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THUCYDIDES' SOURCE CITATIONS: 'IT IS SAID'

Ancient historical writers mention their sources of information more or less frequently and in various ways.[1] Named sources feature frequently in Herodotus, for instance, but rarely in Thucydides and Xenophon.[2] The most common form of citation in these later historians, though still far less common than in Herodotus, is the anonymous 'it is/was said'.[3] The received opinion is that these refer to sources and Thucydides mentions them to mark his uncertainty about the accuracy of their reports;[4] but the application of narratology to historical texts encourages us to read historical narrative in terms of narrative design,[5] and in those terms 'it is said' represents the historian's intrusion into his narrative of another perspective, a 'focalization' separate from his own.[6] The phrase does not always distance him from belief in the reported view, as Herodotus shows, who bases his history on 'what is said' in oral tradition;[7] and as we shall see, Thucydides also uses these other perspectives to confirm his own. It has been noted that older commentators on Thucydides explained his narrative in terms of his sources and phases of com-

[1] Speaking of 'sources of information', I record my thanks to the anonymous reviewer of the original version of this paper, who also directed me to helpful bibliography.

[2] Xenophon mentions Ctesias: *An.* 1.8.26–7; Thucydides mentions Thebans and Plataeans: 2.5.6 and Sicans: 6.2.2.

[3] In Thucydides I found 21 uses of λέγεται, 5 of λέγονται, 2 of ἐλέγετο, 3 of ἐλέγοντο, 4 of ἐλέχθη, ἐλέχθησαν, 2 of φᾶσι, which refer to his own sources. Following Westlake (1977), I do not generally count instances where other speakers refer to their sources (1.37.2, 1.39.1, 3.62.1 etc.), or where 'speeches were said/delivered' by named people (3.36, 4.58, 3.53, 6.32.3). See Gray (2003), 111–23 on such phrases in Xenophon. They are also called 'anonymous spokesmen' or 'reported narrators'.

[4] There is a general statement to this effect on Thucydides 8.50.3 in Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1945–1980). See also the references in this paper to Hornblower (1991, 1996, 2008) and Rusten (1989). Westlake (1977) studied 'it is/was said' in its own right – see below, *passim*.

[5] The application of narratology to historical texts, and narrative devices of particular relevance to such texts, are discussed in Hornblower (1994). He explores (at 139) how Thucydides makes us believe that his reports are objectively accurate. See also Rood (1998), 9–14 and Gribble (1998). But none of these focusses on 'it is said'.

[6] For focalization in narratology: Hornblower (1994), 134.

[7] There is a debate about the distancing effect of 'it is said' in Herodotus. Laird (1999), 116–52 makes the basic theoretical point that reported expressions, in the context of speeches, are not the narrator's property; he is referring mainly to Latin authors but also to Thucydides, and so would presumably apply the principle to Herodotus as well (140). Cooper (1974) believed that Herodotus' use of oblique infinitives, which come after 'it is said', distances him from belief in the reports, but de Jong (2004), 108–9 thinks that 'reported narrators' in Herodotus confirm details; she directs us to her earlier study on Homer. Pelling (2006), 157 n. 59, referring to Harrison (2000), 248–50, also distinguishes 'distance' from 'dubiety, noting that distance can also imply 'importance and respect', which gives it a confirming role. MacLeod (1983), 140–1 suggests that the function of what he calls 'qualifications', such as 'one might almost say', is similar: they endorse what is said because they reveal it as a considered judgement. Citations in a similar way endorse independent witness.

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position whereas recent ones look more to his narrative concerns.[8] My approach places narrative design alongside the question of sources and belief. I take it that Thucydides applied to these reports of 'what is/was said' the method of verification he announces at 1.22.2–3, but he applied that also to other information that he does not mark in this way. The question is then why he marks these relatively few reports and not others.

The limits of the idea that the phrase conveys Thucydides' uncertainty have already been raised by Westlake.[9] He accepted uncertainty as the most frequent explanation of such citations, distinguishing between their reference to contemporary events in the Peloponnesian War and events in the distant past, and between past tense reports as those current at the time of the event and present tense reports current in his own time (but finding this distinction less meaningful than he would have liked: p. 349). In those citations where he found that uncertainty was not the explanation, he thought they justified motives (pp. 352–4) or needed individual explanation (pp. 354–6). I believe that his view that uncertainty is not always the issue applies to many more instances, and I draw up different categories to reflect how the phrases function. These are based on the nature of the content they qualify, and within them the reported perspectives operate alongside the author's voice to confirm details of significance in narratives of special thematic interest. In other words, while accepting their role in his belief system, I maintain that they also have a role to play in his rhetoric as a narrative device.[10]

These reported perspectives operate to some extent in the way that Pelling (n. 7 above) has suggested for some of the reports in Herodotus. He suggested that they mark matters of importance by distancing the author from the report because of his respect for its importance. I would say they achieve this marking by acting as independent confirming witnesses. If we wish to preserve uncertainty, we could transfer it to the audience who disbelieve precisely because the matters are of such magnitude, and find here a first motive for the marking. Such disbelief in the audience is a focus in Pericles' funeral speech, when he says [rhetorically] that those who are enemies of the dead will refuse to believe his [great] praise because it is beyond their own experience (and those of goodwill will think that it can never be great enough to do justice to the dead: 2.35.2). In that case Thucydides has Pericles deploy multiple narrative (rhetorical) devices in the speech to dispel their resistance to the truth. In these cited reports, Thucydides dispels disbelief instead through the equally rhetorical use of the anonymous witness.

The focus here is on Thucydides, but Herodotus and Xenophon will be used to support the findings about his usage. It will emerge that 'it is said' operates in Thucydides in the same way as it does in Herodotus and Xenophon, thus confirming the continuity of use of narrative devices in historical writing,[11] and also that Thucydides uses citations to mark significance in the same general way

[8] Rood (1998), 48–52.

[9] Westlake (1977). Schneider (1974), 133 endorsed the distance of disbelief in Thucydides' speculation, for instance about motivation.

[10] Thomas (2000), 173 makes the point that Herodotus also displays his research methods for rhetorical purpose, in passages where the debate is important to him.

