citizens was still developing, while fourth-century Athens lost some of its personal enterprise and individual spirit. However, Pericles' account amply demonstrates how the genius of a people can be unleashed by a democratic system of government. The underlying implications for Britain, if it embraced the opportunity of political reform, were intended by Grote to be unmistakable.[42]

It must be emphasised that Grote's political model was not Athenian direct democracy but the classical liberal project of extending the franchise for parliamentary representation.[43] He cherrypicked the words of

[38] Demetriou 1999: 91–130. [39] He quoted up to the end of Thuc. 2.41. [40] Grote 1851: 70.
[41] Grote 1851: 74. [42] Kierstead 2014. [43] See generally Urbinati 2002.

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Pericles, carefully weighted his translations in order to obscure the differences between ancient and modern democracies, and presented a sanitised version of the Athenian constitution that was more acceptable to his compatriots. Grote reassured them: 'It is called a democracy, since its permanent aim tends towards the Many and not towards the Few.' In other words, this is not a system based on popular sovereignty, but one in which there is a government, separate from the body of the citizens, which rules on their behalf and in their interests, while they have only a passive role in listening to deliberations.[44] Grote had laid the groundwork for such an account in his description of Pericles as the 'prime minister' of Athens. He further encouraged modern comparisons by talking of Athenian politics in terms of the parties of conservatives and reformers.[45] In his discussion of the key themes of the funeral oration, he sought to correct the idea, which had been advanced by, for example, Benjamin Constant,[46] that ancient and modern ideas of liberty and the role of the individual are different and incompatible:

> This portion of the speech of Perikles deserves peculiar attention, because it serves to correct an assertion, often far too indiscriminately made, respecting antiquity as contrasted with modern societies – an assertion that the ancient societies sacrificed the individual to the state, and that only in modern times has individual agency been left free to the proper extent.[47]

As his friend, John Stuart Mill, emphasised in the second of his review essays on Grote's work – again quoting large portions of the funeral oration – this version of Athens was the very model of a liberal democracy, in which the crucial political question was not sovereignty but rather individual freedom.[48] Mill argued that:

> This picture, drawn by Pericles and transmitted by Thucydides, of ease of living, and freedom from social intolerance, combined with the pleasures of cultivated taste, and a lively interest and energetic participation in public affairs, is one of the most interesting passages in Greek history. . . This remarkable testimony, as Mr. Grote has not failed to point out, wholly conflicts, so far as Athens is concerned, with what we are so often told about the entire sacrifice, in the ancient republics, of the liberty of the individual to an imaginary good of the state.[49]

[44] Grote 1851: 67. [45] Lianeri 2002: 15–16. [46] Constant 1988 [1816]. [47] Grote 1851: 71.
[48] Nippel 2015: 247–77. [49] Mill 1978: 317.

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Contemporary historians in France, such as François-René de Chateaubriand and Victor Duruy, also used the funeral oration as a central text in what Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Nicole Loraux called 'the formation of bourgeois Athens'. They focussed on what Pericles had to say about respect for property and private life and about the industriousness of the Athenians, playing down any reference to popular sovereignty or democracy.[50] Grote and Mill devoted more attention to political structures and were happy to emphasise 'democracy' as the root of Athens' success as a means of arguing for liberal political reform. Importantly, however, their conception was no less anachronistic and bourgeois.

Grote used the funeral oration to support a historical account of Athens that, as, at least, some conservative commentators recognised, served to rehabilitate and to idealise the idea of democracy. Mill drew out the implications for British politics more explicitly, namely that democratic Athens not only could but should be taken as a model in the terms, at least, in which Grote presented Pericles' account. Within fifty years, both ideas were commonplace, as seen in the number of general accounts of Greek history that built their whole account of Athenian culture around paraphrases of the speech. William Smith's 1854 outline of Greek history for students had devoted just three sentences to the oration, although emphasising its usefulness as a sketch of Athenian manners and the Athenian constitution. In contrast, in 1900, J. B. Bury spent four pages quoting and paraphrasing it, having previously established its importance as a portrait of Athenian institutions by dismissing Pericles as an uncreative individual who simply reflected the genius of Athens.[51] Alfred Zimmern's *The Greek Commonwealth* of 1911 offers an interesting example, not least because he constructed his account of early Greece, not only Athens, around this *epitaphios logos*. Pericles' funeral oration was interpreted as evidence for the nature of Greek family life and affections, their treatment of the dead, egalitarianism and a whole value system based on shame.[52] It was only when Zimmern started to consider political institutions that the discussion focussed exclusively on Athens.

