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Athens' Political Failures in the Central Chapters of Book 4 of Thucydides

Edith Foster

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Athens' Political Failures in the Central Chapters of Book 4 of Thucydides

RÉSUMÉ.– Cet article soutient que les chapitres centraux du livre IV de Thucydide montrent l'échec des initiatives politiques d'Athènes durant l'été 424 av. J.-C. Thucydide montre dans ces chapitres qu'Athènes accepte les invitations de factions démocratiques faibles de Mégare et de Béotie dans l'espoir d'imposer de nouvelles dispositions politiques, que sa stratégie repose à la fois sur des affiliations politiques et sur des objectifs politiques, et qu'elle avait des conséquences politiques, puisque Athènes échoue deux fois de suite, et que ses deux attaques aboutissent à la consolidation des régimes hostiles et oligarchiques. Ainsi, la cause centrale des échecs d'Athènes n'est pas le commandant spartiate Brasidas, même s'il eut son importance.

MOTS-CLÉS.– Athènes, Thucydide, démos, oligarchie, démocratie, faction, Brasidas

ABSTRACT.– This paper argues that the central chapters of Book 4 of Thucydides show the failure of Athens' political initiatives during the summer of 424 BC. In these chapters, Thucydides shows that Athens accepts invitations from weak democratic factions in Megara and Boeotia in hopes of imposing new political arrangements: the strategy both relies on political affiliations and has political aims. It also has political outcomes, since Athens fails twice in a row, and both attacks result in the consolidation of hostile and oligarchical regimes. The Spartan commander Brasidas was therefore certainly important for Athens' failures, but not their central cause.

KEYWORDS.– Athens, Thucydides, demos, oligarchy, democracy, faction, Brasidas

Ever since the brilliant analysis of Daniel Babut, published in 1981, Book 4 of Thucydides has been understood to be divided in two.¹ The first half of the book is dominated by the story of Athens' victory over the Spartans at Pylos and subsequent successful attacks on the Peloponnese (3-57);² in contrast, the Spartan commander Brasidas' successful campaigns against the Athenians (84-88; 102-116, 120-131) determine the shape of the second half.³ Brasidas' appearance at Megara (70.1), which brings a halt to Athens' series of uninterrupted successes, marks the turning point.⁴

(1) Babut's interpretation was closely followed by CONNOR 1984, p. 126-132 and subsequently accepted by HORNBLOWER 1996 (p. 149 and subsequently *passim*).

(2) Passages cited according to paragraph or paragraph and sentence are from Book 4 of Thucydides; citations from other parts of Thucydides are provided in the usual 'book, paragraph, sentence' format.

(3) BABUT 1981: 425. "En décrivant la campagne de Brasidas en Thrace et en Chalcidique comme la réplique symétrique et inversée du succès athénien de Pylos, Thucydide met sous les yeux du lecteur le renversement du rapport de forces existant entre les deux belligérants..."

(4) BABUT 1981: 427. "Cette position médiane du personnage suggère que, du point de vue de la composition du récit, la campagne de Mégaride marque la transition entre l'εὐπραγία et la κακοπραγία des Athéniens, et constitue pour ainsi dire la charnière structurale du récit, entre les deux pôles de Pylos et d'Amphipolis."

Babut's analysis is indispensable. In this paper, however, I will challenge the focus on the commander Brasidas which has become customary when examining Athens' reversals at this point in the war and point to political factors which Thucydides also emphasizes;⁵ at the end of the paper, I will argue against the perception that the Spartan-Athenian parallelisms of Book 4 are balanced. First, we will examine Thucydides' representation of Athens' political activity at the turning point. It is surely no coincidence that the Athenians' failures start at the same time as they begin to accept invitations from political factions.

