

Thucydides 4.92.5: A Quotation from Sophocles' *Philoctetes*?

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IN HIS ACCOUNT of the winter of 424/3 BCE, in the eighth year of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides reports the plans devised by the Athenian *strategoí* Demosthenes and Hippocrates with the aid of Boeotian exiles who wished to introduce democracies in their own towns (4.76). The idea was for the town of Siphæ to be betrayed by some of its citizens while Chaeronea would be handed over to the Athenians; at the same time, Hippocrates would seize the sanctuary of Apollo at Delion. In the end the plans failed, due to both a leak of information and a miscalculation of time by Demosthenes (4.89). However, Hippocrates managed to occupy Delion and, after having the majority of his troops retreat to the nearby border with Attica, remained in place for some time with a number of soldiers to supervise the fortification (4.90). In response to this situation, Boeotian military forces, after gathering at Tanagra, determined to attack the Athenians on the border itself in a pitched battle in which, eventually, the enemy army was thoroughly defeated (4.93–4.101.2).¹

¹ On the “political adventurism” of the Boeotian campaign of autumn 424 see L. Canfora, *La grande guerra del Peloponneso. 447–394 a.C.* (Bari 2024) 116–117. On the battle of Delion, e.g. J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts. A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven 2005). For a specific reading of Thucydides’ account cf. J. W. Allison, “Thucydides on Delium: War without Borders,” in G. Rechenauer et al., *Thucydides – A Violent Teacher? History and its Representations* (Göttingen 2011) 131–144. A reassessment of the sources on the

We understand from Thucydides that the decision to attack the Athenians was not taken for granted, for at first the Boeotarchs, the eleven representatives and military leaders of the Boeotian Confederacy, were almost unanimously inclined to avoid fighting, on the grounds that, having retreated to the border, the enemy forces were no longer in the country. The only dissenting voice among them, one the historian chose to let us hear in a significant speech (4.91–92), was that of Pagondas, one of the two Boeotarchs of Thebes and the commander-in-chief of the entire league at the time (4.91, ἡγεμονίας οὔσης αὐτοῦ). Pagondas, urging a prompt attack to secure safety for Boeotia, ultimately succeeded in convincing the Confederates to take the risk. According to Thucydides, the commander’s speech was addressed to both the other Boeotarchs and each battalion separately while they were still in Tanagra, not on the battlefield.²

Pagondas’ speech is remarkable for its compact structure and character.³ The Athenians are depicted, from the beginning, as very dangerous neighbours⁴ and fierce invaders, whose clear

battle (Thucydides, Diodorus, and the troubling evidence in Euripides’ *Suppliques*) is in S. Tufano, “The Speech of Pagondas (Thuk. 4.92) and the Sources on the Battle of Delion,” *Klio* 103 (2021) 409–435. See also R. van Wijk, *Athens and Boiotia. Interstate Relations in the Archaic and Classical Periods* (Cambridge 2024) 265–266, 334–335.

² As was emphasized by K. W. Pritchett, *Essays in Greek History* (Amsterdam 1994) 58.

³ See the analyses by O. Luschkat, *Die Feldherrnreden im Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (Leipzig 1942) 44–53, and R. Leimbach, *Militärische Musterrhetorik. Eine Untersuchung zu den Feldherrnreden des Thukydides* (Stuttgart 1985) 64–71. Cf. also Pritchett, *Essays* 56–59; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides II* (Oxford 1996) 290–291; Allison, in *Thucydides – A Violent Teacher?* 134–137; and Tufano, *Klio* 103 (2021) 409–435, 420 for the possibility that Pagondas was a personal informant of Thucydides.

