BRASIDAS AND THE UN-SPARTAN SPARTAN*

Abstract: While Brasidas is often singled out as a particularly un-Spartan Spartan and is clearly presented as such by Thucydides, there were many other Spartans, including in the pages of Thucydides, who matched Brasidas' innovation, energy and ambitious foreign policy. Thucydides overemphasizes Brasidas' un-Spartan characteristics and downplays his similarities to other Spartans such as Gylippus in order to make Brasidas the exception that proves the rule. Thucydides' treatment of Brasidas is therefore another important element in the historian's methods of characterizing states and individuals.

Keywords: Sparta, Brasidas, Peloponnesian War, Thucydides, characterization

Brasidas, who by capturing Amphipolis in 424 secured for Sparta its only major victory in the first phase of the Peloponnesian War, is one of the standout characters of Thucydides' History.[1] This should surprise no one. If, as most scholars now agree, a major concern of Thucydides is to exonerate Pericles from responsibility for starting the war by his belligerent imperialism, it is only natural that Thucydides should exonerate himself too by lionizing the general that bested him at Amphipolis.[2] From exile, Thucydides seems to say that a leader as energetic and innovative as Brasidas would have defeated anyone. That is not to say that the stakes were merely personal. Brasidas neutralized the advantage Athens had gained by winning at Pylos in the previous year and robbed Athens of

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2018 annual meeting of the Society for Classical Studies in Boston, MA, where I received many helpful comments from the audience and my fellow presenters. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *CJ*, who offered a wealth of insightful suggestions that have saved me from several errors and improved the paper immensely. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

[1] Harley (1941); Daverio Rocchi (1985); Wylie (1992); Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.38–61; Boëldieu-Trevet (1997); Hoffmann (2000); Howie (2005); Bosworth (2009); Mari (2012); Nichols (2014) 78–106.

[2] Kagan's treatment of the causes of the war is now a classic. See the distillation of his thoughts on Pericles' role in starting the war and Thucydides' revisionist defense of him, in Kagan (2010) 58–74. For a comprehensive study of the role of Pericles as the hero of Thucydides' work, see Will (2003); see also Taylor (2010), especially 7–81; but see also Foster (2010), who argues that Thucydides' views on Pericles are rather complicated and that Thucydides was far more critical of Periclean imperialism than most have recognized.

its most important asset in the northern Aegean, a city Athens would try to win back for most of the next century—unsuccessfully. There is no denying that Brasidas achieved remarkable tactical and strategic success and that he merits commensurate treatment by the war's historian. Nevertheless, the length and style of Thucydides' portrait of Brasidas is remarkable, even for such an important figure. Many readers of Thucydides have argued that Brasidas performs a Homeric *aristeia*, placing him in a league with Achilles.[3] Brasidas is able to achieve this in the pages of Thucydides because, as many have pointed out, Brasidas comes across as a most un-Spartan Spartan.[4] In fact, he exhibits the most prominent characteristics of Thucydides' Athenians, and he is marginalized by the Spartan authorities even as he makes great strides in Sparta's interests.

A complication to a great many scholarly interpretations of Thucydides' account and to Thucydides' account itself is that Brasidas was not particularly un-Spartan. Even a cursory reflection on Archaic and Classical Greek history should alert us to many energetic Spartan leaders engaged in two-pronged campaigns of liberation and imperialism while amassing personal glory and facing opposition at home, just like Brasidas did in his campaigns in Thrace. Known to Thucydides were Cleomenes I, Pausanias, Gylippus and Lysander (though Thucydides' history breaks off before Lysander appears on the stage), who are only the most famous of the many Spartans who either prefigured Brasidas or acted as his military and even ideological successors. After Thucydides there was of course Agesilaus, who, as the preceding list should demonstrate, was not all that different from other Spartan kings and leaders, despite his Panhellenic stature.[5] The main thing Brasidas has going for him over other Spartans who ventured out of the Peloponnese is that he died young and left a beautiful corpse—so beautiful, in fact, that the people of Amphipolis buried him as a hero in their agora and established a yearly festival in his honor (Thuc. 5.11).[6] Pausanias and Lysander lived long enough to let their arrogance become too much for their fellow Spartans, the former being starved to death while a suppliant in a temple, the latter being set up by a rival to die ignominiously in battle. Agesilaus lived long enough to become a ridiculous caricature of himself, adventuring in far-flung places around the

[3] See esp. Howie (2005).

[4] Westlake's (1968) 148 statement is definitive: "Brasidas is the antithesis of the conventional Spartan leader." This reading persists: more recently, for example, Mari (2012) 330 n. 9, says that Thucydides' treatment of Brasidas' honors at Amphipolis "clearly confirms Thucydides' evaluation of Brasidas as a unique figure, at least among Spartan leaders."

[5] The best treatment of Agesilaus and his life and times remains Cartledge (1987).

[6] For which, see now Simonton (2018), with further bibliography.

Mediterranean as Greece remained weak and fragmented, largely because of his own actions and policies. Cleomenes supposedly went mad after bribing the Delphic Oracle, among other indiscretions, and killed himself. Gylippus was caught embezzling money and was condemned to death in absentia, before disappearing from history. Brasidas died at the height of his success. Had he not, it is likely he would have seen the inevitable loss of his gains in the north and his new allies sold out and probably the opprobrium of his fellow Spartans for his arrogance in accepting honors such as a treasury building at Delphi which he shared with the Acanthians.[7] Why, then, does Thucydides seem to present Brasidas as so unique, and why have so many bought it, even to the extent of seeing Brasidas as a stand-out beyond Thucydides' History?

Hornblower suggests, quite plausibly in my opinion, that Thucydides uses Brasidas as a vehicle for conveying certain literary themes. Other scholars had already pointed out the strong Homeric resonances in the Brasidas story, but Hornblower adds the nuance that Brasidas is depicted as ignored or opposed by the Spartan authorities—an unlikely prospect in reality—in order to enhance his image as a romantic loner, striving alone with only his noble qualities for help in achieving his goals.[8] Hornblower may well point to an important facet of Thucydides' portrayal, but I want to add another nuance that has so far been overlooked. Thucydides portrays Brasidas the way he does, in all his literary complexity, in order to highlight further the respective characters of the Spartans and Athenians, which were for Thucydides so important to his analysis of the outbreak of the war and its course. Others have noted that Thucydides advances a revisionist negative account of Pausanias in order to explain Sparta's reluctance to engage in imperialism outside of the Peloponnese and to contrast him with Themistocles and the Athenians. I, for example, argue elsewhere that Thucydides distorts the details of the topography of Pylos for his treatment of the battle of 425 in order to do something similar, namely show the Spartans as unable to stick to a plan and ill-equipped to deal with adverse fortune, while the Athenians are quick on their feet and able to overcome reverses.[9] This contrast is further emphasized in the second half of Thucydides' work when it is the Syracusans, rather than the Spartans, who prove to be the most like the Athenians and thus the Athenians' most dangerous enemy (Thuc. 8.96.5)—despite the role the Spartan Gylippus

[7] For this treasury, see Sears (2019), and further, below.

[8] See Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.38–61, for his excellent discussion of Thucydides' portrayal of Brasidas.