Let us follow the stories of Athens' involvement at Megara and in Boeotia as they occur in the text, paying close attention to the terms with which Thucydides describes the politics and political groups of each situation. At Megara, the leaders of the democratic party (τοῦ δήμου προστάται 66.3)⁶ become afraid that the democratic faction (τὸν δῆμον)⁷ will succumb to the hardships of the semi-annual Athenian attacks on the Megarid, the effects of which are regularly exacerbated by the attacks of the Megarians' exiled oligarchs. The προστάται fear that the latter's supporters will join the plurality (called simply οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλει 66.1)⁸ of their fellow citizens, which has begun to discuss restoring the oligarchs and has become friendly enough to the idea that the oligarchs' supporters are openly pressing their case (66.2). In their fear, the προστάται turn to the Athenian generals, Hippocrates and Demosthenes, with the aim of turning their city over to Athens (βουλόμενοι ἐνδοῦναι τὴν πόλιν 66.3), since they believe this will be safer for them than if the oligarchs are restored (νομίζοντες ἐλάσσω σφίσι τὸν κίνδυνον 66.3).

The Megarian προστάται are not said to want an Athenian style democracy. Their plan is determined by fears for their own safety and is surely a last resort, since the Athenians have been attacking twice annually for six years and the προστάται have not before this time chosen to betray their city. Thucydides' description shows the disproportion between their circumstances and their promise: the προστάται call upon Athens when they fear that they are losing popular support, but promise to turn over the city as a whole, an aim that would likely require solid popular support to succeed.

At first, however, things go well. Following the plans of their Megarian co-conspirators, the Athenians capture one of Megara's harbours, Nisaea, and expel a Spartan garrison (4.67-68.3 and 69). During this action the word προστάται disappears from the narrative: beginning from 67.3, οἱ προδιδόντες τῶν Μεγαρέων and similar appellations replace οἱ τοῦ δήμου προστάται.⁹ Thucydides

(5) For a focus on Brasidas as the central cause of Athens' troubles, cf. e.g. CONNOR 1984, HORNBLLOWER 1996, especially p. 38-61, STAHL 2003: 150.

(6) The word προστάτης seems to have come into currency in the 420's to denote political leaders of a democratic faction or people; cf. Connor (1971) 110 – 15; *Knights*, produced in 424, contains the first attested use (1128). The προστάται in Thucydides sometimes offer crucial leadership (e.g. Pericles at 2.65.5), but more often struggle for personal power; in Thucydides' view, competition for the προστασία of the Athenian demos was one of the root causes of Athens' defeat in the war (2.65.11; cf. the Corcyraean προστάτες at 3.82.8). As a quick glance at BÉTANT's *Lexicon Thucydideum* reveals, Thucydides refers to προστάται and προστασία much more frequently than to δημαγωγοί.

(7) Contrasting to Pseudo-Xenophon (cf. LENFANT 2017: LI, LXXII and 222) Thucydides uses the word δῆμος to signify both the people as a whole, assembled or not (cf., in Book 4: 46.2, 74.3, 118.11 and 14) and the democratic faction in a city (cf., in Book 4: 46.4 and 5, 48.5, 66.3, 71.1, 84.2, 130.4). See also SAÏD 2013, p. 201. As with many Thucydidean words, the reader must attempt to discern which meaning is intended each time. For further examples, cf. BÉTANT's *Lexicon*, which had already traced this distinction.

(8) The majority of these citizens had participated in exiling the oligarchs; cf. ἐκπεσόντες ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους also in 66.1. On πλήθος, cf. note 11.

(9) Cf. οἱ ξυμπράσσοντες Μεγαρῆς (67.4), τῶν προδιδόντων Μεγαρέων (68.2), οἱ πρὸς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους πράξαντες (68.4), τοῖς ἐπιβουλεύουσι (68.6); ξυμπράσσειν has a meaning nearly equivalent to προδιδόνα.

thus solidly defines the *προστάται* as men who are consigning their city to Athenian power without the knowledge or consent of the remaining citizens.¹⁰

Athens' success at Megara comes to an end when these conspirators are revealed to the other Megarians. The conspirators planned to convince their fellow citizens to open Megara's gates by using the specious argument that they should march out to relieve Nisaea; the Athenians, who had in the meantime arrived with a substantial army, would then rush in (68.4-5). In order to realize this plan, the conspirators have instructed their supporters (*ἄλλο μετ' αὐτῶν πλῆθος*,¹¹ ὁ ξυνηίδει 68.4), and these have come to the gates to help. One of these supporters now betrays the plot to 'the other' citizens (*καταγορεύει τις ξυνειδῶς τοῖς ἑτέροις* 68.6).

