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Andrew Sweet
Denison University

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Brasidas

By Andrew Sweet '04
Kenyon College

Brasidas is the most compelling Lacedaemonian in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war, and the abilities he shows as a warrior, a general, and a speaker differentiate him greatly from Thucydides' description of normal Spartan character. In fact, although he serves Sparta and her interests, Brasidas' approach and methods are more similar to the Athenians' than to his fellow Lacedaemonians'. He combines strength and bravery with inventiveness and vigor, and he is the only one of his countrymen who understands how to wage war rather than simply fight battles. Of all the Spartans, only he effectively works for the benefit of his homeland after the capture of the Spartans on Sphacteria at the battle of Pylos. He is surprisingly successful in this with his expedition to Thrace, but he is so alien to the other Lacedaemonians that they delay reinforcing him and even harbor ill-will towards him. I think this depiction contains a profound critique of the Spartan regime from Thucydides. If their most able citizen is so different from the other Lacedaemonians that they cannot accept him and even hinder him from aiding their national interests, this points to crucial problems in their political structure.

Despite Thucydides' statements concerning the high standards of accuracy he tries to uphold, it seems likely that he takes liberties with certain facts either for literary effect or to better reflect his analysis of the war.¹ It is especially dangerous to draw conclusions about historical facts from Thucydides' portrayal of Brasidas, since he is the Spartan general who defeated the author

¹ 1.20-21.

and caused his exile. It is possible that Thucydides inflates many aspects of Brasidas' excellence in an attempt to excuse his own defeat. While I believe Thucydides' own statements on the accuracy of his work for the most part, these doubts make it necessary to limit the scope of this paper to an interpretation of Thucydides' portrayal of Brasidas and to leave open the question of whether this account accurately depicts the facts of Brasidas' life.

On the eve of the war, the Peloponnesians hold an assembly at Lacedaemon to discuss whether to declare war, and Thucydides outlines the basic national character of the Athenians and the Spartans through the speeches of the Corinthians and the Lacedaemonian King Archidamus there. The Corinthians try to explain why Athens is so dangerous to Sparta, and they do so by contrasting the Athenian character with the Spartan. This is one of many cases of antithesis in Thucydides' work, and it is important to be mindful that this passage is arranged to highlight these contrasts. That said, the Corinthians paint a picture of Lacedaemonian character that agrees with Thucydides' portrayal of the Spartans, excluding Brasidas, in the rest of the history. Brasidas, however, matches the Athenian character much more closely, insofar as the Corinthians describe it here. The Corinthians tell the Lacedaemonians that

οἱ μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὄξεῖς
 καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ἔργω ἄ
 ὑμεῖς δὲ τὰ ὑπάρχοντά τε σώζειν καὶ
 ἐπιγνῶναι μηδὲν καὶ ἔργω οὐδὲ τάναγ καὶ
 α ἔξι κέ σθαί .
 ὕθις δὲ οἱ μὲν καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν
 τολμηταὶ καὶ παρὰ γνώμην κινδυνευταὶ
 καὶ ἐν τοῖς
 ὁ δὲ ὑμέτερον τῆς τε δυνάμεως ἐνδεᾶ

ἄ ν

δ ε ι ν ο

πρᾶξι τῆς τε γνώμης μηδὲ τοῖς βεβαίοις
πιστεῦσαι τῶν τε δεινῶν μηδέποτε οἶεσθαι
ἀπολυθήσεσθαι.²

The Corinthians go on to describe how the Spartans never want to leave home for fear of endangering it and constantly hesitate to act even in dire circumstances, but the Athenians are constantly away from home attempting new things and act so swiftly that a plan is practically an accomplishment.³

Archidamus does not dispute the truth of the Corinthians' claims but defends these characteristics of his homeland in a speech in the same assembly. He calls their hesitation σωφροσύνη ἔμφρων and praises it as the possession that differentiates them from others, preventing them from being carried away in success and helping them endure hardship. He even says that it allows them to disregard the corrupting influences of others, although Thucydides portrays corruption of Spartans abroad as a real danger.⁴ Archidamus explains that their strict and ancient customs form the basis of the inflexible mindset that results in the Lacedaemonians' continued preeminence:

² 1.70.3: The Athenians “are innovating and keen to contrive and carry out with action whatever they determine; but you save your possessions and come to no new resolve, and you do not even carry out with action the minimum which is necessary. Again, they dare beyond their power and run risks beyond their judgment, and they are of good hope in dangers; but, for your part, you act short of your power and do not even trust the certainties of your judgment, and you believe that there will never be a release from dangers.”

³ 1.70.4-7.