[11] As de Jong, Nünlist and Bowie (2004) prove. Hornblower (1994) also uses examples from Herodotus.

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that his other narrator interventions[12] mark not 'subsidiary points',[13] but points that contribute to the understanding of whole episodes.

CATEGORY 1: THE NEAR MISS

One category of usage is accounts of 'near miss', in which a city just misses being captured, or misses not being captured.[14] Thucydides has five occurrences of 'it is said' in this category, representing a significant proportion of his total usage, and spanning Westlake's special cases and his justification of motives. These near misses are dramatic moments in Thucydides' narrative because they concern cities whose capture would have turned the course of history: Plataea (2.75–7), Piraeus and thus Athens (2.93–4), Amphipolis (3.79), Corcyra (4.104), Piraeus and thus Athens again (8.78). In this category, 'it is said' can mark the near miss itself or the agents who prevented the capture or would have brought it about. Thucydides does not always use the phrase in accounts of near miss, but in those cases (below) he marks the miss or its agents in other ways. Thucydides may have felt these needed supporting because of their magnitude in the eyes of an audience disinclined to accept such twists of fate; in more sophisticated terms his source citations authenticate his narratives by constructing a system of belief and disbelief.

The near miss is already present in Homer's formulaic: 'they would have taken lofty Troy, if not …' (*Il.* 16.698–709, 21.544–611). The device here underlines the might of a warrior who is so heroic that his onslaught almost takes Troy (Patroclus, Achilles), but also the power of the gods to endorse the warriors' destiny, which is not to take Troy. Apollo in both cases causes the miss.[15] The formulaic past potential sentence 'they would have … if not …' is found in the historians' accounts of near miss, although they also convey it as the thought: 'in spite of the vulnerability the city, nevertheless they did not take it.'

In history, Herodotus makes use of the near miss when the inhabitants of the city of Babylon just miss eluding capture by the Persians; and 'what is said' by the inhabitants of the region marks the agent that caused their miss, which is the magnitude of the city. They would have eluded capture, Herodotus says, if they had known of the entry of the Persian forces along the river into Babylon; they could have caught them as in a net, unable to get out, but as matters stood, the Persians came upon them unexpectedly 'by the agency, it is said by the inhabitants of the region, of the great size of the city' (*ὑπὸ δὲ μεγάθεος τῆς πόλιος, ὡς λέγεται ὑπὸ τῶν ταύτῃ οἰκημένων*). The explanation of this allusion to the size of Babylon is that the people were enjoying a festival in the centre of the city and were unaware of the capture of the outskirts because in such a large city these

[12] Rood (1998), 128 says that Thucydides' interventions prove his intellectual and emotional commitment. Gribble (1998) recognizes their role in marking great pathos and other themes of special interest. On Thucydides' concern with what is superlatively great: Grant (1974), 83–5; Macleod (1983), 140–1.

[13] Westlake (1977), 345 sees them as shortened forms of Thucydides' longer discussions of the deficiencies of evidence.

[14] De Jong (2004), 16–17 calls these 'if not' situations. Hornblower (1994), 158–9 calls them 'counterfactuals', with examples including 8.96.1. Rood (1998), 278–9 notes three instances: 8.86.4–5, 87.4, 96.1 that do not involve 'it is said'; on these see below.

[15] See Nesselrath (1992) on this device and its forms throughout ancient epic, 5–37 on Homer, 1–2 on the near miss of Patroclus.

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were so far away (1.191.5–6). In this way the magnitude of the city is made the agent, the reason why the Babylonians narrowly missed foiling the capture. The phrase 'it is said' is placed right after the word 'magnitude' and therefore seems to 'source' and confirm this detail. This reflects Herodotus' larger thematic interest in magnitude, which is shown in his reference to 'great and marvellous' events in his preface, and is developed in the digression after the capture that emphasizes Babylonia's huge revenues, enormous buildings and so forth (1.192–200). In the near miss, he singles out the great size of Babylon as the cause of its overthrow, and this illustrates the special danger inherent in growth to magnitude, the basis of Herodotus' philosophy of rise and fall, which he elsewhere conveys through the famous image of the tallest tree in the forest being always the one to be struck down by lightning (7.10). The reference to 'what is said' thus marks a detail of great thematic significance: 'worthy of being said'. Because it endorses his own belief about magnitude, it is unlikely that Herodotus is uncertain about this reported detail. Rather than expressing uncertainty, his source confirms his own perspective.

Xenophon uses 'it is said' to mark the near miss itself, as when he describes how the Thebans were almost prevented from invading Laconia: 'If Ischolaus had gone forward into the difficult places and held out, *they said* that none would have gone through by that route. But as things were …' (*Hell*. 6.5.26). He marks the agent of the near miss in a different way in his statement that Sparta would have been taken had a Cretan not informed Agesilaus 'by some divine chance' of the coming attack (*Hell*. 7.5.10). 'Some divine chance' emphasizes the agent that prevented the capture as 'it is said' does in examples referred to below, but by referring it to the higher agency of a god.

When we turn to Thucydides, we find a similar use of 'it is said' to mark the near miss and its agents as in Herodotus and Xenophon. The first example marks the agent, when the Peloponnesians narrowly miss taking the city of Plataea in the early years of the war (2.75–7). Thucydides develops this episode to illustrate the thwarting of human design by the operation of accident and chance, a theme voiced by many speakers in the *Histories* and revealed in other narratives by Thucydides himself.[16] He begins by giving a very detailed description of the building of walls and counter-walls and the great earthworks and machines of war that were moved against the city (2.75–6); then, when these failed, he reveals how the Peloponnesians set fire to the city, relying on the wind to carry it (2.77.2). The efforts involved in the military operation, including the decision to burn the city, are explicitly presented as human design: 'for they were devising every shape and form [*πᾶσαν γὰρ δὴ ἰδέαν ἐπενόουν*] in the hope that they could take them without expense or siege' (2.77.2). The theme of chance comes in first when he describes the magnitude of the flames as something never before created by the hand of man and he compares this 'handmade' (*χειροποίητον*) fire with one that occurs 'by chance' (*ἀπὸ ταὐτομάτου*) in the forest: 'already in the mountains, timber rubbed together by the wind of its own has sent up fire and flame'. This comment is hardly necessary to the narrative and stands out like a simile, one that encourages us to read the episode in terms of the contrast between *technê* ('design') and *tychê* ('chance').