[9] Sears (2011).

played in defeating the Athenian forces in Sicily.[10] Brasidas should be added to the list of literary emphases with the purpose of providing neat and contrasting characters for the Spartans and Athenians. Thucydides portrays Brasidas as an un-Spartan Spartan who throws into sharp relief the other Spartans' "Spartan-ness." But outside of Thucydides' history—and even inside in certain cases, if we read carefully—the real Spartans do not appear very Spartan either, nor the Athenians quite so Athenian.[11]

History and Literature

Before going further, we should begin by reaffirming some principles for approaching Thucydides as a literary historian. That is, is it useful or even possible to separate historical "fact" from literary "embellishment" in Thucydides' historiography? In the past, I have written about Thucydides in such a way as to parse the differences between history and literature, especially when those two things seemed to be in conflict.[12] Other scholars have pointed out omissions, such as an adequate discussion of the Megarian Decree and Pericles' role in the lead-up to the war, that suggest Thucydides' account is hardly unbiased and is in fact an exercise in revisionist history.[13] I had tended to think that Thucydides' account of actual events is more or less trustworthy, while less tangible elements such as his attributions of motive and the way character factors into explaining these events is more suspect and susceptible to literary "distortion." I now think that such a dichotomy does a disservice to historiography. One cannot neatly delineate history and literature in a work like that of Thucydides, where history and literature are one in the same, as the term "historiography" properly suggests.[14]

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[10] Rood (1998) 5-9 argues that the parallels between Sicily and Pylos are strong enough to suggest that the latter event influenced Thucydides' portrayal of the former.

[11] But see Cartledge and Debnar (2006) 562, who argue that the dichotomy between the Athenians and Spartans is not always so neat, with Nicias being more like the Spartans and Brasidas being more like the Athenians.

[12] Sears (2011). The classics of this genre are Cornford (1965) and Hunter (1973).

[13] As is Kagan's (2010) argument.

[14] The scholarship on this topic is appropriately vast. See Grethlein (2010) for a discussion of the relationship between historiography and other literary genres. For Thucydides in particular, see Tamiolaki and Tsakmakis (2013), especially Tamiolaki (2013) 41–72. The edited collection of Maciver, Llewellyn-Jones and Marincola (2012) offers many chapters useful for understanding the literary and material ways the Greeks came to grips with the past. See also Loraux (2011), a crucially important essay arguing against the strict categorization of ancient genres, which has led modern scholars to misunderstand Thucydides and the nature of his history writing.

Not only is it simplistic to think of history as a set of facts that are there to be uncovered beneath a layer of literature, the "facts" about Sparta and the Spartans are notoriously difficult to discern by any measure. Infamously insular and secretive, Sparta was mysterious even to its contemporaries. Thucydides himself, while accounting for the numbers in the Spartan army at Mantinea in 418, admits that such figures are nearly impossible to learn, given the secrecy of Spartan society (5.68). In several places throughout the *History*, Thucydides hints at the impenetrability of Spartan decisions and motives, using variations of "it is said" (ὡς λέγεται) as a hedge in a way he rarely does elsewhere.[15] The situation is even direr for modern historians attempting to divine the truth about Sparta and the Spartans and find out where Thucydides might give us a distorted picture. We have an abundance of information about Sparta, but a majority of this information is perhaps due to the "Spartan Mirage," an idealized and fossilized portrait of Sparta concocted in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, when Sparta had become something of a theme park and caricature of itself.[16]

So, while as an ancient historian I think we can get closer to what really happened in antiquity—and, indeed, we should try to do so—I am not interested solely in separating "fact" from "fiction" in Thucydides' portrayal of Brasidas and other Spartans. Such an effort might be fruitless in the end, but it also threatens to obscure the nature of Thucydidean historiography. Here, I follow Tim Rood, who comments on this issue admirably: "The distinction between Thucydides as literature and Thucydides as history would have meant nothing to Thucydides himself, whose criteria for assessing narratives are metre and degree of embellishment, and it hinders our understanding of his work."[17]

The case of Brasidas presents a good opportunity to look once again at characterization as a centrally important element of Thucydides' historiography, to shed further light on the themes Thucydides wishes to emphasize and the ways he understood and conveyed history. In short, Thucydides uses characterization as an explanatory tool for the causes and events of the war, thus understanding how he has characterized Brasidas is vital for understanding how he "wrote the war" in

[15] As pointed out and collected by Rood (1998) 277–8 n. 81.

[16] On the Spartan Mirage and the (un)reliability of the literary tradition, see Starr (2002) and Flower (2002). But, see Figueira (2016), who argues that scholars go too far in dismissing post-Classical sources for Sparta, which might have preserved far more of the Spartan tradition than is generally acknowledged.

[17] Rood (1998) 4.

general.[18] Furthermore, that the popular image of Brasidas as an un-Spartan Spartan is wrong serves as a cautionary tale in reading Thucydides too literally and perhaps not carefully enough.

The Thucydidean Brasidas

We first encounter Brasidas, son of Tellis, in Thucydides' second book, thwarting a surprise Athenian attack and thus becoming the first Spartan to receive an official commendation in the war. From the outset, then, Brasidas is shown to be made of different stuff than other Spartans (2.25). We next see him as one of the commissioners sent out by Sparta to advise the Peloponnesian fleet after suffering a defeat at the hands of Phormio near Naupactus (2.85). Thucydides records—or invents—a pair of speeches before the second Battle at Naupactus, which conveniently sum up the respective characteristics and self-assessments of the Spartans and Athenians (2.87–9).[19] Thucydides says that Cnemus and Brasidas delivered the speech on the Spartan side, which emphasizes courage. The Spartans next send Brasidas as an advisor to Alcidas to deal with the stasis at Corcyra (3.69). After Alcidas defeats the Athenians and Corcyreans at sea, Brasidas urges Alcidas to exploit the victory by attacking the city itself on the next day. The Spartans ignore Brasidas' advice, showing themselves to be the inactive foil to Brasidas' energy and initiative (3.76–9). Brasidas' last exploit before his celebrated campaign in Thrace is as a trireme commander at the Battle of Pylos (4.11). Where his crew and fellow Spartans are nervous to attack the Athenians' position on the rocky headland at Pylos, Brasidas urges his men to ram the trireme against the rocks, sacrificing safety for the chance to strike the Athenians. Brasidas faints after receiving many wounds while gallantly urging on his men. Once again, Brasidas shows daring and energy where his fellows demonstrate only hesitation and conservatism. What is more, he is in charge of a trireme (just as he had earlier been a naval advisor), a very "Athenian" position, if there ever was one.

[18] For characterization in Thucydides, see now de Bakker (2013) 23–40, who argues that individual characteristics are subjugated to wider causal patterns; and Rood (2017) 153–71, who also argues that various methods of characterization are vital parts of Thucydides' narrative, especially concerning causes of events and decisions. See also Stadter (2017) 283–300, who provides a useful schema for the way Thucydides characterizes individuals. Finally, see the now classic article by Lang (1995), which explores Thucydides' use of participles to describe the motivations of his characters. Incidentally, Brasidas, the most un-Spartan, Spartan receives the most participles of motivation (20), while Nicias, the most un-Athenian Athenian, comes in at a close second (19).

[19] de Romilly (2012) 80–7 provides the best analysis of these paired speeches and their invention by Thucydides.