⁴ 1.84.1-2. See also 1.128-135, where Thucydides fully explains the circumstances of Pausanias' recall and death.

πολεμικοί τε καὶ εὐβουλοὶ διὰ τὸ εὐκοσμον
γιγνόμεθα, τὸ μὲν ὅτι αἰδῶς
σωφροσύνης πλεῖστον μετέχει, αἰσχύνης δὲ
εὐψυχία, εὐβουλοὶ δὲ ἀμαθέστερον τῶν
νόμων τῆς ὑπεροψίας παιδευόμενοι καὶ ξὺν
χαλεπότητι σωφρονέστερον ἢ ὥστε
αὐτῶν ἀνηκουστέιν . . . οἰμίζειν δὲ τὰς τε
διανοίας τῶν πέλας παραπλησίους εἶναι
καὶ τὰς
προσπιπτούσας τύχας οὐ λόγῳ διαιρετάς.
. . . πολὺ τε διαφέρειν οὐ δεῖ νομίζειν
ἄνθρωπον ἀνθρώπου, κράτιστον δὲ εἶναι
ὅστις ἐν τοῖς ἀναγκαιοτάτοις παιδεύεται.⁵

Archidamus ends this speech by reminding his listeners how long Sparta has profited from its current political system and urging them not to depart from the practices of their ancestors, but Brasidas excels precisely by not manifesting the effects of his Spartan education which Archidamus praises and the Corinthians blame.⁶ This proves the analysis of the Corinthians, who have specifically addressed how badly suited these supposed advantages are to contending with the Athenians. As the

⁵ 1.84.3-4: “We become both warlike and prudent because of good order. On the hand, because modesty has the greatest share of moderation and courage [has the greatest share] of a sense of shame; and, on the other hand, we are prudent being educated more ignorantly concerning contempt for the laws and more wisely with difficulty than would result in us disobeying them. . . . And [we] believe that the thoughts of our neighbors closely resemble [ours] and that chance circumstances are not determinable by argument. . . . And it is not right to believe that man differs much from man, but that the strongest is whoever is educated in the most constraining things.”

⁶ 1.85.1.

Corinthians warn, this conservative mindset greatly hinders the Lacedaemonians during the war.

According to Thucydides, the Spartan's vaunted mindset actually results in poor relations with allies and ineffective strategy on the part of the city and its commanders, bearing out the Athenian warning to the Lacedaemonians that ἄμεικτα γὰρ τὰ τε καθ'

ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς νόμιμα τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔχετε καὶ προσέτι εἷς ἕκαστος ἐξίων οὔτε

τούτοις χρῆται οὔθ' οἷς ἢ ἄλλη Ἑλλὰς

Once the war begins, the Lacedaemonian strategy consists of marching into Attica once a year, devastating the land, and then leaving. While the Long Walls from Athens to Piraeus stand, the Lacedaemonians cannot properly besiege the city, but yearly ravaging is not an effective alternative. Their inexperience at fighting a naval power and eagerness to return home prevent them from devising better plans.

The examples of the following three Lacedaemonian generals show what results from the standard Spartan mindset in practice. The commander Alcidas, with whom Brasidas has a disagreement at Corcyra, leads an expedition in the summer of the fifth year of the war to protect Mitylene, but he hears that the Athenians captured it before he arrives. He refuses proposals to attempt to retake Mitylene or to begin a revolt in Ionia in another way, and sails homeward to the Peloponnese instead. Along the way, he kills the Ionians he takes prisoner until the Samians send him an envoy telling him that he is foolishly alienating people who should be his friends.⁸ This shows both the Spartans'

⁷ 1.77.6: "for you have customs for yourselves incompatible with others and, furthermore, when each one [of you] goes out, he follows neither these nor the ones the rest of Greece observes."

⁸ 3.30-32.

unwillingness to change objectives to attack targets of opportunity and their inability to interact with other Greeks, the combination of which prevents this expedition from achieving anything that furthers the Peloponnesian cause.

Polydamidas, whom Brasidas places in control of the garrison at Mende, also exemplifies the Spartan inability to deal with allies. His bad conduct first causes a group of allies to desert the garrison, then he starts a fight with the townsmen, and in the ensuing struggle, the Athenians to rush in and seize the town.⁹ Pausanias, a Spartan commander during the Median War, is an even better example of a bad Lacedaemonian general who ruins relations with other cities. Thucydides explains that the Ionians first turned to Athens during the Median Wars in order to get protection from Pausanias, who became βίαιος and began intriguing with the Persians. Having recalled Pausanias, the Lacedaemonians held a trial but acquitted him of most charges, including the well founded accusation of Medism. Seeing that the allies already regarded Athens as their leader, the Lacedaemonians were satisfied as it allowed them to withdraw from the war.¹⁰ This final affair is indicative of both the ill conceived way in which the Lacedaemonians approach foreign relations and the tendency for time abroad to corrupt them.