[16] Stahl (2003), 75–101 includes the near miss of Plataea in a chapter on the role of chance, 81–3, translating 'it is said', but not commenting on it. See also: Edmunds (1975); Rood (1998), 26–31.

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There follow two statements of the near miss: 'This conflagration was great and the Plataeans, though they escaped the rest, were bound to perish in a very short time', and 'if a wind had blown to assist [the fire], as the enemy hoped, they would not have escaped' (2.77.5). Thucydides then marks the agent that caused the miss with our phrase (2.77.6): 'it is said that the following happened': a great storm extinguished the flames.

Westlake made this a special case on the grounds that Thucydides is not uncertain, but is distancing himself from the implicit idea that the gods may have been responsible for the storm.[17] Thucydides certainly was sceptical about the intervention of the gods in human affairs, but he was not sceptical about the operation of chance, and here he seems to attribute to chance what others would attribute to the gods, using 'it is said' to confirm the role of the storm and thus the role of chance as the agent of the near miss. The verb he chooses for the occurrence itself points to chance: *ξυμβῆναι*. The authorial voice and the voice of what is said thus work together to confirm the operation of chance: the author sets up the opposition of *technê* and *tychê* in his narrative, while the reported perspective confirms the key moment when chance prevented the capture. Thucydides operates like Herodotus, who confirms his own perspective on the magnitude of Babylon with the reported view. It might be significant that Thucydides presents the occurrence of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, famines and plague, as phenomena which were before the war merely 'said in report but rarely confirmed in fact' (*τά τε πρότερον ἀκοῇ μὲν λεγόμενα, ἔργῳ δὲ σπανιώτερον βεβαιούμενα*), but which in this war became 'not incredible' (1.23.1–3). The storm at Plataea is such a phenomenon.[18]

Thucydides reveals a narrative design in choosing to place his citation of a source at the key moment when the danger was averted. Without narrative design, he might have placed it at the beginning of the episode or anywhere else, since presumably the whole episode was reported to him as 'what was said', according to his statement of method at 1.22.

The agent of the near miss is marked by 'it is said' in two further episodes in Thucydides: 2.93.4, where there is a virtual near miss and the agent 'is said to be' the wind that prevented them advancing, and 3.79.3, where 'it is said' that Brasidas was recommending capture, which means there would have been no miss, had he been heeded.[19] The larger theme to which the marker draws attention in both episodes is the characterization of the Peloponnesians, especially the Spartans,

[17] Westlake (1977), 354, followed by Gomme and Rusten on 2.77. Cf. Hornblower in his commentary on 2.77, rejecting any divine implication. Comparison is made with the storm sent by Apollo to extinguish the flames burning Croesus alive (Hdt. 1.87). This is another near miss, which Herodotus again marks: 'it is said – by the Lydians', and he gives the whole story in reported speech. This seems to be another case of the citation confirming the near miss and marking its magnitude. There is no reason to question Herodotus' belief in it, since the rest of the narrative is in accord with this version. His endorsement of the miracle through source citation is the same in his endorsement of the divine salvation of Arion, on which see Gray (2001).

[18] We might preserve uncertainty by introducing the focalization of a reader: Hornblower (1994), 134–5, Rood (1998), 11–14. The reader might feel uncertain about a chance occurrence of such magnitude as the storm, and be convinced by the source reference.

[19] Westlake (1977), 353 includes these in his category of justification of motives.

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as hesitant and fearful. This is a significant theme in Thucydides, emphasized as a prominent cause of the outbreak and a prominent factor in the course of the war.[20]

In the first episode the Peloponnesians in fact have two opportunities to capture the Piraeus, but they miss both. Thucydides presents the second near miss in terms of the formula 'they would have … if …' , but he presents the first in terms of the equivalent 'although the situation in the city left it open to attack, nevertheless they did not take it'. So at 2.93.3, he describes the situation that would have led to capture: there was no fleet guarding Piraeus and no expectation at Athens that the Peloponnesians would make a sudden attack; they thought they would detect any plans for attack before they occurred. They were in other words quite unprepared. Yet the Peloponnesians failed to carry the attack through. The agents of the missed opportunity are presented as their fear of the danger, and 'some wind too [which] is said to have prevented them [from sailing there]'. They take Salamis instead. This causes a great panic in Athens and is the setting for the second opportunity to capture the city. Thucydides describes it thus: '[the entry into the harbour] would easily have happened, if they had been willing not to delay, and the wind would not have prevented them' (2.94.1). Thucydides juxtaposes the two agents of hesitation and the wind in both cases, but he marks the role of the wind in the first as 'it is said', just as Herodotus marked the magnitude of Babylon. Whether this is meant to confirm or question the role of the wind perhaps matters less than how the phrase draws attention to the hesitant and fearful character of the Peloponnesians as the main theme of the episode. If it confirms the role, which is then denied in the second statement of near miss, where hesitation alone is responsible, the effect would be to say that 'even when there is no preventing wind, they are still hesitant'. If it questions its role, the wind would be an excuse and leave hesitation as their only genuine motive in both misses, and that would serve the main theme as well. The wind may be marked because it is one of those chance occurrences that cause the Peloponnesians to lose their nerve, as happens when they go to pieces after the chance sinking of one of their ships: 2.91.4. But what is clear is that the marking of the agent of near miss, true or false, remains the function of 'it is said' and the agent is part of the theme of fear.

National character as an agent in human affairs continues to be the focus of the rest of the episode, in which Thucydides contrasts the Athenian with the Peloponnesian character. Throughout Thucydides, Athenian confidence and dynamism is contrasted with Peloponnesian hesitation and fear. In this episode Thucydides notes that the proximity of the Peloponnesians on Salamis caused 'consternation [in Athens] no smaller than any others in this war'. But they immediately recover from their panic to take effective action against the Peloponnesians and reveal their characteristic ability to rise from despair and take the initiative.[21] The wind would not have beaten *them* if it had risen. The account of the panic in the city close to being captured is a regular part of the pattern of the near miss, and can be worked in various ways, here to advertise Athenian resilience.