Even more striking was that Zimmern's Athens was explicitly and unashamedly democratic in the ancient sense: 'there is no "Government"

[50] Vidal-Naquet and Loraux 1995.

[51] Smith 1854: 288; Bury 1900: 404–7, 383. It is interesting to note that contemporary German works tended to dismiss the idea that the oration was a portrait of a real, historical Athens, seeing it instead as Pericles' fantasy or ideal for what his people might become (e.g. Curtius 1870: 63–4; Holm 1895: 294).

[52] Zimmern 1914: 66–7, 87, 118.

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in Athens, for the people is "the Government"'.[53] His account was moderate and liberal insofar as it explicitly set itself against the assumptions of 'hot-headed Radicals' by noting how slowly and tentatively the Athenians came to embrace self-government: 'if they could have lived happy and undisturbed under any other form of government, they would as willingly have turned their energies into other channels as the "silent middle-class voter today"'.[54] Zimmern presented democracy as a pragmatic solution developed by Cleisthenes to solve the problems of uniting and governing a large and diverse territory, and of engaging all citizens in that task. He asserted that 'government does not consist of rights, irrespective of their exercise, but of something a great deal more practical'. The latter idea clearly derived from Pericles' criticism of those who failed to participate in public affairs, as Zimmern explained:

> It was not the Ecclesia . . . which made Athens a democracy; nor is it Adult Suffrage or the Referendum which will make England one. Democracy is meaningless unless it involves the serious and steady co-operation of large numbers of citizens in the actual work of government. . . The Greek City State differs from our modern democracies in enlisting not all but merely a far larger proportion of its representatives in active public work. Whereas with us, however democratic our constitution, the few do the work for the many, in Greece the many did it themselves. As the Funeral Speech says: 'We call our constitution a democracy because its working is in the hands not of the few but of the many'.[55]

'Democracy' was now sufficiently taken for granted as a cardinal value of British political discourse that Zimmern could deploy Athens not to quieten concerns about the risks of extending the franchise, as Grote and Mill had done, but to criticise current political structures for being insufficiently democratic. The funeral oration had now become the epitome of democracy and its ideals, emphasising the gulf between then and now. But at the same time it also had become the means for transcending that gulf, uniting all modern would-be democracies with their ancient inspiration and model, that is, exactly as the draft EU constitution sought to do. The centrepiece of Zimmern's book was a section entitled 'The Ideal of Citizenship', with a single chapter, 'Happiness, or the Rule of Love', that consists largely of his translation of the complete speech.[56] Athenian democracy may have been radically different from any modern form, bound up with a specific historical

[53] Zimmern 1914: 126. [54] Zimmern 1914: 135–7. [55] Zimmern 1914: 158.
[56] Zimmern 1914: 199–201.

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context, but Pericles' encomium – which is also, for Zimmern, Thucydides' eulogy – speaks a universal language. Zimmern concluded:

> All great art is like a ghost seeking to express more than it can utter and beckoning to regions beyond. This is as true in history, which deals with nations, as in poetry or any more personal art. That is why the Funeral Speech, written of a small provincial city in the untried youth of the world, will always find an echo whenever men and nations are living true to themselves, whether in the trenches of Mukden or in the cemetery of Gettysburg. Pericles and Abraham Lincoln were not very much alike. But common needs beget a common language; and great statesmen, like great poets, speak to one another from peak to peak. Let us stand in the valley and listen.[57]

19.5 A Lesson in Patriotism

Through much of this history of modern reception, the specific context and function of the funeral oration – the public commemoration of the Athenian war dead – was seen as incidental to its rhetorical qualities or political message. The chief exception was the Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni, who used Pericles' speech as a model for a eulogy of the Florentine general, Nanni degli Strozzi, in 1428.[58] Bruni's introduction echoed Thucydides' preamble in explaining the institution of the public funeral for 'citizens who die fighting for the fatherland', attributing its invention to Solon and neatly sliding over the fact that the Athenian *epitaphios logos* was for all the dead, not just a single individual.[59] Bruni followed Pericles' model in devoting much of the speech to praise of Florence rather than the dead, at times closely paraphrasing or virtually quoting the Greek original:

> We use that form of constitution which, of all forms, is most directed to liberty and equality of citizens and which, because in all things it is fairest, it is called 'popular'. For we do not fear anyone as if they were a single lord, we do not enslave ourselves to the power of a few. There is equal liberty for all, submitting only to the laws, freed of fear of men. Truly, everyone has an equal hope of gaining honour, as long as they prove themselves industrious, mentally able and having a certain way of living (*vivendi ratio*) which is good and serious. For our city-state requires in its citizens virtue and goodness. Whoever here has this is considered of good enough

[57] Zimmern 1914: 201. [58] Pade 2015: 34. [59] See pp. 14–15.

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> stock to govern the state. Truly the city-state hates so passionately the arrogance and scorn that the more powerful can show that it has enshrined more and sharper laws against that tribe of men than on any other subject . . .[60]

Bruni's oration engages both with Pericles' words and with later debates, especially the arguments of Sallust, about other forms of government. His conclusion is that 'that leaves the popular as the only legitimate form of governing a state, in which there is true liberty, in which the fairness of the law is equal for all citizens, in which the studies of the virtues can thrive without suspicion'.[61] The implication is clear: Florence, like Athens, is a model for other cities, above all because of its constitution.

For the most part, however, the redeployment of the funeral oration as a means of engendering patriotism and self-sacrifice had to wait for the emergence or, more accurately, re-emergence of a kind of war that was based once more on the citizen-soldier fighting for his country as part of his civic duty. This then called for a new rhetorical mode from political leaders and governments so that they could give meaning to mass slaughter. The American Civil War marked a crucial stage in this development. In November 1863, at the inauguration of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Edward Everett, Professor of Greek at Harvard University, offered a two-hour speech in commemoration of the war dead. He opened with a summary of Athenian public funeral customs, and concluded with a direct quotation from the funeral oration: '"The whole earth," said Pericles, as he stood over the remains of his fellow citizens, who had fallen in the first year of the Peloponnesian War, "the whole earth is the sepulchre of illustrious men."'[62] Everett deviated deliberately from the source text in his account of the active role of American women in supporting the war effort, but his insistence on the virtues of duty, service and sacrifice were thoroughly and explicitly Periclean.[63]

There is little evidence that the speech following Everett's, from Abraham Lincoln, was in any way influenced by Thucydides. It is far more interesting to observe that there is such a strong wish to find a connection.[64] The extreme brevity and directness of Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* was a dramatic change from neo-classical models of oratory. It set the tone for the future, not spelling the end of the funeral oration's influence, but changing the mode of its deployment.

60 Bruni 1996: 284–5. 61 Hankins 2003: 173–4. 62 Quoted by Roberts 2012: 145.
63 Roberts 2012: 145–6 on Everett's critique of Pericles' references to Attic women.
64 Roberts 2012; Collins 2017: 44.

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The First World War brought an upsurge in the use of Pericles' speech as a means of arousing patriotism and justifying sacrifice. In the early months of the war, a social-democratic newspaper in Germany's Saxony printed the complete oration for its working-class readers as an expression of the ideals, it claimed, for which the country was fighting.[65] It was also one of the main texts in a volume of the *Feldpostbücherei* ('Active-Service Library'), which privately produced cheap pamphlets that were marketed to German soldiers. This volume, which was entitled *Mannhaftigkeit und Bürgersinn* ('*Manfulness and Civic Spirit*'), offered a collection of 'Voices of the Ancients', selected and introduced by the classicist, Otto Crusius. The section on 'The Age of Pericles' presented Athens as the instrument of true culture, in which 'the best men were conscious of participating in a new and higher ideal for humanity and the state'. This was exemplified by the funeral oration, which was reproduced in full. Crusius' translation, which he claimed avoided 'cheap modernisation' and sought to capture the 'to us alien character of the style', faced some difficulty when it came to some of Pericles' terminology: 'democracy', a negative term in Wilhelmine Germany, had to be translated as *Volksherrschaft* ('rule of the people') in a more abstract and acceptable sense. Nevertheless, Crusius presented the most important sentiment as clearly as possible: 'Set happiness in freedom and freedom in a courageous disposition, and do not look fearfully at the dangers of war.'[66]

A similar British pamphlet, *The Ideal of Citizenship*, produced by the Medici Press and likewise priced at about the daily wage of an ordinary soldier, reprinted the version of Pericles' *Funeral Oration* from Zimmern's *Greek Commonwealth*. It included an introductory note by an unnamed author that largely reproduced sections of Zimmern's account of Athens, but with additional remarks in order to emphasise its contemporary relevance: 'Read in isolation, the words of the speech are self-sufficient, requiring little or no context to render them comprehensible. If this is true in general, it has become the more true to-day – in general, and for us English in particular.'[67] Pericles' words, the writer claimed, encapsulated the genuine spirit of Athens and its empire. Perhaps modern readers might be sceptical of the truth of these claims about Athenian culture and virtues, he or she mused, but they would be wrong:

> If we, to-day, smile at such high estimate of Athenian work, shall not the generations to come be tempted to a like fine laughter at our assurance that 'England entered the war, not on calculations of self-interest but in defence of the inviolable principles of Freedom and the sanctity of Treaties'.

[65] Morley 2018a: 423. [66] Morley 2018a: 424–5. [67] *Memorabilia* 1915.

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Of course not; as the writer explains, 'the English have no doubt about their own motives and virtues, and so should have no doubt about the Athenians'. The presentation moves backwards and forwards between Athenian past and British present, allowing each to reinforce the other, without admitting any possibility that the analogy might not be perfect.

Such pamphlets were not official propaganda but reflected the assumptions of the literary and publishing worlds of both countries about what would appeal to, and educate, the ordinary soldier as well as what would support the war effort. The funeral oration's potential for the latter was recognised by the British government. On 22 May 1915, the *Llanelly Star* (and doubtless many other British newspapers) included the following at the bottom of its 'News in a Nutshell' column:

> The following quotation from Pericles on the Athenians is published in London as a recruiting appeal: 'We have more at stake than men who have no such inheritance. If we sing the glories of our country, it was the warriors and their like who have set hand to array her... For you now it remains to rival what they have done and, knowing the secret of happiness to be freedom, and the secret of freedom a brave heart, not idly to stand aside from the enemy's onset'.

This campaign is famous for the advertisements on buses and underground railway trains in London, using the same quotation, which was a slightly revised version of Zimmern's translation.[68] The motives behind the posters were clear. By mid-1915, British authorities were concerned about a falling off in volunteers. An appeal to the citizen's duty to defend everything that Britain stood for was either a final attempt at encouraging the hesitant or the first step in the introduction of conscription.

It was now judged sufficient to extract just a few sentences from the oration. Possibly, it was felt that the oration was so widely known that no more was required. More likely was that it was a pragmatic decision about costs and available space. But, above all, it reflected an assumption that these few sentences were sufficient: the sentiments, the language and perhaps the authority of Pericles and Athens would speak directly to people's civic spirit, without the need for elaborate argument or extensive context. Indeed, too much historical specificity or detail might undermine the oration's utility in the present.

[68] Turner 1981: 167; Azoulay 2014: 214–15.

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19.6 Commemorating the Glorious Dead

This tendency was reinforced by the most prominent public role of Thucydides in the post-war period,[69] namely the use of quotations from Pericles' funeral speech on war memorials, which echoed discussions among classicists immediately postwar about Athenian honours for the war dead.[70] Apart from Greece, where Pericles' words appear both on the tomb of the unknown soldier in Syntagma square in Athens (1932), and on the Greek monument at the inter-allied memorial at Liège (1937), this was largely, if not entirely, an Anglophone phenomenon; it was especially popular in Australia and New Zealand, perhaps because of their connection to the Gallipoli campaign. Further, the majority of the memorials that quoted the funeral oration were not those erected by local communities for their own people. These emphasised the names of those killed, with no more than brief texts, such as 'The Great War' or 'For King and Country'. The few exceptions included the elaborate memorial at Southport on Merseyside (1923), which had 'To famous men all earth is sepulchre', and the St Saviour's memorial in Southwark (1922), which sported 'May their memory live for ever in the minds of men'. But both of these memorials were much more elaborate than the typical local ones.

The funeral oration is more commonly associated with commemoration by regiments, such as the memorial to the 21st Royal Scots Fusiliers at the Scottish national war memorial in Edinburgh castle (1927), by institutions, such as the soldiers' tower at the University of Toronto (1924), and by nations, such as the Auckland war-memorial museum (1929). The committee planning the Australian war memorial in Canberra, which was completed in 1941, deliberated for many years about including such a quotation from Pericles' speech, but eventually decided against it.[71] Nevertheless, extracts from it were included in the programme for the memorial's inauguration on ANZAC Day in 1929 and featured for a long time on its letterhead. In such contexts, the justification of the soldiers' sacrifice is, at least, as important as the commemoration of their deaths, for which the funeral oration was ideally suited.

All these memorials quoted from the same chapter of the oration: Thucydides 2.43. But this was far from an organised programme, since different monuments cite different lines of the text, using different translations. Both Auckland and Edinburgh, for example, quote 2.43.3, but the

[69] See now Low, Oliver and Rhodes 2012. [70] E.g. Smith 1919. [71] Morley 2018a: 427–8.

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former has 'They are commemorated not only by columns and inscriptions in their own country. But in foreign lands also by memorials graven not on stone, but on the hearts of men', while the latter offers 'their story is not graven only on stone over their native clay, but lives on far away, without visible symbol, woven into the stuff of other men's lives'. Toronto took the distinctive rendition of 2.43.4 by A. S. Way: 'Take these men for your ensamples. Like them, remember that prosperity can only be for the free, and that freedom is the sure possession of those alone that have courage to defend it. Scorn to be haunted by thoughts of the horrors of war.'[72] The quotations were rarely attributed to either Thucydides or Pericles. Perhaps they were assumed to be sufficiently familiar, but more likely it was the sentiment, removed from any distracting historical context, that mattered.

The funeral oration was thus a pervasive influence on public commemorations of the Great War throughout the 1920s. Thereafter, it was extended to other wars. The University of Toronto adopted Thucydides 2.43.3 when it added a section for the Second World War to its memorial, while the Royal Air Force Bomber Command Memorial in London, unveiled in 2012, includes: 'Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.' In the United States, after Armistice Day on 11 November was changed to Veterans' Day in order to commemorate those who had served in any of the nation's wars, selected quotations from Pericles' funeral oration have been included in information packs for military officers and for veterans' organisations as help for them in their organising of events. 'Happiness depends on freedom, and freedom on courage'; this quotation appears in many social media contexts in which veterans and their families use it as a justification for their service to the rest of society. With this usage, of course, the underlying message has shifted from the duty of all citizens to defend the state to the duty of all citizens to honour those who fight on their behalf. Rather more disturbing is that this quotation is occasionally put forward by adherents of the National Rifle Association in order to justify their views on second-amendment rights.[73] The final phrase of Thucydides 2.43.4–5, 'therefore do not weigh too heavily the dangers of war', is most often omitted or misquoted as, for example, 'do not take too lightly the dangers of war', which gives exactly the opposite meaning to the original.

[72] Sawyer 2013.

[73] Searches on Twitter for 'Thucydides' and 'Pericles', especially around Memorial Day (25 May) and Veterans Day (11 November).

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19.7 Conclusion

The most common context in which the funeral oration has been quoted on social media in recent years has nothing to do with either democracy or war. Accompanied by pictures of sunsets, beaches or birds, 'Happiness depends on freedom and freedom on courage' has become a motivational quotation, shared by life coaches, advertising bots and optimistic individuals. Tempting as it is to take this as a symptom of contemporary cultural decadence, the process of detaching the speech from its original context and emptying it of political meaning to make it available for new purposes – whether rhetorical education, the legitimation of liberal democracy or wartime propaganda – has been going on ever since the text was rediscovered by western Europe. While this persistent engagement owes much to the skill of translators in making Thucydides' language quotable and memorable, it must also reflect the power of the original to inspire them to make it accessible to all.

Pericles' funeral oration is one of the most commonly cited sections of Thucydides' work today. It appears in political contexts, in the United States and Europe, as part of the imaginary of modern liberal democracy, but it also features in the commemoration of the war dead and celebration of veterans of military service, and in many different forms on social media. Its reputation originally drew on the cultural achievements of Athens, which it is taken to epitomise, and the reputation of Thucydides as an authority on politics and war. In recent years, however, it has been the words themselves, or just a few of them, that have proved most useful. The history of the funeral oration's reception over the last century has been one of decontextualisation, separating it from its historical and literary context in order to obscure the differences between ancient and modern democracies, and of fragmentation, rendering its complex language, construction and argument into more convenient and memorable soundbites.

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