⁴ A varied vocabulary of closeness and ‘neighbourliness’ is deployed in the speech: ἐκ τῆς ὁμόρου (92.1), ὁμόρους ὄντας (92.3), τοὺς ἀστυγείτονας (92.4), τοὺς ἐγγύς (92.4), οἱ πλησιόχωροι (92.4), τὴν παροίκισιν (92.5), τοῖς πέλας (92.5).

objective is the destruction of Boeotia (4.92.1, τὴν γὰρ Βοιωτίαν ... μέλλουσι φθείρειν) and the enslavement of all Greeks (4.92.4, μὴ τοὺς ἐγγύς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄπωθεν πειρῶνται δουλοῦσθαι).⁵ According to Thucydides, however, the core argument of Pagondas' speech was as follows: if the Boeotians decide against the assault, the Athenians will unleash their usual predatory violence (4.92.4, ἐσελθόντες γὰρ βίᾳ τὰ ἡμέτερα ἔξουσιν); on the other hand, an unexpected attack on the very edge of the aggressors' land would cause the latter serious difficulty and give the Boeotians a chance to win (4.92.5). The speaker then recalled the battle of Coronea, thanks to which, twenty-three years earlier (in 447), the Boeotians had freed themselves from a ten-year period of Athenian control (4.92.6). This recollection gives way to the final exhortatory section of the speech which, while appealing to Boeotian tradition, leverages their ancestors' conduct and trust in the protection of Apollo, whose sanctuary precisely had been occupied by the invaders (4.92.7). The political character of the speech, vigorously championing the autonomy of the confederated communities of Boeotia, is evident: Pagondas' address goes beyond the compositional and 'dramatic' needs of the historical work and can be considered one of Thucydides' most significant pieces of criticism of Athenian imperialism.⁶

Against this background I would like to draw attention in particular to the lines, in the very middle of the speech, in which Pagondas presents the crucial point⁷ of his address and of his strategy: the Athenians are used to striking with impunity those who defend themselves only on their own land; on the other

⁵ According to a scholion, the speech was built ἐκ διαβολῆς τῶν Ἀθηναίων, ὅτι πανταχοῦ ἐχθροί: A. Kleinogel, *Scholía Graeca in Thucydidem. Scholía vetustiora et Lexicon Patmense*, ed. K. Alpers with S. Valente (Berlin 2019) 737.

⁶ On the political nature of the speech see Luschnat, *Feldherrnreden* 48; cf. Allison, in *Thucydides – A Violent Teacher?* 137 n.28. On the criticism of Athens' imperialism in the speech see J. de Romilly, *Thucydide et l'impérialisme athénien*² (Paris 1951) 42–43, and Tufano, *Klio* 103 (2021) 424.

⁷ So Leimbach, *Musterrhetorik* 69 (“den entscheidenden Punkt”).

hand, they struggle with those who dare to confront them outside of their own borders and who, in some cases, take the initiative by striking the first blow. The historian does not have Pagondas speak directly about the Athenians but has him identifying probable consequences of their current actions (ὥσπερ Ἀθηναῖοι νῦν) from what he presents as an empirical fact:⁸

εἰώθασί τε οἱ ἰσχύος που θράσει τοῖς πέλας, ὥσπερ Ἀθηναῖοι νῦν, ἐπιόντες τὸν μὲν ἡσυχάζοντα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον ἀμυνόμενον ἀδεέστερον ἐπιστρατεύειν, τὸν δὲ ἔξω ὄρων προαπαντῶντα καί, ἦν καιρὸς ἦ, πολέμου ἄρχοντα ἡσσον ἐτοίμως κατέχειν. (4.92.5)

Besides, people who in the confidence of strength attack their neighbours, *as the Athenians now do*, are wont to march more fearlessly against one who keeps quiet and defends himself only in his own land, but are less ready to grapple with him who meets them outside of his own boundaries and, if opportunity offers, makes the first attack.⁹

In order to emphasize the fearless and violent behaviour of the Athenians, Thucydides embeds a peculiar expression in this rhetorically accomplished passage, ἰσχύος που θράσει, a word combination that has gone virtually unnoticed, in spite of its singularity.¹⁰ The exact phrase ἰσχύος θράσει (genitive + dative) is a *hapax legomenon* in Greek literature, although, as we shall see, a close parallel does exist. In addition, it should be noted that the phrase also includes a particle (που) whose meaning needs some clarification.

As one might expect, the terms ἰσχύς and θράσος are used separately by the historian in his work. ἰσχύς (“strength/might/

⁸ As pointed out by Leimbach, *Musterrhetorik* 69 (“Erfahrungsregel”).

