

represented by the skene,⁵ is the home not only of the hoopoe, but also of the nightingale, incongruous bedfellows; and it aptly simulates the natural habitat of the latter as well as of the former,⁶ there being repeated reference to bushes or thickets (λόχμη, 202, 207, 224, 265). Aristophanes turns this to good effect with extensive double-entendre (especially 207–8) accompanied by suggestive dialogue and stage-business (especially 668–74). The strong visual contrast between the unprepossessing hoopoe and the attractive nightingale is reinforced by the contrast between the nightingale's filling the thicket with honeyed sound (κατεμελίτωσε, 224), and the hoopoe's disgusting fouling of it. Hoopoe and nightingale are presented with typical Aristophanic humour, the first in scatological and the second in sexual terms.

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⁵ See my article, 'The staging of Sophokles' *Philoktetes* and Aristophanes' *Birds*', in E. M. Craik (ed.), *Owls to Athens* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 81–4.

⁶ See *Collins Field Guide to the Birds of Britain* on the nightingale's habitat, 'thickets of all kinds . . . in woods, copses, commons, heaths and overgrown hedgerows'.

THUCYDIDES 3.12.3

The Oxford text of this passage reads as follows:

εἰ γὰρ δυνατοὶ ἦμεν ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου καὶ ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι καὶ ἀντιμελλῆσαι, τί ἔδει ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου ἐπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι; ἐπ' ἐκείνοις δὲ ὄντος αἰεὶ τοῦ ἐπιχειρεῖν καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι δεῖ τὸ προαμύνασθαι.

This gives the received text and punctuation.¹ No generally agreed meaning has been found in the opening sentence as it thus stands; nor have any of the numerous alternative versions which have been proposed gained widespread support.² In this paper I suggest that good sense can, after all, be made of this passage in its received form.³

Chapter 12 concludes the first section of the Mytilenians' speech, in which they defend their city against the criticism they expect her to face for having revolted from Athens in time of war (Chapter 9). Chapters 10–11 give an account of (in modern terms) the foundation of the Delian League and its transformation into the Athenian Empire; by the end of the *Pentecontaetia*, Mytilene alone, with Chios, remained autonomous (10.5). The Mytilenians owed their freedom, in part, to their cultivation of the Athenian people and of leading Athenian politicians (11.7); but, until the Peloponnesian War broke out, they had not expected to be able to maintain their freedom for very long (11.8). The Mytilenians continue (12.1; Oxford text):

¹ Except that ἀντιμελλῆσαι is adopted from the scholiast, in place of the manuscripts' ἀντεπιμελλῆσαι or ἀντεπιμελῆσαι. There has been general agreement among editors that this is the correct reading. I am grateful to Professor J. A. Crook, Dr J. H. Molyneux, and Professor F. W. Walbank for helpful discussion, and to Professor J. F. Drinkwater for photocopies of German publications unavailable in this country.

² Gomme provides an introduction to the long-standing debate on this passage. Gomme favoured emendation; more recent scholars have accepted the received text, sometimes with reservations: see C. W. Macleod, *JHS* 98 (1978), 66 [= id., *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1983), p. 90], n. 8; Hornblower, and Rhodes *ad loc.*

³ Hornblower justly remarks: 'This is not one of those passages in Th. where a difficulty about text or interpretation makes an enormous difference: the Mytileneans' general point here is plain enough.' Even so, a further attempt to resolve the difficulty seems worthwhile.

τίς οὖν αὕτη ἡ φιλία ἐγίγνετο ἡ ἐλευθερία πιστή, ἐν ᾗ παρὰ γνώμην ἀλλήλους ὑπεδεχόμεθα, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ δεδιότες ἐθεράπευον, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκείνους ἐν τῇ ἡσυχίᾳ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐποιοῦμεν· ὃ τε τοῖς ἄλλοις μάλιστα εὖνοια πίστιν βεβαιοῖ, ἡμῖν τοῦτο ὁ φόβος ἐχυρὸν παρεῖχε, δέει τε τὸ πλεόν ἡ φιλία κατεχόμενοι ξύμμαχοι ᾤμεν· καὶ ὁποτέρους θάσσον παράσχοι ἀσφάλεια θάρσος, οὗτοι πρότεροι τι καὶ παραβήσεσθαι ἔμελλον.

This passage presents several problems of text and interpretation; the only one we need consider here is whether the words *ἡμῖν* and *ᾤμεν* in the latter part of this passage refer to the Mytilenians alone, or to both the Mytilenians and the Athenians.⁴ To both, I suggest: the Mytilenians have just spoken of Athens' and Mytilene's *mutual* fear, and immediately go on to assert that a challenge to the existing relationship between the two states was to be expected as soon as *either* party felt sufficiently confident of success.