The marking of national character as the agent of the near miss by what 'is said' is found again at 3.79.3, where Corcyra is almost captured by the Peloponnesians.

[20] Their slowness is a major feature of the Corinthian characterization of the Spartans, and of their King Archidamus at 1.67–86. Archidamus' slowness is the main feature of his first invasion of Attica (2.10–20), and Peloponnesian character plays a large part in the fighting against Phormio in the Corinthian Gulf (2.85–92).

[21] Again, this trait is well brought out at 1.67–86 and 2.85–90.

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The near miss is caused by the failure by the commander Alcidas to take advantage of the vulnerability of the city, and 'it is said' marks the agency of Brasidas in arguing in favour of an attack: 'On the following day they no more sailed against the city, though it was in great confusion and fear, and though Brasidas, it is said, was recommending attack, but was not equal in votes with Alcidas [and therefore had no effect]'. Westlake may be right to say that the report is exculpating Brasidas from the failure, but it also heightens the drama of the near miss and provides another confirming perspective on the possibility of capture (the author and his 'source', and now even Brasidas himself) that makes the hesitation of the main commander more prominent. It draws us to focus on the commander's hesitation but also on the inequality between Alcidas and Brasidas, which has been an issue from the beginning of the campaign (3.69, 76). Perhaps, if the Spartans had made Brasidas equal with Alcidas, they would have taken Corcyra.[22]

As we have seen from Xenophon, the near miss itself can be marked by 'it is said', and Thucydides thus marks the 'near miss' capture of Amphipolis by Brasidas (4.104.2). This is a significant miss because of the importance of the city, but it also draws attention to the role of *stasis* in the war, which is another one of Thucydides' major interests.[23] In the account, Brasidas' sudden appearance and his capture of their territory outside the walls caused great confusion in Amphipolis (the regular part of the pattern), and this was exacerbated by internal suspicion (4.104.1: 'especially when they were suspicious of one another'). Therefore, 'it is said that it seemed that Brasidas, if he had been willing to go straight against the city instead of turning the army to plunder, could have taken it': *καὶ λέγεται Βρασίδαν … δοκεῖν ἂν ἑλεῖν*.[24] But as things were, he kept the army inactive. Thucydides confirms the reported perspective that capture was possible when he goes on to indicate that those who refused to surrender the city gained the upper hand only as a result of Brasidas' inactivity, because that puts the miss entirely down to his inactivity.[25] The *μέν … δέ …* construction links his inactivity and their advantage as cause and effect: he [*μέν*] remained inactive; while those opposed to surrender [*δέ*] gained the upper hand. The point at which Thucydides seems to disagree with the reported perspective concerns Brasidas' motives for inactivity. They said he just turned to plunder. Thucydides reveals that it was because a) he had overrun the country and b) nothing had come from those inside the city as he had expected. In other words Brasidas failed to attack not because of plunder, but because the people of Amphipolis did not surrender even though he had control

[22] This also reflects on their character. Spartans hesitate to make already powerful citizens more powerful, such as Pausanias in Book 1.

[23] The classic case is the Corcyrean revolution: 3.80–3. Thucydides marks this theme of *stasis* by another citation when, having described how Epidamnus became a 'great and populous power', he notes 'it is said' that as a result of many years of internal *stasis*, they became prey to foreign war and were deprived of most of their power: 1.24.4. This is of great significance for his general understanding of the effects of *stasis*.

[24] Westlake (1977), 355–6 finds this sentence tautologous, whereas Gomme on 4.104.2 suggests: 'It is said that B. *thought* he could take the town'; but 'it is said that the impression was' further accentuates the nearness of the miss, if it means that people had that impression at the time of the near miss and are also reporting it at the time of writing.

[25] Westlake (1977) 355–6 finds it unlikely that Thucydides was uncertain about any aspect of this campaign because he was sent for in the crisis that followed the near miss. He concludes that 'what is said' justifies those who eventually did a deal with Brasidas and let him into the city: it was said by them, in order to excuse their actions, that the city would have been taken anyway. This does not account for the fact that Brasidas failed to take the city.

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of their land. This makes them like the Athenians in the first year of the war, who also refused to surrender in spite of the loss of their land. In this case the reported perspective on the near miss is both confirmed and challenged.

These four examples of near miss suggest a pattern of usage that attaches 'it is said' to the near miss as a category of content, and in a confirming sense. There is a further example at 8.78, where what 'is said' marks internal *stasis* and the poor condition of their ships as the agents that left the Athenians open to an attack that was missed again by a Peloponnesian commander who showed the usual hesitant character. There are examples that do not attract citations, but these still stress the agent in other ways, often for instance by their sheer length, as when Alcibiades is singled out for his role in narrowly preventing the Athenians sailing against their own homeland and putting Ionia and the Hellespont into the hands of the enemy (8.86.4–5). There is also a long account of the agency of Tissaphernes in not putting the fleet into action at 8.87.4, when it would have given victory to the Peloponnesians. In the case of 2.94.1, there is yet another way of marking the near miss by using the formulaic description of the panic in Athens ('consternation no smaller than any others in this war') to accentuate the danger.[26] And in his account of the near miss takeover of the entire Athenian empire at 8.96.4, where the averting agency is again Spartan hesitation, Thucydides marks it by the common device of reinforcing one striking case by reference to other similar ones, commenting that they proved themselves most convenient enemies not only in this instance, but in many others too (8.96.5).[27] Interestingly, these other occasions on which they proved convenient enemies have already been described in the earlier episodes of near miss examined above.