'The others' prove to be well-organized, determined, and intelligent: they consolidate into a group and prevent the conspirators from opening the gates by threatening to fight them if they do. At the same time, they do not reveal that they have found out about their arrangements with the Athenians (*τὰ πρασσόμενα* 68.6). As for the *προστάται*, it never becomes clear how much or little popular support they had enjoyed, since it had required only one deserter to betray them to their opponents and thus to foil Athens' attempt to capture Megara.

Meanwhile, Brasidas' Peloponnesians are arriving; the Megarian factions (*αἱ δὲ τῶν Μεγαρέων στάσεις*) are now trapped in the city while the great powers prowl outside the walls. The democrats fear that they will be expelled if the oligarchs are restored; at the same time, the oligarchs' supporters fear that the democrats will make a preemptive attack upon them in order to prevent this, and that Athens will destroy the city as they fight (71.1). Only the democrats' fears are realized: when Brasidas and his Peloponnesian troops offer battle (73.1), the Athenians Hippocrates and Demosthenes decide that they are satisfied with what they have achieved and leave without coming forward to fight (73.4). Since Brasidas alone remains to support his side, the oligarchic faction (*οἱ τῶν φευγόντων φίλοι Μεγαρής*) automatically takes power and opens the gates for the Peloponnesians, to the despair of *οἱ πρὸς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους πράξαντες* (73.4).

Thucydides' vocabulary for political factions has been non-evaluative throughout this story; he uses no pejorative terms for the democratic or oligarchic side or for the people (the *πλῆθος*) that follow the democratic leaders. In contrast, his manner of indicating the leaders' behavior is uncompromising: the *προστάται* become traitors who are working for and cooperating with the enemy; likewise, the oligarchs, once in power, are shown to murder their enemies. The descriptions of behavior and, to a more limited extent, of motivations, rather than the term for one or the other political leaning are most revealing here.¹²

It is only at the very end of the Megarian narrative that we find a word naming a constitution, since a strict oligarchy is now established at Megara: *οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλει Μεγαρής* are divided into those who most conspicuously promoted an Athenian take-over (*ὅσοι μὲν τῶν πραγμάτων πρὸς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους μάλιστα μετέσχον* 74.2) and 'the others' (*οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι* 74.2); the former flee immediately,

(10) As their plan to hand over the city had from the beginning entailed; cf. *ἐνδοῦναι* twice at 66.3.

(11) For the word *πλῆθος* in Thucydides, see especially SAÏD 2013, p. 201-204, who compares Thucydides' usually non-evaluative use of terms such as *πλῆθος* and *δημος* to the evaluative vocabulary of Pseudo-Xenophon and of Thucydides' oligarchically inclined speakers. Thucydides sometimes did use pejorative terms (e.g. *ὄμιλος* and *ὄχλος*) for 'the crowd'; cf. SAÏD 2013, p. 203-204. Here, however, he uses a neutral term, as also for the democrats' opponents, *οἱ ἕτεροι*.