⁹ Transl. C. F. Smith, *Thucydides* II² (Cambridge [Mass.] 1930) 371 (italics mine). In the 5th cent. CE this passage was selected by Stobaeus in a section of excerpts of military content (*Anth.* 4.13.34, Περὶ στρατηγῶν καὶ περὶ τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον χρεῖων ὑποθήκαι) that encompasses more Thucydidean quotations (1.124.2, 3.48, 4.61.5, 5.9.8, 5.9.9, 5.102, 5.103.1, 6.91.6).

¹⁰ There are no variants in the manuscripts.

power”)¹¹ recurs more than thirty times and its genitive in particular appears nine more times in addition to 4.92.5, in five of which it is connected with a noun as in the case in question (3.11.2 ἐφόδῳ, 3.48.2 ἔργων, 4.18.5 and 4.126.4 δόκησιν, 4.86.6 δικαίῳσει). On the other hand, the use of the substantive θράσος is more limited:¹² it is found in just three other Thucydidean passages, which deserve close examination since they may contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of the word in our passage. In 1.120.4 θράσος denotes an excess of ill-founded confidence following success in war, in the speech of the Corinthians at the meeting of the Spartans and their allies in 432/1: ὅ τε ἐν πολέμῳ εὐτυχία πλεονάζων οὐκ ἐντεθύμηται θράσει ἀπίστω ἐπαιρόμενος. The term occurs again in Pericles’ celebrated funeral oration (2.40.3), where the Athenian leader, while attributing daring in action (τολμᾶν) and deliberation (ἐκλογίζεσθαι), both in a positive sense, to his fellow citizens, ascribes to non-Athenians an unfavourable combination of boldness (θράσος, here as the negative face of τολμᾶν) with ignorance (ἀμαθία) and of hesitation (ᾄκνον) with reflection (λογισμός). In contrast, θράσος denotes a peculiar feature of the violent military action of the Athenians in the mouth of an opponent of theirs, Hermocrates: in this third case the Syracusan general describes the way in which the Athenians used to scare their neighbours (who were not necessarily inferior in strength) by the boldness of their attacks (7.21.3, τῷ δὲ θράσει ἐπιχειροῦντες καταφοβοῦσι). In all these cases θράσος seems to have a negative connotation,¹³ something implying overconfidence and, at the same time, lack of complete

¹¹ See P. Chantraine, “À propos d’un nom grec de la force: ἰσχύς,” *Emerita* 19 (1951) 134–143.

¹² It should be noted that θάρσος and θαρσεῖν also recur in Thucydides, even more frequently, mostly with positive meanings. A comprehensive analysis of this semantic group and of its relation with θράσος is offered by P. Huart, *Le vocabulaire de l’analyse psychologique dans l’oeuvre de Thucydide* (Paris 1968) 426–431; useful information can be found also in E. Garver, “The Meaning of θράσος in Aristotle’s *Ethics*,” *CP* 77(1982) 228–233.

¹³ Pace Huart, *Le vocabulaire* 429.

control over consequences. Hermocrates' speech in particular offers a useful parallel for 4.92.5.

If we now consider the meanings of *που*, the role of this particle seems often to be that of softening or hedging the expression and, sometimes, of conveying irony, in line with a well-documented use that developed from an original basic meaning of 'uncertainty'.¹⁴ It occurs forty-nine times in Thucydides' work (often in *εἰ*-clauses), though 4.92.5 is the only case in which it is interposed between two syntactically linked nouns, which are, moreover, apparently connected here in an unprecedented fashion. This can hardly be devoid of significance and should be regarded as a way for Thucydides to draw attention to the words of Pagondas at this point in the speech.