Although he serves his city's interests throughout his career, Brasidas shows characteristics that differentiate him from these typical Lacedaemonians both before and after he leaves the Spartan command structure. While his difference from the other Spartans is muted by his limited freedom of action before the Thracian expedition, Brasidas does manifest un-Spartan

⁹ 4.130.

¹⁰ 1.95.

swiftness and willingness to contradict superior officers. When an Athenian force assaults Methone in the first summer of the war, Brasidas arrives quickly with a hundred heavy infantry he is commanding. He acts promptly in response to a threat and unhesitatingly throws himself into battle. The Athenians withdraw, and Brasidas

ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ τολμήματος πρῶτος τῶν

κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἐπηνέθη ἐν Σπάρτῃ¹¹ Here the

Lacedaemonians honor Brasidas for being outstanding, but they react quite differently during his campaign in Thrace. This first mention of Brasidas in the History foreshadows his value to Lacedaemonian interests and his quick thinking, and so Thucydides may emphasize it for literary effect. Thucydides next distinguishes Brasidas from typical Lacedaemonians on his second naval expedition, during which he is advisor to the admiral, Alcidas. Their object is to capture Corcyra while it is embroiled in civil strife, and they defeat the allied Athenian and Corcyraean fleet sent out against them. They fail to complete their goal when Athenian reinforcements arrive because they do not attack the city, καίπερ ἐν πολλῇ

ταραχῇ καὶ φόβῳ ὄντας καὶ Βρασίδου

παραινοῦντος, ὡς λέγεται, Ἀλκίδα,

ἰσοψήφου δὲ οὐκ ὄντος¹² Brasidas violates one of the core Spartan values by questioning a superior officer, and this sets him apart from Archidamus' account of Lacedaemonian conduct.

¹¹ 2.25.2: “from this feat of daring, received the thanks of the state first of those [being honored] in Sparta during the war.”

¹² 3.79.3: “although they [the Corcyraeans] were in much disorder and fear, and, as is said, Brasidas was urging Alcidas [to attack], although he was not of equal vote.”

In consequence, Brasidas is demoted, commanding only a single ship during the pivotal battle at Pylos. His character thus leads him in a circle: while his abilities help him advance, they also hinder him when he interacts with his less able superiors. Without regard for this demotion, Brasidas unhesitatingly risks his life for the Peloponnesian cause. When the Peloponnesians are trying to land to attack the Athenians on shore, he exhorts the other ships to run aground and fight without reservation. He then leads by example, forcing his helmsman to run the ship onto the shore, and an enemy wounds him as he charges off.¹³ When he utilizes his skills within the Spartan hierarchy, Brasidas and his city both gain nothing. Despite risking everything in this battle, he cannot prevent the Peloponnesians from suffering a crushing defeat, in which the Athenians capture some Spartan heavy infantry alive on the nearby island of Sphacteria. This leaves Brasidas with only one choice to benefit his city: to leave home so that his exceptional abilities can actually help the Lacedaemonians prosecute the war.

Brasidas therefore convinces the Spartan leadership to allow him to undertake his Thracian campaign, and he truly distinguishes himself both in character and tactical skill from the other Lacedaemonians during the course of this expedition. Brasidas commands of an army of Helots and mercenaries with no regular Spartan heavy infantry, and the Chalcidians and the barbarian Perdicas fund the expedition.¹⁴ The Spartans were glad for the excuse to send away some Helots because there was fear of a revolt after the surrender on Sphacteria, and αὐτόν τε Βρασίδαν βουλόμενον μάλιστα

¹³ 4.11.4-12.1.

¹⁴ 4.79.2.

Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἀπέστειλαν¹⁵ They did not have to risk their precious heavy infantry or spend any money, so the Spartan command must have seen the whole mission as a risk-free chance to get rid of some undesirable elements while also possibly hurting the Athenians. The disaster on Sphacteria completely destroyed the will to fight of most Lacedaemonians, which is all the more reason why leaving the Spartan military hierarchy and taking command of this unconventional expedition was necessary for Brasidas.

