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# Thucydides

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Peloponnesian War, and is soon in for a surprise, encountering realities which King Archidamus had analyzed to them before. I leave out here the parallels of Pericles and the Athenian side.

If these are the kind of recurrences Thucydides had in mind when he wrote (in 1.22) of things 'such and similar to happen again in the future according to the condition of man, *kata to anthrôpinon*,<sup>5</sup> we can only, with great modesty and embarrassment, say that he has proved to be right, for, by now, more than twenty-three centuries.

<sup>5</sup> For the meaning of this phrase, see Stahl (above n. 3) 33 ff. (= Stahl [036] 28 ff.).

## 16

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### A Highly Complex Battle-Account: Syracuse

*Jacqueline de Romilly*

Sometimes it may happen that speeches, beyond general references, relate to still other elements. Let us consider a case in which the form of the battle-account becomes even more complex, and is no longer limited to two speeches before the narrative.

Such a case occurs when a series of battles arises from similar conditions and includes actions both sequential and recurring. Such is the case of the battles joined in the harbour region of Syracuse, in Book 7, particularly the final three battles (7.36–41, 51–4, 59–71), following the Athenian loss at Plemmyrion (24.3): all three are conditioned by the fact that from this point on, Athens no longer has a large enough space at its disposal to exercise its maritime skill.

Thus the problem is the same one encountered in the battle at Naupactus, but here the situation is even more serious; at stake was a battle to the death between the two cities; Athens had met her match, for Gylippus was a brilliant commander, and the Syracusans were experienced on the sea; lastly, locked in a prolonged, face to face deadlock, the adversaries had time to pursue options and improve their military methods.

So Thucydides did something unusual: in 7.36, the indirect statement ascribed to the Syracusans, he portrayed the general conditions

[Previously in this chapter ('Battle-Accounts: Analysis and Narration') there was a discussion of battle-accounts in Homer, Herodotus, and tragedy, and a contrast with Thucydides' more intellectual approach to them, in particular the analytical character of pre-battle speeches at Naupactus (2.87, 98). Several footnotes in the original correcting the French translations of Bétant and Voilquin have been omitted.]

of the conflict preceding the first of these three battles. The frame was simple: one plan, one narrative. The plan is simple as well, consisting essentially of one innovation in weaponry: in order to optimize the battle conditions, the Syracusans shorten and strengthen their prows. But the analysis does not stop there: for this innovation is linked to the tactics, which are themselves linked to the lack of space; and so, the reasoning concludes with the realization that the lack of space can be an advantage.

The passage is difficult in both structure and content<sup>1</sup> precisely because of Thucydides' desire to emphasize quite systematically the coherent nature of the Syracusan campaign: everything is linked, everything intersects. The text shows how weapons, tactics, and topographical conditions affect each other; and it also shows how, in each of these areas, and through their interconnectedness, the Syracusans prevail over the Athenians. Thus he mentions first the weaponry (36.3, beginning) and then the differences in tactics ('because [the Athenians] did not employ prow-to-prow (*antiprôirois*) ramming rather than side-to-side'): the Syracusans thought that Athens was not equipped to resist their new tactic. He then turns to the topographical factors, also linking them to tactics ('[the narrow area] would be in their favour, because charging prow-to-prow (*antiprôirois*)...'): the Syracusans thought that Athens would not have room to respond to these new tactics with new ones of their own. Finally come the tactics themselves, 'colliding prow-to-prow' (*to antiprôiron xugkrousai*...), now linked to the topographical factors in general on land as well as on sea: Syracuse thought that, given the uneven coastline, Athens would not have room to avoid battle by retreating. The outcome would be thus assured, since the Athenian defence itself would risk further disorder and defeat by creating even less room in which to manoeuvre. And so every point of view is considered, all Athenian options removed. And against them Syracuse mounted a systematic opposition.<sup>2</sup> In fact, one could

<sup>1</sup> L. Bodin was very thorough in his analysis of paragraph 7.36: we made a great effort to summarize his conclusions in a corresponding note in our edition (Bodin and Romilly [018] vol. 7, 168–9) and we use them here.

<sup>2</sup> As always, the structural elements are reinforced by verbal repetition, as L. Bodin has remarked. Thus we find, at different stages, the infinitives: *ouk elasson schêsein*... *pros heautôn esesthai*... *pleiston ein autôî schêsein* ('that they would not be worse

say that here we have not the usual indirect style, but one similar to the outcome in a dialectical struggle, in which one side prevails over the other in every respect. In this, the indirect statement found in 7.36 is without equal in the entire work: it is presented in purely dialectical form.

The reason for this is clear. If the battle of Naupactus, where Athenian experience triumphed, has been the subject of the kind of deep analysis that we have observed (Romilly [IV4] 138–150), it is easy to see that the three battles of Syracuse constitute a response to Naupactus: in the account in Book 2, we witnessed the triumph of Athenian experience, as long as they maintained *euruchôria* (breadth of space); the accounts of Book 7 shows the possible defensive tactic, provided one is in *stenochôria* (narrow space).

From this fact we can draw an additional conclusion: this exceptional indirect style is significant only if it represents explanatory *gnômê* ('reasoning'), not only in the battle which immediately follows, but in the sequence of battles leading to the Athenian disaster.

