

## THE NAVAL BATTLE AT PYLOS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

IN the course of the military operations at Pylos three major actions were fought. The first was the series of attacks by land and sea launched by the Peloponnesians against the forces under Demosthenes occupying the peninsula of Pylos (Thuc. 4. 9-12);<sup>1</sup> the second was the naval battle in the harbour (13-14); the third was the Athenian assault on the Spartans cut off on Sphacteria (29-39). The second of these actions does not appear to have had less influence on the development of the situation or to have been militarily less interesting and instructive than the other two. The account of it by Thucydides is, however, less detailed than his accounts of the first<sup>2</sup> and third major actions and may be thought to be lacking in the clarity which is normally a conspicuous feature of his battle narratives.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will examine his account of the naval battle and its immediate consequences. The investigation will be divided into two sections, which are to some extent independent of one another. In the first section (A) certain defects in the narrative will be noted, and an attempt will be made to explain how they have arisen. In the second section (B) attention will be drawn to a discrepancy between the report of Thucydides on the battle and his statement on the Spartan reaction to it together with a brief reference to it in a later book (7. 71. 7). This discrepancy leads to the conclusion that his statement on the Spartan reaction cannot be wholly accurate in the context in which it is set. The origin of this inaccuracy will also be considered. The discussion in both sections will be clearer if preceded by a summary of the narrative together with a few brief comments on certain points.

The Athenian fleet which fought at Pylos was at Zacynthus when its commanders, Eurymedon and Sophocles, received an urgent message from Demosthenes announcing that he was about to be attacked by the Peloponnesians (8. 3). When Eurymedon and Sophocles were approaching Pylos with their fleet of 50 ships,<sup>4</sup> the enemy did not come out to meet them in the open sea. The Athenians saw that, because the shores of the mainland and of Sphacteria were occupied by enemy troops,<sup>5</sup> it was impossible to secure an anchorage inside the harbour<sup>6</sup> without first fighting a battle. Accordingly they withdrew for the night to the uninhabited island of Prote, which lies close to the coast some 13 km. north-west of Pylos (13. 2-3). This decision was doubtless prudent, since the Athenian crews would have been at a disadvantage in battle after many hours of rowing from Zacynthus. On the following day the Athenians returned from Prote determined to engage the enemy fleet inside

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter all references are to the fourth book of Thucydides unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that he does not supply any details about the defence of Pylos against attacks by land.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. B. Grundy, *Thucydides and the history of his age*, ii (1948), 129: 'Thucydides' account of what happened after this is not very easy to understand.'

<sup>4</sup> On the number see A. W. Gomme, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, iii (1956), 450.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> The term *λιμὴν*, which Thucydides uses frequently in his account of the episode, undoubtedly denotes the bay of Pylos (or Navarino), though it was far larger and deeper than other harbours known to him.

the harbour if, as on the previous day, it did not sail out to meet them. The Peloponnesians did not sail out but were preparing to fight in the harbour if they were attacked. These preparations were incomplete when the Athenians surged in through both channels; some of the Peloponnesian ships were not yet fully manned (13. 4-14. 1). Thucydides gives no reason for their unpreparedness but implies very clearly that it was reprehensible.<sup>1</sup> The ships already fully manned, amounting to more than half of the total fleet, were in moderately deep water when attacked, but they proved no match for their fast-moving opponents,<sup>2</sup> and many were damaged as they fled to the near-by shore. Five were captured, one with its crew, and the rest continued to be attacked even after they were beached. The ships only partly manned when the action began were evidently almost helpless: they were rammed by the Athenians,<sup>3</sup> who began to tow away some which were abandoned by their crews (14. 1).

At this stage of the battle the Peloponnesians were clearly in grave danger of losing almost all their fleet of 60 triremes. Disaster was, however, avoided by the action of Spartan troops, who, dashing along the shore and into the water, fought with desperate energy to save the empty ships from falling into Athenian hands. It is noteworthy that Thucydides attributes their distress and alarm to their realization that their comrades serving on Sphacteria were being cut off (14. 2-3). Eventually, when the struggle ended, these Spartans had succeeded in recovering all the empty ships, apart from the five captured off shore at the beginning of the battle and an unspecified number of wrecks. The Athenians then proceeded to sail round Sphacteria and to blockade it, 'considering that the men had been cut off' (14. 4-5).

There is no need to add a summary of the report on the Spartan reaction (15. 1-2), because it is so short. The passage will be discussed in the second section of this paper (B). It is necessary to note here only that, according to Thucydides, the situation created by the naval battle was regarded at Sparta as a great disaster (15. 1).

#### A. DEFECTS OF THE ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE

The account of the naval action shows traces of the vividness which is characteristic of Thucydidean battle narratives apart from the briefest and bleakest of them. It contains distinctive and obviously authentic touches, especially the picture of the Spartan soldiers rushing fully armed into the sea (14. 2);<sup>4</sup> and it

<sup>1</sup> This point will be discussed below, p. 216. There is also implied criticism of their failure to implement their intention to block the two channels leading into the harbour. Undoubtedly they ought to have kept the Sikia channel continuously blocked so long as the Athenian fleet was in the vicinity, a simple operation which had obvious advantages. On the other hand, Thucydides is palpably mistaken in believing that the southern channel could be blocked by eight or nine ships (8. 5-6), as is acknowledged by most scholars, including W. K. Pritchett, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, i (1965), 22 and 29, who considers that he is not guilty of any other topographical errors. This error provides a very strong argument, amounting

almost to proof, in support of the generally accepted belief that his account of the operations at Pylos is not based on autopsy.

<sup>2</sup> As was usually the case, triremes being rowed at speed enjoyed an enormous advantage over triremes moving slowly or not at all, cf. 2. 91. 4-92. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Such appears to be the meaning of *ἐκόπτοντο*. The ships did not necessarily suffer extensive damage. In the two other instances where Thucydides uses the verb in accounts of naval operations (8. 13; 8. 105. 3) almost all the ships subjected to this treatment are stated to have made their escape.

