MISCELLANEA

CLEON AWAITS REINFORCEMENTS?

To seek by textual emendation to reduce the obscurity of a passage which is any case obscure for non-textual reasons and will still remain so, may be suspect on grounds of logic. I take for granted that in the Second Battle of Amphipolis much obscurity results from priority in Thucydides' mind of slant over fact¹). Nevertheless in this case it is possible that obscurity is compounded by textual error.

I begin by accepting that the enigmatic previous sentence means that Cleon, encouraged by its success at Sphacteria, set out to use the same general tactic at Amphipolis (though what that might be, is uncertain). This γάρ-sentence is the only explanation: the μέν-clause represents what, in Thucydides' eyes, Cleon failed to do, the δέ-clause what he said he was doing, and the final, ἀλλά, participial, clause, what his real purpose was; the preceding clause implies, in ἵν ἀναγκαζομαι, a repeated reference to the possibility of battle, for which Cleon ought to have prepared. The problem is, what, in all this, are we to make of καὶ ... περιέμενεν?

Our first impulse is to take the two participial clauses as explanation of Cleon's awaiting reinforcements; Thucydides would be explaining why Cleon did that despite his failure to expect battle, and also counteracting any impression that Cleon was thereby acting at all cautiously. Yet while reinforcements would be necessary for attaining superiority in numbers, it is not clear that Cleon thought them necessary for storming the city; in V 7,5 he thinks that only lack of ladders prevents immediate capture of the city undefended, and this reads not as a change of mind on his part but as an unexpectedly favourable confirmation of his existing idea, that the city can be taken by storm. And so an intention to take the city by storm need not require reinforcements. (The lack of ladders, which Thucydides represents as carelessness, possibly shows that the reconnaissance was genuine.)

The clause οὐχ ὡς ..., though it implies a reference to the possibility of battle, does not seem to mean 'It was not for battle that he wished superior numbers' but rather that he did not trouble about safety in numbers (as a precaution for a possible battle) but intended something else, viz. storming the city—a strange way of explaining why he waited for reinforcements. We naturally expect that storming the city is to wait until

after the reinforcements arrive, but storming the city with reinforcements would be more cautious than without, and had reinforcements arrived they would indeed have been useful for a battle. If Thucydides feared that awaiting reinforcements might seem too circumspect and out of tune with Cleon’s failure to expect battle, he would have been better advised to omit all mention of reinforcements from this sentence: they did not affect the outcome.

It is possible that awaiting reinforcements is given as evidence of cowardice. Cleon’s alleged cowardice (which has to be made to fit his obvious boldness) often seems to consist in expecting others (IV 29,2 Demosthenes and 36,1 Messenians; V 3,2 the naval contingent at Torone) to accomplish tasks for which he has boldly volunteered; the previous sentence may be drawing a parallel between the Messenians on Sphacteria and the reinforcements at Amphipolis, and waiting for reinforcements would be the ‘method’ to which that sentence refers. Nevertheless it is difficult amid accusations of overconfidence to take waiting for reinforcements as anything but a virtue 2).

To approach from a different direction: since the ἄτε-clause evidently contains a deceitful utterance, we seek the ergon corresponding to this logos. The preceding μέν-clause seems to be merely a conspicuously expressed negative explanation, and the ergon itself to be given by the ‘real purpose’ in the ἄλλα-clause. But if the participial clauses express the ergon in contrast to the logos, can they at the same time explain περίπέμενεν, when that is joined to the logos by καί? On the other hand, it is perfectly possible for the participles to be adversative both as ergon to the logos and as the affirmative corresponding to the negative in the μέν-clause.

We must further remind ourselves (see, for example, A. W. Gomme, Commentary, ad loc.) that καί ... περίπέμενεν is inconsistent in other ways. In V 6,2 Cleon sent for reinforcements and then ἡσύχασε περιμένον. But at 7,2, allegedly in response to criticism from the army, he ceased to ἡσύχασεν, and by 7,3 he is leading a force in the field, claiming to be merely on reconnaissance, but in Thucydides’ representation up to some bigger mischief. It may be thought that this degree of activity is inconsistent with περίπεμενεν, which incorporates ‘remain’ and is less of a purely mental activity than English ‘wait’; it tends to mean ‘make no move until...’ Again, at 6,3 Brasidas, who is represented as a paragon of military wisdom and foresight, predicts that Cleon will come against Amphipolis, ὑπεριδόντα σφῶν τὸ πλῆθος, with his present forces. To come against the city with his present forces would in itself constitute ‘despising’ Brasidas’s army; from Brasidas’s point of view, Cleon did just what he expected; in so far as ‘despising’ is a discrepancy, it is a Thucydidean one, due to a temptation to insert yet a further slant, namely that Cleon was governed by agitation from the lower orders, of whom Thucydides never approves, even when they veer in a ‘good’ direction (cf. I 65,4, IV 28,5); but even in Thucydides’ version, overconfidence about the enemy forces may be a condition which permits Cleon to be ‘forced’ into action. But in view of