It follows, the Mytilenians insist (12.2), that Mytilene should not be criticized for having pre-empted an Athenian attack upon her: ὥστε εἴ τῳ δοκοῦμεν ἀδικεῖν προαποστάντες διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων μέλλησιν τῶν ἐς ἡμᾶς δεινῶν, αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἀνταναμείναντες σαφῶς εἰδέναι εἴ τι αὐτῶν ἔσται, οὐκ ὀρθῶς σκοπεῖ. Is the phrase διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων μέλλησιν τῶν ἐς ἡμᾶς δεινῶν to be taken with προαποστάντες or with δοκοῦμεν ἀδικεῖν? That is to say, are the Mytilenians justifying their revolt (μέλλησιν = 'threat')⁵ or explaining why their revolt may seem unjustified (μέλλησιν = 'delay')? The prefix ἀντι- of ἀνταναμείναντες in the following clause seems to me to show that the latter is the correct interpretation.⁶

12.3 is clearly intended to justify or elucidate 12.2; and commentators are agreed that the Mytilenians' general point is, as Marchant puts it: 'we cannot be blamed for taking the first move merely because they delayed to take action against us'. But what precisely are they saying?

Three initial comments on the opening sentence of 12.3. First, the most natural way of reading the sentence is surely, as in the received version, to take the words καὶ ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι καὶ ἀντιμελλῆσαι as going together, and as concluding the protasis.⁷ Secondly, as Marchant, for example, notes, the correspondence in form between the

⁴ For the former view, see e.g. H.-P. Stahl, *Thukydides* (Munich, 1966), p. 53; the latter is the scholiast's view. I assume that the Mytilenians do not have the *Chians* in mind at any point in Chapter 12.

⁵ Cp. 1.69.4; 4.126.5, 6; 5.116.1; and see Andrewes *ad* 5.66.2.

⁶ It is at any rate certainly the usual interpretation, for the most part indeed taken for granted. For the alternative view, see A. W. Spratt (ed.), *Thucydides: Book III* (Cambridge, 1896), *ad loc.*

⁷ It is generally agreed that the two verbs form an antithesis; corresponsive καὶ . . . καὶ is regularly used to couple contrasting terms (Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, pp. 324, 585). Spratt, taking μέλλησιν in 12.2 to mean 'menace', takes ἀντιμελλῆσαι in 12.3 to mean 'to menace in return', translating: 'had we been in a position to meet intrigues by intrigues and threats by threats'; see, however, above. Even less plausible is Jowett's version: taking μέλλησιν to mean 'delay', he nonetheless translates the first sentence of 12.3: 'If we are really on an equality with them and in a position to counteract their designs and imitate their threatening attitude, how is it consistent with this equality that we must still be at their mercy?'

Most alternatives to the received version are based on punctuation with a comma after ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι. The most obvious and serious objection to this punctuation is that it would seem to necessitate emendation of the clause that then begins at καὶ ἀντιμελλῆσαι: whether excision of the phrase ἐπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι (Boehme, Stahl) or, less drastically, acceptance of Krüger's correction of it to ἐπ' ἐκείνους ἵεναι (Classen-Steup, Gomme). Krüger himself read: εἰ γὰρ δυνατοὶ ᾤμεν ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου καὶ ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι καὶ ἀντιμελλῆσαι τι, εἶδει ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου ἐπ' ἐκείνους ἵεναι. Krüger's punctuation was that proposed by J. D. Heilmann, *Kritische Gedanken von dem Charakter und der Schreibart des Thucydides* [Lemgo, 1758], p. 67; punctuation after ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι, attributed to Heilmann in the Oxford *apparatus* and elsewhere, I believe

phrases ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου and ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου suggests some parallel connexion in meaning. Finally, the verb δεῖ in the last clause of 12.3 clearly denotes obligation rather than necessity; one would thus expect εἴδει in the previous sentence to do so too.

Now commentators have shared two assumptions about the opening sentence of 12.3: first, that it expresses an unreal condition, εἴδει being used idiomatically without ἄν; secondly, that ἡμεν refers to the Mytilenians alone.⁸ I should like to suggest that these assumptions are mistaken; that the sentence states an open condition, and that ἡμεν refers not to Mytilene alone, but to both Mytilene and Athens: 'For if we were able both to machinate against each other and to bide our time against each other on equal terms, what obligation was there for us to be at their disposal in the same way as they were at ours? Given that it is always open to them to move against us, so too we must be allowed a similar discretion in respect of our pre-emptive measures of self-defence.' I take the Mytilenians' point to be that if the Athenians, by choosing to bide their time, put themselves at the disposal of the Mytilenians (i.e. allowed them to take the initiative), that in no way meant that the Mytilenians were under any obligation to reciprocate. Athens and Mytilene *had* the same choice; that does not mean that they had to *make* the same choice. For the phrase ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου, cp. 1.143.4, 2.44.3, 4.10.4, 6.78.4, and 6.87.5; as Fraenkel notes (*ad* Aesch. *Ag.* 1423), this phrase in Thucydides' speeches 'means . . . "arising from like circumstances or a similar situation; in a similar way" and shows always that something happens or exists in a manner which corresponds to the action (or situation) of the other side or party. The point always is that *par pari respondet*.' The phrase ἐπ' ἐκείνοις in both sentences of 12.3 expresses the notion of 'being subject to someone's discretion'; with ἡμᾶς ἐπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι cp. 6.22, *ad fin.*: μὴ ἐπὶ ἑτέροις γίνεσθαι, and with ἐπ' ἐκείνοις . . . ὄντος 2.84.2, 4.29.3, and 7.12.5. Exception may be taken to the imperfect εἴδει, given the present δεῖ in the following sentence; but εἴδει relates to the specific time of Mytilene's revolt ('what obligation was there then, in those circumstances?'), while δεῖ demands recognition of a right that holds at all times ('if they are always free to move against us, we must be allowed the right to protect our position against them').

12.3, so understood, seems to me to make excellent sense in the context of Chapter 12 as a whole. The Mytilenians' concern in the first part of their speech is, as we have noted, to persuade their audience that Mytilene's revolt from Athens is, in the circumstances, wholly justified. They maintain (12.1) that by the time the Peloponnesian War broke out the alliance between the two states had become a sham, a relationship based not, as genuine alliances are, on mutual goodwill, but on mutual fear. Neither party was prepared to acquiesce in this situation indefinitely; movement would come from whichever side first felt sufficiently confident of achieving its aim (for Mytilene, severance of her links with Athens; for Athens, subjugation of Mytilene). The fact that up to the moment of Mytilene's revolt Athens had, as it happened, herself made no move against Mytilene is thus in no way evidence that she had not intended to launch an attack upon her whenever a suitable opportunity arose. To suggest that

first occurs in Poppo's text (Leipzig, 1826). Poppo states *ad loc.* that he owed the idea to Gottfried Hermann.

⁸ Cp. however U. v. Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Hermes* 40 (1905), 143: 'Man verstand den ersten Satz "wenn wir gleichermassen in der Lage wären, einander Böses bereits zu tun oder damit noch zu zögern, weshalb sollten wir unter ihnen stehen?"' He comments: 'Das ist freilich Unsinn', and goes on to endorse punctuation with a comma after ἀντεπιβουλευσαι, and excision of the words ἐπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι. So far as I am aware, no commentator had in fact taken the subject of the opening clause of 12.3 to be both Mytilenians and Athenians.

Mytilene should have forgone a favourable occasion for revolt, on the ground that Athens had as yet made no hostile move against her, would thus be misguided (12.2): why should Mytilene have allowed the initiative to rest with Athens? If the two parties were confronting one another on equal terms—if, that is to say, each was free to make a move against the other, or to bide its time, as it judged best—what obligation had Mytilene been under to allow Athens to determine when the issue between them was to be joined? What obligation had there been for Mytilene to allow Athens the advantage of making the first move? Since Athens could choose to move against Mytilene at her own discretion, a similar discretion should be granted to Mytilene (12.3).

It may be objected that the Mytilenians could hardly be supposed to be suggesting that prior to Mytilene's revolt from Athens the two states had in fact been facing each other on *equal* terms, since such a thesis would grossly contradict the argument of Chapters 10–11, which emphasize precisely the growing *disparity* in power between Mytilene and Athens. This is indeed a central theme of Chapters 10–11; it is, however, interwoven with a contrasting theme, the equality of status that at any rate formally continued to obtain between the two states.⁹ In 12.1, moreover, the Mytilenians present the alliance between Mytilene and Athens in the period immediately prior to the revolt as having involved a balance, not indeed of power, but of fear. Their point in 12.2–3, I suggest, is that if—as was in fact the case—the decision as to when to take action against the other was one that could be freely made by either side, Mytilene could not reasonably be criticized for having, as it happened, been the one who first decided to act; had Athens so chosen, she could have been the one to make the first move. For the phrase *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου* denoting equality in a particular respect, one can compare 2.3.4, where the Plataeans expect the Thebans, notwithstanding their numerical inferiority (3.2), to become *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου* with themselves in daylight.¹⁰

The verbal play in 12.3¹¹ parallels the dexterity of its argument. The Mytilenians are concerned to present Mytilene and Athens as having been, not in any real sense allies, but antagonists between whom no issue of *betrayal* could arise. That it was in fact Mytilene who made the first move in no way meant that she had taken unfair advantage of Athens; the two states had been confronting each other on perfectly equal terms. The Mytilenians' argument here of course rests on an equivocation: the Athenians were no doubt always free to move against Mytilene, inasmuch as they could in principle always decide so to do; but, it might reasonably be objected, at the time of the Mytilenian revolt this notional freedom of action was practically speaking nullified by the exigencies of the Peloponnesian War.

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⁹ Note especially 11.1: *ἡμῶν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴσου ὁμιλοῦντες*, and 11.3: *αὐτόνομοί τε ἐλείφθημεν* and (whatever its precise meaning) *τούς γε ἰσοψήφους*.

¹⁰ I have been supposing, with most commentators, that the phrase *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου* refers to equality as between Mytilenians and Athenians. But might it not refer to equality as between *ἀντεπιβουλεύσαι* and *ἀντιμελλῆσαι* (so W. Bannier, *RhM* n.f. 73 [1920–4], 63f.)? The decisive argument against this interpretation is that it disconnects the phrase *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου* from the phrase *ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου* in the next clause (see above).

¹¹ Noted by Macleod (n. 2 above).