Before proceeding, it may be worthwhile to consider ancient and modern interpretations of the phrase. As far as the former are concerned, we can rely on a single scholion transmitted in two late manuscripts of Thucydides that simply explained the words *ισχύος που θράσει* as *μετὰ θρασείας ισχύος*.¹⁵ Among translators, Lorenzo Valla interpreted them as "viribus freti," while Thomas Hobbes proposed "such as upon confidence in their strength," to mention just two important early modern Thucydidean scholars. Moving forward in time, "potentiae confidentia" was Friedrich Haase's choice in his facing Latin translation in

¹⁴ Cf. J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*² (Oxford 1954) 490–495 (491, "που is used ironically, with assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground"); C. M. J. Sicking and J. M. van Ophuijsen, *Two Studies in Attic Particle Usage: Lysias and Plato* (Leiden 1993) 57–64; J. M. Jiménez Delgado, "Operadores de aproximación en el decir y de atenuación en griego antiguo: la partícula που," *Emerita* 87 (2019) 47–72; E. van Emde Boas et al. (eds.), *Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* (Cambridge 2019) 690–691; and, for an interesting case of ironic use in Homer, M. Janse, "The Tragic Irony of a Particle: Agamemnon's νόστος and the Use of που in the διάπειρα Episode (*Il.*, 2.136)," *ÉtCl* 89 (2021) 133–141.

¹⁵ Kassel, UB/LMB Hist 2° 3 (13th cent.) f. 98^r, and Basel, UB E-III-04 (14th cent.) f. 131^v; K. Hude, *Scholia in Thucydidem* (Leipzig 1927) 274. Among older manuscripts Munich, BSB Gr. 430, has just one note of interest (σημείωσαι) next to the section in question, cf. Kleinlogel, *Scholia* 739.

the widespread 19th-century Didot edition. Popular 20th-century translations include those by Charles Forster Smith for the Loeb collection, who rendered the Greek as “in the confidence of strength,” and by Jacqueline de Romilly who, in her edition for the CUF, opted convincingly for the idea of intoxication/inebriation: “un peuple grisé de sa force.”¹⁶ Hobbes alone in this list—and the only one to my knowledge—seems to have been concerned with the translation of πού (“such as”).

We can now go back to the analysis of the unprecedented expression ἰσχύος θράσει. Research for possible parallels leads us to the poetic tradition. In fact, the celebrated Theban poet Pindar, an older fellow citizen of Pagondas,¹⁷ had already paired the genitive ἰσχύος with a compound adjective made up of θρασύς, θρασύπονοι, together with the abstract noun ἀκμαί, in a line that recalled the intense athletic training and arduous competitions at Olympia: ἀκμαί τ’ ἰσχύος θρασύπονοι, “boldly laboring feats of strength” (*Ol.* 1.96).¹⁸ The adjective θρασύπονοι was seemingly a Pindaric creation, the full meaning of which provided work for later scholiasts.¹⁹ Yet, ἰσχύος is linked in this line with the idea of

¹⁶ M. Chambers, *Valla's Translation of Thucydides in Vat. Lat. 1801* (Vatican City 2008) 180; W. Molesworth, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* VIII (London 1843) 475; F. Haase, *Θουκυδίδης. Thucydidis Historia Belli Peloponnesiaci* (Paris 1840) 185; C. F. Smith, *Thucydides* II (Cambridge [Mass.] 1920) 371; J. de Romilly, *Thucydide. La guerre du Péloponnèse* III (Paris 1967) 64.

¹⁷ For the ‘Pindaric connections’ of Pagondas see S. Hornblower, *Thucydides and Pindar* (Oxford 2004) 159. On Pindaric influence on the language of Thucydides see most recently K. Panegyres, “How Brasidas Was Honoured at Skione (Thucydides 4.121.1),” *Mnemosyne* 76 (2023) 3–22.

¹⁸ Transl. W. H. Race, *Pindar* I (Cambridge [Mass.] 1997) 56. Pindar’s first Olympian was composed for Hieron’s victory in 476; for the date see e.g. B. Gentili et al. (eds.), *Pindaro. Le Olimpiche* (Milan 2013) 9–10.