Westlake has two other instances in his category of 'justification' that relate to near miss in Archidamus' first invasion of Attica, where Archidamus' expectation of capturing the city is marked: 'it is said' that he was expecting the Athenians to surrender while their land is still untouched, and 'it is said' that he expected that the Athenians would not endure the sight of their land being ravaged (2.18.5, 2.20). These perspectives justify Archidamus' delay as Westlake said, but they also draw attention to Archidamus' expectation in the interplay between expectation and outcome, which is another of Thucydides' thematic interests.[28]

CATEGORY 2: SUPERLATIVE REPUTATIONS FOR SAVAGERY

Superlative reputations are a category of content that drives Xenophon to use 'it is said', and they include reputations for superlative savagery.[29] There is an instance at *Anabasis* 7.2.22, when, in describing how they slaughtered an army, the Thracian Thynians are 'said to be' the most warlike in the region. Xenophon marks their reputation again when they were attacking his own tent at *Anabasis* 7.4.14: they had 'clubs which [people] *said* they had for the purpose of knocking points off

[26] See 7.71 for this exact same description of panic.

[27] See examples from Xenophon in Gray (2004) such as *Hell.* 5.4.1. The alternative marking of the agent as divine intervention has already been seen in *Hell.* 7.5.10.

[28] See Hunter (1973) and Schneider (1974), 127–71.

[29] Instances of superlative reputations 'said' in Gray (2003), n. 29 include: *An.* 1.9.28, 1.10.2, 1.10.7–8, 2.6.1; *Hell.* 3.3.8, 5.4.57.

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spears'.[30] He may be uncertain, but their savage techniques are in harmony with the rest of his account.

'It is said' confirms superlative reputations for savagery in Thucydides' account of the Aetolian campaign of Demosthenes as well. In the first example, the Messenians are urging Demosthenes to attack Aetolia in reported speech, but one remark is in direct speech and seems to be a comment by Thucydides himself (3.94.5): that the Eurytanians are the largest Aetolian tribe and *are* most incomprehensible in speech and eaters of raw flesh 'as they are said to be'. The authorial 'are' seems to confirm the report, as at 6.22: 'that what *is said* to be ready *is in fact* ready'. At any rate, the content of the report is a superlatively savage characteristic of speech, as well as the eating of raw meat.[31]

In this same campaign, Thucydides describes the slaughter of Hesiod, who 'is said' to have been killed by the men of the region at the very place where Demosthenes camped on the eve of his invasion (3.96.1).[32] Westlake attributes this citation to Thucydides' uncertainty about a story from the distant past, which also involved a prophecy, in which he had no belief (p. 359).[33] Yet there is a parallel use of 'it is said' in Xenophon where there is no prophecy and uncertainty seems unlikely, but where the sensational nature of the slaughter remains a feature: 'it was said' that Teres 'lost many men to [those same Thracian Thynians of superlatively warlike reputation above] along with his baggage train' (*An*. 7.2.22). Xenophon seems certain about this report because he offers it as an explanation of the fear of Seuthes, who lives under guard in a fortress whenever he is in the area where Teres lost his army.[34] Thucydides could then also be marking the savage murder of a great poet rather than expressing uncertainty. A very special reason why he marks their savagery may be its significance for the coming campaign, because the death of Hesiod suggests that Demosthenes had chosen a doom-laden campsite, and also that the men of the region are given to slaughtering strangers, and these both prepare us for their subsequent slaughter of Demosthenes' army in the main account. There, Thucydides develops the theme of the sufferings of war with various narrator interventions, including the mannered reference to 'every shape of flight and destruction',[35] and the confrontation of annalistic and narrative time in the description of the Athenians who died as 'in number and prime of life the best men who died in this whole war from the city of Athens' (3.98.4). The savagery of the Aetolians in this slaughter is consistent with what is said of their reputation. The massacre of Teres' army made Seuthes so wary that he lived in a fortress; the slaughter of Hesiod should have made Demosthenes more wary too.[36]

[30] The Thynians could be the authors of the comment; but it is more likely that others commented – if we want to 'source' the phrase.

[31] Gomme on 3.94.5: 'Thucydides will not vouch for this'. Westlake (1977), 350: the phrase is 'a largely irrelevant parenthesis inserted by Thucydides himself' in order to cast doubt on its truth.

[32] The translation I give is the common one; it is possible also that the story is told 'by the men of the district' that he died, which would leave the agency open.

[33] The oracle said he would die in Nemea, and this place was also called Nemea. Hornblower in his commentary on 3.96.1 challenges Westlake's idea that 'it is said' distances Thucydides from the prophecy.

[34] Xenophon has another example at *An*. 7.5.13, where 'they said' that Thracians [who are always marked by their savagery] used to kill each other over disputed shipwrecks.

[35] Cf. 3.81.5: 'every shape of death occurred' in the pathos of the Corcyrean revolution.

[36] The massacre occurred in spite of the easy capture that the Messenians had predicted and partly because Demosthenes did not wait for his light-armed fighters, though the Aetolian

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The earlier report about the Eurytanians could also prepare for the massacre in the main account, though there is no direct reference to their language or flesh-eating tendencies. The marking in these cases may again be provoked by the historian's expectation that audiences would find such savagery hard to accept, or by a tradition of such expectation that made the marker a matter of normal narrative process.

CATEGORY 3: MYTHICAL PROOFS

Westlake identifies the category of 'the distant past' as a straightforward case where the marker indicates uncertainty, but it includes the story of Hesiod, which seems to confirm Thucydides' own account of the savagery of the men of Aetolia. Another two reports about the distant past absolutely preclude uncertainty because they confirm proofs of what the author is arguing in his own voice. Evidence and proof are of course a thematic issue of great importance to Thucydides. This explains the triple occurrence of the phrase in the story of Alcmaeon, son of Amphiaraus, who settled on islands in the delta of the river Achelous in the distant past (2.102.5: 'it is said, as they say, such things as are said'). Thucydides needs to believe this story because it is proof of a point he has made in his own voice. In fact it supports his case so exactly that one might think he is shaping it for his own purposes.[37] He has been speaking in a digression about the difficulties of a winter campaign caused by the flooding of the river Achelous due to the blockage of its route to the sea. He suggests that small islands in the river mouth have become attached to the mainland through silting and that over time the whole mouth will fill up, and he then tells the story of Alcmaeon, which proves that the land emerged in recent times: that an oracle told Almaeon that because he had murdered his mother the only possible place of settlement for him was land that the sun had not looked on at the time of the killing – i.e. was not in existence as land in recent memory; all other places were banned to him – and that he chose the area of these islands because it fitted this requirement. The story must be believed because it supports the other proof of the recent development but it has special confirming value, which is made clear in the three citations, because it gives a dating for the emergence of the land within human memory, however mythic.[38]

The phrase confirms another legend as proof at 4.24.5, where Thucydides is again digressing to discuss a geographical feature, in this case the straits of Messina: 'This is the so-called Charybdis, through which Odysseus is said to have sailed.' Thucydides describes the huge force of the water as it presses through the narrows in the meeting of two great seas and he says the passage through 'was thought difficult for very good reason', presumably in the poetic tradition. The consensus is that Thucydides is distancing himself from that tradition,[39] but

strength in this area was decisive (3.97–8).