This sequence alone, moreover, leads to the final confirmation.

The first battle (7.37–41) was well commanded, according to the analysis; but a counter-plan intervened. After an initial, inconclusive engagement, Nicias actually had time to respond in one respect to the Syracuse strategy. In order to draw Athens into disorder and defeat, Syracuse was counting on difficulties encountered in attempting to backwater, *tên gar anakrousîn... kai... en pê... biazôntai... taraxesthai* ('for the retreat... if they should be constrained... they would cause confusion'). Nicias minimizes these by anchoring his supply ships (38. 3: *hopôs, ei tis biazôito vaus, eiê katapheuxis asphaltês kai palin kath' hêsuxian ekplous* 'so that, if any ship was constrained, there would be a safe refuge and a way to sail out again at leisure'). The measure is not without effect. In fact, after a period of chaos, owing to a Syracusan ruse (a different level of detail), the battle gets underway, it happens in two stages. The first fully justifies Syracuse's indirect statement; in effect, the benefit of Syracuse's weapons is

off... it would be to their advantage... they would have the best of it on this' with the corollaries *tois Athênaióis ouk esesthai* and *ouk esesthai tois Athênaióis* ('that the Athenians would not have...'). These facts are mentioned, as are others, in our edition.

quickly shown; the power of prow against prow is successful (40.5), as are all the tactics used,<sup>3</sup> in paralysing the great Athenian fleet. Syracuse is victorious. But the next battle justifies Athens' counter-plan; this time Syracuse is unable to exploit fully her victory; Nicias' supply ships halt the pursuit.<sup>4</sup>

Demosthenes' arrival changes none of these facts; on the contrary, his failure at Epipolae manages to discourage the Athenians, and that is their state of mind when the next battle begins. Furthermore, Demosthenes recognizes the problem and wants to leave Syracuse to fight in open water (49.2 *ouk en stenochôriai, hê pros tôn polemiôn esti* 'not in a narrow space, which is to the enemy's advantage'): but no one listens. The conditions being the same, Thucydides furnishes no new explanation of naval tactics before the battle; he simply relates, in an indirect-statement analysis (50.3–51.2), the shift that had occurred in morale and the desire that the Syracusans now have to prevent the Athenians from getting away. In terms of the way the events occurred, the analysis of paragraph 36, without corresponding perfectly to the facts, is again proven correct; and the account shows simultaneously the validity of their predictions, and the thinking that prevented their ultimate victory. First, a tactical error by Eurymedon put him in the position—the words themselves underline it—that was essentially the one predicted by the Syracusan analysis:<sup>5</sup> his units were pushed too close to the shore and sank. However, the Athenians once again are saved from total disaster, this time because their allies guaranteed success on land, permitting the sailors to debark outside the normally protected area without too many losses.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Here two kinds of fighting are involved that were not described in the indirect statement: the attacks by the soldiers on the bridge and by the light boats. As always, Thucydides prioritizes and his analysis involves only the principle.

<sup>4</sup> Note here repetition of the word *katapheuxis* ('refuge') in 38.3 and 41.1, as well as the proper nouns designating the merchant ships and the anchorage.

<sup>5</sup> 36.5 *exôthoumenoîs . . . es tèn gên* ('pushed back to the shore'), cf. 52.2 *pros tèn gên mallon* ('too close to the shore'), then *exeôthou es tèn gên* ('pushed them to shore'). However, the case is not exactly identical, because the accident does not result from prow hitting prow, nor from a defensive withdrawal. That is doubtless why Thucydides is so terse in his explanation of this battle.

<sup>6</sup> The Syracusans had thought that the Athenians could not withdraw except *kat' auto to stratopedon to heautôn* ('through their own camp'): they manage to escape by debarking *exô tôn staurômatôn kai tou heautôn stratopedou* ('outside of their own stockades and camp', 53.1).

After this new Syracusan victory, troop morale changes dramatically once again (55–6); and consequently Syracuse closes the great port. All signs indicate that this time the battle will be decisive, which is why Thucydides puts the catalogue of allies first. The fullness of the account itself is exceptional.

It includes the following elements: Athenian positions (60); Nicias' speech (61–4); Syracuse's position (65); speeches of the Syracusan leaders and of Gylippus (66–8); the final appeal by Nicias (69); the battle (70–2). Only for this battle is the structure even more complete than for Naupactus.

Without going into the details of the contrast between the two speeches, there are three principal points to be made.

The first deals with the reasons for confidence. Like the Peloponnesians at Naupactus, the Athenians had just been defeated here. At Naupactus, the Peloponnesians had to overcome the memory of their defeat by justifying the reasons for it, and by reassuring themselves with thoughts of their valour and their numbers. At Syracuse, apart from their number, the Athenians have to rely on luck. The Syracusans, on the other hand, know that the experience of their earlier defeats has to discourage the Athenians (66.3), and that their number will encumber them (67.3), and that their fear is, in fact, despair, since they can rely only on fortune. All the wise reasoning of the past now works for the Syracusan side, and the very nature of Athenian hopes give comfort to the enemy, so irrational do they now appear.<sup>7</sup> The weakness of the Athenian position becomes apparent from the speech, from the contrast between the two speeches, and even from the contrast between the two debates.

