

Rosie Harman

Metahistory and the visual in Herodotus and Thucydides

An interest in the visual seems to be part of historiographic discourse in the Classical period (and beyond). Scenes of spectatorship and response, as well as a concern with the visibility of actions and the impact of their visibility on their interpretation, recur across a number of historical texts. Such scenes offer the possibility of reflection on the writing and reading of history.¹ As historical characters are depicted observing events, being affected by and interpreting what they see, we are shown a model for the task of the historian in action. We are also shown a model for the task of the reader: just like characters within the narrative, the reader too must observe, judge and respond to the events which the text presents. Such concerns play an important role in the work of both Herodotus and Thucydides, who use the visual in different (although overlapping) ways. In this chapter, I would like to indicate how visual scenes allow these texts to explore problems and concerns specific to each. However, there are also similarities. In both texts, the act of viewing is imagined as politically engaged, and as politically problematic.

Previous writing on the use of the visual in Herodotus and Thucydides has stressed the metatextual or metahistorical function of these texts' depictions of responses to sights, but has tended to frame this as a device for bolstering the authority of the narratorial voice of the historian. We are shown spectators being deceived or manipulated by cleverly crafted displays, being overcome with emotion at spectacles, or otherwise being influenced in their response: we could read such acts of viewing as emblems of failure, as counter-models for the proper role of the historian and reader of history, who should reign in his or her emotions, not be misled, but stand back from events and come to a "clear view" of history. On this model, the historical narrator offers a way out of the problems that spectators within the text face, guiding the reader towards a correct reading. I would like to build on such interpretations, but in order to complicate such a reading. I will suggest that the reader, positioned as a viewer of the text's narrative, is implicated in the problems faced by viewers within the narrative. The problem of how to look at the sights of the text reveals and allows engagement with the politics of the reading process. In the context of this short chapter, the interpre-

¹ See Davidson 1991 on Polybius, Elsner 1992 and 1994 on Pausanias, Feldherr 1998 on Livy. Cf. Maier (this volume) on Procopius and Miltiades 2016.

tation offered here will aim to be indicative rather than exhaustive, but I hope will contribute towards the wider study of readerly process in these authors. It will also hopefully offer a contribution towards the study of the purpose and effects of experientiality in historiographic prose.

Herodotus: Political and cultural difference, and *hybris*

Herodotus' *Histories* contain repeated scenes of spectacle, display and spectatorship within a variety of cultural and political settings. Herodotus also presents the historian, and the reader, as viewing the events, peoples and places described. He calls his text a display (*apodexis*, Hdt. 1.1),² describes objects and places mentioned in his narrative as worth seeing (*axiotheētos*),³ refers to the wondrous sights (*thōmata*) to be found in foreign lands,⁴ and verifies the authority of his narrative through the claim of having seen what he describes (autopsy).⁵ Herodotus uses claims about the visibility of what he describes (via use of the term *phaneros*; cf. also the rejection of what cannot be seen, *to aphanes*) to substantiate his arguments. His use of visual language recalls the terminology of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and early medical writers, indicating that for Herodotus the visual is associated with the acquisition of knowledge.⁶

However, many of the scenes of display and spectatorship presented in the text involve problems of interpretation. A well-known example is Xerxes' viewing of the battle of Salamis. He observes the behaviour of his officers and has a scribe take notes:

ὄκως γάρ τινα ἴδοι Ξέρξης τῶν ἐωυτοῦ ἔργων τι ἀποδεικνύμενον ἐν τῇ ναυμαχίῃ, κατήμενος ὑπὸ τῷ ὄρει τῷ ἀντίον Σαλαμίνοσ τὸ καλέεται Αἰγάλεωσ, ἀνεπυθάνετο τὸν ποιήσαντα, καὶ οἱ γραμματισταὶ ἀνέγραφον πατρόθεν τὸν τριήραρχον καὶ τὴν πόλιν (Hdt. 8.90).

For whenever Xerxes, from his seat under the hill over against Salamis called Aegaleos, saw any feat achieved by his own men in the battle, he inquired who was the doer of it, and his scribes wrote down the names of the ship's captain and his father and his city. (trans. A. D. Godley)

² Hartog 1988, 276

³ Hdt. 1.14, 1.184, 2.111, 2.163, 2.176 (two uses), 2.182, 3.123, 4.85, 4.162. Cf. ἄξιος θέης: 1.25, 9.25, 9.70, 9.109.

⁴ Hartog 1988, 230–237, Elsner 1994, 230–35, Munson 2001, 232–65.

⁵ See Hartog 1988, 260–309 on Herodotean autopsy.

⁶ See Thomas 2000, 190–212, 221–28, 249–69.

However, when Artemisia rams a Calyndian ship from her own side in order to escape from the pursuit of an Athenian vessel by tricking the Athenians on that vessel into believing that she is in fact on their side, Xerxes, watching these events (λέγεται γὰρ βασιλέα θεγύμενον μαθεῖν τὴν νέα ἐμβαλοῦσαν, Hdt. 8.88), assumes that she has successfully rammed an enemy ship, and praises her success (Hdt. 8.87–8). Noting the role of Xerxes as observer and recorder of events, but one who misreads what he sees, Jonas Grethlein reads this scene as representing a failed model of the historian at work.⁷ Discussing Herodotus' use of the visual as metahistorical discourse, he argues that the *Histories* present this compromised attempt at viewing as a foil for the trustworthy view offered to the reader by the *Histories*: “Xerxes’ failure to get the facts straight throws into relief the accuracy of Herodotus’ account”.⁸

While I agree that the visual in Herodotus operates as metahistorical or metatextual discourse, I would diverge from Grethlein’s reading by questioning how safe the reader remains from falling into the traps faced by spectators in the text. Acts of viewing in the *Histories* are often highly politically problematic, not just for the text’s internal viewers but for the reader too. Scenes of viewing become moments where the reader’s cultural and political relationship to the groups described in the text are constructed, explored and tested. Indeed, as I will argue, we could understand the pay-off of a highly visual narrative style in Greek historiography to be the implication of the reader in the problems of the historical narrative.