¹⁹ A. B. Drachmann, *Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina* I (Leipzig 1903) 50–51: 154c, ὁ δὲ νοῦς· ἔνθα πρὸς ἀλλήλας ἐρίζουσι καὶ φιλονεικοῦσιν αἱ τῶν ἀκμαίων ἰσχύες, αἱ γενναίως πρὸς τοὺς πόνους χωροῦσι. 154d, τὸ δὲ ἀκόλουθον, αἱ ἀκμαῖαι ἰσχύες. 154e, ἀντὶ τοῦ, ἔνθα γίνονται καὶ δρόμοι καὶ πάλαι καὶ παγκράτια καὶ πυγμαί· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ θρασύπονοι ἀκμαί ἰσχύος. Cf. the

‘exploits’ rather than with the idea of ‘over-boldness’.²⁰

More interestingly, however, the only proper parallel to Thucydides’ expression is to be found in tragic poetry, namely in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*. The tragedy was staged in Athens at the City Dionysia of 409, in the twenty-second year of the Peloponnesian War, after the restoration of democracy following the regime of the Four Hundred, and won first prize. In the prologue Odysseus and Neoptolemus have just landed on the island of Lemnos, where Philoctetes was abandoned ten years before by the Greek army on their way to Troy, to recover the hero’s bow, which, according to the oracle, is needed by the Greeks to win the war. Odysseus explains to a reluctant Neoptolemus that the task should be performed by deception (101 δόλω) since Philoctetes can be neither convinced with words nor taken by force. This leads a sceptical Neoptolemus to argue (104): οὕτως ἔχει τι δεινὸν ἰσχύος θράσος; (“Has he such wondrous confidence in strength?”).²¹ Odysseus’ answer focuses precisely on the lethal

commentary by C. Daude et al. (eds.), *Scholies à Pindare I* (Besançon 2013) 417–419, also E. Ábel, *Scholia recentia in Pindari epinicia* (Budapest 1890) 101. As for modern commentators, I will mention only M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode. An Introduction* (Park Ridge 1976) 93: “The new θρασύπνοτοι associates the pain involved in winning with the power that has brought all accomplishment so far in the ode.”

²⁰ Curiously, another different combination of the two elements (actually through the verb θαρσεῖν) can be found in another ode written for Hieron’s Olympic victory in 476, the one by Bacchylides, who compared himself to the eagle of Zeus that “is bold, trusting in his mighty strength,” θαρσεῖ κρατερῶ πίσυνος ἰσχυῖ (5.21–22).

²¹ This and the following translation are from H. Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles. Antigone – The Women of Trachis – Philoctetes – Oedipus at Colonus* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1994) 267. Here is a partial list of available translations of the line. R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments IV*² (Cambridge 1898) 25: “Hath he such dread strength to make him bold?”; P. Mazon, *Sophocle III* (Paris 1967) 13: “A-t-il de si bonne raisons d’avoir confiance dans sa force?”; T. B. L. Webster, *Sophocles. Philoctetes* (Cambridge 1970) 76: “Has he some so overpowering confidence in his strength?”; R. G. Ussher, *Sophocles. Philoctetes* (Warminster 1990) 33: “Has he such a dread source of strength that lends

effect of Philoctetes' weapon as the grounds for his overconfidence: "Yes, inescapable arrows that convey death" (105, ἰούς (γ') ἀφύκτους καὶ προπέμποντας φόνον).

Solely in this scene of *Philoctetes*, then, are the words ἰσχύς and θράσος connected exactly as in Thuc. 4.95.2.²² The coincidence is striking and can hardly be fortuitous, though it has gone mainly unnoticed and has not been emphasised by commentators.²³ The question therefore arises whether a connection exists between the two texts. The relation of Thucydides to poetry and to tragedy has been variously explored, and connections between Sophocles and Thucydides have already been

him confidence?"; G. Cerri, *Sofocle. Filottete* (Milan 2003) 23: "Ha tanto straordinaria fiducia nella sua forza?"; S. L. Schein, *Sophocles. Philoctetes* (Cambridge 2013) 139: "does he have so terrible a boldness consisting of strength?" F. W. Schneidewin and A. Nauck, *Sophokles VII¹¹ Philoktetes* (Berlin 1911) 33, commented: "nicht subjektiv *fiducia virium*, sondern so viel wie ἀσφάλεια ἰσχύος"; and B. Manuwald, *Sophokles. Philoktet* (Berlin 2018), 96 notes: "Zutrauen (θράσος), das in Bezug auf die Stärke (ἰσχύος) besteht und von ihr ausgeht, sodass es Philoktet kühn macht."