(12) For motivations, cf. e.g. *δείσαντες* at 66.3, *φοβούμεναι* 71.1. Compare the murderous Corcyraean episode of 46-48. The leaders of the people are called *προστάται* and then merge, after the success of their plot, with the Corcyraeans in general, called *οἱ Κερκυραῖοι* at 47.3, 48.2, 48.4, i.e. during the entire vivid and lengthy scene in which they murder the oligarchical faction. Thucydides concludes: *τοιούτῳ μὲν τρόπῳ οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους Κερκυραῖοι ὑπὸ δήμου διεφθάρησαν*. Thus, actions rather than political labels characterize the competing parties; cf. SAÏD 2013, HAWTHORN 2015, and JAFFE 2017, who seem to agree (I generalize from lengthy arguments) that Thucydides did not see formal differences between regimes so much as the ability of regimes to obey their own laws and to balance the needs of the many and the few.

the latter make an agreement with τοῖς τῶν φευγόντων φίλοις to remember none of their past deeds (μηδὲν μνησικακήσειν 74.2).¹³ Once the restored oligarchs are installed, however, they cull a hundred democrats and personal enemies from the assembled army (74.2) and kill them (ἐκτείναν), after compelling the people (τὸν δῆμον 74.3) to condemn them to death. They then establish a narrow and long-lasting oligarchy (ἐς ὀλιγαρχίαν τὰ μάλιστα κατέστησαν 74.3). The word ὀλιγαρχία, which is surprisingly rare in Thucydides,¹⁴ emphasizes Athens' political failure and introduces Megara's political identity for the rest of the war: the result of the Athenians' attempt to take over Megara is a constitution that will be intransigently and consciously opposed to Athens' form of government.

The Megarians had not, in the beginning of Thucydides' story, thought of political change so much as of getting relief from their circumstances and their fears. The narrative of Athens' activities in Boeotia begins differently. During that same summer, Thucydides says, 'some men' in Boeotia had contacted Hippocrates and Demosthenes because they aimed to establish Athenian style democracies in Boeotia: τὰ Βοιωτία πράγματα ἀπὸ τινῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἐπράσσετο, βουλομένων¹⁵ μεταστήσαι τὸν κόσμον¹⁶ καὶ ἐς δημοκρατίαν¹⁷ ὥσπερ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τρέψαι¹⁸ (76.2). The same activity of betraying the state to a foreign power as at Megara (cf. πράγματα... ἐπράσσετο)¹⁹ is here given a specifically constitutional motivation: this anonymous group of men wants to change the political order. They have a named leader, Ptoiodorus, who is an exile from Thespiis or perhaps Thebes, and develop a complex plan to take over Boeotia: they will betray Siphiae, a town on the Corinthian gulf, on the same day as conspirators from Orchomenus and Phocis betray Chaeronea in north-western Boeotia; simultaneously, the Athenians are to capture the temple of Apollo at Delium in south-eastern Boeotia (76.3-4).

Ptoiodorus' aim to turn Boeotia toward Athenian style democracy contrasts to *all* other parties in Book 4: the Megarian προστάται had not turned to Athens for democracy, but for salvation, and once Brasidas reaches northern Greece, all cities who think they can succeed eagerly revolt from

(13) The verb is found again only at 8.73.6.

(14) Thucydides uses the word ὀλιγαρχία when he and his characters conduct explicitly political actions and analyses, and it is relatively rare; this is its only occurrence in Book 4. All examples in Thucydides except for those in Book 8 are summarized here: 1.19.1 (Sparta enforces oligarchies on her allies), 3.62.3 (see note 25), 5.31.6 (the Boeotians and Megarians believe that democratic Argos is less useful to themselves, since they are oligarchies) 5.81.2 (the Spartans impose an oligarchy on Argos), 6.11.6 (Nicias argues that oligarchical powers are plotting against Athens), 6.39.1 (Athenagoras defines oligarchy as rule by part of the state), 6.60.1 (the Athenians suspect an oligarchic plot against the democracy after the desecration of the Herms).

(15) βούλομαι in Thucydides often indicates political will, cf. e.g. 66.3, the parallel passage to this one.

(16) κόσμος 'political order' possibly refers to the organization of the Theban federation, as well as to civic constitutions. This term occurs only here and in Book 8; cf. 8.48.4, 8.67.3, and 8.72.2.