Even before leaving for Thrace, Brasidas shows how quickly and effectively he can react to developing situations when commanding an army. He receives word of an Athenian assault on Nisaea and immediately gathers additional Corinthian and Boeotian allies to protect the nearby town of Megara. The Megarians refuse him admittance until they can see whether he will defeat the Athenians, so Brasidas forms his troops for battle outside Megara and waits for the Athenians to attack him. They withdraw since they have already captured Nisaea and see no need to risk the battle, and the Megarians consider Brasidas and his allies victorious.¹⁶ This is the first time Brasidas has sole command of a significant force, and his genius and skill are quite evident from the masterful way he handles events. He outmaneuvers the Athenians and saves Megara by quick action and cleverness without even having to engage the enemy in battle, whereas a typical Spartan could have avoided fighting only by arriving at Megara after it was captured and then going home like Alcidas at Mitylene.

Next Brasidas sets out for Thrace, where he attempts to disrupt the Athenian power base by causing

¹⁵ 4.80.2, 4.81.1: “And the Lacedaemonians dispatched Brasidas, who wanted himself [to be sent out] most of all.”

¹⁶ 4.70-73.

their tributary allies to revolt in any way possible, a strategy unlike other Spartans' since it requires constant reassessment of goals and vigorous movement. In fact, the Corinthians' statement concerning the Athenians that εἴ τις

αὐτούς ξυνελών φαίη πεφυκέναι ἐπὶ τῷ μῆτε

αὐτούς ἔχειν ἡσυχίαν μῆτε τοὺς

ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἔαν, ὀρθῶς ἂν εἴπωσιν aptly

describes Brasidas on this

campaign.¹⁷ The Spartans only resume these methods

after Alcibiades joins them and persuades them to do

so.¹⁸ Depending on the situation, Brasidas uses one of

two different tactics to win over the Athenian allies who

do not immediately join him: he convinces them that he

comes on a noble quest for the freedom and honor of the

Hellenes, or he simply takes their towns by treachery. In

all cases, Brasidas offers favorable terms and does his

best to assure the revolting cities that they have nothing

to fear from Athens while he is there to protect them.

This strategy is so successful that the Athenians become

greatly afraid of a large scale revolt in Ionia,

ὁ γὰρ Βρασίδης ἐν τε τοῖς

ἄλλοις μέτριον ἑαυτὸν παρεῖχε, καὶ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις

πανταχοῦ ἐδήλου ὡς

ἐλεθερώσων

τῆν

Ἑλλάδα

ἐκπεμφ

Thucydides also explains that Brasidas is responsible for

later effects on the Athenian allies:

¹⁷ 1.70.9: "If someone should say, in short, that they were born in this world neither to have rest themselves nor to allow other men [to have it], he would speak correctly."

¹⁸ 8.12. Compare Alcidas, who twice refuses suggestions to incite revolt in Ionia (see pp. 4-5).

¹⁹ 4.108.2: "Since Brasidas was proving himself moderate both in other things and in the declarations he was making known everywhere that he was sent out to free Hellas."

ἔς τε τὸν χρόνον ὕστερον μετὰ τὰ ἐκ
Σικελίας πόλεμον ἢ τότε Βρασίδου ἀρετὴ
καὶ ξύνεσις, τῶν μὲν πείρα αἰσθημένων,
τῶν δὲ ἀκοῆ
νομισάντων, μάλιστα ἐπιθυμίαν ἐνεποιεῖ
τοῖς Ἀθηναίων ξυμμάχοις ἐς
τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους. πρῶτος γὰρ
ἐξελθὼν καὶ δόξας εἶναι κατὰ
πάντα ἀγαθὸς ἐλπίδα ἐγκατέλιπε βέβαιον
ὡς καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τοιοῦτοί
εἰσιν.²⁰

By acting thus, Brasidas helps the Lacedaemonians both in the short term, by gaining them some towns to exchange with the Athenians during the peace negotiations that take place after his death, and in the long term, by convincing the allies of Athens that the Spartans are truly fighting for freedom and honor.

The speech of Brasidas to the Acanthians is the only example of an exhortation to Athenian allies to join him willingly that Thucydides records. During this speech, Brasidas combines clever rhetoric designed to convince the Acanthians that he has come to release them with overt threats, and thus he successfully incites their revolt. Unlike the other Spartans, Brasidas accomplishes this because he understands how to appeal to other Greeks and is capable of

²⁰ 4.81.2-3: “And later, after the happenings in Sicily, the excellence and sagacity of Brasidas at this time, which some learned by experience and others believed from hearing, most of all made in the allies of the Athenians an inclination towards the Lacedaemonians. Since he was the first who came out, and, having gotten the reputation of being good in everything, he left behind the firm expectation that the others were also of such a kind.”