The second remark bears on the question of what is at stake. Although the two antithetical speeches are roughly parallel, this issue comes first for Nicias, and last for the Syracusans; the situation of the two adversaries is, in terms of risk, very different. Only the urgency of their risk can motivate the Athenians, while the Syracusans are inspired by the exceptionally positive consequences

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the speech in 7.77 is entirely based on hope (which, as we know, only arises when the situation has grown hopeless) and on *eutuxia* ('good fortune'), i.e. a *tuixê* that Nicias attributes to the Gods. The narrative is, in fact, a contradiction of his speech rather than a confirmation of it (for example, concerning the forced marches, or the fidelity of the Sikels): his argumentation foreshadowed the result.

of total victory. Here again, the arguments are made with rigour, but only to make all the more apparent the weakness of the Athenian position.<sup>8</sup>

That leaves, finally, the role of the tactics themselves. Here Nicias provides something new, for he too wished to adapt to the battle conditions analysed in 7.36; he has changed the usual position; since the battle will have naval manoeuvres, he has taken on board many men who will fight on deck and, as the enemy's reinforced prow-extensions will protect him against the shock of prow against prow, Nicias will use iron grapplers to immobilize their ships after these assaults (7.62).<sup>9</sup> As he says himself, he rejects traditional naval tactics for the Athenians, since the conditions preclude their use; in their place, he adopts the principle of 'ground fighting on deck'.<sup>10</sup> But, as with all the other elaborations, this project finds a response<sup>11</sup> in the Syracusan speech (67. 2–end). For these observe that the Athenians, by changing their ways, will adopt methods that were well-known and normal for their adversaries (*xynêthê... ouk anarmostoi*), but unusual for themselves (*para to kathestêkos... chersaioi... epi naus*); this, combined with the number of ships, will immobilize them. So, whereas in other areas the contrast between arguments revealed the Athenians' inferiority, it could be said that here, we have come full

<sup>8</sup> Here again, we find many verbal echoes. We could even say that, despite an appearance of parallelism between the beginnings of the two speeches, Nicias's first lines and the final lines of the Syracusans are presented as stark opposites: Nicias began (61.1–2) with a remark on the stakes, the words *ho men agôn* ('the contest') being followed by information of a twofold objective *te... kai* ('both... and'); then came the hypothesis of success *ên gar kratêsômen* ('for if we prevail...'), finally information about the proper attitude *ou chrê... oude* ('for we must not... nor'). The Syracusans began their conclusion (68.3) with information about the proper attitude *mê... prepei... mêde* ('we must not be... nor'); then came the hypothesis of Athenian success *kai ean kratêsôsîn* ('and if they prevail'), finally the indication of the double objective (*te... kai* 'both... and') concluding with the stakes (*kalos ho agôn* 'the contest is glorious').

<sup>9</sup> The introduction of this refinement has a place within a rigorous logical progression. Diodorus (13.16), on the other hand, writing after Thucydides, reveals the iron hooks by accident, in an aside, in the account of the fourth battle.

<sup>10</sup> For anyone pondering retreat, Nicias has but one exhortation; he reminds them in that case of how little land the Athenians occupy (62.4 and 36.5; cf. the repetition in 63.1).

<sup>11</sup> The answer to the iron grappling hooks will be leather coverings, introduced in the narrative with a purpose-clause (*hopôs*, 65.2).

circle: in order to adapt, the Athenians are compelled to change; and it is this very change that will lead to their defeat.<sup>12</sup>

The battle of Syracuse thus becomes a kind of ratification of the battle of Naupactus. After great trial and error, the Syracusans have succeeded in doing what the Peloponnesians tried in vain to do at Naupactus: they denied Athens the *euruchôria* ('wide space'), by limiting her space both on land and on sea; they forced her gradually to modify her armaments, her battle formation, and even basic tactical principles. In the naval battle that ensued, Athens no longer enjoyed the benefit of her long experience.

After that, the battle unfolds in precisely the ways foreseen by the Syracusans in their analysis of paragraph 36, and very soon repeated in the paragraph on tactics in their last speech: the battle is fought between many ships in a tight space;<sup>13</sup> manoeuvres such as pulling back (withdrawing) and breaking through become impossible and are replaced by simple assault;<sup>14</sup> soldiers on deck assume great importance.<sup>15</sup> Everything transpires amidst ferocity and chaos and, after relentless fighting, we witness the turning point (71.5 *prin ge dê*, 'until at last...'): the Athenians turn and flee to the shore, the disaster is total.

Here, then, the narration of the battle is introduced, not simply by indirect speech, or by a direct speech, or by contrasting direct speeches, but by an entire complex<sup>16</sup> including an initial analysis, that ushers a series of accounts, and stretches over two-thirds of the book.

One might, moreover, take this conclusion even further; for what is true from the point of view of tactics is also true with regard to the

<sup>12</sup> Syracuse, on the other hand, can effectively employ a procedure previously condemned, (36.5), because it was its own: Athens, in the last battle, has to relinquish at once its habitual ways and advantages.