Much of the second half of Book 4 and the first several chapters of Book 5 (4.70–5.12) are devoted to Brasidas' mission in Thrace and the north Aegean, where he demonstrates not only strategic ingenuity by taking the war to Athens' possessions rather than Athens itself, but also tactical skill, diplomatic finesse and personal bravery.[20] Aside from taking Amphipolis—the action which led to Thucydides' exile after the Athenian failed to arrive from Thasos in time to save the city—Brasidas also famously defended it from Cleon and died heroically in the process. Brasidas "liberated" many other Athenian subjects in the region and each time he deployed shrewd rhetoric as a speaker who, in Thucydides' estimation, was "not bad, for a Spartan" (4.84.2). His speech at Acanthus, especially, was a tour de force, blending compelling arguments with the threat of military action (4.85–7).[21] While most scholars see in Brasidas' northern exploits a marked imperialism using liberation as a mere slogan, Thucydides is at pains to show that Brasidas was beloved by many of those he liberated, exhibiting marked gentleness (πραότης, used only for Brasidas, 4.108.3) and moderation (μετριότης, 4.105.2). [22] Thucydides singles out Brasidas as the only individual in the entire Peloponnesian War with both excellence and intelligence (ἀρετή and ξύνεσις, 4.81.2).[23]

The problem, for Thucydides, arose when other Spartans took his place, men who were by no means like Brasidas. Thucydides also says that the Spartan authorities were not always on board with Brasidas' activities and actively worked to undercut him, though Hornblower and others have argued that Sparta must

[20] In addition to the references listed above, n. 1, for a discussion of Brasidas' Thracian mission, see Badian (1999).

[21] For this speech and Brasidas' diplomacy in general, see Sears (2015).

[22] For Brasidas as a cynical imperialist, see Glover (1917) 364 (quoted in Cartledge (1987) 49); Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1945–1981) 3.555; Wylie (1992) 80; Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.56–7; Burns (2011) 516; Dmitriev (2011) 23, who says rather bluntly but representatively that the speech at Acanthus was "an unmatched display blending arrogance and blackmail." Brasidas' rhetoric was taken to be especially cynical in light of Sparta's subsequent treatment of its new northern allies. See especially Bosworth (1993) 36–7. Not everyone has taken such a low view of Brasidas. Nichols (2014) 78–106, for example, argues that Brasidas' actions in Thrace were an attempt to force Sparta to live up to its professed ideals, though such an attempt was probably doomed from the start.

[23] The Syracusan Hermocrates, however, comes close, having both ξύνεσις and ἀνδρεία. See Hornblower (1991–2008) 3.485. Nicias, by contrast, has ἀρετή but not ξύνεσις (7.86.5). Interestingly, at 6.54.5, the Pisistratid tyrants are described as having ἀρετή and ξύνεσις. For a full discussion of this Thucydidean formula, see Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.271–2.

have supported Brasidas to a greater degree than Thucydides allows.[24] Here again Thucydides seems too keen to demonstrate Brasidas' uniqueness, perhaps at the expense of providing a more accurate view of the range of sentiments among the Spartans. Thucydides says that the good behavior of Brasidas coupled with his military successes (even those he embellished in his speeches) made Athens' subjects hopeful beyond what was sensible, assuming that other Spartans would prove just as energetic as Brasidas and that Athens would remain as powerless to stop the Spartans as they were at Amphipolis (4.108).[25]

A naval commander, strategic and tactical innovator, astute diplomat and charming figure, Brasidas was everything other Spartans were not. This general who defeated Thucydides himself was as Athenian as the Athenians and perhaps even more so. If only Sparta had had more men like Brasidas! And despite Thucydides' portrait, it seems Sparta might have.

Other Un-Spartan Spartans

It is really rather remarkable that the Spartans have the reputation they do, given that its most prominent figures in Classical historiography are more often than not aggressive imperialists who are more than happy to interfere in affairs outside of Laconia or even the Peloponnese. King Cleomenes I dominates much of Herodotus' narrative about Archaic Greece and the political revolution at Athens in the late 6th century (Hdt. 5.55–96). In addition to corrupting the Delphic Oracle (Hdt. 6.66), Cleomenes as king of Sparta interfered in Athenian internal affairs, once in the service of liberty by helping to expel the Pisistratids, and again, in a much more tyrannical fashion, in trying to reinstall Isagoras, a rival of Cleisthenes, and occupying Athens. After he was expelled from Athens, Cleomenes arranged for a coalition to invade Attica, but the venture failed when Corinth refused to take part and the coalition dissolved. There are few characters in the pages of Herodotus and Thucydides more imperialistic and interventionist than Cleomenes. And though he faced opposition at home, Cleomenes seems to have represented a pronounced imperialistic faction—or at least tendency—

[24] Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.268–70. See also Lazenby (2004) 91, who argues that Brasidas was following Spartan policy in the north because he had earlier won the Spartan authorities over to his ideas.

[25] Bosworth (1993) 36–7, argues that Thucydides here strongly criticizes Athens' subjects for accepting Brasidas' propaganda while underestimating Athens' strength, just like the Melians would do later in the war. For a discussion of 4.108 and its various interpretations, including the fact that Thucydides points out Brasidas outright lies about previous successes against Athens, see Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.340–5.

within Sparta. Philip Stadter argues that Herodotus' Cleomenes logos, along with other important passages like the construction of the Isthmus Wall, highlights that Sparta was both imperialist and isolationist. While different from Athenian imperialism, Spartan imperialism was real and championed by important Spartans, including Cleomenes. Herodotus, according to Stadter, sought to warn his audience of the dangers of imperialism, including Spartan imperialism.[26]

Another un-Spartan Spartan is Pausanias, hero of the Battle of Plataea. Thucydides provides a famous digression (1.128–38) on the post-Plataea activities and sordid fate of Pausanias, whom the historian pairs with Themistocles, the Athenian most responsible for the Battle of Salamis. Pausanias is recalled to Sparta and condemned to death because he allegedly tried to betray the Greeks to the Persians in exchange for being installed as the pro-Persian master of Greece himself. In addition to treason, he also affected the dress and manner of a Persian grandee and behaved so arrogantly that the Greeks turned to Athens instead of Sparta to lead the anti-Persian alliance. Sparta was only too happy to give up its overseas leadership role, fearing that any of its leaders spending too much time abroad would likely end up behaving like Pausanias (Thuc. 1.95). The bad behavior of Pausanias thus set the stage for the history of the 5th century, including the rise of Athens as an imperial power and Peloponnesian War itself.

It is important to note that Pausanias is not really an un-Spartan Spartan in Thucydides' mind. Rather, he behaves as the stereotypical Spartan who goes abroad and begins to suffer from delusions of grandeur. Because Spartan leaders often act like this, the Spartans were apparently loath to venture far from home and were ill-equipped for and unenthused about assuming leadership of the Greeks around the Aegean. It is also important to note that Thucydides offers a revisionist account of Pausanias, especially given that Herodotus treats Pausanias at length as the dominant figure of the last phase of the Persian invasion of Greece. As J. A. S. Evans argues, there were at least two traditions about Pausanias' supposed Medism, one of which, the one followed by Herodotus, was much more favorable to the Spartan. Evans demonstrates that, according to Herodotus' preferred version, Pausanias' imperialistic actions abroad in places like Thrace were not outrageous personal aggrandizement and not dissimilar to Brasidas' mission during the Peloponnesian War, despite the fact that Thucydides deliberately contrasts Pausanias and Brasidas.[27]

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[26] Stadter (2012).

[27] Evans (1988). For the contrast between Pausanias and Brasidas, see, for example, Connor (1984) 130 n. 52, 139 n. 70.