τὸ τὰ δέοντα πράξαι like an Athenian.²¹ Acanthus is the first Greek city that Brasidas approaches on his Thracian expedition, and he persuades its citizens to admit him alone to speak.²² While he is delivering this skillfully constructed exhortation, Brasidas appeals to the Acanthians by portraying himself both as a glorious liberator and representative of the Spartans in general. He immediately explains that the Lacedaemonians brought about his and the army's ἔκπεμψις to substantiate the reason for which they began the war, Ἀθηναίοις ἐλευθεροῦντες τὴν Ἑλλάδα πολεμήσειν²³ Archidamus also claimed this when he campaigned against Plataea, but it was no more than a justification of Lacedaemonian aggression for him.²⁴ Brasidas, on the other hand, transforms another Spartan's excuse for aggression into the basis of a crusade for justice and honor.

His exhortation to join the fight for Hellenic freedom begins with a portrayal of the Lacedaemonians as friends of the Athenians' tributary allies. He tells the Acanthians that this first expedition from Sparta has arrived so late because of an opinion about the war that

²¹ 1.70.8.

²² 4.84.

²³ 4.85.1: "that freeing Hellas [we] would make war against the Athenians."

²⁴ 2.71-74: Archidamus undertook this campaign with the Boeotians, who were long standing enemies of the Plataeans, for no other purpose than the destruction of Plataea. They besiege Plataea and make ludicrous demands to its people, which marginally comply with the treaty binding all of them, and the Plataeans have no choice but to reject these. Since Archidamus' final response to the Plataean denial of his demands is little more than a summary of how he is legally in the right, it proves he invoked the cause of Hellenic freedom only to justify attacking the city.

led them to hope for a swift victory without the Acanthians' κίνδυνος, but now that chance has offered they should join with him against Athens.²⁵ Brasidas even feigns amazement that the gates were shut against him and tells the Acanthians that the Lacedaemonians considered them allies in spirit even before their actual arrival. Brasidas offers as proof of this goodwill that his expedition ran a great risk by traveling a long and dangerous road through a foreign land and showing πᾶν τὸ πρόθυμον²⁶ By saying these things, Brasidas begins to deceive the Acanthians by representing his own attitude as the general outlook of the Lacedaemonians while making the Acanthians better disposed towards them. He depicts his fellow countrymen as quite eager to fight for Hellenic freedom, but the other Lacedaemonians are actually trying to negotiate peace with Athens at this time.

In order to further build friendly feeling towards Lacedaemon, Brasidas moves on to emphasize to the Acanthians how crucial they are to the fight for Hellenic freedom: since he has come to them first, the other Greek cities would be hesitant to join him should the Acanthians, men who are πόλιν ἀξιόχρεων παρεχομένους καὶ ξύνεσιν δοκοῦντας ἔχειν refuse to do so.²⁷ Thus he flatters them but holds back his highest praise, implying that they must prove their ξύνεσις to him, no doubt by revolting from Athens. By casting opposition to him as opposition not only to their own freedom but also to freedom for all the other Athenian allies, Brasidas augments the shame that would come from rejecting

²⁵ 4.85.4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 4.85.6: “providing a noteworthy city and seeming to have sagacity.”

him. These appeals to glory and shame are natural for someone who represents himself as a freedom fighter, but Archidamus did not use anything similar to address non-Spartans. Brasidas, on the other hand, embraces his role as a liberator and all of the rhetorical tools this offers him.

Brasidas' refutation of two central points of argument against joining his crusade, that he brings ἄδικον τὴν ἐλευθερίαν or that he is unable to fight off the Athenians, reinforces the contrast between Brasidas and other Lacedaemonians.²⁸ In order to prove that he is quite capable of repelling the Athenians, Brasidas reminds his listeners of what happened at Megara. Unashamedly lying, he says that there he commanded the army he currently has and that the Athenians were more numerous than his troops.²⁹ He insists that the Athenian unwillingness to fight him there is evidence that they will also be unwilling to fight him in Ionia. This point is particularly specious given the Athenian willingness to dispatch fleets and since revolting allies threaten Athenian revenue and thus their ability to make war, but Megara was not strategically important enough to risk the battle. Thus he adroitly focuses more on proving that he brings just freedom, both because he can cite more evidence for this assertion and because it enhances the conception of him as the liberator of Hellas.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ In fact, his force was more numerous and included Corinthians, Phliasians, Sicyonians, and Boeotians who did not accompany Brasidas on this expedition (4.70.1, 4.72.1, 4.74.1). The Athenians had already captured Nisaea, their most important objective, and could have lost their best heavy infantry in a battle, so they did not attack. Nor did Brasidas attack, but the Megarians lauded him as victor when the Athenians withdrew from the field first (4.73.4).

The ὄρκοι by which the Lacedaemonians are bound are his first support for bringing true freedom, namely Brasidas' pledge that ἐ μὴν οὖς ἂν ἔγωγε προσαγάγωμαι ξυμμάχους ἔσσεσθαι αὐτονόμους.³⁰

He continues that they do not want to compel the Acanthians by force or fraud but to join them as allies since the Acanthians were enslaved by the Athenians. Brasidas portrays himself as an eager liberator using especially clever rhetoric, since he is deceiving them and willing to use force if necessary, and even adds that it is not right to mistrust him in light of these guarantees and his ability to fight the Athenians. As additional support for the truth of the freedom he brings, Brasidas addresses the fear that he might meddle in the Acanthians' domestic affairs. He explains that if he supported a faction, it would be worse than foreign rule, and the Lacedaemonians would receive αἰτία instead of the τιμή and δόξη they seek.³¹ Again, Brasidas portrays his own motivations, honor and glory, as those of all the Lacedaemonians, who would leave allies autonomous mostly from a desire to return to Sparta. He even says that by intervening they would become worse than the Athenians, whom they are fighting for interfering with other cities, since the Lacedaemonians have represented themselves as just due to the fact that

ἀπάτη γὰρ εὐπρεπεῖ αἴσχιον τοῖς γε ἐν
ἀξιώματι πλεονεκτῆσαι ἢ βία ἐμφανεῖ τὸ
μὲν γὰρ ἰσχύος δικαιοῦσει, ἦν ἡ τύχη ἔδωκε

³⁰ 4.86.1: "I swear, those whom I bring over will be autonomous allies."

³¹ 4.86.5.

ν, ἐπέρχεται, τὸ δὲ γνώμης ἀδίκου
ἐπιβουλή.³²

This is both an elaborate manner of rhetoric and a rather Athenian idea that Brasidas expresses.³³ Brasidas uses any means necessary to achieve his goals, including duplicity, but convincing the Acanthians he thinks it is shameful allows him to mislead them better.

Only after establishing himself as a liberator does Brasidas turn to threatening the Acanthians, and he even relates his threat back to the fight for Hellenic freedom. Brasidas echoes Archidamus by calling on the local gods and heroes as witnesses but for a slightly different purpose. While Archidamus invokes them as witnesses that he is following the treaty with the Plataeans, Brasidas says μάρτυρας μὲν θεοὺς καὶ ἥρωας τοὺς ἐγχωρίους ποιήσομαι ὡς ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ ἥκων οὐ πείθω³⁴ Brasidas thus continues to assert he fights for justice and then bolsters this claim with two ways in which the Acanthians would oppose what is right: first, by harming the Lacedaemonians with tribute payments to Athens, and second, by hindering the release of the other Greek from slavery. Brasidas even explicitly states that the Lacedaemonians owe freedom to the other Greeks because of κοινόν τι ἀγαθόν.³⁵

³² 4.86.6: “since, for those of reputation at least, gaining advantage by a comely trick is more shameful than by open force; for the one comes about by the just claim of strength, which fortune gave, but the other by the scheme of an unjust mind.”

³³ Gomme, v. 3, 554. He calls it a “Thucydidean-Athenian” idea comparing it to 1.76-77.

³⁴ 4.87.2: “I will make the gods and heroes of this country witnesses that, although I came for the good, I do not persuade [you].”

³⁵ 4.87.4.

Because of this, it would be wrong for the Spartans, who are not at all looking for empire according to Brasidas, to overlook opposition from the Acanthians. Brasidas concludes with a final exhortation to be the first to fight for Greek freedom and, in so doing, αἰδιον δόξαν καταθέσθαι, καὶ . . .

ξυμπάσῃ τῇ πόλει τὸ κάλλιστον ὄνομα περιθεῖναι.³⁶

This speech, with its well constructed appeal to the Acanthians, is different from any other Lacedaemonian speech in the History, and it shows Brasidas taking over the formerly Athenian position of liberator in Ionia.³⁷ While the idea that Sparta is fighting for liberty is not new, Brasidas is the first to use it to create an argument that actually sways other Greeks. In order to get the Acanthians to join him, Brasidas uses every means available to him, even deceiving them and simultaneously condemning deception. The success of this speech proves that Brasidas understands the specific psychology of the Ionian Greeks, which contrasts with the assertion of Archidamus that the Spartans view all men as fundamentally the same as themselves but inferior. Brasidas reveals how desperately he needs the Acanthians to join him as part of his rhetorical strategy, but the behavior of Alcidas shows that he was not concerned with gaining Ionian support either in action or in mindset.