<sup>4</sup> The familiar Thucydidean terms *θόρυβος*, *προθυμία*, and *ἐκπληξίς* appear

is undoubtedly founded upon reports by eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses, however, do not appear to have included anyone possessing detailed information about the feelings and plans of the generals in command on either side. The somewhat indefinite indications of motive could be mere inferences from observing what action was taken. For example, the decision of Eurymedon and Sophocles to withdraw to Prote on the day before the battle is attributed to the difficulty of securing an anchorage for their 50 ships (13. 3), a difficulty obvious to any Athenian serving with the fleet as well as to the troops on the Pylos peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, because the Peloponnesians did not sail out to oppose the Athenians and were in the process of manning their ships when they were attacked, they could be assumed to have planned to engage the enemy fleet if it should enter the harbour (13. 4), though not necessarily at once. Thucydides records in some detail the plans of Demosthenes for the defence of Pylos (9. 2-3, cf. 10. 2-4) and for the assault on Sphacteria (29. 3-30. 3; 32. 3-4), analysing the factors leading to the adoption of these plans. He would presumably have included similar information about the plans of Eurymedon and Sophocles if reliable evidence had been available to him. As it is, important questions are left unanswered. Since they had evidently decided to engage the Peloponnesian fleet before taking any other steps to relieve the pressure on their troops on Pylos, they may well have appreciated, perhaps through information received from Demosthenes, that the principal threat to these troops was from Peloponnesian landings from ships in the Sikia channel (cf. 13. 1). Whether they foresaw that by winning a decisive victory at sea they could turn the tables on the enemy by cutting off the Spartan force occupying Sphacteria does not seem to be determinable, though it is perhaps more likely that they did not (cf. 14. 5). Nor does Thucydides indicate whether the Spartan leaders appreciated the danger to which this force could be exposed until it became unmistakable (14. 2).

There has been widespread agreement among scholars that much of the information on which Thucydides based his account of the campaign at Pylos was derived from Demosthenes.<sup>2</sup> This belief does not seem to have been challenged, and, although it cannot be proved, it is almost beyond doubt. Wherever Demosthenes was personally involved in the direction of operations, the narrative is packed with circumstantial detail and, as noted above, includes abundant information about his plans and motives. Thucydides was certainly acquainted with him and had opportunities of consulting him about his experiences at Pylos, since they were colleagues on the board of strategoi in 424/3. Accounts of other episodes in the Archidamian war in which Demosthenes played a leading role are exceptionally detailed and graphic.<sup>3</sup> The eyewitnesses of the sea battle in the harbour who supplied Thucydides with information about it may well have included Demosthenes: he must have watched such parts of the operation as were visible from a vantage-point on Pylos.<sup>4</sup> It is,

together in a single sentence in 14. 3 (though Gomme, *Hist. Com.* iii. 452, is justified in objecting to the sentiment expressed in this passage).

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Busolt, *Gr. Gesch.* iii. 2 (1904), 654 n. 1; E. Schwartz, *Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (1929), 293; J. H. Finley, *Thucydides* (1942), 188. Recently D. K. Silhanek,

*C.W.* lxiv (1970), 10-13, has maintained that Demosthenes was the primary source for the entire account of the Pylos episode.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. my *Individuals in Thucydides* (1968), 97.

<sup>4</sup> Silhanek, *op. cit.* 11-12; but his suggestion that the final stage of the battle was fought directly beneath the crags of Pylos is not at all convincing.

however, most unlikely that he was fully informed about the plans of Eurymedon and Sophocles, and he may have been inclined to give them less credit than they deserved because of his previous disagreement with them (3. 1-4. 1).<sup>1</sup> There is some reason to believe that neither Eurymedon nor Sophocles was among the informants of Thucydides. After the end of the operations at Pylos they sailed on with their fleet to Corcyra and Sicily (46. 1), and they did not return to Athens until the summer of 424, when they were prosecuted and convicted. Eurymedon was fined and Sophocles banished (65. 3). It is unlikely that Thucydides had any opportunity after their return from Sicily to consult either of them about the part which they had played at Pylos. He may indeed have left Athens to take up his command in the north very soon after their return. Although he disapproves of their conviction (65. 4), he seems to have felt some antipathy towards Eurymedon, whose conduct on two occasions during the civil strife at Corcyra he records with unmistakable distaste (3. 80. 2-81. 4; 4. 46-8).<sup>2</sup> On the second of these occasions Sophocles also was involved. Thucydides does not seem to have been dependent on Peloponnesian sources in any part of his report on the naval battle, and there is certainly no trace of information obtained from anyone closely associated with Thrasybulos the Spartan nauarchos (11. 2) or with others responsible for the direction of operations on the Peloponnesian side. It is probable that Thucydides consulted Spartan officers captured on Sphacteria while they were in captivity at Athens,<sup>3</sup> but they were already on the island when the naval battle was fought. Although they may have watched its progress, they were no longer in contact with the mainland and can have had no knowledge of the reactions by their superiors there when the Athenian fleet entered the harbour.

The deficiencies of the report on the sea battle to which attention has so far been drawn are attributable to the inferiority of the sources available to Thucydides by comparison with his information on actions where Demosthenes was in command. There are, however, other deficiencies which may be thought to be even more damaging. They seem to owe their origin to the unfamiliarity of Thucydides with the topography, which has affected his account of the naval battle more seriously than his accounts of the other operations at Pylos.<sup>4</sup> At several points his narrative is inadequate or misleading because he apparently fails to bear in mind the enormous extent of the harbour, if indeed he ever appreciated how large it is.<sup>5</sup> It covers a considerably larger area, and is more exposed, than the Great Harbour at Syracuse, and to anyone who has seen it its size is by far the most striking feature of the whole district. Thucydides does indeed mention that it is 'not small' (13. 4 *ὡς ἐν τῷ λεγμένῳ ὄντι οὐ μικρῷ*

<sup>1</sup> It is true that there is no hint of any friction after the fortification of the Pylos peninsula.

<sup>2</sup> Gomme, *Greek Attitude to Poetry and History* (1954), 147-8, notes the contrast between the favourable treatment of Nicostratus and the unfavourable treatment of Eurymedon.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gomme, *Essays in Greek History and Literature* (1937), 125-31 and *Hist. Com.* iii. 485. Passages in which some of the detail was probably derived from Spartan prisoners are: 26. 5-8; 32. 1; 34. 2-3; 38. 1 (perhaps also the anecdote in 40. 2). The narrative

does not seem to contain any information which must have been obtained from Peloponnesians after Thucydides became an exile (see below, pp. 224-5).