²² The manuscript tradition of Sophocles' line is unanimous. No papyrus containing this section has been published so far. A reverse construction involving the use of the verb ἰσχύειν occurs in Euripides' *Orestes*, which was first staged one year after Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, in 408. In the middle of the tragedy, the off-stage assembly of Argive citizens that has voted to put Orestes and Electra to death is reported by a messenger, who recounts the speeches that were made (852–956). The third speaker in the assembly, whose motion prevailed, is described as follows (903–904): "Then there stood up a man with no check on his tongue, strong in his harshness," ἰσχύων θράσει (transl. D. Kovacs, *Euripides V* [Cambridge (Mass.) 2002] 513).

²³ Sophocles' parallel was simply mentioned in 19th-century commentaries on Thucydides: S. T. Bloomfield, *The History of Thucydides II* (London 1829) 342; K. W. Krüger, *Θουκυδίδου Συγγραφή I.2* (Berlin 1846) 202 (Berlin 1860³ 180); J. Classen, *Thukydides IV* (Berlin 1869) 147–148 (Berlin 1877² 150). Cf. also L. A. L. Cyranka, *De orationum Thucydearum elocutione cum tragicis comparata* (Wroclaw 1875) 31; C. E. Hesse, *Dionysii Halicarnassensis de Thucydeide iudicia examinantur* (Leisnig 1877) 18. To my knowledge, the Thucydidean parallel is not mentioned in any commentaries on Sophocles.

highlighted.²⁴ In our case, the presence of *πov*, whose usual meanings and peculiar usage in 4.92.5 have been recalled above, appears to be evidence of a quotation and strengthens the impression that Thucydides was quoting Sophocles here with the aim of adding a certain nuance to Pagondas' words, contributing to the positive portrait of a general whom he likely admired.

If that is the case, the reasons for a precious poetical citation from a celebrated master of the Athenian theatre in the core passage of Pagondas' speech cannot be easily determined. However, we can try to discern a possible motive behind this choice. One may conjecture as to an ironic intent in recalling the line concerning Philoctetes' invulnerability in order to expose the Athenians' presumption of invincibility. That is, Neoptolemus' sceptical reaction to Odysseus' recommendation was transformed by Thucydides into the key element of Pagondas' lucid analysis of the aggressive conduct of the Athenians (*ὥσπερ Ἀθηναῖοι vōv*), who were to be soon afterwards defeated by the Boeotians.

Of course, the allusion to Sophocles' line would have been more effective in relation to a specific identification of the character of Philoctetes (or of some of his traits) by the Athenian

²⁴ As regards poetry, I shall confine myself to V. Jung, *Thucydides und die Dichtung* (Frankfurt 1991), for a more theoretical approach. On tragedy see e.g. C. Macleod, "Thucydides and Tragedy," in *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983) 140–158. Old but useful lexicographical and stylistic surveys can be found in Cyranka, *De orationum*; and C. F. Smith, "Traces of Tragic Usage in Thucydides," *TAPA* 22 (1891) xvi–xxi, "Poetic Words in Thucydides," *TAPA* 23 (1892) xlviii–li, and "Some Poetic Words in Thucydides," *TAPA* 25 (1894) 61–81. For more recent overviews see the extensive note in W. Lapini, "Tucidide tragico: noterella su 3.113.1–6," *Sileno* 17 (1991) 121–138, at 128–130 n.19, and S. Hornblower, "Intellectual Affinities," in J. S. Rusten (ed.), *Thucydides* (Oxford 2009) 60–88, at 87–88. For a possible case of mutual dependence between Sophocles and Thucydides see O. Longo, "Edipo e Nicia: Sofocle O. T. 56–57 / Tucidide VII 77.7," *AAPat* 87 (1974/5) 61–76. An interesting parallel reading of Thucydides' Book 8 and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* as "two different ways of plotting the same events" is offered by E. Greenwood, *Thucydides and the Shaping of History* (London 2006) 107 for the quotation.