[37] He shapes the legends about Minos at 1.4 for instance, in order to illustrate his power theory.

[38] Gomme on 2.102.5 suggests that Thucydides gives details of the story because it was not well known.

[39] Westlake (1977), 359 speaks of Thucydides' 'misgivings' about poetic authority. Gomme suggested that he was putting his natural explanation against the supernatural exaggeration of the poets. Rood (2004), 119 says the phrase gives the straits a 'mythical aura' and cites Hornblower's commentary for the idea that even Homer distances himself from belief by making

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Thucydides confirms as 'reasonable' the view that the straits were thought difficult, so that the reported perspective confirms his own. He may not even have had the fabulous elements of the poetic tradition in mind, so as to distance himself from them. His 'natural' description of the strait as ῥοώδης could in fact be a prose rendition of Homer's line: δεινὸν ἀνερροίβδησε θαλάσσης ἁλμυρὸν ὕδωρ (*Od.* 12.236), which restricts itself entirely to the natural description of the straits.

There remain the reports on the early settlement of Sicily, which do often indicate uncertainty. Thucydides has no knowledge about the report of the Cyclops as the earliest inhabitants (6.2.1), and he leaves the issue open: 'let it be sufficient that the poets have said it as it seems to each about them' and he passes on. He contrasts the Sicans' own report about their origins with the truth as he knows it. But his comment at 6.2.4, that 'what is said' about the Sicels crossing from Italy to Sicily on rafts is 'likely', confirms the detail even though Thucydides also allows for other versions of their crossing.

CATEGORY 4: LARGE NUMBERS (AND THE FORMULA OF PERFECT KNOWLEDGE)

Another category of Thucydides' use of 'it is said' is large numbers, as in Xenophon.[40] There is a simple instance when Thucydides is describing the magnitude of the Odrysian kingdom and its resources. He describes the gathering of numbers of troops by their King Sitalces, the huge extent of his territory, and the vast wealth he could command. He declares in his own voice that the magnitude of the kingdom is second only to that of the Scyths, but stronger in that the tribes are united under Sitalces (2.95–7). His account of Sitalces' march into Macedonia is equally grand, with no loss of life and a large number of reinforcements (2.98). It is after this long description that the other perspective of 'it is said' confirms the size of his army as a total of 150,000 (2.98.3: τὸ πᾶν πλῆθος λέγεται …). As in the case of the storm at Plataea (above), Thucydides could have declared from the outset that he based his report on a source or could have 'sourced' a greater number of the details. His decision to mark only the grand total is based on narrative design to mark the culmination of the gathering of strength. The fact that he knows the details of the various contingents rules out uncertainty (2.98.4) and the large number is in accord with the large territory and wealth and the 'many' who joined him in the expectation of plunder (98.3).[41] The only uncertainty might be in the mind of the reader who doubts such magnitude and needs to be convinced.

A complex marking of great numbers occurs at 3.113.6, in another event of magnitude, the massacre of the men of Ambracia, which Thucydides calls the 'greatest calamity that ever happened in the whole war'. It is complex because it involves the presentation of a number that is said to be unbelievable, as well as an account of near miss (and the formula of perfect knowledge described below). Thucydides says here that he has not written down the finite number (ἀριθμόν) of the dead because 'the mass is said to have died to a measure beyond belief

his secondary narrator Odysseus tell this tale; he concludes that 'it is said' may just represent the narrator's qualified omniscience.

[40] Instances in Gray (2003), n. 29 include *Hell.* 4.2.16, 5.3.2, 6.4.12, 6.4.29, 6.5.29.

[41] Cf. Gomme, Westlake and Hornblower on uncertainty in their commentaries.

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relative to the size of the *polis*' (διότι ἄπιστον τὸ πλῆθος λέγεται ἀπολέσθαι ὡς πρὸς τὸ μέγεθος τῆς πόλεως). According to Gomme, Thucydides may have been uncertain because he did not have the final total of the dead in spite of his earlier count of over 1,000 (3.113.4), or was perhaps given the exact figure and found it incredible, but his description of the numbers as beyond belief looks to me like a rhetorical enhancement of their magnitude: 'so great that it will sound incredible to those who hear it'.[42] Thucydides does not question but confirms the relative magnitude he points to in his: 'relative to the size of the *polis*', when he goes on to present the effects of the losses as a near miss situation for the population of Ambracia. Indeed, he is very exact in his knowledge (οἶδα) that their losses were so great that if they had made the attempt, their enemies could easily have taken the city: 'I do know that if the Acarnanians and the Amphilochians had been willing to heed Demosthenes and the Athenians and take Ambracia, they would have taken it without a shot (αὐτοβοεί).' It is interesting that, as is usual in near misses, the causal factor or agency that made capture possible, which is the number who died, is marked by 'it is said' – even though it is not revealed. The causal factor that nullified the opportunity to capture the city is, also as usual, fear, this time of the growth of Athenian power, which resonates so strongly in the outbreak of the war (3.113.6: 'As it was, they feared that the Athenians if they took the city would be more difficult for them as neighbours').