<sup>4</sup> Apart from his error in stating that the southern entrance to the harbour could be blocked by eight or nine ships (see above, p. 212 n. 1).

<sup>5</sup> It is 5 km. long and 4 km. wide at its widest point according to A. Philippson, *Gr. Landschaften* (ed. E. Kirsten), iii (1959), 387, whose geographical description of this district (*ibid.* 386-90) is packed with valuable information.

ναυμαχήσονται). Here, however, he seems to be suggesting only that it was large enough for a sea battle to be fought in it; if such is his intention, he is guilty of a palpable understatement.<sup>1</sup>

It is remarkable that he nowhere divulges, except in the vaguest and most general terms, which part of the harbour was the scene of the battle. This omission could be due to inadvertence, but, in view of other indications which will be noted below, he probably did not consider information on the subject to be necessary because he was unaware that the harbour was large enough for a battle involving rather more than 100 ships to have been fought in a number of widely separated areas. The first clash between the two fleets evidently took place not very far from the coast of the mainland (14. 1 *ὡς διὰ βραχέος*). There is also evidence that during the closing stages of the action there was fighting close to the shore within easy reach of the Spartan camp, since Spartan troops were able to rescue the abandoned ships before the Athenians could tow them away (14. 2 *παρεβοήθουν*). Unfortunately, however, Thucydides fails to mention explicitly the position of the Spartan camp, though there are reasons for locating it near the modern Gialova, which is situated near the eastern end of the sand-bar on the north-eastern shore of the harbour.<sup>2</sup>

In a passage describing the arrival of the Athenian fleet from Zacynthus on the day before the battle, the Athenians are stated to have 'seen that the mainland was packed with hoplites and the island too' with the result that 'they did not know where to anchor' (13. 3). Although Thucydides may have been aware that only parts of the harbour can have been visible from the position in the open sea whence the Athenians conducted their observations, he creates the impression that the whole coastline of the harbour was guarded by troops wherever it was practicable for a fleet to find an anchorage. A similar if less marked impression is created by an earlier passage reporting Spartan plans for denying the Athenians the opportunity of making a landing on the island or the mainland (8. 7-8).<sup>3</sup> To have effectively guarded a substantial part of the long coastline would have required the presence of a huge army and must have been beyond the capacity of the troops assembled by the Spartans in the area,<sup>4</sup> especially as some of them were otherwise engaged in besieging the force under Demosthenes on Pylos. In this instance Thucydides may well have misunderstood information from some Athenian who, looking into the harbour from the open sea and seeing enemy troops massed on the sand-bar and the northern end of Sphacteria, had justifiably concluded that there was no prospect of securing an anchorage at any point where contact with Demosthenes could easily have been established.

A more striking indication of failure to appreciate the size of the harbour occurs in a passage recording the immediate antecedents of the naval battle (13. 3-14. 1). The Athenians, as soon as they saw that the Peloponnesians did not intend to commit themselves to an engagement in the open sea, *καθ' ἑκάτερον τὸν ἔσπλουν* (i.e. at either end of Sphacteria) *ῥῆμυσαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς* (14. 1). Thucydides implies that this attack could be, and was, launched

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gomme, *Hist. Com.* iii. 451 and 482. Thucydides gives the length of Sphacteria as 15 stades (8. 6); the figure should be 24. This error perhaps lends some support to the view that he failed to appreciate the size of the harbour, but it may be the result of textual corruption.

<sup>2</sup> Pritchett, *op. cit.* [above, p. 212 n. 1], 24.

<sup>3</sup> The problems of this disputed passage cannot be discussed here.

<sup>4</sup> Some of these apparently arrived only after the naval battle, cf. 14. 5 *καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων ἤδη βεβοηθηκότες*.

rapidly,<sup>1</sup> and he seems unconscious that it presented any problems. It is, however, evident that to move the Athenian fleet through both channels into the harbour and then to unite it for a concerted assault must have been a fairly lengthy and intricate operation. Eurymedon and Sophocles cannot have divided their fleet until they were satisfied that the Peloponnesians would not come out to meet them (13. 3) and that the Sikia channel was not blocked. The Athenians were presumably then somewhere off the western mouth of this channel. The squadron which was to enter the harbour through the southern channel would have to row southwards along the western coast of Sphacteria and then to traverse almost the entire length of the harbour in a north-easterly direction, if the enemy fleet was concentrated not far from the Spartan camp. The total distance to be covered cannot have been much less than 10 km.<sup>2</sup> The other Athenian squadron, which was doubtless the smaller of the two because the Sikia channel was so narrow, must have been held back, since it would have been heavily outnumbered if it had attacked alone. Thucydides may have had some reason for wishing to record very briefly the sequence of events leading to this action. He may even have been influenced by his apparent lack of sympathy towards Eurymedon. On the other hand, the tactical problem with which the Athenian commanders had to deal before they could engage the enemy is one that might have been expected to have interested him. It is much more probable that through unfamiliarity with the topography he did not appreciate the existence, or at any rate the magnitude, of this tactical problem, especially if no informant drew his attention to it.

This explanation receives some support from another factor. Although, as noted above,<sup>3</sup> Thucydides is implicitly critical of the Peloponnesians for having been taken by surprise, his account suggests that their unpreparedness was partly due to the swiftness of the Athenian attack (14. 1). If the foregoing reconstruction of Athenian movements has any validity, the Peloponnesians had plenty of time to put into operation whatever measures they deemed appropriate to counter the Athenian attack long before it could be fully developed. Their unpreparedness seems to be entirely inexcusable. They may well have been unaware that on the previous day the Athenian fleet had withdrawn no further than to Prote,<sup>4</sup> whence it could return in an hour or two. Nevertheless, even if its reappearance on the day of the battle was unexpected, during much of the long interval between the moment when it was sighted off the entrance to the Sikia channel and the moment when it engaged the enemy its movements must have been visible from the area in the north-east of the harbour where the Peloponnesian fleet was apparently concentrated.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 34. 1 and 2. 92. 1 the phrase ὁρμησαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς is used of attackers who were already close to their adversaries.

