

Joshua REYNOLDS
Evaluative Signs in Thucydides' Historiography

There is a standard view of the role of signs in Thucydides' inquiry. Cochrane, for instance, explains that in his search for the truth about the "actual transactions which have taken place," Thucydides considers *sēmeia* and *tekmēria* to be adequate standards of evidence (1929, 25). John Finley argues *tekmēria* are similar to *eikota* and part of Thucydides' method of "[deducing] a course of history from Homer's description of men's habits in former times" (1967, 9). Connor insists that Thucydides' method "leads not to total exactitude but to approximations that are sufficiently precise for useful inferences" (1982, 275). Likewise, Connor argues that Thucydides' *tekmēria* are not "proofs" or "incontrovertible evidence," but "indications of facts or observations that point in a certain direction" (1984, 28).

These statements fairly well represent the standard view of how signs fit into Thucydides' methodology. They suggest that Thucydides appeals to signs as evidence to show that certain events probably happened as he or his sources report. The present paper, on the other hand, argues that Thucydides does not assume this function for the argumentative devices that he refers to as *sēmeia* and *tekmēria* at the beginning of book one. Instead of seeking to support his descriptions of the likely occurrence of factual matters, such as events and deeds, Thucydides rather appeals to these *sēmeia* and *tekmēria* as standards to determine with absolute certainty evaluative matters, such as the greatness and weakness of events and deeds.

Recognizing the distinct role of Thucydides' evaluative signs shows how recent criticism of the historian's objectivity can be misplaced. A common criticism is that Thucydides does not meet the standards of historiographical objectivity since he ends up presenting not the facts (*erga*) themselves, as he promises, but his own evaluative account (*logos*) of the facts (Wallace 1964; Parry 1969; Parry 1972; Hunter 1973; Woodman 1988). But Thucydides does not want to deny the reliability of all *logoi*. His concern is rather to criticize the popular, untested *logoi*, while defending his own account. He argues that his own evaluations are capable of certainty because they are based on a reliable standard, that is, his signs. In order to achieve the knowledge that Thucydides promises to his reader, we must understand his account of the determinants of power and greatness—both the conditions that constitute it, and the signs for recognizing it. We must learn that a sufficient proof of greatness is not a *logos* based on appearances or poetic and popular opinion, but rather a *logos* based on the things of which there are appearances and opinions—that is, the events and deeds alone, without the traditional encomium.