<sup>13</sup> 70. 4: *en oligôi pollôn*, reinforced by *pleistai... en elachistôi*. cf. 36.3: *ouk en polloi pollais nausin*; 62. 1: *tôn mellonta ochlon tôn neôn esesthai* and 67. 3: *en oligôi gar pollai*. The term *stenochôria* ('narrow space') is used again further on (70.6); cf. 36.4 (twice).

<sup>14</sup> 70. 4; cf. 36.4 and 5.

<sup>15</sup> 70. 5; cf. 40.5; and n. 3 above.

<sup>16</sup> The second appeal of Nicias, in the last battle, cannot be taken into consideration; it is not helpful to an understanding of the narrative, and appears there to make the extreme gravity of the situation felt. We might compare it to the second appeal of Brasidas in 5.10.5.

analysis of morale or even face-to-face formations of forces; in these two areas, as in that previously considered, the texts reinforce each other, and all the clues that precede the final battle are themselves the product of comprehensive preparation still earlier.

What must be remembered is that in this vast composite, Thucydides is not content to relate, as would many good historians, every new phase and the importance of every factor; he weighs, compares, explains everything in advance. When his account grows richer, it is always the same part that expands: the part that precedes the action; facts are not more detailed; they are more analysed, more explained; an increasingly elaborate dialectical system traces a kind of outline which soon comes to include everything. From that point on, no aspect of events can any longer be mentioned in the narration without revealing immediately to the reader its meaning and its causes, its truth or necessity, its gravity. Nothing happens that is not either a confirmation or a refutation of the calculations worked out by reason; nothing appears that is not an adaptation, that is not a concept, nothing that has not been given its shape and foundation by the mind.

### PATHOS AND REALISM

This suggests that the battle loses any anecdotal quality;<sup>17</sup> but it does not mean that it lacks either pathos or concrete realism. The account of the battle of Syracuse itself, often cited as an example, should suffice to prove it. But here the pathos and realism take on a special quality.

In Thucydides, as in tragedy, pathos is tied to structure; and it is manifested in the battle-accounts as well as elsewhere. However, whereas in tragedy it is the narrator's emotion that, quite naturally, gives the narrative its form, in Thucydides it is the narrative form

<sup>17</sup> This is easily shown for Book 7 when we compare the accounts of Thucydides with those of Plutarch, Romilly [037] 46. When Thucydides offers an anecdote in a battle narrative, we can be sure that it concerns an individual of particular importance (such as the fall of Brasidas, wounded, in 4.12.1) or of a particularly catastrophic event (such as Timocrates' suicide in 2.92.3).

that excites the emotions. The reader, already initiated into the plans of the two adversaries, and informed of the significance of every event even before it occurs, is led, by prior knowledge, to invest the text with sympathy, hope, and fear. He is thus in the position of a participant.

Even more, in the exceptional example just examined, we observe that Thucydides is not content simply to create pathos by the rigour of intellectual preparation: to make it felt, he uses the very technique used in tragedy to describe the way participants feel themselves affected by events.<sup>18</sup>

First, their suffering corresponds to the suffering in tragedy expressed by people who are outside the battle but who will be affected by the outcome, of which they are as yet ignorant. Thus, for the reader, Nicias' final warnings function here in a way similar to the tears of Jocasta or Atossa, or to the anxious anticipation of the chorus before the narrative.

But above all we see how the account itself is interrupted by the evocation of the emotional reactions of those who were involved in the fighting or were witnesses to it. In tragedy, in one place there is 'lamentations mixed with wailing',<sup>19</sup> and in another 'witnesses, more than actors feeling their sweat run, so afraid were they for their friends';<sup>20</sup> above all, in *Persians* it is the cries and appeals resounding in the two camps, mixed with sobbing, echoing the two stages of the fighting.<sup>21</sup> These devices, so natural to tragedy, are precisely the ones employed by Thucydides.

In the account of the battle of Syracuse, in addition to a division of the battle into two phases (inconclusive fighting, followed by the Athenian retreat to the shore), we actually see another division: for each of these two phases is considered in turn, first directly and then indirectly, through the reactions of witnesses (71.1: *ho te ek tês gês pezos* 'the infantry on land', *ho de pezos* 'the infantry'); each time, the

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Finley [038] 321-2 shows with great precision that Thucydides' narrative of the battle of Syracuse is more evocative of Aeschylus or Euripides than of Herodotus. Numerous excellent comparisons are to be found in his book; here we are concerned only with their meaning as related to problem of technique we are considering.

<sup>19</sup> Euripides, *Heracleidae*, 388, cf. Romilly [037] 119.

<sup>20</sup> Romilly [037] 119. <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 120-1.

feelings of these witnesses are analysed (71.1–2; the anxiety, the tension, the mood, the fear for the future; 71. 6: *ekplêxis*, ‘panic’); they are perceived through gestures (71. 3: ‘the very movements, in this extreme suffering, follow the fluctuations of their mood’), and in particular they express themselves through their cries; first wailing mixed with cries, as they observe the spectacle of defeat (71. 3: *olophurmôî te hama meta boês* ‘lamentation simultaneous with shouting’), then an entire concert of exclamations, for which Thucydides has found stylistic effects and asyndetons that are worthy of Aeschylus (71.4):

πάντα ὁμοῦ ἀκοῦσαι, ὀλοφυρμὸς βοή, νικῶντες κρατούμενοι, ἄλλα ὅσα ἐν μεγάλῳ κινδύνῳ μέγα στρατόπεδον πολυειδῆ ἀναγκάζοιτο φθέγγεσθαι.

it was possible for all things to be heard together, lamentation, shouting, conquerors, defeated, every other sound of many kinds that a great camp in great danger could be forced to make.