<sup>2</sup> There is, according to L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (1971), 279 n. 37, 'no information on how fast an ancient galley could spurt'. If, however, the somewhat speculative calculations of W. Rodgers, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare* (1937), 516, are accepted and some allowance made for the fact that the rowers must not be allowed to exhaust themselves before the fighting began, the distance in this case can hardly have been covered in less than

one and a half hours.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> J. Wilson and T. Beardsworth, *C.Q.* xx (1970), 50, make this attractive suggestion. Their view that the Athenian fleet may have been thought to have 'gone for good' is less convincing. Even the most optimistic Spartans can hardly have imagined that Eurymedon and Sophocles would abandon the Athenians besieged on Pylos without making even the smallest effort to help them.

<sup>5</sup> A possible explanation of Peloponnesian unreadiness is that, when the Athenians entered the harbour, the Spartan High

There is no reason to believe that Thucydides was less interested in the naval battle at Pylos than in the other two major actions there or considered it to be less important. The shortcomings of his account may be attributed, primarily at least, to the handicap imposed by the factors which have been noted above.

#### B. THE DISCREPANCY ON THE DECISIVENESS OF THE SEA BATTLE

The Athenians had won a handsome victory in the naval battle. It gave them control of the sea inside the harbour together with the advantage, which ultimately proved very profitable, of having cut off the Spartan troops serving on Sphacteria, who included a considerable number of Spartiates (38. 5; 5. 15. 1). The victory was not, however, an Aegospotami, nor indeed were the enemy losses comparable with those inflicted by Athenians in later battles fought near or on hostile shores at Abydos and Cyzicus.<sup>1</sup> As has already been mentioned,<sup>2</sup> five Peloponnesian ships, one with its crew, were captured by the Athenians, who were also left in possession of some wrecks. Some of the ships rescued by the efforts of the Spartan troops were more or less severely damaged (14. 1), and there were fatal casualties among the Peloponnesian sailors (14. 5).<sup>3</sup> Hence, if the facts recorded by Thucydides in his account of the battle are accurate and nothing of major importance has been omitted, the Peloponnesians must after their defeat have still possessed almost as many ships as the Athenians, though there may perhaps have been a shortage of trained crews. This conclusion is reinforced by his statement that, when a local truce was negotiated soon after the battle, the number of Peloponnesian ships surrendered to the Athenians under its terms amounted to 'about 60' (16. 3). It is true that these included not only those at Pylos but also all the warships in Laconia at the time (16. 1). The latter cannot have been many; the Spartans never possessed more than a very few ships of their own,<sup>4</sup> and some Spartan ships were already at Pylos, where they had been in action during the attempts to force a landing on the peninsula (11. 4 *τὰς τε σφετέρας ναῦς*). There seems no reason why ships belonging to their allies should have been in Laconia at the time.

The Spartan leaders must have realized that, if they committed their fleet to a second major battle, the chances of success would be very slender.<sup>5</sup> The immediate need, however, was to rescue their troops now marooned on Sphacteria or to keep them supplied with food until they could be rescued. The attainment of these objectives was not necessarily contingent upon a naval victory whereby control of the entire harbour was regained. Plenty of other expedients might have been adopted in which the Peloponnesian fleet, without fighting a full-scale naval battle, could have played an important part in

Command assumed that their primary aim was to force a landing somewhere (cf. 8. 8), not to fight a naval action. If so, the task of repelling an attempted landing would best be entrusted initially to the troops on the shore, while the Peloponnesian fleet was held in reserve until the Athenians were fully committed and its intervention might prove most effective.

<sup>1</sup> Abydos: Xen. *Hell.* 1. 1. 4-7; Diod. 13.

45-6. Cyzicus: Xen. *Hell.* 1. 1. 16-18; Diod. 13. 50-1.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Apparently no Athenian ship was lost or damaged beyond repair (23. 2), but some Athenians were wounded (14. 4).

<sup>4</sup> H. Michell, *Sparta* (1952), 275. They contributed only ten ships to the fleet at Arginusae (Xen. *Hell.* 1. 6. 34).

<sup>5</sup> They had at the outset sought to avoid the risk of a naval action (8. 8).

collaboration with the land forces.<sup>1</sup> At a later stage of the campaign the Athenian generals are seen to have appreciated that the enemy fleet might have made a decisive contribution to the outcome. Their refusal to hand back the ships surrendered to them under the terms of the truce must have been prompted by fears lest the restoration of these ships might ruin the prospects of capturing the Spartans on Sphacteria. In order to remove the risk of intervention by the Peloponnesian fleet they were prepared to incur charges of bad faith, which Thucydides, and doubtless many other Greeks, believed to be well founded (23. 1).<sup>2</sup>

It is remarkable that Thucydides immediately after his account of the naval battle reports Spartan reactions to 'what had happened at Pylos' without referring to the Peloponnesian fleet or mentioning that its numbers had not been drastically reduced by its defeat (15. 1-2). Any reader of this passage who has not paid close attention to the preceding narrative (14) might infer that the fleet had been virtually annihilated, and indeed some modern scholars have reached this conclusion.<sup>3</sup> When the news reached Sparta, officials were sent to Pylos to consider what action should be taken. The outcome of their deliberations is somewhat surprising if the account of the naval battle is trustworthy. According to Thucydides, εἶδον ἀδύνατον ὄν τιμωρεῖν τοῖς ἀνδράσι (15. 2), so that, not wishing them to run the risk of death either by starvation or in action against overwhelming odds, they decided to try to negotiate a truce with the Athenian generals; an embassy would then be sent to Athens to make proposals for a general settlement. The meaning of τιμωρεῖν in the phrase quoted above is not altogether clear. In military contexts the verb normally means 'protect against attack' (1. 40. 6 and 86. 2; 3. 92. 4; 4. 85. 6), but here the reference to the danger of starvation suggests that the officials did not expect even to be able to keep the marooned men supplied with food.<sup>4</sup> Hence the meaning appears

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 220-1.

<sup>2</sup> The motives of the Athenian generals, when the truce was negotiated, in insisting on the surrender of all the ships in Laconia as well as those at Pylos (16. 1) may have been similar. They may have suspected that during the truce an attempt might be made to smuggle out Spartans from Sphacteria on ships hitherto based in Laconia and thus to present the Athenians with a *fait accompli*. Only a small squadron would be required for this purpose. The Spartan troops who rushed into the sea realized the potential value of ships in saving their comrades on the island (see above, p. 212).