Brasidas' immediate successor during the Peloponnesian War was Gylippus, the unorthodox and controversial general the Spartans chose to send in aid of the Syracusans against the Athenias (Thuc. 6.93). Gylippus demonstrated Brasidean energy and creativity in turning the tide of the conflict in Sicily decidedly against Athens (see esp. Thuc. 7.1–6, 79–86) and was instrumental in handing Athens one of its greatest defeats, just as Brasidas had done a few years earlier. Like Brasidas, Gylippus was given a meager force consisting largely of helots. Gylippus was even more removed from polite Spartan society since he was a mothax, a second-class Spartan who probably had a helot mother (Ael. 12.42). Like Brasidas, Gylippus' unconventionality perhaps gave him a freer tactical and strategic hand in Sicily. Westlake calls Gylippus a "worthy successor to Brasidas."[28] Westlake's comment might be true as far as it goes, but it has generated words of caution from Cartledge and Debnar, who warn against multiplying Brasidas-types.[29] This alarm was first sounded by Hornblower, who, in the case of Clearidas, another Spartan general abroad, said that "we cannot keep reduplicating Brasidas-types indefinitely or we will end up with Brasidas as the conventional Spartan."[30] I would agree. Gylippus fell into disgrace after the war by stealing treasure entrusted to him by Lysander, falling into the typical trap waiting for Spartans who ventured abroad. He was condemned to death in absentia (Diod. 13.106; Plut. *Nic.* 28 and *Lys.* 16–17). We will return to Gylippus below.

The most famous un-Spartan Spartan of all is Lysander, victor of the Peloponnesian War, friend of the Persian prince Cyrus and harbinger of the Hellenistic monarch. Lysander has been compared to Brasidas many times, usually unfavorably as the embodiment of the reductio ad absurdum of Brasidas' more noble imperialistic enterprise. Bearzot, for example, argues that Lysander wanted to be thought of as in the mold of Brasidas, but was more likely to strike others as a new Pausanias.[31] Bearzot's article is a neat encapsulation of the standard dichotomy between Brasidas, the well-behaved Spartan abroad, and Pausanias and all the other Spartans abroad, who invariably go bad. But again, would Brasidas have behaved any differently than Lysander had he lived longer and achieved total victory over the Athenians and thus imperial responsibilities? Lysander behaved as an absolute ruler and was honored with cult and other lavish rewards far beyond what Greeks should have deemed acceptable for a mortal (see, for example, Plut. *Lys.* 18). Brasidas, though, was given a remarkable posthumous cult at Amphipolis,

[28] Westlake (1986) 278.
[29] Cartledge and Debnar (2006) 581.
[30] Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.59.
[31] Bearzot (2004).

which stands nearly alone in Greek history up to his time, and was named on the Treasury of the Acanthians at Delphi (a building which later housed a statue of Lysander, in fact), the first such living person to be so honored since the Archaic 'Age of Tyrants.'[32]

Though Thucydides lived to see the end of the Peloponnesian War and Lysander's role in engineering Athens' defeat and surrender, the historian died before completing his work, which breaks off abruptly in the account of the year 411. Lysander certainly would have been a dominant character in the remainder of Thucydides' work, and as Hunter Rawlings has persuasively argued, Thucydides would likely have paralleled Brasidas' activities in Books 4 and 5 with Lysander's in the hypothetical Books 9 and 10. Rawlings argues that Thucydides' comparison of Brasidas and Lysander would not have been all that favorable to the latter, leaving Brasidas to remain as a standout among the Spartans, even among the other standouts.[33] If Rawlings is right, Thucydides would certainly have a strong motive for not including other Brasidas-types before introducing Lysander.

There are other examples of un-Spartan Spartans in Thucydides, including the above-mentioned Clearidas, who replaced Brasidas in the north Aegean. Even more existed outside of Thucydides' purview, such as the roguish Clearchus, briefly Spartan governor of Byzantium after the war, and mercenary extraordinaire with the Ten Thousand, who is a main character in the first two books of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. One more example of an un-Spartan Spartan will suffice for this paper: Agesilaus. The closest anyone came to being king of Greece before Philip of Macedon, Agesilaus was famously imperialistic and interventionist and spent a great deal of his career fighting wars abroad, including in Asia Minor and even as a mercenary in Egypt. His most infamous interventionist actions, worthy of Cleomenes, were his grants of approval of a seemingly unsanctioned takeover of the acropolis of Thebes and the attempted capture of the Piraeus by the Spartan Sphodrias. Though his Panhellenic policies generally failed, only paving the way for increasing fragmentation amongst the Greeks and further weakening of Sparta, Agesilaus did not act markedly differently from a host of Spartan leaders before him, including all those mentioned in this paper. He shared with Brasidas a commitment to the slogan of liberation, which he attempted to put into practice by invading Persian territory in Asia Minor to set free the Greeks of Ionia. Like Brasidas, Agesilaus really seemed to believe in his mission of liberation but was

[32] For the cult, see Simonton (2018); for the treasury, see Sears (2019).
[33] Rawlings (1981) 234–43.

stifled by his Spartan rivals and events beyond his control, including ongoing Greek infighting and Persia's meddling in Greek affairs.[34]

To return to Westlake's description of the Thucydidean Brasidas:

> Wherever he appears in the narrative of Thucydides, there is action, energy and enterprise. Almost alone of Spartan leaders in the Peloponnesian war he is seen to have appreciated the value of consulting the interests of other Greeks and to have possessed a remarkable flair for winning popularity and even devotion.[35]

I agree with Westlake that such is the Thucydidean presentation of Brasidas, at least in part. I hope, however, that the preceding examples suffice to demonstrate that Brasidas was not all that unique among Spartan leaders. While Sparta might have in the main been isolationist and slow to action, it had always possessed leaders with "action, energy and enterprise," who were interested in the affairs of other Greeks and were able to forge alliances, even if imperfect ones. The question I want to answer, therefore, is why Thucydides wants us to think otherwise. What purpose does an un-Spartan Brasidas serve for Thucydides' History?

Three Other Spartans in Thucydides: Archidamus, Sthenelaidas and Astyochus

To complicate matters somewhat, let us consider three prominent Spartans in Thucydides' History that appear to conform to Thucydides' portrayal of the Spartans, if in slightly different ways from one another. Archidamus, the king for whom the first phase of the war is named, adheres to the stereotype of Spartan slowness and over-caution, even if he also has a reputation for intelligence and prudence. Sthenelaidas, an otherwise unknown ephor, was Archidamus' blunt and war-mongering counterpart in the debate in 432 concerning whether or not to go to war. Finally, Astyochus was given great power as the overall commander of the naval efforts in Ionia after the Sicilian expedition, but was found to be both incompetent and corrupt, looking out for his own interests as he colluded with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes.

While introducing Archidamus before his speech to the Spartans (1.79–85), Thucydides calls him both wise (ξυνετός) and prudent (σώφρων). In Thucydides, the former description applies overwhelmingly to Athenians (Theseus, the Pisistratids, Themistocles, Phrynicus, the oligarchs of 411 and Hermocrates of Syracuse) but to one other Spartan, Brasidas. Archidamus is the only person in the

[34] Cartledge (1987) offers a comprehensive treatment of Agesilaus and his role in Sparta's 4th century decline.

[35] Westlake (1968) 148.