And finally the great moans of defeat, recalling the long wail of Xerxes in *Persians* and his piercing sob (71. 6: *oimôgêi te kai stonôî*).

As in tragedy, moreover, this evocation specifically helps to emphasize the duration of the battle, and contrasts two parts of unequal importance: the long sustained effort on both sides, then the sudden panic. This sort of descriptive pathos can only make the personal suffering more moving as a result of the intellectual preparation.

In fact, even when dealing with a battle less noteworthy for its significance or for the care Thucydides devotes to it, it does appear that the account is presented in such a manner as to direct the sympathy of the readers, leaving them to interpret, in a literary way, the emotional value of different stages of the action. Whereas there was nothing, in the account of the battle of Naupactus, to correspond to the sights and sounds evoked in Book 7, there can be no doubt that the logical commentaries in *hoper ekeinoi prosedechonto* ‘as they expected’ (2.90.3) and in *hoper eboulonto malista* ‘as they most wished’ (2.90.4) help, as much as any cry of joy, to make one feel the Peloponnesian success at Naupactus; or that the contrast between the battle cry announcing this almost final success and the *etuche de* ‘and it happened that there was...’ that erupts at the beginning of the sentence, draws attention to this development or surprise; or that words like *phobos* ‘fear’ and *tharsos* ‘daring’, coming

into the narrative at that point, translate the intelligible cause of the final result, and at the same time the psychological value of the catastrophe. These sentiments are not, as they are at Syracuse, those of powerless witnesses; they form part of the action, where their causes and their consequences are read; as such, they are part of a rational system; but that does not make their emotional value any less immediately accessible.<sup>22</sup>

The preliminary analyses give the narrative its intellectual transparency; it is that very transparency, when projected in time in the narrative, that assumes a life-like rhythm, and is converted to pathos.

Similarly, it is its intellectual character that determines when and how concrete reality finds a place there.

It may, certainly, occur in an initial case; as an integral part of the *gnômê* (‘intelligence’), in other words, when this is used either to improve the material at hand or as a supplement for what is missing.

The first of these two is what is often found in the sieges; sieges allow for more leisure than the actual battles and give rise to corresponding inventiveness. Characteristic of this pattern is the siege of Plataea. There we find, clearly argued and analysed, a dialogue between the *gnômai* of the two adversaries; however, this dialogue makes sense here only in precise, concrete detail. Thucydides begins by describing at some length the construction of the earthworks put up by the Peloponnesians in front of the city wall (‘tree trunks, cut on Mount Cithaeron, ran the length and width of the two sides of this construction, to prevent (*hopôs mê...*) The hole was filled with wood, stones, earth...’); the details are explained by the fact that the battle is one of practical initiatives. In order to defend themselves against the earthworks, the Plataeans began by raising their wall by means of a wooden wall whose construction is described for us with the same precision: ‘They fortified it with bricks, taken from neighbouring houses; the pieces of wood served as support and prevented

<sup>22</sup> The emotions of the combatants are evoked in a rather detailed way at the battle of Pylos, and also their cries (4.34: *tou tharsein* (‘boldness’), *kataphronêsantes kai emboêsantes* (‘with disdain and shouting’), *tês boês* (‘shouting’), *ekplêxis* (‘panic’), *tês meizonos boês* (‘louder shouting’), *ouk exontes elpida* (‘hopeless’), *eti pleioni boêi tetharsêkotes* (‘boldly shouting still louder’). Here, though, a new way of fighting is the issue: the confidence assumed by the light troops allows them to scatter and horrify the Peloponnesians by their loud and tumultuous attacks.

(*tou mê*)... They hung skins and hides on the outside of the scaffold so as (*hôte*) to provide the workers protection from the burning arrows.' But at the same time the Plataeans began to remove the embankment that supported the earthworks. What will the Peloponnesians do? They invent a new system involving reed baskets filled with clay to prevent (*hopôs mê*) the removal of the earth. How will this obstacle be met? The Plataeans begin to remove it from below: they invent a new method that involves digging a tunnel from the city. At the same time, they begin a new construction. What can be done against these efforts? The Peloponnesians resort to machines. How can the damage of the machines be stopped? The Plataeans have the idea of using slipknots, or heaving heavy posts to break the head of the battering ram (2.76.4: 'they hung the two ends of giant posts from iron chains, that slipped on two leaning masts that jutted out from the wall...'). Every invention is answered with a new effort, and practical results are abundant; the result was practicality informed by intelligence to meet certain practical goals, calling upon very practical skills.