<sup>3</sup> For example, F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (1907), 87: 'The Athenian fleet . . . sailed in and knocked them into bits'; Steup, n. on 14. 5: 'Die Flotte, die so gut wie vernichtet war'; J. H. Finley, op. cit. [above, p. 213 n. 2], 192: 'the Athenians . . . shattered the enemy fleet.' On the other hand, the attempt by A. Ferrabino, *L'impero ateniese* (1927), 157-9, to show that the Peloponnesians were more successful than the Athenians is unconvincing. He maintains that the Peloponnesian fleet was under

orders to withdraw to the shore if attacked and thus suffered little damage; that Thucydides has based his account on a dispatch sent to Athens by Eurymedon and Sophocles which created the impression that they had won a victory; that the Spartans on Sphacteria were not at this time in any great danger. It is, however, difficult to believe (i) that Eurymedon and Sophocles can have made an essentially false report when its falsity was bound to be exposed by men who, for one reason or another, returned to Athens and did not accompany them to Sicily; (ii) that, even if a report of this kind was sent, Thucydides can have been misled by it when he obviously had information from eyewitnesses, probably including Demosthenes; (iii) that the Athenians who negotiated the truce can have been in a position to impose terms so unfavourable to the Spartans (16. 1-2) if their own fleet had accomplished almost nothing and if the troops on Sphacteria were not seriously threatened.

<sup>4</sup> The closest parallel is 129. 1, where the rebels on the peninsula of Pallene whom Brasidas considered himself to be unable to



to be 'assist' or 'relieve' in the widest sense.<sup>1</sup> At all events, the officials seem to have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that no military action of any kind by their forces at Pylos would prove successful in rescuing or even maintaining the troops on the island and that the only course open to Sparta was to try to recover these men by negotiation.<sup>2</sup>

The conviction attributed to the Spartan officials appears to receive some support from a passage in the seventh book, though because of compression the situation is viewed from a somewhat different angle. Here Thucydides does refer to the Peloponnesian fleet, and he is stating his own opinion, not reporting the opinion of others. He concludes his account of the final battle in the Great Harbour at Syracuse by comparing the plight of the Athenians after their defeat with that of the Spartans after the naval battle at Pylos (7. 71. 7 *παραπλήσιά τε ἐπεπόνθησαν καὶ ἔδρασαν αὐτοὶ ἐν Πύλῳ· διαφθαρεῖσιν γὰρ τῶν νεῶν τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις προσαπώλλυντο αὐτοῖς καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ νήσῳ ἄνδρες διαβεβηκότες*). The comparison is not particularly apposite, since the two situations were not closely parallel. It is, however, relevant to the present discussion that, according to Thucydides, the Peloponnesian fleet at Pylos, like the Athenian fleet at Syracuse, was reduced to a condition in which it was no longer capable of effective action.<sup>3</sup> Although he is here referring briefly and in general terms to the situation at Pylos, the passage is inconsistent with his account of the naval battle in the fourth book.

Because his information about the Peloponnesian fleet was somewhat meagre, he might possibly have remained unaware of some factor relating to it which convinced the Spartan leaders that it could not be expected to contribute effectively to any action designed to relieve their men on the island. It cannot, however, have suffered serious losses in the battle in addition to those reported by him: in that case the number of ships surrendered to the Athenians under the terms of the truce could hardly have amounted to 'about 60' (16. 3). There is a possibility that the crews, almost all of them allies, were demoralized by their defeat, but, unlike the Athenians after the last battle at Syracuse (7. 72. 3-4), they cannot have refused to man their ships. They were not in a position to defy the Spartan leaders, who could have used Spartan hoplites to enforce obedience.<sup>4</sup>

There is, therefore, no valid reason to doubt that after the battle the Spartans still had at their disposal a sizable, though not highly efficient, fleet. The

'assist' (*τιμωρεῖν*) are the people of Scione, which was in danger of either being taken by storm or reduced to surrender by blockade (as it eventually was, 5. 32. 1).

<sup>1</sup> J. de Romilly (Budé) translates 'd'exercer des représailles pour libérer leurs hommes', which may well be what Thucydides means but is an interpretation rather than a translation.

<sup>2</sup> P. Huart, *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres de Nice*, xi (1970), 31, cf. 44, infers from this passage that the Spartan authorities, with characteristic selfishness, considered only the safety of their own men, especially the Spartiates, and ignored the interests of their allies.

<sup>3</sup> He sometimes uses *διαφθεῖρειν* in con-

texts where ships were neither sunk nor damaged beyond repair. The verb occurs four times (2. 90. 5; 91. 1; 92. 2 and 5) when in the battle off Naupactus nine Athenian ships were trapped close to the shore by the enemy, although they were later recovered (92. 2), some of them doubtless in a damaged condition. Clearly, however, the verb could not be applied to ships lost through being handed over temporarily and not restored.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 11. 4, where the exhortations of Brasidas during the unsuccessful attempts to force a landing on Pylos show that the Spartans expected sacrifices by their allies in return for benefits conferred upon them.

reference in the seventh book should presumably be attributed to faulty recollection of a complex episode. The main problem is to explain why the Spartan officials promptly decided to take the drastic step of making overtures designed to lead to a general peace without first trying out any alternative methods of saving their men on Sphacteria.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the situation was unprecedented and that, though they studied it on the spot, they could not have foreseen all the difficulties which, after the breakdown of the negotiations, hampered Athenian efforts to bring the campaign to a victorious conclusion. These difficulties proved in fact to be formidable. Even at that stage, when the Athenians had refused to hand back the Peloponnesian fleet and had themselves been reinforced by 20 ships from Athens (23. 2), their blockade of the island was only partially effective, and sufficient food was smuggled across from the mainland in small boats and by swimmers to save the Spartan troops from starvation (26. 2-9). For some weeks even Demosthenes, who was not normally disinclined to take risks, did not venture to commit his forces to an assault on the island because he appreciated the difficulties of the terrain (29. 3-30. 1). During this period the Spartans continued to attack the Athenian fortifications on Pylos 'looking for an opportunity, if any should arise, of rescuing their men' (23. 2). Their relative inactivity at this critical stage has evoked some surprise. There is at least a suspicion that they were lacking in determination and enterprise,<sup>2</sup> though any attempt to evacuate their troops from the island when they had only small boats at their disposal would have been very hazardous and its failure almost certainly disastrous.<sup>3</sup>