History called "prudent" by Thucydides.[36] This introduction, therefore, is high praise from the historian, and even though Archidamus seems to be one of those typical Spartan leaders explicitly contrasted with Brasidas, that he is given an Athenian and Brasidean quality complicates this contrast.[37] In the speech, Archidamus is even made to suggest the bold shift in Spartan policy of reaching out to non-Greeks, namely the Persians, for help in combatting the Athenians (1.82.1), a move that anticipates what Spartans such as Lysander would not do until two decades later. In his analysis of Sthenelaidas' following speech, Edmund Bloedow argues that Archidamus' speech is logical and convincing, and Thucydides used the pair of speeches to highlight the irrationality of the Spartan decision to go to war.[38]

Eloquence and strategic insight aside, Archidamus largely plays to type and is used by Thucydides to lay still further groundwork for his characterization of the Spartans. During the first Peloponnesian invasion of Attica in 431, Archidamus was criticized by his soldiers for his slowness to act by wasting time in the region of Oenoe, a fortress on the border of Attica, instead of invading Attica itself. Though Thucydides does not necessarily vouch for it, the soldiers assumed that Archidamus delayed out of friendship for the Athenians and his opposition to a full-scale war (2.18.3). In his speech, Archidamus foreshadows his actions by outlining the case for Spartan slowness and deliberation (1.84). Spartan slowness, Archidamus argues, has prevented the Spartans from growing overconfident when things are good and being brought down when things are bad.[39] He also says that the Spartans are trained not to be too clever in useless things, such as accurately accounting for and critiquing the enemy's preparations, only to fare less well against them in the action itself.[40] As I show elsewhere, and as we will discuss below, overconfidence in good times and discombobulation in bad, along with carefully constructed plans inadequately carried out, are exactly the character traits that get Spartans into trouble in two of their biggest disasters during the first phase of the war, namely the naval battles against Phormio in 429 and the Battle of Pylos in

[36] For these descriptors of Archidamus, see Hornblower (1991–2008) 1.124–5.

[37] Westlake (1968) 122–3 introduces Archidamus as the first of these Spartan leaders to be contrasted with Brasidas.

[38] Bloedow (1987).

[39] 1.84.2: μόνοι γὰρ δι' αὐτὸ εὐπραγίαις τε οὐκ ἐξυβρίζομεν καὶ ξυμφοραῖς ἧσσον ἑτέρων εἴκομεν.

[40] 1.84.3: καὶ μὴ τὰ ἀχρεῖα ξυνετοὶ ἄγαν ὄντες τὰς τῶν πολεμίων παρασκευὰς λόγῳ καλῶς μεμφόμενοι ἀνομοίως ἔργῳ ἐπεξιέναι.

425.[41] While Archidamus is not the fullest embodiment of these negative traits, that Thucydides puts this statement into the Spartan king's mouth is telling.

Sthenelaidas is the Spartan ephor who provides the counter-speech to Archidamus'. He is otherwise unknown and, as Hornblower suggests, seems used by Thucydides to convey a certain character type rather than a fully realized historical individual.[42] Sthenelaidas, instead of exhibiting the Spartan slowness and caution that characterizes Archidamus, complains about the fancy speeches of the Athenians and bluntly advocates settling things with action instead of words. While, as Bloedow argues, Sthenelaidas' speech is more rhetorically sophisticated than it first appears, it does seem to be the ideal counter to Brasidas' clever speaking ("for a Spartan," as Thucydides says at 4.84.2).[43] In his rejection of long and clever speeches and appeal to common sense (ἢν σωφρονῶμεν), Sthenelaidas resembles Thucydides' idea of an un-Athenian Athenian (or at least a bad Athenian) and Brasidas' nemesis, Cleon. In his speech during the Mytilenean Debate (3.37–50), Cleon chastises the Athenians for being taken in by clever speeches and appeals for simple common sense (ἀμαθία τε μετὰ σωφροσύνης, 3.37.3).[44] Sthenelaidas, then, seems for Thucydides to represent the other side of the Spartan coin from Archidamus.

Astyochus is introduced in Book 8 as the admiral sent out to Ionia in 412–411 to take command of all the Spartan military operations in the region.[45] Not only is he singularly ineffective in accomplishing anything for Sparta's war effort, he is seen by his own soldiers as a corrupt conspirator with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes, looking out only for his own financial interests. When confronted by angry soldiers, Astyochus treats them with especial arrogance and even threatens to beat one with a staff, until he is himself faced with being stoned (8.84). Hornblower argues that Astyochus' violent arrogance is typical of Spartans abroad, at least in Thucydides' History. In their speech during the debate at Sparta, the Athenians point out this Spartan characteristic (1.77.6).[46] Violent misbehavior abroad does seem to be a particularly Spartan trait for Thucydides, but as A. W.

[41] Sears (2011).

[42] Hornblower (1991–2008) 1.130.

[43] Bloedow (1987).

[44] This rhetorical connection between Sthenelaidas and Cleon is pointed out by Cartwright (1997) 49.

[45] Westlake (1968) 290–307 has a chapter on Astyochus, arguing that the Spartan was portrayed as perhaps even more incompetent than his ineffective compatriots. Being in Book 8, Astyochus is given no words in direct speech, but is characterized primarily by his deeds, which is itself noteworthy for Thucydides' methods of characterization.

[46] Hornblower (1991–2008). 3.991–2.

Gomme points out, such a trait does not seem to apply to Brasidas.[47] Instead, as we have seen, Brasidas is portrayed abroad as gentle and moderate, traits typically associated with the Athenians in contrast to others, especially the Spartans.[48]

In different ways, therefore, all three of these Spartans play roles in Thucydides' History that can be contrasted with Brasidas. Archidamus, while eloquent and sensible, is slow and cautious in a way that Brasidas is not. Archidamus also ironically praises certain Spartan traits that real Spartans, other than Brasidas, perhaps, do not actually exhibit. Sthenelaidas is more akin to Cleon than to Brasidas in his appeal to simplicity and rejection of sophisticated rhetoric (even if this rejection is itself rather rhetorically sophisticated). And Astyochus is incompetent, arrogant and violent, where Brasidas is capable, charming and mild.

And yet, more than a simple contrast, Brasidas possesses many of the same traits as these paradigmatic Spartans, but he wields them effectively, whereas the others are hampered by them. Brasidas is eloquent like Archidamus, but his eloquence is in service of action rather than inaction. Brasidas does take action like Sthenelaidas suggests, but he does so in the service of a careful and rational plan instead of being a driven by emotion. And Brasidas does threaten violence like Astyochus, but he does so, as seen in the case of Acanthus, to win allies to his side rather than drive them away and invite resentment.

Thucydides, Brasidas and the Spartans

Thucydides was keen to show that the Peloponnesian War was inevitable and that the two sides in the war were diametric opposites, which ensured the war's inevitability.[49] The clearest description of the respective characteristics of the Spartans and Athenians comes from the speech of the Corinthian ambassador in the debate at Sparta before the outbreak of the war (1.68–71). The Corinthians accuse the Spartans of being singularly inactive and slow to act (ἡσυχάζετε γάρ, μόνοι Ἑλλήνων, 1.69.4) and incapable of foreseeing danger until it has grown to be nearly unmanageable. This is hardly a welcome characteristic in a power supposed to be the guarantor of Greek liberty. The Athenians, on the other hand, are prone

[47] Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1945–1981) 3.550.

[48] The Athenian speakers in the debate at Sparta claim that the Athenians exhibit moderation (μετρίοις) in governing their empire (1.77.2), and Alcibiades calls the rule of his Alcmeonid forebears as more moderate (μετριώτεροι) than that of other leaders, evidence of his own fitness to be an Athenian leader (6.89.5).

