

THUCYDIDES AND KLEON: THE SECOND BATTLE OF AMPHIPOLIS

That Thucydides disliked Kleon and thought him a vulgar demagogue and a most mischievous politician, is obvious; but was he also *biassed* in his narrative when Kleon is prominent? The two things are not the same: if Kleon was in fact a vulgar demagogue and most mischievous politician, it was the historian's duty to represent him as one. We have the invaluable evidence of Aristophanes to indicate that he was; for when the pictures drawn, independently, by two men, both contemporaries, of such very different temper and interests as Thucydides and Aristophanes, agree or complement each other, there is every reason to suppose that they represent the truth, even though each had been attacked by Kleon and the life of one of them wellnigh ruined. Certainly it is our duty to accept the evidence in default of anything better, unless we find in it inconsistency or absurdity. But that is not the whole of our duty; for, though Thucydides' dislike was, we assume, justified and his picture in the main accurate, we have still to ask ourselves, was he *biassed*, in consequence both of his dislike and his misfortune—his failure at Amphipolis and his exile—to the extent that he twisted the facts against Kleon, consciously or unconsciously, or even suppressed some of them that would have been in his favour? Can we observe any such bias in his narrative? a question of importance, as well as of the greatest interest to all who have concerned themselves with Thucydides.

Kleon appears in Thucydides on three great occasions, Mytilene, Sphacteria and Amphipolis (not, by the way, as one of the maligners of Perikles in 431 or 430, though we know from contemporary comedy that he did take part: Thuc. ii 21.3, 59; Plut. *Per.* 33.8; nor expressly as responsible for Athenian discontent after the fall of Poteidaia: ii 70.4). There is nothing as such *biassed* in the picture of Kleon in the Mytilene debate, if we accept it that he *was* a loud-voiced demagogue (and a most effective and outspoken orator—no simple flatterer of the demos),

except, perhaps, that it is at the first mention of him that he is called βιαίτατος τῶν πολιτῶν, which is anticipating the evidence. But the narratives of Sphakteria and Amphipolis are different. The former is well known and there is no need to linger on it; Kleon first discomfiting the Spartan ambassadors by his bullying; then at the later ekklesia edging away from the position where his attack on the strategoi had landed him; the crowd cheering; he plucks up courage and makes his boast that he will finish the campaign in twenty days; the people laughing at his κουφολογία, and the sensible element among them being glad that of two things one at any rate will be gained—either an important victory over Sparta, or, more probably, the end of Kleon. Every detail is, we need not doubt, true; and the proportion given to them will be also correct in that they loomed large at the moment of that assembly and filled men's minds; but from the historian we might have had something more, in order that all these things might be seen in their right perspective—some emphasis perhaps on the inglorious part played by Nikias: his weak conduct is not denied at all, but it is almost lost in the narrative as it was lost in the clamour of that meeting. Or rather, Thucydides' normal way is to leave the reader to make his own judgements about men's conduct: as in the case of the Spartans at Plataia or Eurymedon and Sophokles at Kerkyra (iii 81, iv 46-48), so here about Nikias; but *Kleon's* conduct is expressly condemned, here (κουφολογία, iv 28.5) and later (τοῦ Κλέωνος καίπερ ματιώδης οὔσα ἢ ὑπόσχεσις, 39.3), just as he is called βιαίτατος τῶν πολιτῶν when he is first mentioned.

The story of Amphipolis is similar, and has interesting features of its own. It will be best to take it in the order of Thucydides' relation. The *policy* of attack on Brasidas' position in Thrace was common to all parties and persons in Athens: in the summer of 423 Nikias and Nikostratos had had some success at Mende and Skione (iv 129-130), and Nikias later, in 415, pretended at least that he was in favour of action against Chalkidike (vi 10.5), though he had done little in the interval to forward it (v 83.4). But it was on Kleon's initiative that, in the autumn of 422 after the year's armistice, an expedition was sent to recover Amphipolis and other cities, with himself in command (v 2.1). He began with a notable success at Torone. Leaving Skione to the slow process of a siege which it had already been undergoing

for a year or more, he crossed the narrow sea to Torone and by a rapid attack from sea and from land achieved something rare in ancient Greek warfare, the storming of a walled city, and that in the face of both the citizen army and a Peloponnesian force under Pasitelidas within, and in spite of the presence of the redoubtable Brasidas nearby, who arrived too late to save the place. Of what does this remind us? Surely of Brasidas' own success at Amphipolis two years before, with Pasitelidas in the rôle of Eukles (the Athenian commander at Amphipolis in 424) and Brasidas in that of Thucydides himself, while Kleon plays the part of the earlier Brasidas? The latter was at least as much to blame for the loss of Torone as Thucydides for Amphipolis. Was he perhaps upset by the sending of Pasitelidas as governor from Sparta (contrary to his own promises to the liberated cities, iv 86, 114.3, 120.3) and on bad terms with him? But the loss of Torone was no such great matter for Sparta as that of Amphipolis had been for Athens; and Brasidas' name is hardly tarnished and Kleon's is none the brighter.