At an earlier stage, when the Spartans still had a considerable number of triremes, the prospects of success in any operation designed to rescue their men must have been very much brighter. As has already been pointed out,<sup>4</sup> it was not necessary for them to think in terms of a major naval action. The most promising route for evacuating their troops was probably the channel between the southern extremity of Sphacteria and the nearest point on the mainland, a distance of rather more than 1 km. This route would undoubtedly be policed by Athenian triremes, but only a few could be spared for duty here at the same time, and the Athenians could be prevented from reinforcing them while the evacuation was in progress if diversionary attacks were to be launched by Peloponnesian squadrons in the northern half of the harbour.<sup>5</sup> The Spartans would have no hesitation in sacrificing allied ships and crews if their own men could thereby be saved. Another feasible scheme would be to move some Peloponnesian ships along the coast to a point beyond the southern end of the harbour, protected where necessary by troops on the shore, and then to send them, preferably in windy weather (cf. 23. 2), to the western side of Sphacteria.

<sup>1</sup> This problem was recognized by G. Grote, *History of Greece* (1888), v. 241, who refers briefly to it after analysing the military situation, but it has been strangely neglected since his time.

<sup>2</sup> Gomme, *Hist. Com.* iii. 468, suggests that in windy weather, when the Athenian patrols would be less effective, an attempt might have been made to take the men off in the boats which brought their food. An operation of this kind would, one imagines, have appealed to Brasidas, but he had been wounded (12. 1).

<sup>3</sup> J. Wilson and T. Beardsworth, *Phoenix* xxiv (1970), 116-18, consider various methods of rescue which might have been attempted, but they conclude that the risks were too great in each case.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson and Beardsworth, *ibid.*, discuss the prospects of rescue by the southern channel when only small boats were available. In their opinion, which may well be right, the Athenians were then in a position to prevent evacuation by this route.

Here the hoplites could be embarked and eventually landed at any suitable point on the mainland, perhaps as far away as Methone.<sup>1</sup> Other schemes of evacuation could doubtless be envisaged as well as methods of keeping the men supplied with food. In so large a theatre of operations there was always a fair prospect of taking the enemy by surprise, as the Athenians found when they landed on the island shortly before first light without being detected (31. 1–32. 1).

In the period after the sea battle the Spartan officials sent to review the position were fully justified in feeling anxiety for the men on this island. Yet their conclusion that the situation was hopeless seems to be indefensible if, as has been suggested, there was a reasonably good prospect of rescue by military action of some kind. Unless they were influenced by factors of which no trace survives, the only feasible explanation is that they considered peace to be desirable on other grounds in addition to the needs of the local situation at Pylos and that they were now presented with an opportunity of pursuing a course of action hitherto denied to them because it would have involved an unacceptable loss of prestige.<sup>2</sup> They were confident, indeed over-confident, that the Athenians, whose overtures on earlier occasions they had rejected, would now gladly accept their proposals and that the restoration of their men on the island would be assured (21. 1). This explanation receives some support from the speech delivered in the Athenian assembly by Spartan envoys during the truce (17–20), which is among the most puzzling of Thucydidean speeches. In addition to the usual difficulty of deciding how much of its content is authentic and how much consists of *τὰ δέοντα* supplied by Thucydides, the reader must feel that the speaker is inhibited by circumstances from presenting his case with the frankness expected of a Spartan. What he leaves unsaid is almost more important than what he says.<sup>3</sup>

He draws a picture of the situation at Pylos which is somewhat equivocal. The principal proposal which he tries to persuade the assembly to accept is based on the assumption that the men on the island had a good chance of being rescued through military action. He declares that the Spartans offer peace, alliance, and friendship, *ἄμεινον ἢ γούμενοι ἀμφοτέρους μὴ διακινδυνεύειν, εἴτε βία διαφύγοιεν παρατυχούσης τινὸς σωτηρίας εἴτε καὶ ἐκπολιορκηθέντες μᾶλλον ἂν χειρωθεῖεν* (19. 1). He may be trying to bolster a weak case by misrepresenting the prospect of rescue as being much rosier than it really was. It is, however, possible, in view of the considerations noted above, that his assessment of the situation is more realistic than the very pessimistic conclusions attributed to the Spartan officials sent to Pylos (15. 2). On the other hand, he three times defines the predicament in which the Spartans find themselves as *ξυμφορά* (17. 1; 18. 1; 20. 2), while acknowledging that the Athenians are at the moment enjoying success (17. 4; 18. 4–5). These admissions form part of his basic argument that good fortune cannot be expected to be lasting, so that the Athenians would be wise to make peace while they are in a position of advantage. It is, however, arguable that the speaker is acknowledging, even exaggerating, the unfavourable aspects of the present situation in order to avoid having to make a much more damaging admission, namely that, in the

<sup>1</sup> This suggestion is based on autopsy. The operation could have been conducted, partly or wholly, under cover of darkness.

<sup>2</sup> Ferrabino, *op. cit.* [above, p. 218 n. 3], 159, convincingly maintains that the Spar-

tans welcomed the opportunity of making peace.

<sup>3</sup> The ensuing discussion of this speech will be limited to aspects of it which are relevant to the present investigation.

opinion of the Spartan government, six years of war had shown its declared aim, namely the destruction of Athenian power, to be unattainable. Such a confession of failure would encourage the Athenians to reject peace proposals, since total victory would appear to be in sight. It would also inevitably cause the allies of Sparta, who would soon learn what the envoys had said at Athens (cf. 22. 3), to complain that their interests were being betrayed, especially if concessions made by the Spartans were at their expense. There is a hint in the last sentence of the speech (20. 3) that in any event hostile repercussions of some kind within the Spartan alliance were to be expected. If, however, the allies could be convinced that peace was being negotiated in order to avert the loss of a precious hoplite force, which was the backbone of the Peloponnesian League army, they would be less likely to feel indignant. The strangely evasive tone of the whole speech suggests that the speaker is to some extent concealing the real feelings of the Spartan government.