(17) Like the term ὀλιγαρχία, δημοκρατία is confined to explicitly political actions and analyses, and this is its only occurrence in Book 4. For other occurrences before Book 8, cf. 1.115.2 (the Athenians enforce democracy on Samos), 2.37.2 (Pericles argues that Athens is ruled not for the few but for the many and is therefore called a democracy), 2.65.9 (Thucydides says that Athens was called a democracy but was really rule by the first man, i.e. Pericles), 3.37.1 (Cleon says that democracies are incapable of ruling), 3.62.2 (the Thebans claim that their city was neither an oligarchy nor a democracy during the Persian wars; see further note 25), 5.31.6 (the Boeotians and Megarians believe that democratic Argos is less useful to themselves, since they are oligarchies), 6.39.1 (Athenagoras argues that democracy is not unintelligent and unfair, as oligarchs argue), 6.89.6 (Alcibiades argues that he and his family preserved democracy at Athens because it was dangerous to change regimes in wartime, even though they understood that it was an unintelligent system).

(18) In Thucydides τρέπειν, when it is not used in the battlefield sense, often means to turn to a different political attitude or idea: cf. 1.71.4 (do not turn us Corinthians toward other allies, i.e. Athens), 3.13.1 (the Mytileneans are frightened and turn toward safety, i.e. Sparta), 39.4 (cities that have experienced good luck turn to hubris), 6.35.1 (the Syracusans turn Hermocrates' warnings about Athens into a joke).

(19) For this phrase, see also note 9. τὰ πράγματα often means 'the state' or 'the management of the state'; cf. in Book 4: 2.3, 24.4, 76.2 and 5.

Athens. Ptoiodorus and his associates are therefore very much outliers: their idea that it would be beneficial to them to imitate Athens is unique. Moreover, Ptoiodorus is an outlier in more ways than one: his status as an exile may have weakened his ability to gain reliable support.²⁰

By contrast to Ptoiodorus and his associates, the conspirators from Orchomenus and Phocis (we note again the conspicuous presence of exiles: καὶ οἱ Ὀρχομενίων φυγάδες ξυνέπρασσον τὰ μάλιστα 76.3) are not associated with any vocabulary for constitutional change; their motivations for participating, which probably have to do with a desire to compete with or limit Theban power, remain opaque.²¹ The Athenians have their uses for all these parties, regardless of their motivations: they plan to capture the three bases and then to harass the Boeotians until they can destabilize the area. Thucydides describes their aims in political terms: the Athenians hope for revolutions in respect to the constitutional arrangements in Boeotia (νεωτερίζοιτό τι τῶν κατὰ τὰς πολιτείας τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς),²² and to shake up the way governments are managed (οὐ μενεῖν κατὰ χώραν τὰ πράγματα) until they can make them useful to themselves (καταστήσειν αὐτὰ ἐς τὸ ἐπιτήδειον). His description shows that the Athenians want to create political chaos; i.e. they do not aim, necessarily, to support the conspirators' plan to adopt Athenian style democracy. Thucydides' description of the vague character of their hopes leaves the impression that the Athenians would be satisfied with any political arrangement that is friendly to their interests. Thus, their campaign to Boeotia does not respond to Ptoiodorus' political program so much as to their intentions in respect to the war and the expansion of their sphere of influence. These intentions will be frustrated, just as they were at Megara, by an individual whose motivations remain unknown to us: an otherwise unknown Phocian (whose name, Nichomachus, Thucydides happened to know) betrays the plan (89.1), which the Thebans immediately suppress with military force.²³

Thucydides' description of the political aspects of Athens' ill-fated Megarian and Boeotian adventures shows that Athens has made common plans with democratic forces of unknown strength and varying motivations and that these forces are ultimately betrayed from within;²⁴ Athens has both times taken a risk on a weak party, while the majority of citizens in each place is excluded from the secret conspiracies. Especially the Boeotian story highlights that Athens aims to dominate these citizenries by force and by stealth in order to disrupt and change their political arrangements. These aims are foiled by the fears or private interests of unnamed individuals, who act, in small, as Athens and the conspirators do in large.