'It is said' in this episode is therefore serving two categories of usage and confirming Thucydides' view of the relative magnitude of the loss as both incredible and such as to produce a near miss situation. He suppressed the arithmetical total as unbelievable because he found that rhetorically effective, and in any case the near miss statement was a more telling indication of relative magnitude. Perhaps he preferred to spell out the relative magnitude because the absolute losses were small to audiences from more populous cities such as Athens. The confirmation of the losses as incredible could then address the audience's disbelief.

There is another instance of marking great numbers in relative if not absolute terms at 5.74.3, in the account of the battle of Mantinea and this also involves what 'was said'. Thucydides brings out the significance of the battle by calling it 'the greatest in a long time' and fought by the cities 'most worthy of report' (ἀξιολογωτάτων). He numbers among the dead 700 of the Argive forces, 200 Mantineans, 200 of the Athenian forces. He then says that the Spartan allies did not suffer badly enough to make their losses 'worthy of report' (ἀξιόλογον), but that, in spite of the difficulty he had in getting the truth about the Spartans, their losses 'were said to be' around 300. The question is whether these losses warrant the marker because they are great or because Thucydides is uncertain about them. The admission of the difficulty he had in getting the number seems to act like the formula of perfect knowledge (below) and heighten the value of the report he has been able to secure, as something into which he has put great effort and which is as certain as it can be.[43] He seems also to confirm the relative magnitude of the

[42] Stinton (1990), 236–64 reviews '*si credere dignum est* – if the story is true' as not an expression of disbelief but of quite different attitudes, such as a comment on the shocking and surprising elements of a story, which are nevertheless believed. Gribble (1998), 51–2 treats this passage as an example of a narrator intervention designed to mark pathos by confronting narrative time with chronical time; the support given to the narrator's voice by what is said marks its significance even more. He notes that Thucydides' paradigmatic passages are often rhetorically vague, which explains this refusal to give a precise figure.

[43] See Hornblower (1994), 151: 'a famous piece of diffidence'; also (2008), loc. cit.

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300 by putting it into a μέν … δέ … construction that opposes this loss to the insignificant losses of their allies: they did not suffer losses worthy of report; by contrast the Spartans did. λέγεται thus seems to confirm ἀξιόλογον: 'it is said' because it is 'worthy of being said'. There is further confirmation of the relative magnitude of their losses in the subsequent assertion that the other Greeks thought that this operation made up for previous Spartan cowardice at Pylos (4.40), and incompetence on other campaigns (5.75.3). Thucydides might still be uncertain about the exact total, but he confirms the relative magnitude of their losses in these ways. They do not match the Argive losses, but do recall the 300 dead of Thermopylae, a great battle recalled in connexion with Pylos (4.36.3).

In his account of the losses of the Ambraciots above, Thucydides uses the formula of the claim to perfect knowledge, in which, according to the usual opinion, the writer confesses one area of ignorance in order to boost the reader's confidence in the knowledge that is claimed in another area.[44] Homer and Herodotus use versions of it.[45] Thucydides confesses disbelief rather than ignorance about the exact numbers of the dead, but still claims exact knowledge about their relative magnitude in the near miss. The formula of perfect knowledge with 'it was said' is also found in his reports about the origins and causes of the plague: that it came from Ethiopia (2.48.1) or was the result of the Peloponnesians poisoning the wells (2.48.2). He does not resolve these versions, but passes over them to proceed to his own exact knowledge of the nature and effects of the disease: 'Let it be said as each man, specialist or not, thinks, as to its origin and the causes he thinks responsible for such a marked change; I will describe what it was like, from which an inquirer might most likely have foreknowledge so as not to fail to recognize it if it should ever occur again, and this I will reveal as one who had the illness and saw others suffering it.' Here the formula of perfect knowledge does emphasize more significant over less significant knowledge, in this case Thucydides' autopsy over hearsay, and the nature and effects of the plague over its origins or causes. The reason why the causes and origins are less important is his view that the universality of human nature produces recurring responses to similar events (1.22.4). In this view, the causes and origins of the plague remained specifics, not likely to be repeated, but the impact of the disease on human nature would be repeated if the plague happened again and could be recognized. He confirms this in his subsequent description of its effects on human nature both physiological and psychological. He probably is uncertain about the accuracy of the reports, but he marks them as what is said to distance himself from their insignificance, not from belief, and he does so in order to support his illustration of what is significant. The third use of the marker in the plague ('it is said' that the inva-

[44] Hornblower (1994), 149–52 examines Thucydides 3.87, which vouches for the number of hoplites who died, as against the countless number of others, and also 5.74.3 (above). Rood (2004), 119–21 believes that expressions of uncertainty bolster confidence and have other sophisticated effects; but he does not pursue his idea of 'Herodotean colouring' in 'it is said', and he continues the impression of uncertainty in 'qualified omniscience'.

[45] De Jong (2004), 16 calls this the *aporia* motif – 'I could not' – and the *recusatio* motif – 'I will not'. Examples from Herodotus include: 1.57.1 οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν … (he does not know exactly what language the Pelasgians spoke, but spends a page of proofs to convince us that he knows it was not Greek); 1.172.1 οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως διακρῖναι … (he does not know how their language came to be similar, but he does know they are very different in their customs); 2.103.2 οὐκ ἔχω τὸ ἐνθεῦτεν ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν (he does not know how it came to pass, but the Colchians definitely are Egyptians). The list goes on: 2.167; 3.115–16; 3.130; 4.16; 4.25; 4.81.1; 4.187.2; 4.197; 5.86; 6.14; 7.54; 7.152; 8.8; 8.87; 9.18; 9.84.

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sion ended because of the fear of the plague: 2.57.1) seems to continue to mark national characteristics. Another instance of the formula of imperfect knowledge is 8.87.2–3, which confirms the presence of 147 Persian ships after an admission of uncertainty about the reported motives.