In the summer of 425 there must have been many Spartans who had voted for war with high hopes of a rapid and complete victory but were now profoundly disillusioned because so little progress had been made towards the fulfilment of their aims.<sup>1</sup> The optimistic predictions of the Corinthians before the outbreak of war that the Peloponnesians would soon be able to challenge successfully the naval supremacy of Athens (1. 121. 3-4) had been shown to have been mistaken and the counter-arguments of Pericles (1. 142. 6-9) fully vindicated. In the few naval actions which had been fought the inferiority of Peloponnesian seamanship had been exposed. Attempts to obtain naval and financial aid from allies in Italy and Sicily and from Persia had produced nothing.<sup>2</sup> Peloponnesian invasions of Attica, which at the outbreak of war were expected by the Spartans themselves (5. 14. 3) and by other Greeks (7. 28. 3) to prove decisive, had inflicted much material damage and severe hardship, but in 425 there seemed no prospect that, however many times they were undertaken, they alone would ever compel the Athenians to capitulate. The Peloponnesians had had little success in exploiting the unforeseen advantage conferred upon them by the plague. Hopes of widespread disaffection in the Athenian empire had not materialized, and the ignominious failure of the Peloponnesian attempt to save Mytilene had discouraged other allies of Athens from venturing to revolt. There had also been failures both at Corcyra, where the Peloponnesians had been unable to turn the struggle between local factions to their own advantage, and on the mainland of north-western Greece, where the victories of Demosthenes had forced them to abandon their attempts to destroy Athenian influence. In the northern Aegean they had not been able to relieve Potidaea, and their uneasy association with Perdiccas had not yet produced any tangible benefits. Their only positive achievements, apart from the devastation of Attica, were the reduction of Plataea and the foundation of Heraclea; the former damaged their reputation for fair dealing, while the latter failed to yield the advantages expected of it.

There are indications, though they are only indications, that for some time before the Spartan troops were trapped on Sphacteria enthusiasm for the war had been waning among Spartan leaders, who were increasingly disposed to be content with a negotiated peace.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 426 the Peloponnesian

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the admission by Brasidas in his speech at Acanthus (85. 2).

<sup>2</sup> P. A. Brunt, *Phoenix* xix (1965), 260-3

with full references.

<sup>3</sup> An order issued to the Spartan commander at Plataea in 427 (3. 52. 2) shows

army mobilized at the Isthmus for an invasion of Attica was disbanded without proceeding further (3. 89. 1). Thucydides attributes the abandonment of the expedition to the occurrence of many earthquakes, which was doubtless the official reason. It is true that earthquakes aroused superstitious fears and might even be considered dangerous to a large body of troops assembled in a small area. There is, however, some likelihood that Agis, who was in command for the first time, and other Spartans welcomed the opportunity to abandon an operation for which, since earlier invasions had not brought victory appreciably nearer, there was doubtless little relish. The other king, Pleistoanax, had recently returned to Sparta after years of exile; since he is known to have been active in promoting peace in 421 (5. 16. 1), he may well, from the time of his return, have endeavoured to steer Spartan opinion in that direction. A passage in the *Acharnians* (652-4), produced early in 425, contains what appears to be a clear reference to a Spartan offer of peace on terms which included the restoration of Aegina. Modern scholars have indeed concluded that at some time in 426 formal proposals were made which the Athenians rejected.<sup>1</sup> There is, however, an element of Aristophanic fantasy in the passage; and, if an official offer had been made, Thucydides might have been expected to have included a reference to it, even though he provides very meagre information about diplomatic activities during the early years of the war.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the passage does suggest that Sparta at least put out peace feelers of a tentative and unofficial kind, which Thucydides did not consider to be worthy of mention.<sup>3</sup> Finally, some traces of waning zest for the war may be detected in his report on the invasion of Attica in the spring of 425 (2. 1; 6. 1). The Peloponnesian army withdrew in haste after the shortest of all invasions on hearing that Pylos had been occupied. The reasons given for this decision are that Agis and the Spartans were deeply alarmed by the news and that the invaders were suffering hardship through dearth of food and unseasonably stormy weather. It may be suspected that now, as perhaps in the previous year, excuses for disbanding the army were not unwelcome. The Spartans at home reacted very differently to the news from Pylos, treating it almost with nonchalance (5. 1). Thucydides makes no comment on this remarkable divergence of view, but it probably reflects some disagreement on war policy in general. It suggests that younger Spartans serving with the army in Attica resented being sent on expeditions which they considered to be futile, whereas their elders at home were more complacent. The views of Agis at this stage are unknown; years later he established a reputation for zealous, though not at all enlightened, leadership (cf. 7. 27. 4), but when first entrusted with the command of expeditionary forces he was young and may have been influenced by the pessimistic outlook of his father Archidamus.

These indications of Spartan feelings are by no means conclusive. They do, however, provide some basis for believing that for at least a year before the Spartan envoy delivered his speech in the Athenian assembly leading Spartans were becoming convinced that there was nothing to be gained by continuing the war and that peace negotiations should be initiated as soon as a suitable

that at that time the government at least envisaged the possibility of a negotiated peace.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Busolt, *op. cit.* [above, p. 213 n. 2], 1079.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my observations in *Ryl. Bull.* liii (1970), 230.

<sup>3</sup> The cautious treatment by Gomme, *Hist. Com.* ii. 391, is abundantly justified.

opportunity presented itself. The danger to the troops on Sphacteria was the immediate cause of the Spartan overtures, but it would be a mistake to imagine that a desire for peace was suddenly and for the first time engendered by their predicament.

The results of the investigation in the second section of this paper are as follows. If there is a discrepancy, as has been maintained, between the account of the sea battle and that of the Spartan reaction to it, one of these accounts must be misleading through incompleteness or inaccuracy. Although the account of the naval battle has defects which have been noted in the first section of this paper, it is the account of the Spartan reaction that fails to convince. According to Thucydides, the Spartans considered the position of their men on Sphacteria to be so desperate that it was imperative to sue for peace at once. There is, however, a good case for believing that, because they still had a substantial fleet at their disposal, the prospects of rescuing their men by military action were by no means unpromising and that the decision to open negotiations was taken largely for a reason unconnected with their anxiety about the situation at Pylos, namely dissatisfaction with the progress of the war.