When, instead of improving skills, intelligence had to compensate for the lack of alternatives, calling upon their wits plays the same role in a way less learned and more human; an example is the action of the soldiers at Pylos, who made up for the absence of tools in choosing their stones, and for the absence of troughs by carrying the mortar on their backs: 'bending in order to hold it, and crossing their hands behind their backs to keep it from slipping off' (4.4.2). This vivid picture is shown with the same *hôs* and *hopôs* as every other *gnômê*. Moreover, its presence is even more justified in the passage since Thucydides insists, for the entire episode, on the fact that Demosthenes' plan could not be carried out except thanks to a felicitous coincidence of luck and the soldiers' spontaneous good will.<sup>23</sup>

Occasionally, this type of information is found in the battles themselves, but rarely, as the situations hardly lent themselves to these kinds of initiatives. However, we notice, in the case of a series of battles, such as those of Syracuse, the role that modification of material played.

<sup>23</sup> On the element of luck, see Romilly [198] 174–5.

On the other hand, battle contains one element that eludes rational interpretation, for by its very nature it is irrational; this is where Homer opens, with a scene of chaotic confusion.

For Homer, this marks the beginning out of which a whole series of individual exploits arise. For Thucydides, it marks the end, the result of a whole system of well-reasoned calculations on the part of the generals; it is the conclusion.

The naval battle of Leukimme, alone, begins right off with the chaos of rioting, accompanied by *thorubos* 'uproar' (1.49.4: *pantaxhêi men oun polus thorubos kai tarachôdês ên hê naumachia* 'Everywhere there was great uproar and the sea-fight was a confusion'); but this is precisely because this involves a battle of the old fashioned kind, in which everyone fights 'with more courage and energy than thought'. Otherwise, to attack this way is barbaric (4.127.1: *pollêi boêi kai thorubôi prosekeinto*, 'they attacked with much shouting and uproar'): Brasidas devotes one whole speech (4.126) to showing the contrast between this behaviour and that of the always disciplined and orderly Greeks. For an intelligent Greek, *thorubos* is, in fact, accidental. But everyone attempts to create it in the enemy, as Thucydides says of the naval battle at Corcyra (3.78.1, *epeirônto thorubein*).

Accordingly, disorder, which can only be described in its concrete reality and its very incoherence, arises from within a rational system; it is foreseen by one of the adversaries; it marks the success of one line of reasoning, or the error of the other.

It may stem from a style of fighting with which one of the combatants is unfamiliar, in particular, the use of light troops. That is the case at the end of the Aetolian campaign, in 3.98. Demosthenes should not have exposed himself to such risk;<sup>24</sup> and the result is not long coming: the Athenians, 'exhausted by repeating the same movements covered with javelins by the Aetolians, turned to flee; since their guide, the Messenian Chromon, had been killed, they fell into impassable gullies and unfamiliar places, where they were killed. The Aetolians, agile and light-armed, quickly caught up with the fugitives and speared them.

<sup>24</sup> In fact he made two serious mistakes, which the report exposes fully: 95.1 = *Messênion chariti peistheis* ('persuaded by his wish to gratify the Messenians'), and 97.2 = *ho de toutois de peistheis kai têi tuchêi elpisas* ('and he, persuaded by them and relying on luck...').



Most of the Athenians were lost . . . ' It was the same at Pylos (4.34–35): 'They didn't know which way to turn, unable to see anything in front of them or understand their orders, drowned out by the enemy's shouting. Harassed on all sides, they saw no hope of escaping the battle. A great number of them were already wounded', etc . . .

Elsewhere, a similar effect is obtained by surprise:<sup>25</sup> the Plataeans' attack (3.22.5–6, with, in particular: *ethorubounto men oun* 'and so they were in confusion . . .'), the return to Megara at night (4.67–8), and especially the battle of Amphipolis, when the element of surprise, that was so important to Brasidas,<sup>26</sup> causes exactly the result anticipated in the narrative (5.10.58: *xunebê te . . . thorubêthênai* 'and confusion resulted . . .').

Again elsewhere, it may be overconfidence that leads to panic.<sup>27</sup> In any case, of all the examples, the most remarkable is the one which adds to this two important circumstances: the fact that the battle takes place in unknown territory and that it is fought at night. Undoubtedly, Thucydides emphasizes this exceptional and illustrative battle all the more because it is the one that, by causing the Athenians to lose any chance of taking Epipolai and thus benefiting from the arrival of Demosthenes, would prove to have the direst consequences (7.43–4). From the *ataxia* 'disorder' of the victors (43.7) to the *tarachê* 'confusion' (44.1)<sup>28</sup> then to *thorubos* 'uproar' (44.4); and no part of the description of the chaos is as concrete, nor as complete: the quality of the light, the tumult of the voices, the movement in all directions, are evoked in a chapter that fills no fewer than forty-six lines in the Oxford edition; even the troubled spirits are made perceptible in the narrative,<sup>29</sup> up to the moment when total chaos reigns at last, when we see them 'once the lines had been broken, falling over each

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes a surprise attack leads to early chaos that is immediately remedied: cf. VII.3.1: *ethorubêthêsan men to prôton, paretaxanto de*; also VII.37.3 and VII.40.3.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Romilly [037] 137.

<sup>27</sup> At Potidaea for example (1.62 to end 63, cf. Romilly [037] 231) and, on the sea, at Naupactus (2.91–2, cf. Romilly [037] 147).

<sup>28</sup> The idea of *tarachê* is repeated: 4.1 *en pollêi tarachêi*, 44. 3 *etetarakto*, 44.7 *etarachthêsan*.