Herodotus’ story of Gyges and the wife of Candaules is a good illustration. In a near-quotation from Heraclitus (22 B 101a D.-K.), Candaules insists that Gyges look at his wife naked on the grounds that telling him of her beauty is insufficient, since “the ears are more untrustworthy than the eyes” (ὥτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἑόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν, Hdt. 1.8). This saying marks the importance of the visual in the acquisition of knowledge. However, crucially, this episode presents viewing not only as a means of accessing information about the world, but as a problematic and politically charged act. Gyges begs the king not to make him look, warning that each man should “look to his own” (πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποισι ἐξεύρηται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν τοῖσι ἔν τῷδε ἐστὶ, σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἑωυτοῦ, Hdt. 1.8): Gyges’ struggle to avoid seeing what he should not and the violent consequences of his viewing – as one

7 Grethlein 2009. Christ 1994 notes the role of Herodotean kings as observers and investigators, offering possible models for the historian. See also Katz Anhalt 2008 for the suggestion that compromised models of viewing establish in contrast the trustworthy nature of the Herodotean narrative voice.

8 Grethlein 2009, 208.

dynasty gives way to another, and a chain of retribution begins which resonates throughout the text – mark the visual act as a matter of concern. It also raises a question for the text’s audience. The scene is highly voyeuristic, as Candaules describes how the sight of the woman stripping off her clothes can be enjoyed in secret from behind a door (κεῖται δὲ ἀγχοῦ τῆς ἐσόδου θρόνος· ἐπὶ τοῦτον τῶν ἱματίων κατὰ ἕν ἕκαστον ἐκδύνουσα θήσει, καὶ κατ’ ἡσυχίην πολλὴν παρέξει τοι θεήσασθαι, Hdt. 1.9). Candaules’ display of his wife gives the Greek reader a privileged “view” onto an alluringly exotic foreign world – a view which the text, as a “display” (*apodexis*, Hdt. 1.1) of the affairs of Greeks and non-Greeks, consistently promotes.⁹

Interestingly, despite Candaules’ detailed guidance on how best to observe the undressing of the queen, the text never tells us what the queen looks like naked. The vivid detail of Candaules’ words allows us to imagine ourselves, like Gyges, stepping into the bedroom and peering out from behind the door, but the sight that Gyges sees from his hiding place is not described.¹⁰ The text playfully withholds the punchline; we are teased with the possibility of seeing what we should not see, but then finally we are not quite allowed to look. The illicit nature of the viewing process, and our involvement in it, is emphasized. As we take pleasure in the erotic narrative, enjoying our vicarious near-miss “look” at the queen – just as we are told that to look is inadvisable, and may have dangerous unforeseen consequences – we cannot stand aloof from the sense of transgression and risk attached to this viewing. Standing programmatically at the opening of the text, the scene both offers the non-Greek world for the reader’s gaze and hints that this experience may not always be a comfortable, self-affirming one.

The positioning of the reader against the sights of the text is similarly raised in the scenes of viewing in the *Histories* which involve ethnographic response, as viewers gaze at foreign sights.¹¹ One such narrative is the story of the Athenian wise man Solon’s viewing of the palace of Croesus of Lydia. Solon gazes at the marvellous riches of Croesus,¹² but when asked who he thinks is

⁹ See Walker 1993, 373 on the story of Gyges’ viewing of Candaules’ wife as “a story that reflects Herodotus’ own project as an intruding ethnographer”.

¹⁰ Katz Anhalt 2008, 274 notes that a lot more attention is paid to Candaules’ description of what can be seen than to Gyges’ experience of the sight itself.

¹¹ Hartog 1988. See e.g. the Fish-Eaters’ viewing of Ethiopia (Hdt. 3.23–4), the Spartans viewing the dead Persians on the battlefield of Marathon (Hdt. 6.120), and examples discussed below.

¹² Hdt. 1.30: ...κελεύσαντος Κροΐσου τὸν Σόλωνα θεράποντες περιήγον κατὰ τοὺς θησαυροὺς, καὶ ἐπεδείκνυσαν πάντα ἔδοντα μεγάλα τε καὶ ὄλβια. θεησάμενον δὲ μιν τὰ πάντα καὶ σκεψάμενον, ὡς οἱ κατὰ καιρὸν ἦν, εἶρετο ὁ Κροῖσος τάδε.

the most blessed man in the world, much to Croesus' dismay he recounts stories of poor Greek men who have lived simple, pious lives and received honour in death (Hdt. 1.29–33). Solon's sight of and response to the riches of Croesus' palace potentially mediates the reader's response to alien luxury by providing an authoritative "Greek view", which contrasts with and allows rejection of Croesus' way of seeing.¹³ The terminology in this scene, which repeatedly refers to Solon as undertaking *theōria* (κατὰ θεωρίας πρόφασιν ἐκπλώσας, Hdt. 1.29; τῆς θεωρίας ἐκδημήσας ὁ Σόλων εἶνεκεν, Hdt. 1.30; φιλοσοφῶν γῆν πολλὴν θεωρίας εἶνεκεν ἐπελήλυθας, Hdt. 1.30), might suggest that Solon is somehow representing Athens or Greece. The term allows us to picture Solon as if he were acting in the capacity of a sacred ambassador sent out to view foreign festivals on behalf of his city (a frequent connotation of *theōria*), thereby giving cultural authority to his position as a viewer.¹⁴ One reading has argued that in this scene, as in the scenes of Xerxes' spectatorship, Herodotus establishes a particularly barbarian, and particularly autocratic, mode of viewing for Croesus, which contrasts with a Greek way of seeing.¹⁵

In contrast, I would suggest that the problem of how Greeks respond to sights is self-consciously addressed and questioned in Herodotus. For example, in the description of Peisistratus' display of Phya mocked up as the goddess Athena in his attempt to regain the tyranny of Athens, Herodotus claims not only that Greeks are less easily duped than non-Greeks, but that Athenians are less easily duped than other Greeks (Hdt. 1.60). Yet Herodotus also informs us that, in spite of this, the Athenians were duped by Peisistratus. A division between Greek and non-Greek ways of seeing is no sooner asserted than undercut. Similarly, although Solon's way of seeing might appear to be valorised, this too is not straightforward. The Solon-Croesus narrative gets its humor and critical edge from the reversal of Solon refusing to see things in the way that Croesus anticipates and desires. Yet, in this contest of values, the surprising, radical nature of Solon's absolute rejection of the blessings of Croesus' life might also alienate the Greek reader used to more traditional, socially hierarchical, ways of thinking about the world. Not only may Solon's assertion of the early death of Cleobis and Biton as an ideal model for human life be potentially

¹³ See Redfield 1985, 102.