Brasidas also approaches the battle exhortations that he gives in Thrace with a more Athenian than Spartan mindset. In the third year of the war, Brasidas and other Lacedaemonians are advisors to the commander of the Peloponnesian fleet, Cnemus, and

³⁶ 4.87.6: “to lay up a store of everlasting glory, and . . . to place the noblest fame around the whole city.”

³⁷ Gomme, v. 3, 554.

Brasidas' unique perspective seems to be lost in their speech before the battle at Naupactus.³⁸ In fact, Brasidas' subsequent battle speeches resemble Phormio's to the opposing Athenian fleet much more than the Lacedaemonian speech here. The Lacedaemonian commanders are attempting to encourage their newly reinforced fleet that they will defeat the smaller Athenian fleet, which previously overcame them. They say that they lost the battle before because they were unprepared to fight by sea rather than on land, fortune was against them, καὶ πού τι καὶ ἡ ἀπειρία πρῶτον ναυμαχοῦντας ἔσφηλεν.³⁹

The commanders argue that this time is different, but the reasons they cite are flimsy and unconvincing. They say that the defeat did not overcome the inherent bravery of the troops, which is primarily due to the severe training and resulting quality of their heavy infantry, and they excel the Athenians in this more than the Athenians excel them in experience. Once the battle is joined, fear will drive out the Athenians' superior expertise, since they lack bravery ἀνευ δὲ εὐψυχίας οὐδεμία τέχνη πρὸς τοὺς κινδύνους ἰσχύει⁴⁰ They emphasize ill preparation instead of inexperience as the decisive factor in the earlier battle, but the commanders try to prove that they are prepared this time because making the previous mistakes educated them and their preparation is not inferior to that of the previous commanders. The best argument they make is that

³⁸ 2.85-87.

³⁹ 2.87.2: "And perhaps also to some degree inexperience hindered [us] fighting at sea for the first time."

⁴⁰ 2.87.4: "and without bravery no art is strong against dangers."

περιγίγνεται δὲ ὑμῖν πλῆθος τε νεῶν καὶ πρὸς τῇ
 γῆ οἰκεία οὔση

ὀπλιτῶν παρόντων ναυμαχεῖν but this is a much greater advantage for a land battle.⁴¹ They conclude with a warning about the punishment for cowardice and the rewards for valor. Even the conclusion of this speech thus reinforces that it is unconvincing, since the speech offers no proof that the commanders have made any real improvements. The commanders are also clearly making the same mistake as at the previous sea battle, treating this fight as if it were on land and relying on their advantage there to give the troops confidence here.

Phormio, on the other hand, must prove to his troops that their expertise at sea will enable them to overcome the more numerous Peloponnesians.⁴² In contrast to the Peloponnesian commanders, who tell their men to depend on their natural superiority, Phormio argues that the right knowledge will be the decisive factor. This consists of understanding that the Peloponnesians' large fleet reflects the fear arising from their previous defeat and that the Athenians' naval expertise gives them the same advantage at sea as the Lacedaemonians enjoy on land. Furthermore, unwilling allies of Sparta make up much of the Peloponnesian fleet, and the very fact that the Athenians fight with such small numbers proves their greater courage and terrifies the enemy. Phormio also explains his own strategy for the battle, so that his men will know exactly how he expects to capitalize on their advantages to overcome the Lacedaemonians. He concludes by reminding them

⁴¹ 2.87.6: "there is both superiority for us in the number of ships and [we] fight at sea near our own land with hoplites present."

⁴² 2.89.

ὅτι νενικήκατε αὐτῶν τοῦς πολλοῦς· ἡσσημένων
δὲ ἀνδρῶν

οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν αἱ γνῶμαι πρὸς τοῦς αὐτοῦς

κινδύνους ὁμοῖαι εἶναι⁴³ Phormio thus teaches the

Athenians that despite appearances they actually have the advantage, offering their expertise and the Peloponnesians' fear as proofs.

The speech that Brasidas gives to his troops before they join battle with barbarians in Thrace is remarkably similar. Phormio and Brasidas are both outnumbered and fighting the type of battle at which they excel, but these speeches are more alike than this alone warrants. Brasidas opens by explaining that he called his troops together upon seeing their attitude and offers a διδασχὴ with a παρακέλευσις so that they will be brave.⁴⁴ Although Brasidas tells his troops that their bravery rests on innate courage, his main goal is to correct the ἀπειρία that is causing their fear.⁴⁵ Brasidas' approach to this exhortation is thus to educate his men about the inferiority of the enemy in order to bolster his troops' resolve, just as Phormio does at Naupactus. A discussion of the fighting techniques of the barbarians forms this teaching, as Brasidas explains that they do not fight in ordered ranks or with any sort of discipline. The barbarians may look and sound frightening but will not stand firm against well ordered Greek troops. In this way, Brasidas uses the same approach as Phormio, and his army successfully fights off the more numerous barbarians.

