

# Thucydides, not Philistus

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**E**CHRISTIAN KOPFF has argued that the passage giving the reasons for Nicias' lack of success at Syracuse at Thucydides 7.42.3 is not Thucydides but a fragment of Philistus which has crept into the text from the margin.<sup>1</sup> The non-Thucydidean element extends in Kopff's view from ἀφικόμενος γὰρ το ἀνασκοπῶν ὁ Δημοσθένης. Kopff's argument starts from the words ὡς οὐκ εὐθὺς προσέκειτο ταῖς Συρακούσαις, ἀλλ' ἐν Κατάνη διεχείμαζεν, ὑπερώφθη at 7.42.3. These words suggest that Nicias' first attack on Syracuse took place after the winter spent at Catana and that Syracusan disdain for him arose only after the winter spent at Catana. In fact, according to Thucydides' own account, the Athenians had spent part of the winter in Naxos as well as Catana (6.74.2, 75.2, 88.3 and 5), and shortly after the onset of the winter of 415 B.C. they had attacked Syracuse (6.63-71). The contempt that the Syracusans had felt for Nicias before this assault (6.63.2), Thucydides' narrative implies, was dispelled after it (6.72f, 103.3). Kopff's solution to these problems is to take the passage from Thucydides and give it to Philistus. In support of that attribution he makes the following case: (1) A number of ancient authorities state that Philistus affected the style of Thucydides.<sup>2</sup> (2) 7.42.3 is at odds with the reasons given in Thucydides' narrative for the failure of the Sicilian expedition. (3) 7.42.3 accords well with the criticisms of Nicias' strategy found in Plutarch's *Nicias*, which criticisms G. Busolt has argued derive from Philistus.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of considerations which tell decisively against this attribution. First of all, in claiming that a passage of Philistus has been incorporated into the text of Thucydides at 7.42.3, Kopff does not consider what the real problem at 7.42.3 is, namely, that this passage suggests that the first Athenian attack on Syracuse came after the winter spent at Catana. If these words are a problem in Thucydides, they are no less of a problem in Philistus. There is no reason

<sup>1</sup> "Thucydides 7.42.3: an Unrecognized Fragment of Philistus," *GRBS* 17 (1976) 23-30.

<sup>2</sup> Dion. Hal. *De Imit.* 3.2; Cic. *QFr.* 2.11.4, *De Or.* 2.57; Quint. 10.1.74.

<sup>3</sup> *Hermes* 34 (1899) 280-97.

at all to think that Philistus believed that the Athenians did not attack Syracuse until the spring of 414 B.C. In short, what purports to be a solution to an old problem in Thucydides is no solution at all since it simply transfers the problem from Thucydides to Philistus, who is most unlikely to have been mistaken on this matter.

Secondly, part at any rate of the passage which Kopff wishes to excise from the text of Thucydides is protected. Immediately after Kopff's excision the Greek reads, *καὶ γιγνώσκων ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ παρόντι τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ μάλιστα δεινότατός ἐστι τοῖς ἐναντίοις, ἐβούλετο ὅτι τάχος ἀποχρήσασθαι τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ στρατεύματος ἐκπλήξει.* The subject is Demosthenes. The words, *καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ παρόντι—δεινότατος*, "he too on the day of his arrival was especially frightening," imply that Thucydides had just said that someone else on his first arrival was especially frightening. Since this is what is said of Nicias in the first words of the passage to be excised, *ἀφικόμενος γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ὁ Νικίας φοβερός*, we may reasonably infer from the coincidence of phrasing and thought that these are Thucydides' words and not those of Philistus. It is fair to assume that Thucydides went on to explain how the consternation which the Syracusans felt on first learning of the arrival of the Athenians was dissipated. So we may extend the protected passage to include *ὡς οὐκ εὐθὺς προσέκειτο . . . ὑπερώφθη*, although we cannot on this basis infer the existence in the text of Thucydides of the troublesome sentence, *ἀλλ' ἐν Κατάνῃ διεχείμαζεν*. If so much of the passage can be shown to be Thucydides, there is no good reason to deny that he is the author of the rest of it. It expresses the same view of the crucial rôle that Gylippus played in saving Syracuse that we find in Thucydides' narrative (7.1f).

Thirdly, the sentence which immediately precedes the supposed fragment of Philistus, *ὁ δὲ Δημοσθένης . . . νομίας οὐχ οἶόν τε εἶναι διατρίβειν οὐδὲ παθεῖν ὅπερ ὁ Νικίας ἔπαθεν*, must have had some explanation of what it was that happened to Nicias after it. As it stands, it is by no means clear what is supposed to have happened to Nicias. If we do have a fragment of Philistus here, we must posit not only its having crept into the text from the margin but also the extrusion of a passage of Thucydides, a much more complex process, and for that reason less likely, than the one which Kopff suggests occurred, namely, the inclusion of a marginal note in the text.

In conclusion, 7.42.3, although it does present problems, is Thucydides. There is reason to think, moreover, that the criticism in that

passage of Nicias' failure to exploit the fear which the Athenian presence in Sicily had initially caused represents Thucydides' judgement at the time at which the main narrative of events in Sicily was composed.<sup>4</sup> In particular, at 6.63.2 we are told that the Syracusans' confidence grew each day when the Athenians did not attack and that they even began to despise the Athenians when they failed to take Hybla. This is in substantial agreement with what is said at 7.42.3, except that in the latter passage the disdain felt for Nicias seems to occur first in the spring of 414 B.C., whereas in 6.63.2 the Syracusans are already in the autumn of 415 B.C. contemptuous of the Athenians. W. Liebeschuetz has argued that 7.42.3 is not Thucydides' considered judgement on the ground that it is clear from Thucydides' narrative that the historian believed that the Athenians could accomplish nothing without a cavalry force of their own to protect them from the Syracusan cavalry.<sup>5</sup> But it is only after the Athenians have lost their initial advantage of fear that Thucydides draws attention to their need for cavalry. Thucydides may then have believed that a determined Athenian attack on Syracuse on their first arrival in Sicily would have met with little opposition and that they would have succeeded in investing Syracuse. The Syracusan cavalry became a problem only because the Syracusans were allowed to regain their confidence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> So A. W. Gomme, *JHS* 71 (1951) 72.

<sup>5</sup> *Historia* 17 (1968) 299–306.

<sup>6</sup> I should like to thank Professor John Vaio for his criticisms of a first draft of this note.