¹⁴ See Rutherford 1995 on the religious connotations of *theōria*. See Ker 2000, 308–11 for a discussion of Solon's viewing in terms of the political role of the *theōros* as city representative. As Nightingale 2004, 40–71 notes, *theōria* can suggest viewing at foreign sanctuaries by private pilgrims or by sacred ambassadors, as well as having a more general application to the viewing of sights abroad; it seems to imply the experience of the foreign.

¹⁵ Konstan 1987, 68.

hard to swallow, but it may be hard for the reader *not* to be impressed by the account of Croesus' riches (especially given the evocative detail which the text lavishes on the description of the Lydian kings' Delphic dedications, both those of Croesus and those of his ancestors, before and after this episode: Hdt. 1.14, 25, 50–54). Although on the surface we are pointed one way, in this most polyvocal – and (to coin a term) polyvisual – of texts, the ghost of alternative ways of seeing lurks behind every encounter.

The potential ambiguity of the responses invited by the Solon-Croesus encounter is heightened by the liminal position that Lydia holds in the text. The Croesus narrative, which is (according to the narratorial statements at Hdt. 1.5) supposed to explain the origins of conflict between Greeks and barbarians, offers the possibility of questioning the fixity of those divisions.¹⁶ Croesus (like the other Lydian kings) is described as attacking and subjugating Greek cities, but also as dependent on the Delphic oracle and as welcoming to Greek intellectuals. Lydian customs are similar to Greek ones, and a number of Greek customs were originally Lydian (Hdt. 1.94) – although the comment that Lydian customs are similar to Greek customs apart from the fact that the Lydians prostitute their daughters (Λυδοὶ δὲ νόμοισι μὲν παραπλησίοισι χρέωνται καὶ Ἕλληνες, χωρὶς ἢ ὅτι τὰ θήγεια τέκνα καταπορνεύουσι, Hdt. 1.94), a custom that would be a complete travesty of normative Greek social conduct, ironically allows us to question how far this similarity goes. For the reader, knowing what to make of such a culture, and how to position oneself in relation to it, is difficult.

The reader is also implicated, I suggest, in those scenes which deal with the problematics of power. As Matthew Christ has shown, the *Histories* present a number of “enquiring kings”, who test, examine and interpret phenomena about them, acting as models of the historian against which the historical approach of the narrator can be compared.¹⁷ Christ shows how some enquiring kings pervert the processes of historical investigation through the hubristic abuse of their power.¹⁸ We might think here of the viewing of Xerxes at Salamis, mentioned above. Part of the ironic punch of the narrative of Xerxes' misreading of the sea battle comes from the self-important way in which Xerxes views: he sits with his courtiers, watching and judging the actions of his subordinates, yet nevertheless, he gets it all wrong.¹⁹ Elsewhere, the text shows a

16 See Pelling 1997, 56 on the liminal position of Lydia.

17 Christ 1994.

18 See also Munson 1991 on the hubristic king as a perverted model of the historian.

19 Xerxes' distanced viewing is reminiscent of Zeus watching the Trojan War from Mount Ida in the *Iliad*: Grethlein 2009, 209 and de Jong 1999, 268. His viewing of Salamis is imagined as an assertion of power over his men: Xerxes watches in order to make his men fight better (Hdt. 8.69), and indeed each man is spurred on by the fear that the king's eyes may be on him

concern with powerful figures trying to assert or cement their position by staging (often deceptive) spectacles which their audiences must interpret and respond to.²⁰ The Athenians, in seeing Peisistratus' display of the false Athena in the way that he desires them to, submit to political coercion (Hdt. 1.60), whereas Xerxes fails to mislead his men with a fabricated display of corpses which aims to conceal the scale of Persian losses after the battle of Thermopylae (Hdt. 8.24–5): although his men come to see the sight (ταύτην μὲν τὴν ἡμέρην πρὸς θέην ἐτράποντο, Hdt. 8.25), no one is taken in. Importantly, it is not just the historical narrator but also the reader whose role as enquirer and interpreter is prefigured in these viewers. As we are shown viewers whose overconfidence in their position, or alternatively whose malleability, leads to a mistaken interpretation with political consequences, the reader is invited to consider his or her own relationship to the sights encountered in the text.

We can ask about what we might call the reader's cultural confidence in relation to the foreign sights of the text. The *Histories* invite us to consider how far the experience of reading about the strange ways of exotic peoples will allow for an affirmative construction of Greekness, and how far it is an unsettling experience which calls into question how Greek identity might be constituted and thought about.²¹ The *Histories* present examples of views of foreign behaviour being greeted with bemusement and derision by self-confident viewers. A good example might be Xerxes before Thermopylae: when his scout, after gazing at the Spartans preparing themselves before battle (ἐθηεῖτό τε καὶ κατώρα, Hdt. 7.208; ταῦτα δὴ θεώμενος ἐθώμαζε, Hdt. 7.208) describes the Spartans exercising and combing their hair, Xerxes finds this laughable (ἀλλ' αὐτῷ γελοῖα γάρ

(Hdt. 8.86). Xerxes acts as a spectator in a number of related scenes, which similarly suggest the empowered position from which he views: on the way to Greece, he stops to see Troy (Hdt. 7.43); at Abydos he gazes at his army and makes his ships put on a race (Hdt. 7.44); he watches his troops cross the Hellespont (Hdt. 7.56); at Doriscus he reviews his army and navy (Hdt. 7.100); he goes to see the mouth of the Peneus river in Thessaly (Hdt. 7.128); and he watches the battle at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.212). Cf. Darius' gaze at the Black Sea and Bosphorus (Hdt. 4.85, 87).