CATEGORY 5: BASE MOTIVES

These patterns of usage make us look again at the phrase when it qualifies base motives at Thucydides 7.86.4 and 8.50.3. The motives in the first case are the reasons for the execution of Nicias after his surrender to Gylippus. We are told that Nicias trusted in the goodwill of the Spartans when he surrendered and that the Spartan commander wished to take him back to Sparta alive too because of his attempts to release the captives taken at Pylos. But in the midst of this atmosphere of trust, certain Syracusans 'as it was said' caused Nicias' execution by bringing charges against him, along with some Corinthians and others, out of fear for their own futures. Thucydides describes their motives at length: they feared that he would break under torture to implicate them in treason, or bribe his way out of captivity to harm them again. He concludes: 'So he died because of blame (αἰτίᾳ) from these men, of such a sort as this or as very close to it, though he was least worthy to meet such a misfortune because all his habits tended toward virtue.' (7.86.5) The common view is that Nicias' misfortune was to have died after surrender, but Thucydides' emphasis on the nature of the charges suggests that his misfortune was also to have fallen victim to such charges, which suggested that he would use bribery or implicate under torture those who had approached him from the other side.[46] If we take his reputation for virtue seriously, then these motives cannot be taken as warranted. In drawing attention to the nature and effect of the motives and the charges, 'it is said' marks a theme of larger significance too, because it again illustrates Thucydides' interest in the impact of the sufferings of war on human nature. His account of the Corcyrean revolution indicates that the stress of war reduced human nature to the level of mere personal survival, and that selfish and debased motives then emerged in charges that destroyed men of virtue (3.82.1–2). Nicias' killers are examples of this. Out of fear for themselves they destroyed a man whom Thucydides describes as virtuous and replaced trust by suspicion as at Corcyra (3.83.1), plotting against him as also at Corcyra (3.82.5). The description of the charges as 'of this sort or very close to it' might encourage the reading of 'it is said' as an indication of uncertainty;[47] but the motives Thucydides describes are too exact and too relevant to the authorial assessment of Nicias' death, and in any case Thucydides does not imply uncertainty when he uses other such pairs of words to confirm sameness in a kind of hendiadys: 1.140.1, 1.143.3, 7.42.2,

[46] Edmunds (1975), 141–2, in describing how the theme of *tychê* that attended Nicias' life resonates in the *dystychia* he suffers in his death, identifies the misfortune as dying after having surrendered but recognizes the focus on the nature of his death. This is the line taken also by Gomme, Andrewes and Dover on 7.86. See also Rood (1998), 183–201 on the pathos, esp. p. 185.

[47] Gomme, Andrewes and Dover at 5.74.1 on Thucydides' summation of the battle of Mantinea as 'of such a kind and as close to it as possible', argues against the view that it suggests certainty. Hornblower (2008), loc. cit. suggests it marks hesitancy due to controversy.

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7.78.1.[48] Another example of the marking of base motives is the 'private gain' that 'is said' to have motivated Astyochus, who was bribed by Tissaphernes not to complain about the lowering of the pay rates for the fleet (8.50.3). There seems to be no uncertainty: Alcibiades had advised Tissaphernes to use bribes in this way.[49] But the motive of 'private gain' is certainly part of Thucydides' thematic interest in the moral decline he diagnosed in the war, in the Corcyrean revolution (above) and at Athens (2.65 etc.).

The categories above account for most uses of 'it is said' in Thucydides, but other categories also involve content of high significance, such as reports about premonitions; we have in this category the response of Apollo at Delphi that there would be victory for the Spartans and that he would assist (1.118.3), the earthquake on Delos that 'is said and seemed' to be a premonition for the future (2.8.2–3), and the explosion of Aetna, which 'is said' to have occurred 50 years after the first, and to have been one of only three such explosions (3.116). This category has Herodotean precedent in the citation of the Delians for the first and only Delian earthquake, which he imagines the god to have sent as a warning of future troubles at 6.98. Thucydides may sometimes disbelieve portents, but his desire to foreshadow and enhance the significance of the war makes him use the marker. There are reports of sensational turning points similar to those of the near misses in the stories of Pausanias and Themistocles (1.132.5, 134.1, 138.4, 138.6): when the man with the letter gives his information, when Pausanias is about to be arrested in the street, and in Themistocles' suicide and the return of his bones to Attica. There are reports of 'firsts' in human history that had been significant since Herodotus: so 'it is said' that the Corinthians were the first to build ships in the modern style (1.13.2 – we are reminded that 'it is said' is just one device among many to mark such content when Thucydides uses 'the most ancient of those we know through report' rather than 'it is said' to mark the first naval power: 1.4.1). To return to the matter of authorial belief, Pericles cites the proverbial wisdom about honour at 2.44.4, and is evidently endorsing it.

CONCLUSION

I have suggested ways of understanding the narrative functions of Thucydides' use of 'it is/was said' over and above the implication of uncertainty or certainty. Such phrases represent voices alongside his own, which he uses often to confirm his own. They occur in passages of high thematic interest – as do most narrator interventions in Thucydides – as one of an arsenal of devices that mark his thematic commitment to such passages. They mark significant details such as the agents and causal

[48] So Pericles 1.140.1 says, presumably not expressing uncertainty, he must give the Athenians 'the same and similar' advice as ever, because he is 'of the same resolution' as ever: *ὁμοῖα καὶ παραπλήσια*, and summarizes his account of Peloponnesian resources as 'such as these and similar', 1.143.3: *τοιαῦτα καὶ παραπλήσια*. The Syracusans at 7.42.2 see a force coming against them that is 'equal and similar to the previous force' *ἴσον καὶ παραπλήσιον*. The context suggests that they are unlikely to be uncertain. Herodotus 3.101 already uses 'like and similar to'. Cf. Thuc. 6.17.6: 'such as these and even easier to attain, as I am aware from report'; cf. 1.91.7: *ὁμοῖόν τι ἢ ἴσον*.

[49] Hornblower (2008), loc. cit. follows Westlake (1977), with scholarship for and against the idea of disbelief in the report.

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factors for near misses in passages that develop themes of chance and national character, they mark numbers great in relative or absolute terms, and sensational killings in episodes of high pathos, they mark legends as important evidence, and base motives for their importance in studies of the corruption of human nature. They also reinforce the claim to perfect knowledge in important matters. 'It is said' is only one in a range of devices that mark significance, but it has the unique quality of reinforcing Thucydides' voice with the perspectives of others.

University of Auckland VIVIENNE GRAY
v.gray@auckland.ac.nz

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