The difficulty involved in the interpretation of this passage has called forth many solutions, and no final agreement has so far been reached. My excuse for tackling it again is that I believe an answer can be provided—an answer which has always been available on the pages of Thucydides himself and some other Greek sources. If the truth of this claim can be substantiated, it will undoubtedly appear to be surprising that such a simple answer has not been given before. This may, I hope, justify me in employing a somewhat unusual procedure. For I propose to discuss not merely this short sentence of Thucydides, but also the methods used in its interpretation by some of the most important commentators. I shall do this not for any antiquarian reasons, but because it seems to me that here we have, within a fairly small compass, some of the more common symptoms of a disease not uncommon in the literature of commentaries on Classical authors.

The clearest and most explicit statement of the problems of this sentence has, I believe, been given by Adamantios Corais. "S’il est vrai", says Corais, "que le mot ἐπισκευάζω ne puisse signifier autre chose que raccommoder ce qui est vieux, comme il est prouvé par d’autres auteurs, et par Thucydide lui-même, liv. VI, ch. CIV... la première pensée qui se présente, et qui m’a toujours embarrassée, c’est que tous les vaisseaux de Corcyre

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étaient vieux. C'est aussi ce qu'observe l'un des scholiastes: ὥδεμιά κανή ναυς ἤν... mais comment accorder cela avec le chapitre XXV vers la fin, et XXXIII au commencement, où la marine de Corcyre est représentée comme la plus puissante après celle d'Athènes? Il se trouve donc que, dans cette marine si nombreuse et si bien montée, tous les vaisseaux ont besoin d'être réparés

Here, in a few candid words, we have the clue to what has baffled all commentators. If we agree with the scholiast's version that "there was no new ship" and that both verbs, ζεῦγνωμι and ἐπισκευάζω, refer to repairs of ships, we are faced with the difficulty that two thirds of a fleet second only to the Athenian navy are in need of repair before the war has even started. The only way out is to show that Thucydides does not really imply that all Corcyrean ships were in such a state. In terms of our text, this means that we shall have to show that either ζεῦγνωμι or ἐπισκευάζω does not necessarily mean 'to repair'. It is precisely one or the other of these answers that we find in our commentaries.

Corais is alone among them in assuming that it is to the verb ζεῦγνωμι that we should turn. Referring to its meaning outside naval contexts, where it is normally applied to the harnessing of an animal to a plough or a chariot, he maintains that it is in a similar sense that it is used in our passage: 'to equip a ship with its tackle'. This requires an emendation, quite plausible on palaeographical grounds: for παλαίζε read πολλάζε, and you have restored sense to the sentence. Most ships were, accordingly, in a fit and proper state, and only needed the tackle to be mounted on them. It is 'the others', that is, the few which were not fit for battle, which had to be repaired.

But this interpretation, attractive as it may look, has not been followed by the rest of our commentators 2). Their reasons (apart, I suppose, from a conservative reluctance to admit an emendation into a text) are provided by Bloomfield in his long note on this passage 3). The scholia, as Bloomfield shows, are not alone in taking

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1) Eighty out of 120 (Thuc. I 29,4): not 'tous les vaisseaux' as Corais has it.
2) Except Reiske (quoted by Levesque, loc. cit.), who accepts Corais' interpretation, but emends παλαίζε into παλνάζε!