⁴³ 2.89.11: “you have defeated many of them; and the mindset of men, who have been beaten, is not likely to be similar against the same dangers.”

⁴⁴ 4.126.1.

⁴⁵ 4.126.3.

Brasidas again uses this method while exhorting his troops before the battle with the Athenians under Cleon at Amphipolis. Quickly dispensing with the idea that they usually beat the enemy because of innate superiority, Brasidas spends most of this speech explaining his tactics and why these will bring victory. The reason for Brasidas' unconventional approach is that

ὅστις . . . πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν τὴν
ἐπιχείρησιν ποιεῖται μὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ
προφανοῦς μᾶλλον καὶ
ἀντιπαραταχθέντος ἢ ἐκ τοῦ πρὸς τὸ
παρὸν συμφέροντος, πλεῖστ' ἂν ὀρθοῖτο·
καὶ τὰ κλέμματα ταῦτα καλλίστην
δόξαν ἔχει ἂ τὸν πολέμιον μάλιστ' ἂν τις
ἀπατήσας τοὺς φίλους μέγιστ' ἂν
ὠφελήσειεν.⁴⁶

Brasidas thus shows his favor for taking advantage of whatever the situation offers, an Athenian rather than Spartan attitude, and this flexibility leads to his many successes. His strategy involves splitting his force so that he can increase the confusion and fear among the disorganized Athenian troops, and he explains the benefits of this plan to give his men courage. Brasidas even finishes this speech by returning to the idea, which is most prevalent in his speech to the Acanthians, that he fights for freedom against the Athenian oppressors. Although he is fatally wounded in this battle, Brasidas lives long enough to learn that his troops are victorious

⁴⁶ 5.9.4-5: "whoever makes an attempt with regards to his own power, not by an open and hostile array rather than by taking advantage of the circumstance, succeeds most of all; and these tricks, which benefit our friends most greatly when someone has deceived the enemy completely, have the noblest reputation."

and dies a hero to the Ionian Greeks with whom he fought.

Brasidas more successfully promotes Sparta's interests than any other Lacedaemonian general, but his countrymen do not support him. An excellent contrast to this is Pausanias, the Spartan commander during the Persian Wars, who becomes so fractious and violent that the allies seek Athenian help rather than work with him. Pausanias intrigues with the Persians and begins to Medize, which causes the Lacedaemonians to suspect him as a traitor. The Spartans let him go again and again, however, not even being convinced by an incriminating letter he tries to send to the Persians. They are finally persuaded by overhearing him admit to a servant that he is betraying Lacedaemon but wait until later to arrest him, and one of the officials lets him know what was about to happen so that he has a chance to run.⁴⁷ Just as Brasidas acts moderately and recruits allies in any way possible, Pausanias drives them away. Brasidas goes out in order to benefit his country, but the Lacedaemonians suspect him of the same personal aggrandizement of which Pausanias is guilty. While suspicion of Brasidas' motives is expected, it is remarkable that they react to him with φθόνος.⁴⁸ Brasidas is certainly not a traitor like Pausanias, but the Lacedaemonian leadership must expect him to fail because of the nature of his army and the unconventional tactics he utilizes. Since these things lead to wild success rather than failure, Brasidas challenges the core beliefs as enumerated by Archidamus. The Lacedaemonians show pity to Pausanias because they understand him, but they envy Brasidas since he is incomprehensible and therefore dangerous.

⁴⁷ 1.128-134.

⁴⁸ 4.108.7.

Brasidas is of the greatest benefit to his city, both acquiring towns that the other Lacedaemonians can barter with during peace negotiations and creating a friendly feeling among the Ionians for Sparta. In order to do this, Brasidas must be flexible and swift to act, which sets him apart from the other Spartans. In this approach to war, Brasidas shows a mindset more Athenian than Spartan, and the other Lacedaemonians react badly toward him. This contrast between Brasidas and other Spartans combines with their reaction to him to portray the Lacedaemonian system as flawed. The typical Spartan cannot command as skillfully or speak as persuasively as Brasidas, but the city does not send support for his expedition to Thrace until he has already died. The prized constitution of Sparta thus creates citizens who are unable to prosecute a foreign war successfully and hate any of their number who manage to retain these abilities. Just as the Corinthians warn, the ancient regime at Sparta is ill suited for the Peloponnesian War, and the example of Brasidas makes this very clear.

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