[49] Though many scholars (especially Kagan (1969) and (2010)) have argued convincingly that the war was not necessarily inevitable, and that Thucydides was writing a revisionist account at odds with the view of his contemporaries, Thucydides' framing of the war as inevitable remains a popular trope.

to action, innovation and accomplishing what they set their minds to (οἱ μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὀξεῖς καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ἔργῳ ἃ ἂν γνῶσιν, 170.5). They are even described as happy to undertake reckless action without adequate planning, which often works out to their advantage. These characteristics have propelled the Athenians to become masters of the Aegean and threatened the freedom of all the Greeks, including those that had not yet succumbed to the Athenian Empire. To rub salt in the wound, the Corinthian says that the enslavement of the Greeks is Sparta's fault: although Sparta has the power to stop the Athenians, they have not used their power precisely because they were held back by their congenital inactivity. The Corinthian speech essentially poisons the well in terms of how every subsequent action of both the Spartans and the Athenians is interpreted by the reader.[50]

Towards the end of his work, Thucydides, in his own authorial voice, repeats the exact sentiments of the Corinthians from the first book, and he does so to demonstrate that Spartan and Athenian characteristics explain not only the causes of the war but also its longevity. While discussing how the Athenians managed to hold out for so long even after the enormous losses of the Sicilian Expedition, Thucydides says that the differences in national character between the Spartans and Athenians was decisively in the Athenians' favor. The Athenians possess speed and boldness (ὀξεῖς, ἐπιχειρηταί) while the Spartans are slow and cautious (βραδεῖς, ἄτολμοι). Only the Syracusans were a match for the Athenians, because, as Thucydides argues, they were closest to the Athenians in character (ὁμοιότροποι, 8.96.5). In his study of the Peloponnesian War, Lazenby points out what should be rather obvious, that this characterization of the Spartans is quite unfair to Brasidas and Gylippus.[51]

Thucydides reinforces this central contrast several times in his work, especially in the early books. In a brilliant article, Ellis analyses the Pausanias and Themistocles digression, in conjunction with account of the would-be tyrant Cylon, to show that Thucydides, by providing a revisionist and ornately wrought version of events, embellishes and outright fabricates the details of these stories to bring out the characters of the Spartans and Athenians. Essentially, Thucydides portrays both Pausanias and Themistocles (reinforced by the Cylonian affair) as acting perfectly in line with their respective national characteristics, namely quick to act but slow to lose interest in the case of Athens and slow to act and slow to

[50] On the speeches at Sparta as laying out the national characteristics of the war's main players, see Hornblower (1991–2008) 1.107–8.

[51] Lazneby (2004) 193.

change in the case of Sparta. Ellis sums up by suggesting a useful approach to Thucydidean invention:

> In the case of Thucydidean myth, interestingly, when inconsistent or undeniably faulty details drive us into doubt, we historians either supplement his account to the point where we can call his inventiveness no more than selective, or blame the inconceivable on his sources, or brazen it out … The real question is whether or not the answer has been under our noses from the outset, part of the educative needs of Thucydides in his work.[52]

Building on the work of de Romilly, I have shown elsewhere that Thucydides elaborates on his characterization of the Spartans and Athenians in his account of Phormio's naval battles (2.80–92).[53] I go on to argue that Thucydides' treatment of the Battle of Pylos is in many ways parallel to that of Phormio's battles, at least in terms of motivation and how the Spartans and Athenians behave. In both situations, the Spartans are poor at developing plans and are unable to stick to their plans if they face any misfortune; whereas the Athenians craft sensible plans and deal expertly with reversals. As we have already seen, this is exactly the type of situation Archidamus' speech, ironically, says that Spartan traits should prevent. So important were these respective characterizations, Thucydides might have deliberately altered the topographical details of the region around Pylos—a notorious problem in Thucydides' History—to make the Spartans and Athenians behave in line with the historian's literary constructs. In brief, Thucydides depicts the southern channel into the Bay of Navarino and the bay itself as smaller than they really are in order to convey the impression that the Spartan plan of blocking the channel and fighting in confined waters was rational, highlighting the Spartan folly of not seeing the plan through. If even topography could be molded to fit Thucydides' paradigms, overemphasizing the difference between Brasidas and his fellow Spartans seems a relatively minor literary adjustment.

The contrast between the Athenians and Spartans, most forcefully expressed by the Corinthians in Book 1 (1.68–71), is given, as we have seen, further nuance in Book 8. Not only are the Athenians bold and fast and the Spartans cautious and slow, the Syracusans are thrown into the mix as those most like the Athenians and thus Athens' most effective enemy (8.96.5). And yet, it is one of our un-Spartan Spartans, Gylippus, who played a leading role in Syracuse's defeat of Athens in 413. While Gylippus does feature prominently in Thucydides' account of the second

[52] Ellis (1994) 187–8.

[53] de Romilly (2012) 80–7 and Sears (2011).

half of the Sicilian Expedition, at the end of Book 6 and throughout Book 7, as others have noted he is not given nearly as much characterization as one might expect. Instead, Thucydides uses the Sicilian Expedition to explore the contrasting characters of the Athenians Nicias and Alcibiades and introduce the Syracusan leader Hermocrates, who seems to be given far more of the credit than Gylippus. As Westlake argues, Thucydides' relative silence is remarkable, given that Gylippus is perhaps the most successful general in the pages of Thucydides and is nearly as important to the Spartan victory in the war as Lysander.[54]

Unlike Gylippus, Hermocrates is given a rich and flattering introduction in which he is credited with both ξύνεσις and ἀνδρεία, a close second to Brasidas' ξύνεσις and ἀρετή (6.72.2).[55] He also delivers full speeches in oratio recta (such as at 6.76–80), while Gylippus either speaks briefly, typically in oratio obliqua, or as part of a much larger group of speakers, dominated by Syracusans (such as at 7.65–9). Where both Gylippus and Hermocrates speak together (at 7.21, in oratio obliqua) the latter receives far more space. Hermocrates was certainly a crucial figure in the Sicilian Expedition and the Peloponnesian War. The discrepancy however, in how Thucydides treats him and Gylippus is striking given that Gylippus does many of the things that Thucydides' Athenians do and Thucydides' Spartans fail to do in other sections of the History, especially in the narrative of the Battle of Pylos. The Battle of Pylos is a major source of comparison with the Sicilian Expedition for Thucydides, but in Sicily Hermocrates and the Syracusans get the credit instead of Gylippus or, by extension, the Spartans.

When the Athenian fleet is destroyed in the Great Harbor at Syracuse, and along with the fleet the Athenians' hopes of getting away safely, Thucydides explicitly compares the situation of the Athenians to the Spartans at Pylos (7.71.7).[56] The parallels go well beyond the one highlighted by Thucydides, namely that the

[54] See Westlake's (1968) chapter on Gylippus, especially 289, where he argues that Thucydides downplays Gylippus in order to focus on Hermocrates. Westlake attributes Thucydides' relative silence on Gylippus to a decline in Gylippus' leadership over the course of the conflict in Sicily. While Westlake admits this is only speculation, I do not find it a satisfactory explanation for such a glaring lack of characterization in a section of Thucydides' work so full of rich characterization. Kern (1989) argues that Gylippus' arrival in Sicily marks an important turning point for Thucydides, around which the historian organizes his entire narrative of the Sicilian Expedition. While it is undeniable that Gylippus' arrival changes the fortunes of the Syracusans dramatically, beyond his arrival and the morale boost it engendered, Gylippus himself plays a smaller role in Thucydides' pages than his decisive presence might warrant.