Has Thucydides misunderstood the situation at this stage, and, if so, why? He may possibly have been aware that his statement on the feelings of the Spartan officials about their men is not wholly accurate in the context in which he has placed it. It would be entirely appropriate to the situation immediately after the termination of the truce when the Spartans no longer had the use of a fleet,<sup>1</sup> and he might have deliberately antedated it in order to make his narrative of a complex episode more easily intelligible to his readers. Close adherence to the chronological sequence of events is a basic principle of his historical method, but there are some passages in which he relaxes this principle.<sup>2</sup> Such passages, however, record a whole chain of developments which are inherently dependent upon one another, so that the present case is not strictly parallel with them. It is much more likely that Thucydides has somehow overlooked the influence which the Peloponnesian fleet, despite its defeat, could still exert upon the military situation while it remained in operation; and that, largely because of this oversight, he has believed anxiety for the men on the island to have been the overriding cause of the Spartan desire to make peace. The tactics adopted by the Spartan envoys during the negotiations at Athens also encouraged this belief.

The origin of his oversight cannot be determined with certainty, but two palpable flaws in his knowledge of the Pylos episode doubtless contributed to it. The first is that, as has already been noted,<sup>3</sup> he did not appreciate the size of the harbour and would therefore underrate the chances of success in operations conducted by the Spartans, while they still possessed a fleet, with the intention of supplying or rescuing their men. The second flaw is more complex and involves consideration of his sources. Here, as elsewhere, the difficulty which he evidently experienced in obtaining full and reliable information from Spartan sources was a serious handicap and may well have caused him to rely in this

<sup>1</sup> At that moment the Athenians expected to bring the operation to a successful conclusion within a few days (26. 4).

<sup>2</sup> H. Erbse, *Rh. Mus.* xcvi (1953), 38–62, who points to 1. 56–9; 4. 80–1; and 7. 27–8 as the principal examples, cf. my *Individuals*

in *Thucydides*, 192, where I note that the letter of Nicias from Syracuse pictures the situation not so much as it was at the time of writing but rather as it became six months later.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 214.

case largely on inference. Throughout his *History*, though he claims that his banishment gave him the opportunity to associate with the Peloponnesians (5. 26. 5), he is seldom adequately acquainted with the grounds for Spartan decisions on war policy and with the conflicts of opinion within the ruling class at Sparta which caused their policy to fluctuate considerably;<sup>1</sup> this scantiness of information is especially marked for the period between the outbreak of war and the beginning of his exile. His statement on Spartan reactions to the situation created by the naval battle might conceivably be based on information gleaned from leading Spartans after his banishment. It is, however, a somewhat imprecise statement,<sup>2</sup> and, more significant, there is elsewhere throughout his account of the Pylos episode no passage suggesting that any of his evidence was obtained when he had become an exile. There are two groups of Spartans whom he could have consulted at Athens about the episode. The first consists of prisoners captured on Sphacteria from whom he probably derived some information about their experiences on the island, as has been pointed out above.<sup>3</sup> They can, however, have known little or nothing about the reactions and deliberations of the Spartan leaders on the mainland after they were themselves cut off. The second group consists of the Spartan envoys sent to Athens during the truce. It cannot be established that Thucydides was at Athens during their visit, since he might have been engaged in public or private business abroad, but it was surely at Athens that he would wish, if possible, to be in his twin capacities as embryo statesman and embryo historian. The exceptional vividness of his reports on two debates in the Athenian assembly during this period (17-22; 27-8) suggests that he attended them himself. In some respects he is remarkably well informed about the views of the envoys not disclosed in the speech by their spokesman, especially their fears of alienating their allies (22. 3).<sup>4</sup> The envoys can have had no hesitation in divulging these views at private conferences with leading Athenians sympathetic towards Sparta, such as Nicias,<sup>5</sup> and Thucydides would doubtless be able to discover what they had said. He may even have been present himself: he must already have achieved some prominence in the political field, since within a year he was elected to the board of strategoi, and he undoubtedly believed that the Athenians made a disastrous mistake in rejecting the Spartan offer of peace. On the other hand, though the envoys were doubtless prepared to speak more frankly in private than in the assembly, they can hardly have been so misguided as to have disclosed to anyone at Athens, however well-disposed towards Sparta, that the Spartans now wished to end the war because they were no longer confident of victory.<sup>6</sup>

Thucydides was thus aware from what the envoys said at Athens that the

<sup>1</sup> Busolt, *op. cit.* [above, p. 213 n. 2], 659 n. 4; Brunt, *op. cit.* [above, p. 222 n. 2], 278-80. It is significant that the period on which Thucydides is most fully supplied with information from behind the scenes at Sparta is when Alcibiades was involved in discussions and intrigues leading to the formation of Spartan policy after the Athenian disaster in Sicily (8. 5-12).

<sup>2</sup> Neither the names nor the status of the officials sent from Sparta are mentioned, though they doubtless included at least one

of the ephors and possibly one of the kings. They are defined merely as τὰ τέλη (15. 1).

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 214 with n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> I have considered this point in *The Speeches in Thucydides*, edited by Philip A. Stadter (1973), 97-8.

<sup>5</sup> Nicias established a reputation for consistent friendship with Sparta: 5. 16. 1, 43. 2, and 46. 1-4; 6. 89. 2; 7. 86. 3; Plut. *Nic.* 9. 6, cf. 27. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 221-4.

Spartans were very eager for peace, not indeed at any price but at the price of considerable sacrifices. This conviction was doubtless confirmed by information from Athenians, including Demosthenes, who had been involved in negotiating the truce at Pylos: they must have concluded from their success in insisting on severe terms that the Spartans took a very pessimistic view of the situation there. It might thus seem to be a legitimate inference from this evidence that from the moment when the Athenians won their naval victory the Spartans virtually abandoned hope of saving their men on the island by any method other than the conclusion of a peaceful settlement.

Any attempt to show that Thucydides has committed even a minor error is a hazardous undertaking. His entire *History* confirms his claim to have spared no effort to discover the truth (1. 22. 2-3). He did, however, fully appreciate the difficulty of obtaining trustworthy and complete evidence from oral sources (*ibid.*), especially when they were Spartan (cf. 5. 68. 2). His difficulties were intensified where he was dealing with opinions and intentions. He was not infallible.

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