<sup>29</sup> *pôs an tis saphôs ti êidê* ('how anyone could know anything clearly'), *apisteisthai* ('disbelieve'), *chalepa ên . . . diagnônai* ('it was difficult to recognize'), *ezêtoun te sphas autous* ('they looked for each other'), *mê einai allôî tôi gnôrisai* ('there wasn't any other way to know').

other, friend against friend, citizens against citizens . . .' (44.7), when even those who escaped became lost and perished.

Disorganization at sea may arise for the same reasons: ships are surprised before even getting out to sea; that was the case at the first battle of Pylos, where we see the Lacedaemonians 'rush into the sea in their heavy armour, grab their ships and try to drag them back, each man thinking that all would be lost without his own effort. The tumult (*thorubos*) was great.' But what really impedes the ships' ability to manoeuvre is the lack of space, with the result that each is in the other's way; we saw this happen to the Peloponnesians at Patrai (thanks to an Athenian manoeuvre),<sup>30</sup> and to the Athenians at Syracuse (owing to a whole series of Syracusan operations). In this last battle, we see the confusion of battle brilliantly drawn, the noise so great that the pleas of fellow soldiers could not be heard (70. 6). The passion of each man, the feelings and behaviour of combatants and spectators alike combine in this description of *thorubos* and give it meaning.<sup>31</sup> The concrete description of the battle, with its visual and auditory elements suggesting psychological realism, adds to its emotional power. The *thorubos*, in which individual suffering overtakes discipline, marks the point at which Thucydides is unable to confine his narrative to pure strategy or thought.

But this *thorubos*, which cannot be described intellectually, is meaningful only in the context of rational analysis, of which it is the culmination. A reflection of individual suffering, it is the sign most feared and most hoped for by the strategist, and is joined to his *gnômê*.

## CHANCE AND INTELLIGENCE

As narrated by Thucydides, the battle, though neither dry nor disembodied, may be offered chiefly as a lesson.

<sup>30</sup> 2.84.3, cf. Romilly [037] 126–7; the *tarachê* ('confusion') was predicted by Phormion's indirect speech, 84.2 *tarachên parexein* ('will produce confusion'); cf. 84. 3: *etarassonto* ('they were confused') and *hupo tês tarachês* ('because of their confusion').

<sup>31</sup> Cf. pp. 367–8 above. Here again, the *tarachê* was predicted in the analysis given in 36.6 (*taraxesthai*), and, more aptly, in Gylippus's speech (67.2: *taraxontai*).

It is first of all a lesson to the strategists: the causes of *thorubos* are shown clearly so that they may learn how to protect their own armies from it, and how to instill it in their enemies. That is, no doubt, a rather broad lesson. Xenophon and Caesar, military experts more than dialecticians, would offer more instructive details in this regard. But what Thucydides loses in technical precision, he gains in forcefulness. Unlike Caesar, he does not provide information on the number of divisions, on the topography, or on the particulars of complex movements;<sup>32</sup> he simplifies in order to highlight only the general principle and to show it with perfect clarity. Moreover, he reveals this general principle first, and in such a way that the whole exposition comes to refute or confirm its value. This is what other historians almost never do.<sup>33</sup> It is precisely this aspect that gives Thucydides' lessons their rational and privileged quality: owing to the combination of reason versus reason and reason versus action, the reader perceives at every instant, not only the how of every measure taken, but also the why of every success.

The lessons that emerge have significance beyond the level of strategy. More than the triumph of this or that tactic, what Thucydides shows us is in fact, in any battle, the triumph of reason. Precisely because any military victory corroborates reason, it is obvious that reason can and must be the agent of victory. The art of foresight, always essential for Thucydides, thus finds its most striking justification.

There is no question that moral qualities are necessary; but in Thucydides we find them subordinate to intellectual ones. The question that Herodotus raises à propos of Amompharetus<sup>34</sup> is thus

<sup>32</sup> The battle of Mantinea (V.66–75) is the one where Thucydides comes closest to this type of narrative. There we find much information about the methods of the Lacedaemonian army in general (66.3–4; 73.4), on the numbers and organization of the troops (68.3), finally on the role of each corps in the battle, all unusual for Thucydides. Of course there he is concerned with a battle on land, exceptionally important: Thucydides was able to take the opportunity to study the organization of the Lacedaemonians in a battle on land as elsewhere he studies the organization of the Athenians for battle at sea; but it is a fact that some details prefigure Xenophon.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. in Caesar, the clearest narrative, nowhere foreseen, of Sabinus's victory (*Gallic Wars* 3.17–19). When the plan is given in advance (the battle of the Sabis, 2.16 ff.), the narrative wanders off into thousands of details.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Romilly [037] 112.

settled; and Thucydides insists, in Brasidas' speech, on the merits of a strategy based on observation and trickery. Even the courage of the troops, always indispensable of course, rests, ultimately, to some extent on reason. The speeches, by their very inclusion in the narrative, imply that the soldier will be more or less valiant as he understands the advantages of his situation;<sup>35</sup> besides, we have seen that Phormion neatly disposes of the concept of natural valour, preferring a notion of confidence based on experience. This same distinction appears again, as L. Bodin has shown, in Plato (*Protagoras* 351a); but in particular it corresponds to the concept frequently defended by Pericles.<sup>36</sup> Whereas for Homer, the gods could alter a man's courage, in Thucydides courage is tied to experience, to superior skill and to reason.