Kleon sailed thence to Eion at the mouth of the Strymon, which Thucydides had saved from Brasidas in 424, and made it his base. He won back Galepsos to the east, but failed in an attempt on Stagiros—just as Brasidas had succeeded at Akanthos and Stagiros and been foiled at Sane and other places on Athos (iv 109), and at Poteidaia (iv 135). He sent to Perdikkas for promised help—for that shifty prince was for the moment an ally of Athens—and also to the Thracian Odomantoi; and decided (as a prudent commander would?) to wait for these reinforcements (v 6.2). Brasidas also had come newly arrived Thracian troops and was waiting for more (6.3-5). He had 300 Greek cavalry and 2000 hoplites in all, more than half of whom had come with him from the Peloponnese two years before and should have been by this time an experienced force, with all the help of recent victories and inspiring leadership. Kleon had 1200 Athenian hoplites and more from the allies, and 300 Athenian horse (2.1). Brasidas took up position on the high hill west of the city and of the river, from which he could observe any movement of the Athenians from Eion towards Amphipolis¹.

¹ For details of the topography of the district see the opening pages of *J. Papastaurou's* *Amphipolis* (*Klio*, Beiheft 37, 1936), and the pla-

Then, unexpectedly, with nothing to lead up to it, not even a statement about a *long* delay, we hear that Kleon's troops were impatient with waiting about, and were contrasting *his* ignorance and *μαλακία* ('softness', 'lack of energy', or 'cowardice'?) with Brasidas' experience and daring, and remembered how unwilling they had been to sail with him from Athens; so, to prevent further indiscipline, he led them out towards Amphipolis, on reconnaissance. Now there is nothing in Thucydides, from the first mention of Brasidas and of Kleon, to suggest either that the Athenians had an exaggerated fear of Brasidas or that Kleon had displayed any particular lack of intelligence, still less *μαλακία* (whatever that exactly means here). They had met Brasidas before and with success, and had recently been sent to confront him under Nikias and Nikostratos without any special comment being made (though they might well have feared the matching of the hesitant *Nikias* against Brasidas); and it was now the hoplites, not Kleon, who, apparently full of confidence, ἤχθοντο τῇ ἔδρᾳ. And for Kleon — at Pylos he had at least the good sense not to interfere with the plans of Demosthenes — he played his politician's part well; he had not been responsible for Athenian defeats, Spartoios, Aitolia, Delion and Amphipolis, so far as we know from Thucydides — we could say of him just what Plutarch says of the good Nikias, Fortune's favorite: τούτων ἀπάντων ἀναίτιος ἔμεινε (*Nik.* 6.3-4); and in the present campaign he had so far shown marked energy and success. This sentence, and the next (7.2-3), suggest a strong bias, a hatred and contempt for Kleon which has not been justified by Thucydides' own narrative¹. On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that

tes at the end. I am not myself convinced that Kerdylion is hill 340 (west of the bridge) rather than hill 171 to the south and on the river bank. The latter is a good deal lower, but is so much closer to Eion and to the road to Amphipolis on the opposite side, that it affords a better view.

¹ I do not however share the opinion put forward by West and Meritt in their article in *A. J. A.*, XXIX, 1925, pp. 59 foll. (cf. Adcock, *C. A. H.*, V, 248), that Kleon won back a number of other towns as well, a success which Thucydides suppressed owing to his prejudice against him. These small places appear in the tribute assessment list of 421 (A 10 in *Athenian Tribute Lists*, II); but (1) their appearance there does not make it certain that they were then in Athenian hands, and (2), if they were, they may have been recovered by Nikias or Nikostratos in 423, or by small Athenian forces after, or even before, Kleon's death.

Kleon did possess any military skill, and every reason to think that his confidence, which had hitherto carried him from one success to another, was nothing but overweening arrogance. We have here his first failure (except his inability to curb Aristophanes): he could not inspire confidence in his troops nor withstand their restlessness.