[55] See above n. 23.

[56] For the comparison between Pylos and Sicily, see Rood (1998) 5–9 and Hornblower (1991–2008) 3.703–4.

respective land forces of the Spartans and Athenians were left helpless after a defeat at sea. Instead, Thucydides' description of the fighting at Syracuse, especially as the Athenian army attempts to withdraw from Syracuse, closely resembles the plight of the Spartans fighting light-armed troops on Sphacteria. Furthermore, Thucydides' description of the topography of the Syracusan Great Harbor and the Syracusans' plan for fighting in it mirrors his description of the Bay of Navarino at Pylos and the Spartan plan for fighting there. Since, as outlined above, the topography of Pylos seems to have been distorted in such a way as to highlight the characters of the Spartans and Athenians, the similarities to the fighting at Syracuse similarly highlight the characters of Thucydides' actors, in this case the Syracusans and the Athenians.

The struggles of the retreating Athenians as they are harassed and killed by missiles hurled by a more mobile enemy in 7.79 are virtually identical to those faced by the Spartans against the light-armed troops of Cleon and Demosthenes in 4.32–5. Compare in particular 4.32.3–4 and 7.79.5:

> Δημοσθένους δὲ τάξαντος διέστησαν κατὰ διακοσίους τε καὶ πλείους, ἔστι δ᾽ ἡ ἐλάσσους, τῶν χωρίων τὰ μετεωρότατα λαβόντες, ὅπως ὅτι πλείστη ἀπορία ἦ τοῖς πολεμίοις πανταχόθεν κεκυκλωμένοις καὶ μὴ ἔχωσι πρὸς ὅτι ἀντιτάξωνται, ἀλλ᾽ ἀμφίβολοι γίγνωνται τῷ πλήθει, εἰ μὲν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἐπίοιεν, ὑπὸ τῶν κατόπιν βαλλόμενοι, εἰ δὲ τοῖς πλαγίοις, ὑπὸ τῶν ἑκατέρωθεν παρατεταγμένων. κατὰ νώτου τε αἰεὶ ἔμελλον αὐτοῖς, ἢ χωρήσειαν, οἱ πολέμιοι ἔσεσθαι ψιλοὶ καὶ οἱ ἀπορώτατοι, τοξεύμασι καὶ ἀκοντίοις καὶ λίθοις καὶ σφενδόναις ἐκ πολλοῦ ἔχοντες ἀλκήν, οἷς μηδὲ ἐπελθεῖν οἷόν τε ἦν· φεύγοντές τε γὰρ ἐκράτουν καὶ ἀναχωροῦσιν ἐπέκειντο.
>
> By Demosthenes' plan, this force was divided up into groups of 200, or somewhat more or less. They seized the highest bits of ground in order to confound their enemy utterly. For the enemy would be encircled and would be unable to counterattack but would face a mob everywhere they turned. If they tried to attack to the front, they would be pelted from behind; if they turned against those on one flank, they would be attacked by those on the other. Wherever the enemy went, they would have their foes behind them and the hardest ones to deal with at that: those using arrows, javelins, stones and slings, effective at long range and tough to close with. These foes would be better both at running away and returning to renew the fight.

> τῇ δ᾽ ὑστεραίᾳ προυχώρουν, καὶ οἱ Συρακόσιοι προσέβαλλόν τε πανταχῇ αὐτοῖς κύκλῳ καὶ πολλοὺς κατετραυμάτιζον, καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐπίοιεν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, ὑπεχώρουν, εἰ δ᾽ ἀναχωροῖεν, ἐπέκειντο, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς ὑστάτοις προσπίπτοντες, εἴ πως κατὰ βραχὺ τρεψάμενοι πᾶν τὸ στράτευμα φοβήσειαν.
>
> On the next day, the Athenians began to advance, and the Syracusans attacked them from all directions and in a circle and wounded many of them. If the Athenians went forward to attack, the Syracusans would withdraw; and if the Athenians withdrew, the Syracusans would renew their attack. The Syracusans especially attacked the rearmost Athenians, thinking that by routing them bit by bit they would strike fear into the whole army.

The two naval battles in the Great Harbor (7.36–41; 59–60, 69–71) are similar to the naval battles at Pylos and Naupactus, which are themselves similar to each other, as we have seen above.[57] In all three cases, the forces arrayed against the Athenians realize that the Athenians are superior in terms of naval skill and therefore plan to attack the Athenians in confined waters and in such a way to reduce the effectiveness of Athenian maneuverability. In the case of Pylos and Syracuse, the battles are fought in the confines of a harbor (albeit large harbors, even larger than Thucydides allows), and the foes of Athens plan to block the harbor entrances. Only at Syracuse, unlike at Naupactus or Pylos, the anti-Athenian plan is successful, primarily because the Syracusans stick to their plan and execute it well, while in the earlier battles the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies lost all semblance of order after facing setbacks. It is not, however, the Spartans, or Gylippus in particular, who are given the credit for getting things right—finally—at Syracuse. Rather it is the Syracusans, who, being ὁμοιότροποι with the Athenians are able to beat the Athenians at their own game.

Gylippus is certainly present and active in the events on Sicily, and even in Thucydides' account he is an important and successful leader. He attacks the Athenians boldly, innovates in terms of fortifications and other tactical measures on the battlefield and is remarkably successful in recruiting allies to join the anti-Athenian cause. Most remarkably for a Spartan, Gylippus even admits his own fault in an unsuccessful engagement and learns from his mistake (7.5.3). Gylippus, however, does not get the kind of fawning treatment Thucydides reserves for Brasidas. And where Gylippus is successful, he is often portrayed as being with the Syracusans, so it is impossible to determine from the text the extent to which he is

[57] And see Sears (2011).

personally responsible for the successes (see, for example, at 7.65, where it is Gylippus and the Syracusans who anticipate the Athenians' plans in the Great Harbor, and Gylippus and the generals deliver the speech to the Syracusan troops).

When Gylippus faces the most capable Athenian general in Sicily, Demosthenes, the victor of Pylos, during a night battle at the fortifications on the heights of Epipolae above Syracuse, Gylippus' troops win, but Gylippus is conspicuously denied credit.[58] To stem Demosthenes' attack at night, Gylippus and the troops with him join the Syracusans and other allies, only to be pushed back by the unexpected and bold attack of the Athenians. While the Athenians were true to form up to this point, they lost order in the elation of their success, and the Boeotian troops set upon them and put them to flight. Even though the Boeotians were in the contingent led personally by Gylippus, this passage of Thucydides credits Gylippus only with the unsuccessful part of the action, where the Boeotians, hitherto unnamed in the engagement, get the glory (7.43.6–7). Thucydides would not have treated Brasidas this way.

