The phenomenon, of making a point in a pithy way which can be remembered and quoted, surely existed before it was identified and defined; Aristotle's _Rhetoric_ is close to soundbites in its discussion of _gnomai_ and _enthymemata_ (II. 1394 A 19 - 1402 A 28), but they involve generalisations, whereas soundbites may do so but do not necessarily do so.

Some styles of writing and speaking are more conducive to soundbites than others: on the whole Herodotus' style is not, though he produced some good sound-bites, such as the remark that Aristagoras of Miletus was unable to mislead Cleomenes of Sparta but was able to mislead thirty thousand Athenians (V. 97. ii); and, after one of his stories, "I am obliged to state what is stated, but I am not wholly obliged to believe it" (VII. 152. iii). Thucydides' style was much more conducive to soundbites, and he has given us many both when speaking in his own narratorial voice and in the speeches attributed to various men.

As good as any in the narratorial voice is his claim for his own history: "a possession for all time rather than a prize composition for immediate hearing" (I. 22. iv). He can produce them in various contexts: at the end of a military campaign, e.g. Athens' Sicilian venture of 415-413, which is rounded off by what we might call a collection of soundbites ("most glorious for the victors and most miserable for the destroyed [that is in verse rhythm, to highlight it further] . . . they lost army and navy and there is nothing which they did not lose, and few out of many returned home": VII. 87. v–vi); judgments on individuals (e.g. Cleon, III. 36. vi, IV. 21. iii; Hyperbolus, "a wretched man, ostracised not because of fear of his power and worth but because of his villainy and being a disgrace to the city", VIII. 73. iii; and the unexpectedly favourable comment on Nicias at his death in Sicily, VII. 86. v).

When we find soundbites in speeches we have an instance of the pervasive problem of deciding how much is authentic reporting and how much is Thucydides' invention of
what he considered suitable; it has been argued that he gives distinctive characters to 
individual speakers more than has commonly been allowed (D. P. Tompkins,
series of articles), but that would be compatible either with his incorporating 
remembered soundbites from individual speeches or with his inventing suitable 
expressions for a speaker. And how far can we rely on echoes with a slight difference? 
When Pericles says that the Athenian empire "is like" a tyranny (II. 63. ii) and Cleon 
say that it "is" a tyranny (III. 37. ii), is Thucydides deliberately making Cleon go 
further than Pericles or is he making Cleon echo Pericles without going back to check 
the form of words which he gave to Pericles? The Melian Dialogue, quoted (V. 89) by 
Sir Ivor Roberts in his valedictory telegram as British Ambassador to Italy, must at 
least in its wording be Thucydidean invention rather than authentic reporting, since it 
is most unlikely that Thucydides ever met anybody who had been engaged in the 
dialogue. But when Sthenelaidas begins a laconic speech heard only by Spartans in 
their assembly, "I don't understand the many words of the Athenians" (I. 86. i), is that 
a felicitous invention or is it something which was remembered and reported 
afterwards?

We have no written speeches by Pericles himself (cf. Plut. Per. 8. vii), but a few 
soundbites are alleged to be from speeches of his, such as the reference to Aegina as 
the eyesore of the Piraeus (Plut.) and the claim that the death of young men in the war 
against Samos was like the removal of spring from the year (Arist. Rhet. I. 1365 A 31- 
3).

Drama, of course, is full of speeches, with opportunities for soundbites. Aeschylus 
was capable of soundbites as well as of high-flown phrases: for instance, Zeus "made 
learning through suffering a binding law", and Agamemnon "put on the harness of 
necessity" (Ag. 177, 218). In Sophocles' Antigone Haemon objects to Creon, "You 
would be a fine sole ruler of a deserted land" (Ant. 739). And of course Old Comedy 
is full of soundbites: the sophists have two logics, the better and the worse, and "of 
these two logics the worse, they say, prevails though it speaks what is less just" (Ar.
Nub. 112-5); and what is to be done about Alcibiades, when the city "longs for him, hates him, wants to have him" (Ran. 1425)?

We have another paper on the Attic Orators, but I shall venture into the fourth century to look at another historian, Xenophon. Like Herodotus, he does not have the epigrammatic style which we associate with soundbites; but, like Herodotus, he could on occasion produce them. The Spartan Dercylidas was always philapodemos, "fond of being away from home" (Hell. IV. iii. 2). And, if Thucydides began his history with proud claims of his superiority, Xenophon ended his with a despondent soundbite: the battle of Mantinea in 362 did not resolve the power struggle, but "there was even more indecision and confusion after the battle than there had been in Greece before: so let my history be written up to this point; what followed will perhaps engage somebody else" (VII. v. 27).