But, when he does move, his mood is at once of complete selfconfidence — just as it was after Pylos: sure that he would not be attacked, he was only going *κατὰ θέαν*, and was waiting for his Thracian reinforcements nor in the cautious spirit of a Nikias, in order to be in superior strength, but certain that he could then capture the city at a blow¹. He even regretted that he had not brought *μηχαναί* with him: there seemed to be no troops ready to defend the walls, and he might have captured it there and then. Yet we have just been told that it had not been his idea at all to make this reconnaissance; he was forced into action by his impatient and unruly soldiers². Has Thucydides made clear to himself what was wrong in Kleon's strategy? There is another slight inconsistency, which also suggests uncertainty, between 8.2-3 and 8.4: in the former Brasidas feels his inferiority (not in the numbers, but in the quality of his troops — a notable tribute in passing to the Athenian hoplite, ignored of course by him in addressing his army, 9.1), and in consequence *must* resort to stratagem; but in § 4 he has the chance of catching the enemy *μεμονωμένους*, isolated, that is, Brasidas here has the advantage. These two sentences are easily reconcilable, but are hardly reconciled by Thucydides.

We come to the battle itself. The Athenians had marched some 5 kil. from Eion to a position just east of that city wall which

¹ *Ἐχρήσατο τῇ τρόπῳ ὅπερ καὶ ἐς τὴν Πύλον*, § 3, is often translated, 'had the same *plan of campaign* as at Pylos'. This cannot be right; for (1) it was quite different, and (2) the plan at Pylos had been not his, but Demosthenes'. *Ἐβτυχήσας* too shows, I think, that it is his *mood* after the great success on the island that is referred to.

² It is said that *καθαρόν* in 8.2 means that the Athenian hoplites were a select and so an aristocratic force, which would naturally dislike Kleon; but *καθαρόν* only means pure Athenian, no *μέτοικοι* nor *ξένοι*; and even if they had been specially selected, that would not make them, in Athens, aristocrats. The contrast is with Brasidas' mixed troops, none of whom were Spartiatas.

ran from 'river to river' (iv 102.3) in a north-south direction. The hill, 158m. high, on which the city was built, within the great bend of the Strymon, is connected by a ridge, which sinks to below 100m., with the range of Mt. Pangaion to the east; the road from Eion crosses this ridge at its lowest point, and near here the Athenians were drawn up in line facing westwards to the city wall. Kleon himself advanced, north or north-eastwards, to a higher hill, which gave him a view not only of the general lie of the land (iv 108.1), but of the interior of Amphipolis. Brasidas, who from his position west of the river had seen all the Athenian movements, now brought his forces into the city, and occupied himself with sacrificing in the centre where in his turn Kleon could see him. His plan, the stratagem, was to make a sudden attack with a quite small force that could advance at a run over the short distance that separated the enemy lines from the wall (who would be out of range of arrow and javelin, but not much further, not more than 200m. or so below the wall), and for Klearidas, with the great mass of the troops, including the cavalry and numerous lightarmed, to follow at once with a second attack. Klearidas was posted at the Thracian Gate, the northernmost in the Long Wall, he himself at the 'first' gate, i. e. at the southern end of the wall, the first gate as you approach from Eion (10.1-6).

Kleon still wished not to engage before his reinforcements arrived (hardly a sign of over-confidence), and ordered his force to withdraw to Eion. They turn left, the left wing moving first as it became the head of the column going south. This must have been a somewhat elaborate manoeuvre, though often practised, in the face of an enemy: perhaps the rear ranks moved first, covered by the front ranks, and took up position themselves to cover the move of the rest, and so on, in turn, until the whole body should be free of immediate danger of attack. Kleon, impatient at the time taken by the movement of his left (reading $\sigma\chi\omicron\lambda\eta\ \gamma\acute{\iota}\gamma\upsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ at 10.4), followed too quickly with his right, exposing its flank; that is, probably, he ordered an immediate turn to the left and a march in column ($\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\ \delta\epsilon\zeta\iota\omicron\nu$) with no covering troops, and Brasidas saw his chance ($\kappa\iota\nu\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ and 'the movement of heads and spears', 10.5, need not mean disorder; cf. $\kappa\iota\nu\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$, 8.1, but was the sign of a particular manoeuvre which was here the wrong one—the right wing's turn to

the left). Here we have proof of Kleon's poor generalship, and the description could not be clearer. Brasidas attacked suddenly, having only a short space to cover, *κατὰ μέσον τὸ στράτευμα* (10.6), perhaps in the gap already formed between Kleon's left and his right, and defeated them. Klearidas at once followed with the main force; the Athenian right stood its ground for a time, but was overwhelmed by superior numbers and the rout became general. The left got away (*εὐθὺς ἀπορραγὲν ἔφυγεν*: 'it was at once cut off from the right wing and continued its retreat', or *ἔφυγεν*, 'it broke into flight'? The latter is perhaps the more probable); Brasidas himself fell in attacking the Athenian right; Kleon was killed in the defeat by Klearidas' troops. But what was the manner of his death?