The respective Athenian and Spartan characters outlined by the Corinthians in Book 1 and demonstrated at Naupactus and Pylos in Book 2 and Book 4, respectively, remain in force in Books 6–7, if only to show that the Athenians are bested by those who exhibit similar characteristics—the Syracusans, as Thucydides adds in his own authorial voice in Book 8. The Athenian-like characteristics of Brasidas defeated the Athenians in the north, and the Spartan-like qualities of Nicias led to Athenian defeat again in Sicily, but not at the hands of Brasidas' Spartan successor.[59]

Thucydides seems also to downplay Brasidas' similarity to other Spartans in terms of his political activities vis-à-vis the cities he liberates in the north. While Thucydides could be critical of Brasidas—pointing out, for example, that he lied to the people of Acanthus about his victory over the Athenians at Megara (4.108.5)—the historian reserves most of his criticism for those Spartans who followed Brasidas and imposed harmosts and oligarchies. In addition to those Spartans mentioned above, such as Astyochus, the violence and senselessness of Brasidas' replacements is captured by the behavior of Brasidas' deputy in Mende, Polydamidas. While Brasidas was away in Macedonia, Polydamidas drove the

[58] For Demosthenes in Thucydides' *History*, see Westlake (1968) 97–121. For the ups and downs of Demosthenes' military career, including his role in Sicily, see Roisman (1993).

[59] Thucydides almost certainly meant to contrast the Athenian-like character of Brasidas with the Spartan-like character of Nicias. See Lang (1995), who demonstrates that Brasidas and Nicias receive by far the greatest number of participles to describe their motivations.

people of Mende to return to the arms of Athens after he publicly assaulted a Mendean who complained about Spartan behavior (4.130). The violent Polydamidas, rather than the mild Brasidas, exhibited typical Spartan behavior, with detrimental consequences for Sparta's war effort. Yet, despite the mildness of Thucydides' Brasidas and his seemingly genuine efforts at liberating the Greeks (even if by force, on occasion), Brasidas might have been more typical even in terms of bolstering oligarchic, or at least non-democratic, governments in those cities he liberated.[60]

There has been a great deal of scholarly speculation concerning whether or not Brasidas changed the constitution of Amphipolis from a democracy to an oligarchy after he took the city from the Athenians. The issue continues to be debated because Thucydides does not make any comment on the state of the Amphipolitan constitution before or after Brasidas.[61] In a stimulating recent article, Matthew Simonton focuses on the famous description of the burial and hero cult Brasidas received at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.11.1) to argue that these posthumous honors were part of a complex strategy on the part of the oligarchs to signify their ascendency and to force a wider buy-in from the population.[62] Even though Thucydides provides a rich account of these honors, Simonton argues that Thucydides, "in a rare moment of misunderstanding," missed their broader significance in terms of supporting a new oligarchy.[63] While Thucydides might perhaps have failed to grasp the rich semiotics of destroying the monuments of a democratic regime and replacing them with those of an oligarchy, if I am right, Thucydides had another motive for overlooking the change in government.

Downplaying (or outright ignoring) Brasidas' establishment of an oligarchy at Amphipolis would further contrast Brasidas from other Spartan leaders and indeed Sparta's general foreign policy. As can be seen in the case of Acanthus, another city Brasidas took in the north, Thucydides is at pains to portray him as promising to allow the cities he takes to maintain their own internal constitutions, and he even secured oaths from the Spartan authorities that Sparta would abide by these promises (Thuc. 4.86, 88.1).[64] If Brasidas himself had meddled with a city's

[60] For the Thucydidean Brasidas' mission of liberation as genuine, see Sears (2015).

[61] For the view that Brasidas changed the constitution from democracy to oligarchy, see Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1945–1981) 3.623–4 and Robinson (2011) 145–6. Brock (2009) 152–3 thinks Thucydides would have explicitly mentioned a change in government.

[62] Simonton (2018).

[63] Simonton (2018) 6.

[64] That these oaths really were sworn by the Spartan authorities, see Hornblower (1991–2008) 2.47–8 and Badian (1999) 29.

constitution (or not meddled with it), one would expect Thucydides to be interested, not only because of his general treatment of Brasidas, but because the conflict between democracy and oligarchy is one the central themes of his work.[65] By focusing on liberation rather than the imposition of pro-Spartan constitutions, Thucydides is better able to present a contrast between Brasidas and other Spartans, especially Lysander.

Even at Acanthus, things might not have been as straightforward as Thucydides presents. While he gives a fulsome account of the honors Brasidas received at Amphipolis, Thucydides does not mention another unusual and lavish benefit of Brasidas' northern campaign. Plutarch tells us (*Mor.* 400F, 401C; *Lys.* 1.1) of a treasury at Delphi, on which are named the people of Acanthus, which is entirely in line with other treasuries at the sanctuary, and Brasidas as an individual, an honor not afforded an individual in the two hundred years after the Corinthian tyrant Cypselus had dedicated a treasury under his own name. As I have recently argued, in celebrating Brasidas as the liberator, the Acanthians might also have presented him deliberately in the guise of a tyrant, one who set them free from the Athenians just as Archaic tyrants had freed the people from traditional aristocracies.[66] Whatever the case, Brasidas being named on a Delphic treasury was an extraordinary symbol very much in line with how Lysander, a much more controversial "liberator," was treated at the end of the war. In fact, it was a statue of Lysander inside the Treasury of Brasidas and the Acanthians that causes Plutarch to remark on the structure.

Conclusion

Here I wish to suggest that Brasidas' portrayal as unusually dynamic, energetic, inventive and yet mild and moderate—indeed, much like an Athenian—serves to highlight further, in this case by means of contrast, the Spartan and Athenian national characters. I think Hornblower might be right to argue that the Spartan authorities' mistrust of and outright opposition to Brasidas, as carefully conveyed by Thucydides, is both historically untrue and a literary device to render Brasidas a more romantic figure, worthy of a Homeric aristeia. But not only was Brasidas not nearly as marginalized among the Spartans as Thucydides portrays, he acted very much in line with a great many Spartan leaders, as we have seen. So common is the 'Brasidas-type' in real Spartan history, Brasidas might be better conceived of

[65] As shown most powerfully in the context of the stasis at Corcyra (3.82.1). For an overview of democracy and oligarchy in Thucydides, see Raaflaub (2006).

[66] Sears (2019).

as a typical Spartan leader advancing typical Spartan policies, even if there was a powerful faction in Sparta that urged the opposite tack. In addition to Hornblower's suggestion, Thucydides paints a picture of Brasidas as the romantic loner in order to cement his all-important characterization of the Spartans, a characterization that in the end might be no less embellished than his image of the un-Spartan Spartan.

I should make it clear that even if there were far more Brasidas-types than Thucydides allows, Sparta, on average, was more isolationist, more conservative and less interventionist than Athens. The frequent appeals to religious festivals as an excuse not to venture out of the Peloponnese, the persistent fear of the helots and helot revolts, the abandonment of Panhellenic leadership after Xerxes' invasion, the meager force sent to Thermopylae and the complete failure after the Peloponnesian War to step up as an imperial power all point to the sort of Spartan character emphasized by Thucydides. But, in line with Stadter's arguments discussed above, Spartan policy was hardly monolithic, nor was there always (or ever) consensus among influential Spartans.[67] Furthermore, as I have argued, it is not the case that Brasidas merely exhibits the opposite traits of Thucydides' paradigmatic Spartans. Rather, he shares many of their traits, but is more adept at using them properly. Even according to Thucydides' paradigmatic approach, therefore, the relationship between Brasidas and other Spartans is rather complicated. In the end, it is quite difficult to pinpoint exactly why one figure is more Spartan or un-Spartan than another, even as Thucydides relies on "Spartanness" and "Athenianness" in his writing of the war.

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[67] Stadter (2012).

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