Just as the weakness of these democratic factions and movements harms the Athenians, so, simultaneously, the strength of authoritarian rule benefits Brasidas. At the same time as the Athenians are making their plans to attack Boeotia, Brasidas heads for Thrace. Since he is marching

(20) SIMONTON 2017, p. 104. Ptoiodorus is one of numerous exiles in Book 4; bereft of support in their cities, exiles are normally forced to engage mercenaries in order to accomplish their aims (cf. e.g. 46.2, 52.2, as well as the exiles from Orchomenos mentioned here), although they can sometimes get other cities to help them (cf. e.g. 1.3). If Ptoiodorus was from Thespis (the mss. of Thucydides unanimously teach that he was from Thebes, but this identification is rarely accepted by modern historians; cf. RHODES 1998, *ad loc.*), then he came from a city with strong democratic leanings, whose democratic revolution was crushed by Thebes in 414 (6.95.2; SIMONTON 2017, p. 203); if he was Theban, his desire for democracy may originate in the period of civil strife that occurred while Athens dominated Boeotia between 457 and 446; cf. 92.6 and LENFANT 2017, p. 187-188 to Pseudo-Xenophon 3.11. Either way, having been exiled would surely make it more difficult (although not impossible, as the example of the exiled Megarian oligarchs shows) to gather supporters.

(21) Cf. RHODES 1998, *ad loc.*

(22) The plural τὰς πολιτείας might suggest that the Athenians aimed both to upset Boeotian federal arrangements as well as the constitutions of the cities; cf. HORNBLOWER 1996 *ad loc.*, with note 16.

(23) Thus, although Demosthenes famously arrived on the wrong day (89.1), betrayal had already foiled the plan.

(24) I am grateful to an anonymous peer reviewer who points out, entirely correctly, that the democratic tendencies of the conspirators from Phocis and Orchomenos are not mentioned, and that these parties were likely comprised of opportunists who may or may not have claimed a political aim.

overland, he must pass through Thessaly. Thucydides pauses on this crossing to show that he gets through Thessaly despite the opposition of the majority of Thessalians, who were well disposed to Athens (τοῖς τε Ἀθηναίοις αἰεὶ ποτε τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Θεσσαλῶν εὖνουν ὑπήρχεν 78.2), because the ruling clique is, if not friendly, then at least not an enemy to Sparta, and lets him pass. Thucydides concludes that if the Thessalians had had *ισονομία*²⁵ rather than the rule of a few (*δυναστεία*),²⁶ Brasidas would not have gotten through.²⁷

Thus, an authoritarian political regime that happens to be strong helps Brasidas, whereas weak factions have harmed Athens, and would have harmed Brasidas also, had he decided to play on their offers. Once in Acanthus, however, Brasidas announces a plan of action opposite from that practiced by the Athenians at Megara and in Boeotia.²⁸ He explicitly assures the Acanthians that he will not hand over the city to one faction or another (86.3): saying that he has not arrived to support one side or the other in a domestic struggle (οὐ γὰρ ξυστασιάσων ἦκω 86.4), he argues that to turn the city over to one or the other faction would be worse than to turn it over to foreign rule, a consequence we have observed at Megara (86.5; cf. 74.2-3). He thus asserts his independence from the continuous factional struggles in the cities and strengthens his own chances of political success. As Babut so rightly observed, this was the opposite tactic from that used by Athens, which had, despite the apparently democratic direction of its plans, left the majority in the dark: 'au lieu de jouer sur les rivalités entre factions politiques à l'intérieur des cités, il s'efforce de gagner l'ensemble de la population' (1981: 431).

The central chapters of Book 4 therefore show Athens' political failure as much as her military failure and Brasidas' political success as much as his military success; the evidence provided in the notes also shows that Thucydides here employs terms that are not otherwise used in Book 4, and seldom in the *Histories* as a whole, until he relates the oligarchical coup at Athens in Book 8. This choice of vocabulary reflects the political character of the events: the Athenians have decided to accept invitations from factions who promised to help them impose new political arrangements on cities and places close to home: the strategy both relied on political affiliations between democratic groups and had the political aim of imposing an order that was friendly to democratic Athens. The stories of Athens' attacks on Megara and Boeotia explain the failure of this initiative twice in a row, since the result of both was the consolidation of hostile and oligarchical regimes.