Thus, in the end, every human means is subordinate to intelligence. A single aspect remains outside, and that is *tuchê* 'chance'. Thucydides recognizes it and emphasizes its role. In fact, that is the word he uses for everything that cannot be foreseen by even the most astute analysis. However, it is precisely for that quality that it has a place among the leaders' calculations. Their job is to minimize its role; and to do that, they must first imagine as many circumstances as possible, but then allow it as small a role as possible; leaders and soldiers must be, like the Athenians at Naupactus, sufficiently disciplined to avoid becoming disheartened, sufficiently informed to improvise on the spot a new solution. The *tuchê* is therefore what distinguishes reality from reason, and to which the best reasoning must be able to adapt.

In a smooth transition, these modest lessons to the generals are followed by a lesson of infinitely greater import. The true battle is one of intelligence, which is always looking to triumph over reality; the

<sup>35</sup> The Lacedaemonian Brasidas apologizes twice for addressing his troops with this *didachê* 'didacticism' (4.126.1 and 5.9.2); these habits of thought, this principle of clear courage appear no doubt less natural for a Peloponnesian than for an Athenian.

<sup>36</sup> 2.40.3; 2.62.4–5 (in the first case, the notion is more modest; we know in fact, despite L. Bodin, that knowledge of what is formidable and welcome does not stop the Athenians from facing danger—nor does it enable them to do so). Compare these intellectual ideas of courage with the definition given by Nicias in the *Laches* (196d). Thucydides however knows how to recognize the importance of bravery at the time (in V.72.2 it compensates for the lack of experience, but Thucydides adds no analytical commentary.)

power of the mind, which can never be absolute, but which strives constantly, more and more forcefully, to become so. We might say that Thucydides' battle narratives reach for an ideal, always just out of reach, in relation to which the two opposing speeches may be seen, while the narrative has nothing new to add.

Clearly this attempt to encompass reality and to meet it with the highest level of intelligence possible establishes Thucydides' overwhelming originality. We saw, in the first part of this study,<sup>37</sup> that the structure he adopted for the battle narratives could be considered as the culmination of an evolution beginning with Homer and tending, more and more, to rationalize combat. But here it has reached the limit, it can go no farther. After Thucydides, nothing is the same.

The facts may be partly responsible for this. As battles themselves, from Homer to Thucydides, became more thoughtful and systematic, more subordinate to intelligence and strategy, so perhaps did the art of war, continuing to develop, become inseparable from more detailed and less simplistic analysis: one may analyse, at the beginning of an account, general principles of strategy, but not the reasons behind complex movements, involving on all sides particular knowledge of multiple technologies.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the very scale of the previous battles makes it more difficult to fit them into a Thucydidean schema.<sup>39</sup>

However, even more than the facts themselves, history has changed.

The problem history faces is actually seen most clearly in the case of the concrete and complex action involved in a battle: everyone who has ever tried to write about battle has experienced the difficulty of introducing order into something that seems so lacking in it; one has only to read Marbot's confession on this point: 'Most military authors are apt to confuse the reader's mind by overcrowding their story with details. So much is this the case that, in the greater part of

<sup>37</sup> Romilly [037] 107–22.

<sup>38</sup> The way that Xenophon explains, in *The Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, the movements of the Spartan armies shows quite well that one can be concerned with military actions from a less general point of view than that of Thucydides.

<sup>39</sup> If it is true that battle, after Homer, becoming more organized and more democratic, became more easily studied, the opposite also happens: the great Roman or Napoleonic battles, or even modern ones, are fought on such a scale that in most cases the process would be incoherent. Stendhal's battle of Waterloo is a well-known example.

the works published on the wars of the Empire, I have been utterly unable to understand the history of many battles at which I was present, and of which all the phases were well known to me. I believe that in order to preserve the clarity of the narrative of action in war, one must limit himself to an indication of the positions of the respective armies before the battle, and to relate only the principal and decisive facts of the battle.<sup>40</sup> But how is one to choose? Is it possible to go as far as the asceticism practiced by Thucydides? Is it possible to be satisfied with the sacrifice of so many details, particularities, specifics? And why? In the name of what duty?

In truth, no historian has ever gone as far as Thucydides in this direction, or required so much intelligibility: after Thucydides the two concepts, of intelligibility and foresight, separated; narrative superseded description. Thucydides' effort, perhaps an unreasonable one, to try to reduce everything to reason, has remained exceptional.

To demand a rational accounting of battle may be something that few would attempt, and perhaps only a mind stimulated by the very novelty of the scientific method and dialectical rigour. The first methodical and rational historian was also, very clearly, the one whose method and reason went furthest. So the pressure to intellectualize that, after Homer, had been growing stronger might finally account for this extreme quality, might have led Thucydides to refuse compromises that later writers were compelled to make.

#### EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

For later works on the Battles at Syracuse see Paul [211] and Allison [404]. On chance and intelligence see subsequently Edmunds [131].

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Baptiste Marbot, *The Memoirs of Baron de Marbot*, trans. Arthur John Butler (London: Greenhill Books, Lionel Leventhal Limited, 1988), vol. I, 196.