20 Many scenes can be discussed in terms the political relations constructed through viewing. For example, the Candaules-Gyges narrative, which presents viewing as potentially both dangerous and desirable, is centred on the instability of such relations. Candaules forces Gyges against his will to see what he should not, but through the act of viewing Gyges' position in relation to both king and queen changes. His role as viewer of another man's wife prefigures and instantiates his displacement of that man: having warned that each man should look to his own, it turns out that he is looking to his own: see Konstan 1983, 11–13. Similarly, Solon's refusal to be impressed by Croesus' display marks Croesus' failure to assert himself and reaffirm his position.

21 See esp. Hartog 1988, Dewald 1990, and Pelling 1997.

ἐφαίνοντο ποιέειν, Hdt. 7.209). But it is soon revealed that he was mistaken in his dismissal of the Spartans. Here the laughter of Xerxes reveals his *hubris*: because of his over-confidence in his position, he has made the error of misinterpreting the sight. We can compare this to another episode: Pausanias' viewing of the paraphernalia of Mardonius (Hdt. 9.82). On capturing the luxurious tent of Mardonius, Pausanias has Mardonius' cooks cook a Persian meal, which he displays in all its decadence beside a simple Spartan meal. Asking his followers to compare the two, he laughs (γέλῳσαντα, Hdt. 9.82) at the absurdity of the wealthy Persians desiring to capture such a poor land as Greece. As with the Solon-Croesus episode, the surface level of the narrative invites the reader to laugh alongside Pausanias, valorising the Spartans' mockery of Persian decadence. But, as Munson has shown in her analysis of the madness of Cambyses,²² Herodotus reveals the foolishness of mocking foreign customs. In reading this episode we may wonder if Pausanias has entirely understood the Persians and is correct to disparage them so easily, remembering that just as he may laugh at them, so too, Xerxes laughed at the Spartans.²³ Pausanias' display is also a display of Spartan austerity, and his view is a Spartan view: for him the meagre Spartan meal with which he compares the Persian fare is normality. Yet, for non-Spartan readers, there may be an element of ethnographic distance in their viewing of Spartan customs here, which might bring their experience slightly closer to that of Xerxes before Thermopylae.²⁴ Similarly, although in the Thermopylae scene Xerxes' arrogantly dismissive attitude may alienate us from his perspective, nevertheless, through allowing us to experience Spartan behaviour through the prism of Persian incomprehension, the Spartans' oddity and potential to confound is also highlighted.

Such scenes invite us to consider how secure we can and should be in our own cultural or political position. To return to our earlier examples, the Gyges-Candaules story also revolves around acts of *hubris*: Candaules over-confidently displays what he should not, but Gyges over-confidently looks at what he should not²⁵ – as, perhaps, do we as readers. Can we look at the queen with

²² Munson 1991.

²³ See Redfield 1985, 115: “[Herodotus] tells the story in ironic criticism of Pausanias, and as a warning to the Greeks. (Laughter is always a bad sign in Herodotus.)” We can compare Cambyses' mockery of Egyptian religion with the Ethiopian King's laughter at Persian diet and customs (Hdt. 3.22.2). See Munson 1991, 60.

²⁴ See Cartledge 1993, 80–82 and Hartog 1988, 152–156 on the Spartans as a “Greek Other” in Herodotus. Cf. also Millender 1996 on the “barbarization” of Sparta in fifth century literature.

²⁵ Konstan 1983, 11–13, Christ 1994, 188. On Gyges' responsibility, see Katz Anhalt 2008, 274–5 on the oracle cited at Hdt. 1.91. Whereas in the original episode Gyges is a passive and powerless character and the bad decision is down to Candaules, in this later reference back to the story, the blame is attributed to Gyges.

the self-assured gaze of the ethnographer-voyeur, or might this look into a foreign world also, simultaneously, be disturbing? Similarly, Croesus has false confidence in his position: as we gaze at the lavish but conventional pleasures of his life, how confident can we be that we really do see things differently from him? I have suggested that the problems faced by Herodotus' spectators are problems which the reader too must face in positioning himself or herself against the sights of the text. We are offered alternative ways of responding to sights from different cultural or political perspectives, we are shown the instability of these perspectives, and we are shown viewers too secure (or too easily influenced) in their cultural or political position. All this reflects back on the experience of the reader as a "viewer" of the text, reminding us of the difficulties of reading history – the difficulties involved in looking back, as a Greek, at these Greek and non-Greek events, and interpreting their consequences for the present.

Thucydides: Power struggles, emotion, judgment

In Thucydides, as with Herodotus, the visual is the basis for knowledge. Thucydides stresses the importance of the eye witness in his methodological preface. He frequently shows political or military decisions being made on the basis of what can be seen and speakers justifying their position by reference to their scrutiny of evidence (particularly through the verb *skeptomai*).²⁶ However, the act of viewing is not always straightforward. Thucydides depicts the battlefield as a visual arena, where being in control of what you see, and looking in the right way, are involved in the construction of relations of power. In fighting against Arrhabaeus, Brasidas advises his men not to be taken in by the fearsome display of the enemy: "You should be able to see clearly that everything about them which you thought frightening amounts in real fact to very little, alarming as it may be to look at and listen to" (σαφῶς τε πᾶν τὸ προϋπάρχον δεινὸν ἀπ' αὐτῶν ὁρᾶτε ἔργῳ μὲν βραχὺ ὄν, ὄψει δὲ καὶ ἀκοῇ κατασπέρχον, Thuc. 4.126.6).²⁷ Brasidas is successful at the second battle of Amphipolis because he makes sure that he gets a view over the terrain and the movements of his opponent, Cleon (κατεφαίνετο πάντα αὐτόθεν, ὥστε οὐκ ἄν ἔλαθεν αὐτὸν ὁρμώμενος ὁ Κλέων

²⁶ See e.g. Themistocles' advice to the Spartans not to trust verbal reports about the building of Athens' walls but to send envoys who could see for themselves (Thuc. 1.91.2). Crane 1996, 242–3.

²⁷ Greenwood 2006, 30–31. Transl. Warner 1954 (with adaptations).

τῷ στρατῷ, Thuc. 5.6.3). In contrast, although Cleon goes to a hilltop and looks (ἐλθὼν τε καὶ καθίσας ἐπὶ λόφου καρτεροῦ πρὸ τῆς Ἀμφιπόλεως τὸν στρατὸν αὐτὸς ἐθεᾶτο τὸ λιμνώδες τοῦ Στρυμόνος καὶ τὴν θέσιν τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ τῇ Θράκῃ ὡς ἔχοι, Thuc. 5.7.3), he fails to see what Brasidas is doing. Cleon, it seems, looks in the wrong way.²⁸ The verb used to describe his look is *theaomai*, which indicates a leisurely gaze (cf. the description of Cleon's viewing: κατὰ θεάν, Thuc. 5.7.3 and 5.9.3). Although very frequent in Herodotus, this verb is rare in Thucydides.²⁹ The marked use of this term here is reminiscent of Cleon's own attack on the Athenian assembly for becoming the "spectators of speeches" (θεαταί ... τῶν λόγων, Thuc. 3.38.4) of others, rather than relying on their own sight to make judgments (τὰ δὲ πεπραγμένα ἤδη, οὐ τὸ δρασθὲν πιστότερον ὄψει λαβόντες ἢ τὸ ἀκουσθέν, ἀπὸ τῶν λόγῳ καλῶς ἐπιτιμησάντων, Thuc. 3.38.4) – for failing to use viewing in the appropriate way.³⁰ Reading Cleon's complaint in the context of the political importance of the spectator in the institutions of democratic Athens such as the assembly, law court and theatre, Simon Goldhill argues that an evaluative, judging, analytical form of viewing had become an ideal of civic participation.³¹

This has important implications for the reader of Thucydides' text. As Emily Greenwood has argued, Thucydides presents the reading process as visual experience: Thucydides tells us that the text will prove useful to those who want to look clearly (τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν, Thuc. 1.22.4) at the past.³² However, often viewers in the text are unable to gain knowledge from sight, either like

28 Greenwood 2006, 26–30.

29 Crane 1996, 244–246. Crane discusses the three uses of this verb in Thucydides. In addition to Cleon's gaze, this verb is used disparagingly by the Athenians of the Melians: "On the basis of these discussions, you alone, as you appear to us, judge the future as clearer (*saphestera*) than the things before your eyes (*horōmena*), and because of your wishes, you gaze upon (*theasthe*) those things which are invisible (*aphanē*) as if they already existed" (Thuc. 5.113). Crane suggests that the term denotes a "fascinated gaze" (245), which here is used to mark the Melians' foolishness. The third use of the term occurs in Pericles' funeral oration: Pericles invites his audience to gaze upon (*theōmenous*) the power of their city and become her lovers (Thuc. 2.43.1). Crane notes that unlike elsewhere in Thucydides, here an emotionally laden, fascinated look is promoted, in contrast to the more rational, analytical form of viewing suggested by the visual terms more common to Thucydides, *skopeō* and *skeptomai*: "Where Herodotus turns again and again to *theaomai*, "to gaze", and the picture of the traveler, exposed to a new environment, gazing in surprise at new phenomena, Thucydides dwells upon the detached observer. His favourite words for vision are *skeptomai* and *skopeō*, virtually synonymous terms for scrutinizing and studying evidence" (Crane 1996, 241).

30 Greenwood 2006, 27, Goldhill 2000, 172–173, Ludwig 2002, 366.

31 Goldhill 1998, 106–109, Goldhill 1999, 1–10, and Goldhill 2000.

32 Greenwood 2006, 19–41. See also Walker 1993, 374, and Woodman 1988, 23–28.

Cleon, because they look in the wrong way, or because in the confusion of battle they are unable to see what is happening around them. Viewers also frequently misread what they see, through limited perspectives, through the manipulation of display by others, or because their own emotions get the better of them, leading them to overly optimistic or overly pessimistic interpretations. Greenwood argues that the failed or mistaken views of characters in the text act as foils for the “clear view” of history offered to the reader by the Thucydidean narrator: the readers of Thucydides are allowed to see and understand more than the characters in the text.

This reading imagines the use of the visual in Thucydides as a metahistorical discourse which serves to bolster the authority of the text as trustworthy guide: “Thucydides distinguishes the kind of sight that is available to agents in history from the reflective sight and insight that is possible for readers of his *History*”.³³ Yet, as with Herodotus, I would question how far the reader’s experience can remain unaffected by the problems faced by viewers in the text, and would suggest that the treatment of viewing in this text can be read as self-reflexive. I would also stress the political implications of the reader’s visual involvement. In a text where being able to view in an incisive, independent way is involved in the production of power and political self-determination, we can ask how the reader is positioned in relation to the sights of the text.

On a number of occasions in the narrative leading up to the Sicilian Disaster, the Athenians are depicted as being won over or deceived by impressive display. The Athenians are persuaded by the spectacular figure of Alcibiades, who claims to have increased the Greeks’ perception of Athens’ power through his extravagant chariot display at Olympia (Thuc. 6.16.2). The Athenian envoys and naval crews are falsely convinced of the magnitude of the Egestans’ funds after being shown the silver temple dedications and being entertained at banquet with gold and silver cups (Thuc. 6.46.3–5). The Athenian population, unsure of the wisdom of sending out the fleet to Sicily, have their enthusiasm renewed by the spectacular sight of the ships in the harbour at Piraeus (διὰ τὸ πλῆθος ἐκάστων ὧν ἐώρων, τῆ ὄψει ἀνεθάρσουν, Thuc. 6.31.1). Responses to sights are political responses; viewers are persuaded to make political decisions or to identify with political figures. Yet Thucydides depicts spectacle as capable of stirring up emotions so powerful that the spectators’ critical judgments about what they see are lost. As Andrew Walker comments: “In the Piraeus scene, the outstanding spectacle of the Athenian fleet all but overwhelms the Athenians’ misgivings about the wisdom of the expedition as a whole [...]