audience. In that respect, the most attractive hypothesis is the one that sees in the Sophoclean hero features of the figure of the exiled Alcibiades, whose return had been sanctioned by a decree proposed by Theramenes soon after the fall of the Four Hundred and who had become popular again in Athens after the naval victories of 410.²⁵ From this perspective, if Neoptolemus' words (οὕτως ἔχει τι δεινὸν ἰσχύος θρόσος;) were alluding to the boldness and aggressiveness of Alcibiades' politics (see e.g. his speeches in Thuc. 6.16–18, especially 18.2–3, and 89–92), they might have been adopted by Thucydides to illustrate the character of Athenian imperialism as a whole.²⁶ Such a choice would have been even more significant if the historian, in an *ex post* diagnosis, was pointing to the beginning of the end of the Athenian military policy based on a presumed invincibility precisely in the events of 424/3, as the composition itself seems to suggest.²⁷

Whatever the reason may be, acknowledgement of a quotation from Sophocles' *Philoctetes* would have further implications: firstly, on the date of composition or revising of this page of Thucydides' *History*, which would need to be placed after winter 409; secondly, on the way the historian came to know Sophocles' text. If Thucydides was in exile at the time of the staging, in line with the traditional biographical view based on the controversial so-called 'second proem' (5.26), we would have to imagine that,

²⁵ As far as general interpretations of the tragedy are concerned, see P. E. Easterling, "Philoctetes and Modern Criticism," *ICS* 3 (1978) 27–39. On the possible 'presence' of Alcibiades in the play cf. M. Vickers, "Alcibiades on Stage: *Philoctetes* and *Cyclops*," *Historia* 36 (1987) 171–197, and *Sophocles and Alcibiades: Athenian Politics in Ancient Greek Literature* (Stocksfield 2008) 59–81; G. Ugolini, *Sofocle e Atene. Vita politica e attività teatrale nella Grecia classica* (Rome 2000) 185–212.

²⁶ On Alcibiades' imperialism see e.g. S. Forde, *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides* (Ithaca 1989).

²⁷ In Thucydides' account, the defeat of Delion, in which roughly a thousand hoplites fell (4.101.2), is interwoven with Brasidas' campaign in Thrace that led to the loss of Athenian control of the area, cf. Canfora, *La grande guerra del Peloponneso* 111–125.

most unusually, the text of the tragedy was soon after available to the historian—unless one imagines a re-performance after his return.²⁸ For those who are convinced, as I am, that the person speaking in 5.26 is an editor and not the author, the perspective may be reversed,²⁹ and we can picture Thucydides attending the tragedy in Athens in 409. In any case, that unusual Sophoclean *iunctura* left its mark on his literary memory.³⁰

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²⁸ On the debated question of the written circulation of Attic tragedies, useful information can be found in M. Caroli, *Studi sulle seconde edizioni del dramma tragico* (Bari 2020); on reperformances see e.g. A. A. Lamari, *Reperforming Greek: Tragedy, Theater, Politics, and Cultural Mobility in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC* (Berlin 2017).

²⁹ Arguments against the traditional view of the exile are collected by L. Canfora, *Tucidide. La menzogna, la colpa, l'esilio* (Rome 2016), and again, more recently, *Tucidide e il colpo di stato* (Bologna 2021).

³⁰ He was probably not the only one. The Sophoclean expression interfered in some way with the manuscript tradition of Euripides' *Medea*. In the second episode, Jason tries to overturn the argument concerning the good Medea did to him by stating that she actually got more than she gave: above all the possibility, by being among Greeks, to live by law with no concession to force (538, νόμοις τε χρήσθαι μὴ πρὸς ἰσχύος χάριτι). For this line, a scholion preserved in *Paris.gr.* 2713 (f. 116^v) attests the existence of the variant reading πρὸς ἰσχύος θράσει, cf. A. Martina, *Medea. Euripide II* (Pisa 2018) 100. On the other hand, as far as readers of Thucydides are concerned, the author of 1 Maccabees was probably recalling his text in a passage in which he made Judas pray to God to dissolve the θράσος ἰσχύος of the enemy (4:32); and a well-known imitator of Thucydides, Cassius Dio, probably had 4.92.5 in mind when he portrayed (though using the verb θαρσεῖν) the self-confidence of Pompey the Younger waiting for Caesar in the besieged Spanish town of Ulia: τῇ ἰσχύϊ ἑαυτοῦ πάνυ θαρσῶν (43.32.2).

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