He had not rushed off with the left wing, one notices, but stayed with the rear, as Greek commanders did when an army was in retreat; for he was killed by one of Klearidas' force. But was he 'stabbed in the back as he fled', as J. G. Frazer said, or is Adcock right that, 'as better soldiers have done, he ran away and was killed, along with 600 Athenians' (*Camb. Anc. Hist.* v. p. 248)? Neither is what Thucydides says: he was killed by a javelin, i. e. something thrown from a safe distance, and, for all that we know, he was struck in the chest; on the other hand, Thucydides clearly *contrasts* him with his men (10.9, where I would keep the reading of the majority of MSS., *ἔμενέ τε μᾶλλον*, and suggest as well *εὐθὺς <αὐτὸς> φεύγων*—cf. my note on *αὐτοὶ ἐκράτησαν*, i 100.3—and perhaps *οἱ δὲ <μετ'> αὐτοῦ ξυστραφέντες [δπλαίται]*): 'the right stood its ground better and, though Kleon himself fled and was killed, the men closed their ranks and beat off one or two attacks'. Is this true? Note first that it was the right wing which exposed its flank and, says Brasidas, 'will not stand' (§§4-5); yet it does stand. Of course this is possible enough, but is the narrative clear, by Thucydides' standards? Does it fit with *τρέπει*, § 6? Has he accurately envisaged what happened? Secondly, with the evidence of his own bias before us, with his statement that many of the troops hated and despised Kleon also before us, considering the uncertainty of *any* report of this nature from the middle of a confused battle, one which ended in a humiliating defeat, and the desire of all to put the blame on someone who could not answer, I am not by any means sure that Thucydides was, on this occasion, sufficiently awake to his own princi-

ples explained in i 22.3, to be on the look out for bias, as well as

for faulty memory, in his informants.

The word φεύγειν by itself need carry no disgrace. The British and French armies 'fled' from Mons in 1914, and as fast as they were allowed; it was a tribute both to the skill and the courage of the troops that they did disengage successfully. The British army 'fled' into and out of Dunkirk in 1940; but the word would have a different meaning on the lips of the triumphant Hitler, on those of the defeated French who felt — it was the last straw — that we were deserting them, and on our own. And since we all have our party feelings about ancient history too, almost as strong, we say of Chaironeia, 'the Athenians fled, Demosthenes with the rest'; we do not say the same of Sokrates after Delion, though he too retreated when the line broke (ἀνεχώρει, says Plato, *Symp.* 221a). What really happened at Amphipolis in 422? Did Kleon simply desert his men of the right wing? or did he retreat, withdraw, because he had ordered a withdrawal? or perhaps even hurry after the left wing in an attempt to strengthen the resistance of the right? It would have been better for his reputation had he stayed and fallen with the latter; but can we say for certain that he 'ran away', by himself? that he played the coward?

Compare with this the report of two other battles. At Spartolos too the Athenian army, hoplites and cavalry, had been badly defeated, with heavy losses on the retreat including all three strategoi, mainly by the peltasts, the light-armed, and the cavalry of the Chalkidians (ἀναχωροῦσι: δ' ἐνέκειντο καὶ ἐσηκόντιζον); the survivors got away to Poteidaia and were withdrawn to Athens (ii 79). But though the defeat was complete, there was no *disgrace*, of army or generals. The report of the fighting on Sphakteria is even more interesting in the comparison. We know that well, as an outstanding example of Spartan courage and endurance, an unequal combat of hoplites on ground unsuited to them against superior numbers of light-armed. The language used by Thucydides there (iv 35. 1-2) compared with that of v 10. 6-12 is worth noting. The Spartans, hard pressed, ἐχώρησαν, 'marched', from their camp in the middle of the island to the northern extremity; ὡς δὲ ἐνέδοσαν...οἱ φιλοὶ ἐπέκειντο, and ὅσοι μὲν ὑποχωροῦντες ἐγκατελαμβάνοντο ἀπέθνησκον, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ διαφυγόντες... ἐτάξαντο. This is not altogether unlike what happened here: the Athe-

nians οὐ πρότερον ἐνέδοσαν till the cavalry and light-armed surrounded them, the latter always firing from a distance; and Kleon was 'overtaken and killed' (καταληφθεὶς... ἀποθνήσκει), like many Spartans on the island. The losses too are similar, showing the character of the fighting: very many Spartans and very few Athenians on Sphakteria (iv 38.5); 600 Athenians and a handful of the enemy at Amphipolis (v 11.2). And the famous retort of the Spartan prisoner to the Ionian's taunt about the surrender, 'It would be a valuable *spindle* that could distinguish the brave', might have come to the mind of some of Kleon's hoplites¹.