33 Greenwood 2006, 26.

Conflicting feelings of hope and lamentation are alleviated by the impressive sight (*opsis*) of the powerful Athenian fleet...”.³⁴ Putting such scenes in the context of discussions about the misleading nature of visual appearances elsewhere in the text,³⁵ Lisa Kallet argues that Thucydides is criticising the Athenians for “incorrectly interpreting *opsis* in the context of power”.³⁶

However, interestingly, Kallet also notes some ambiguity: “While I have argued that Thucydides has constructed his account to privilege the negative interpretation – that the signs by which people are judging power are misguided and that ostentatious display does not per se signify power – he weaves into it the possibility, accepted by his contemporaries certainly, that the Athenians were setting out on an expedition of manifestly great strength”.³⁷ As we read about the setting out of the expedition, despite our knowledge through hindsight that it will turn out badly, the vividness of the writing and the use of visualisation make us feel as if we were there, among the spectators, and like them, we may be impressed by the sight. The use of *enargeia* and temporal perspectives in Thucydides is pertinent here. As Grethlein has shown, through the avoidance of narratorial *prolepsis* and the frequent use of “side-shadowing” – the observation that at any stage different things could have happened – Thucydides restricts the temporal focus of the narrative to the perspective of the characters, meaning that we are placed in the same position as the audiences in the text, for whom the future is as yet undetermined.³⁸ Although we are shown an audience led astray by emotion in their interpretation of a sight, we are also encouraged to look through their eyes, and may risk a similar response.

A number of scenes focus on the feelings of viewers. At Pylos, Thucydides describes the growing confidence of the Athenians as they see their own numbers (αὐτοὶ τῆ τε ὄψει τοῦ θαρσεῖν τὸ πλεῖστον εἰληφότες πολλαπλάσιοι φαινόμενοι, Thuc. 4.34.1), and the confusion and fear of the Spartans who are caught in a cloud of ash and cannot see where they are or what they are doing (ἄπορόν τε ἦν ἰδεῖν τὸ πρὸ αὐτοῦ, Thuc. 4.34.2; ἀποκεκλημένοι μὲν τῆ ὄψει τοῦ προορᾶν, Thuc. 4.34.3).³⁹ We are given a similar description of confusion

³⁴ Walker 1993, 356.

³⁵ See Kallet 2001, 56–58 on Thucydides’ comment about the difficulty of judging the power of Mycenae, Sparta and Athens from the visual impression of their cities, since Sparta will look less powerful, and Athens more powerful, than they are (Thuc. 1.10.1–3).

³⁶ Kallet 2001, 83.

³⁷ Kallet 2001, 84.

³⁸ Grethlein 2010, 254: “the reading experience mirrors the experiences at the level of the action with regard to the future”.

³⁹ Rood 1998, 49–50.

in the night battle at Epipolae: “The moon was bright, but they saw each other in the way that is to be expected in moonlight: that is they would see the sight of a body, before they could be sure if it belonged to one of their own men” (ἦν μὲν γὰρ σελήνη λαμπρά, ἐώρων δὲ οὕτως ἀλλήλους ὡς ἐν σελήνῃ εἰκός τὴν μὲν ὄψιν τοῦ σώματος προορᾶν, τὴν δὲ γνῶσιν τοῦ οἰκείου ἀπιστεῖσθαι, Thuc. 7.44.2).⁴⁰ Thucydides remarks on the problem of providing an account of events: since even in daylight participants can never see everything that happens, at night “how could anyone know clearly what had happened?” (πῶς ἄν τις σαφῶς τι ἦδει, Thuc. 7.44.1). Greenwood notes “a parallel between the conditions of military struggle and [Thucydides’] own historical endeavour” but argues that Thucydides is able to overcome these problems to present an authoritative account:

“Thucydides has it both ways ... He manages to impress both sights and sounds on us, gratifying the desire for entertainment which he dismissed at 1.22.4, while still maintaining an impression of historiographical rigour and circumspection [...] Because he informs us that a sense of confusion and an inability to distinguish what was going on were themselves determining factors in the battle, Thucydides’ account reads convincingly”.⁴¹

There is a lot to be said for this reading. At both Pylos and Epipolae, Thucydides does seem to give us a “panoptic” view of all the different elements of confusion on the battlefield, which explain the outcome. However, we could add to this reading by considering the effect on the reader of the focus on sights (and sounds): the experiential aspects of the text can be understood as a way of shaping interpretations. The vividness of the writing, which invites us to experience, moment-by-moment, the feelings of the participants, enables us to understand the historical outcome, which is often the direct product of the historical actors’ perceptions.⁴² But it also has a political effect. By enabling us to see as the different participants see and experience events from their perspectives, the text forces us to consider how far we identify with the different sides depicted.

The political effects of a vivid narrative style are most clearly revealed in Thucydides’ representation of speeches. One reading of manipulative speech in the text has seen it as a foil for the authoritative narratorial voice. On this model, the introduction of alternative voices into the text via persuasive speeches serves to reveal the inadequacy of rhetoric as a trustworthy guide,

⁴⁰ Transl. Greenwood 2006, 36.

⁴¹ Greenwood 2006, 36.

⁴² See Rood 1998, 57: “The emotional aspects of the narrative are themselves part of its historical meaning”.

as we are shown how internal audiences are misled; this reveals Thucydides' historical endeavour as superior, and places Thucydides' readers in a superior position.⁴³ However, as Elton Barker has argued, attention to the experiential nature of Thucydides' assembly scenes allows us to complicate this reading. The vividness of the text, which invites the reader to step into the shoes of the speeches' audiences, listening to and judging the speeches just as they do, means that it is much harder for readers to distance themselves from problems faced by internal audiences; instead, the reader is forced to take part.⁴⁴ This has political consequences: rather than seeing the text as essentially univocal, insisting on the absolute authority of the Thucydidean narrator, and also as opposed to democratic processes, rejecting speech-making as manipulative and assembly audience responses as overly emotional and misguided, we are rather forced to experience the *problem* of political decision making.⁴⁵ This is self-reflexive: the reader is exposed to the difficulties of weighing up and judging between claims and explanations in a way that reflects back on his or her wider reading of the text.⁴⁶ Similar problems, I suggest, are raised in the use of visual perspectives in Thucydides.

This is well illustrated by Thucydides' description of the battle in the Syracusan harbour (Thuc. 7.71). Thucydides describes how observers standing in different places on the shore saw different things and therefore interpreted what was happening differently:

διὰ τὸ (ἀνώμαλον) τῆς ναυμαχίας ἀνώμαλον καὶ τὴν ἔποψιν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἠναγκάζοντο ἔχειν. δι' ὀλίγου γὰρ οὐσῆς τῆς θέας καὶ οὐ πάντων ἅμα ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ σκοποῦντων, εἰ μὲν τινες ἰδοίεν πῆ τοὺς σφετέρους ἐπικρατοῦντας, ἀνεθάρσησάν τε ἂν καὶ πρὸς ἀνάκλησιν θεῶν μὴ στερεῆσαι σφᾶς τῆς σωτηρίας ἐτρέποντο, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ τὸ ἡσώμενον βλέψαντες ὀλοφυρμῶ τε ἅμα μετὰ βοῆς ἐχρῶντο καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν δρωμένων τῆς ὕψεως καὶ τὴν γνώμην μᾶλλον τῶν ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ ἐδουλοῦντο: ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἀντίπαλόν τι τῆς ναυμαχίας ἀπιθόντες, διὰ τὸ ἀκρίτως ξυνεχῆς τῆς ἀμίλλης καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν αὐτοῖς ἴσα τῇ δόξῃ περιδεῶς ξυναπονεύοντες ἐν τοῖς χαλεπώτατα διῆγον: αἰεὶ γὰρ παρ' ὀλίγον ἢ διέφευγον ἢ ἀπώλλυντο. (7.1.2–3)

As the battle swung this way and that, so, inevitably, did their impressions alter as they watched it from the shore. The sight was close in front of them and, as they were not all at once looking in the same direction, some saw that at one point their own side was winning, and took courage at the sight and began to call upon the gods not to deprive

⁴³ See Ober 1998, 53–63.

⁴⁴ Barker 2009, 203–63, esp. 206–7: “because of Thucydides' strategy of direct imitation [...] his representations of debate also have the effect of propelling readers into the hurly-burly of warring words, which, to a certain extent at any rate, puts them at risk of being seduced by the arguments reproduced”.

⁴⁵ See esp. Barker 2009, 240–48, on the Mytilene debate.

⁴⁶ See Dewald 1999 on strategies of focalisation in Thucydides.

them of their salvation, while others, looking towards a point where their men had been defeated, cried out aloud in lamentation, and were more broken in spirit by the sight of what was being done than were the men actually engaged in the fighting. Others were looking at some part of the battle where there was nothing to choose between the two sides, and, as the fight went on and on with no decision reached, their bodies, swaying this way and that, showed the trepidation with which their minds were filled, and wretched indeed was their state, constantly on the verge of safety, constantly on the brink of destruction.⁴⁷

Thucydides' narrative allows us to see and understand more than the text's actors. We see from multiple perspectives at once, and thereby have a better overarching view of what is happening than individual spectators who can only see what is in front of them. The passage can also be read as metahistorical reflection. Following Thucydides' discussion of the difficulties in using eye witness reports (Thuc. 1.22.3), the passage offers self-conscious reflection on how viewing (as historical analysis) works.⁴⁸ Viewers' experiences may be partial, and sights may be misinterpreted due to emotional investment: overwhelmed by their fear, those who see their side winning think salvation is near and those who see them losing are distraught. One reading would therefore see this as a warning to the reader about how not to view (and read).

However, the emotionalism of the passage also serves to draw in the reader: as we read, we are put on tenterhooks, just like the observers in the text who sway to and fro in their anxiety about what will happen next. The concern with how the audience feels and the vivid way in which the fluctuation of emotions is described allows the reader to imagine that he or she is there: we experience the battle through the eyes of the viewers on the shore. As Plutarch notes,

“assuredly Thucydides is always striving for this vividness in his writing, since it is his desire to make the reader a spectator, as it were, and to produce vividly in the minds of those who peruse his narrative the emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them”.⁴⁹

We must ask how easily we can escape the problems faced by spectators in the text. And further, we must ask about the political implications of our emotional involvement. If we as readers are pulled in by the text, affected by the emotions of the Athenian spectators on the shore as we see from their perspective, how far can we distance ourselves to view the battle, and the Athenian venture in Sicily more generally, with the dispassionate eyes which Thucydides' preface

⁴⁷ Transl. Warner 1954.

⁴⁸ Walker 1993, 372–75.

⁴⁹ Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 347a. Transl. Babbitt 1936.

informs us are required by the historian?⁵⁰ The passage both offers the possibility of understanding more than the participants, *and also* mires us in their emotions.⁵¹ Rather than (only) providing a model of how not to read, we could see this passage as exploring the *problem* of reading. Just as the Athenians are overwhelmed by their circumstances, and are led to partial and partisan interpretations, so too in reading about their experiences we may be sucked into identifying with them – even as their mistakes and “short-sightedness”, both here and across the Sicilian Expedition narrative more widely, may also prompt us to criticise them. Although the text allows us to consider historical events at a safe and critical distance, it also reminds us of the difficulty of retaining critical distance when faced with events such as these – events which for Thucydides’ original readers still had political resonance, and might still seem too close for comfort.

Conclusion

In this brief discussion, my aim has been to suggest a reconsideration of the use and effects of the visual in Herodotus and Thucydides. Following recent scholarship, I have suggested that these texts’ representations of spectatorship and uses of visualised narrative can be read in terms of their metatextual or metahistorical connotations. However, I have departed from previous readings in regards to the implications of these metahistorical reflections for the political experience of the reader.

As I have shown, these texts have different concerns. Reflection on historical method has different implications in each, and each text constructs the readerly process in different ways. However, there are similarities between them too. Both, I suggest, allow the possibility of self-reflexivity in their moments of metahistorical reflection. As well as showing mistakes made by interpreters of history, which the reader is allowed to overcome, both authors also involve the reader in the difficulties faced by those interpreters. We are shown

50 We are told that one problem with eye witnesses is that their reports are affected by their loyalties towards one side or another (Thuc. 1.22.3).

51 See Connor 1985, 8–13, on the construction of narrative authority through mimetic illusionism, where the reader is made to feel as though present at the events described, but also through the presentation of multiple perspectives. As Connor comments, between these two techniques there is an “inevitable tension – the rapid shifting of viewpoints risks a shattering of the experiential quality of the work” (17).

historical interpretation in action, with all its problems, and are forced to think through our own engagement in those problems.

In each case, by transforming the reader into a viewer of the text's action, the reader becomes directly implicated in the problems of the text, with political effect. The reader is forced to think through his or her own responses to the characters and events depicted, and is invited to position himself or herself against them – often in politically conflicted ways. The use of the visual functions as a metahistorical discourse which reflects back on the position of the reader, and operates also therefore as political discourse. Just as visual experience in these texts so often raises problems of interpretation for the historical agents, so too such scenes produce a politically challenging experience for the reader.

Bibliography

- Babbit, F. C. (1936), *Plutarch. Moralia*. Vol. IV, Cambridge.
- Barker, E. T.E. (2009), *Entering the Agon: Dissent and Authority in Homer, Historiography and Tragedy*, Oxford.
- Cartledge, P. (1993), *The Greeks. A Portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford.
- Christ, M. R. (1994), "Herodotean Kings and Historical Enquiry", in: *Classical Antiquity* 13, 167–202.
- Connor, W. R. (1985), "Narrative Discourse in Thucydides", in: M. J. Jameson (ed.), *The Greek Historians. Literature and History. Papers Presented to A. E. Raubitschek*, Stanford, 1–17.
- Crane, G. (1996), *The Blinded Eye. Thucydides and the New Written Word*, London.
- Davidson, J. (1991), "The Gaze in Polybius' *Histories*", in: *JRS* 81, 10–24.
- de Jong, Irene J. F. (1999), "Aspects narratologiques des *Histoires* d'Hérodote", in: *Lalies* 19, 217–275.
- Dewald, C. (1990), "Review of Hartog 1988", in: *CP* 85, 217–224.
- Dewald, C. (1999), "The Figured Stage. Focalizing the Initial Narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides", in: T. M. Falkner / N. Felson / D. Konstan (eds.), *Contextualizing Classics. Ideology, Performance, Dialogue: Essays in Honor of John J. Peradotto*, London, 221–252.
- Elsner, J. (1992), "Pausanias. A Greek Pilgrim in the Roman World", in: *P&P* 135, 3–29.
- Elsner, J. (1994), "From the Pyramids to Pausanias and Piglet. Monuments, Travel and Writing", in: S. Goldhill / R. Osborne (eds.), *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, Cambridge, 224–254.
- Feldherr, A. (1998), *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History*, Berkeley and London.
- Goldhill, S. (1998), "The Seductions of the Gaze. Socrates and his Girlfriends", in: P. Cartledge / P. Millett / S. von Reden (eds.), *Kosmos. Essays in Order, Conflict and Community in Classical Athens*, Cambridge, 105–124.
- Goldhill, S. (1999), "Programme Notes", in: S. Goldhill / R. Osborne (eds.) *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, Cambridge, 1–29.
- Goldhill, S. (2000), "Placing Theatre in the History of Vision", in: N. K. Rutter / B. A. Sparkes (eds.), *Word and Image in Ancient Greece*, Edinburgh, 161–182.

- Greenwood, E. (2006), *Thucydides and the Shaping of History*, London.
- Grethlein, J. (2009), "How Not To Do History. Xerxes in Herodotus' *Histories*", in: *AJP* 130, 195–218.
- Grethlein, J. (2010), *The Greeks and their Past. Poetry, Oratory and History in the Fifth Century B.C.E.*, Cambridge.
- Hartog, F. (1988), *The Mirror of Herodotus. The representation of the Other in the writing of history*, Transl. J. Lloyd, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Kallet, L. (2001), *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
- Katz Anhalt, E. (2008), "Seeing is Believing. Four Women on Display in Herodotus' *Histories*", in: *New England Classical Journal* 35.4, 269–280.
- Ker, J. (2000), "Solon's *Theoria* and the End of the City", in: *ClAnt* 19, 304–329.
- Konstan, D. (1983), "The Stories in Herodotus' *Histories*: Book I", in: *Helios* 10, 1–22.
- Konstan, D. (1987), "Persians, Greeks and Empire", in: *Arethusa* 20, 59–73.
- Ludwig, P. W. (2002), *Eros and Polis. Desire and Community in Greek Political Theory*, Cambridge.
- Millender, E. G. (1996), "*The Teacher of Hellas*". *Athenian Democratic Ideology and the "Barbarization" of Sparta in Fifth-century Greek Thought*, Diss., Pennsylvania.
- Miltsios, N. (2016), "Sight and Seeing in Herodotus", in: *TC* 8.1, 1–16.
- Munson, R. V. (1991), "The Madness of Cambyses (Herodotus 3.16–38)", in: *Arethusa* 24, 43–65.
- Munson, R. V. (2001), *Telling Wonders. Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus*, Michigan.
- Nightingale, A. W. (2004), *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge.
- Ober, J. (1998), *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens. Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Princeton.
- Pelling, C. B. R. (1997), "East is East and West is West – or are they? National Stereotypes in Herodotus", in: *Histos* 1, 51–66.
- Redfield, J. (1985), "Herodotus the tourist", in: *CP* 80, 97–118.
- Rood, T. (1998), *Thucydides. Narrative and Explanation*, Oxford.
- Rutherford, I. (1995), "Theoric crisis. The Dangers of Pilgrimage in Greek Religion and society", in: *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 61: 276–292.
- Thomas, R. (2000), *Herodotus in Context. Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*, Cambridge.
- Walker, A. D. (1993), "*Enargeia* and the Spectator in Greek Historiography", in: *TAPA* 123, 353–377.
- Woodman, A. J. (1988), *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography. Four studies*, London.