Thucydides' narrative of these events therefore compares the failure of the democrats with the relative strength of authoritarian arrangements. The democratic parties or factions in Megara and Boeotia treacherously introduced a strong ally but were treacherously betrayed from within and thus proved to be too fragile. In contrast, more decisive and more authoritarian arrangements, allied with Brasidas and Sparta, won out in Megara, Boeotia, and also in Thessaly. It is a political irony of these stories that the oligarchical Spartan Brasidas first espouses a politics that includes the many and the few, while democratic Athens excludes the many and tries to take over by force.

(25) *ισονομία* is used only twice in Thucydides, at 3.82.8 (where it is advanced as an example of an empty slogan, used to manipulate the many) and here, where it seems to describe a condition in which more than a very few people would have been making decisions; *ισονομεῖσθαι* 'to have equality with' occurs at 6.38.5; *ισόνομος* 'governed with consideration for equality' occurs at 3.62.3, where the Thebans claim that their city was neither an *ισόνομος* ὀλιγαρχία nor a democracy during the Persian wars, but hostage to a *δυναστεία* (a passage that is enlightening for Thucydides' view of both oligarchy and rule by a clique); τὸ ἴσον 'fairness' is however frequent.

(26) *δυναστεία* in Thucydides (another relatively rare word) usually means rule by a narrow clique; cf. 3.62.3, 6.38.3.

(27) 78.3: ὥστε εἰ μὴ δυναστεῖαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἰσονομίαι ἐχρῶντο τὸ ἐγχώριον οἱ Θεσσαλοὶ, οὐκ ἂν ποτε προῆλθεν.

(28) This is not to suggest that Brasidas necessarily knew about the failures of the Athenians and the factions to whom they had entrusted their endeavors, but that his first speech declares that he himself will not favour particular factions; the dramatic placing of this announcement immediately after the successive Athenian failures, is of course due to Thucydides' arrangement of the material at his disposal.

Brasidas is, however, not as central to Athens' failure in these chapters as has sometimes been thought (he has nothing at all to do with Athens' disaster in Boeotia, for instance): the roots of Athens' failure in both Megara and Boeotia lie in the fact that Athens can attract only the weakest and most desperate parties to her cause; those who believe that the Spartans offer an alternative try to escape as quickly as possible.

Correspondingly, Athens' losses in the second half of Book 4 are more grievous than Sparta's in the first half. The loss of major cities in Thrace (especially Amphipolis, which is not recovered) and of over 1,000 lives at the battle of Delium were more significant than Sparta's loss of Pylos (however much the Spartans may have panicked at the time); for instance, the Spartans do eventually recover the 292 prisoners captured on the island of Sphacteria (5.21.1) and they will gain relief from the Messenians at Pylos in 409 (cf. Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.2.18). Perhaps more important, however, is the disproportion at the political level: Brasidas' campaign to Thrace in the second half of Book 4 is dramatically successful at provoking revolts against the Athenians. Thucydides makes clear that many more cities would have revolted if they had had the chance (108.2-5), and once Athens fails in Sicily, these places one by one make the attempt (cf. e.g. 8.14-22). In contrast, Athens' occupations of Pylos, Cythera, and Methana in the first half of Book 4 fail to inspire the expected Helot revolts against the Spartans (41.3, 55.1, 80.2). Athens thus suffers more seriously, in the second half of Book 4, than Sparta does in the first half, and whereas Sparta is eventually able to restore her losses, Athens cannot. Part of the reason for this was Athens' inability to attract other strong parties to her much-vaunted democratic constitution; the Megarian and Boeotian narratives describe some consequences of this political problem.

Edith FOSTER

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