This is to say that, with a very slight alteration of language, just a shift of emphasis, a longer and more detailed account of Athenian difficulties, the story of Amphipolis could have been made very like that of Sphakteria — with indeed this added disadvantage for the Athenians that, though the ground was rather better fitted for hoplites than were the rocks of Sphakteria, they had to face cavalry as well. (We hear nothing, by the way, of the Athenian cavalry v 2.1, in the battle). Kleon too was shot from a distance, just like the *καλοικαγαθοί* of Sparta. But Thucydides has chosen to make the story the very antithesis of that of Sphakteria, and not for Kleon only, but for the Athenian hoplites who, we have been told, so much disliked him — there is no partially *there* at least. We must not of course positively assert that he was not correct, altogether correct, in this estimate of the two battles; it may well be that the slight shift of emphasis in the telling such as I have suggested would have been quite unjustified, and have resulted in grave inaccuracy. But also we cannot help doubting: not only because of Thucydides' dislike of Kleon, but because the story is not everywhere clear (as is the story of Sphakteria) and the details apparently not entirely consistent.

One other matter concerning Kleon, which I can only refer to briefly here (I shall deal with it more at length in the second volume of my *Commentary*), is Thucydides' summary of the personal factors that made for peace after the deaths of Brasidas and Kleon, v 16.1: Brasidas had been out for glory and success, Nicias was for obscurity and success, Pleistoanax for a safe throne, and Kleon — he had wanted the war to go on to give him the opportunity to continue his knaveries and his slande-

¹ See my paper in *C. Q.* iii, 1953, 65-68.

rous attacks on his enemies: 'peace would make his knavery more obvious and his slanders less credible'. Aristophanes had said the same of him three years before, *Knights* 801-809—

ἀλλ' ἔνα μᾶλλον

σὺ μὲν ἀρπάξης καὶ δωροδοκῆς παρὰ τῶν πόλεων, ὁ δὲ δῆμος

ὑπὸ τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τῆς δμίχλης ἂ πανουργεῖς μὴ καθορᾷ σου, κτλ.

Just another example of Thucydides' bias, we say; but it is more interesting than that. There are few things more notable in the *History* than his Olympian way with the stories that were told against Perikles in 432-1-0 — he ignores them altogether; particularly the charge that Perikles began the war in order to cover his own misdeeds, though he stays to give Kleon's equally unworthy motive for wanting to continue it. This the foolish Ephoros gave as the sole cause of the great war (Diodoros, xii 38-39, if Diodoros is to be trusted); one particular, at least, he had from Aristophanes—Perikles involved in the peculations of Pheidias. What is specially interesting is this, that this story comes from *Peace*, and was unknown before it (603-618), the play that was produced a few days before the peace between Athens and Sparta was agreed and the oaths taken, and had been written, a good deal of it anyhow, since the death of Kleon. That is, these attacks on Perikles which Aristophanes, in his own way, records, were made at the same time as similar charges were made against Kleon. But Perikles was, and is, the great statesman, Kleon the vulgarest of demagogues and now dead and discredited by all. Again, what a difference a slight shift of the emphasis might have made in Thucydides' narrative, and in consequence in the world's judgement, if, even, it had been consonant with his purpose to have mentioned some of the slanders against Perikles; and again we must not say that that slight shift would have brought us to a juster view of Kleon. We may however remember that his name was preserved on a stele of those who fell in the war (Pausanias, i 29.13); and since we may reasonably doubt the story of how he died, we may wonder whether Thucydides ever thought, with Kleon in mind, that καὶ γὰρ τοῖς τᾶλλα χεῖροσι δίκαιον τὴν ἐς τοὺς πολέμους ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἀνδραγαθίαν προτίθεσθαι· ἀγαθῶ γὰρ κακὸν ἀφανίσαντες κοινῶς μᾶλλον ὠφέλησαν ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἐβλάψαν.