

THUCYDIDES 2.13.6–7: OLDEST, YOUNGEST, HOPLITES, METICS

On the eve of war in 431 Pericles, speaking in the Athenian Assembly, reaffirmed his strategy of withdrawal within the city–Piraeus fortifications in the event of enemy invasion: what mattered was, not Attica, but Athens' navy, her empire and the tribute (13.2).¹ After a detailed account of Athenian finances (13.3–5), Pericles turned to Athens' military forces (13.6–7):

χρήμασι μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἐθάρσυνεν αὐτούς, ὀπλίτας δὲ τρισχιλίους καὶ μυρίου εἶναι ἄνεν τῶν ἐν τοῖς φρουρίοις καὶ τῶν παρ' ἑπαλξιν ἑξακισχιλίων καὶ μυρίων. [7] τοσοῦτοι γὰρ ἐφύλασσον τὸ πρῶτον ὅποτε οἱ πολέμιοι ἐσβάλοιεν, ἀπὸ τε τῶν πρεσβυτάτων καὶ τῶν νεωτάτων, καὶ μετοίκων ὅσοι ὀπλῖται ἦσαν.

Thucydides goes on to give details of the length of wall to be defended, and to report (13.8) the figures that Pericles gave for cavalry, archers and triremes; he then comments: ταῦτα γὰρ ὑπῆρχεν Ἀθηναίους καὶ οὐκ ἐλάσσω ἕκαστα τούτων, ὅτε ἡ ἐσβολὴ τὸ πρῶτον ἐμελλε Πειλοποννησίων ἔσεσθαι καὶ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον καθίσταντο (13.9).

Thucydides gives figures for Athenian hoplite forces in two later passages of his account of the first year of the war. With the enemy still in Attica, the Athenians despatched a retaliatory naval expedition that included 1,000 hoplites (23.2); in late summer they invaded the Megarid with a hoplite force that, when united with the hoplites returning from the naval expedition, numbered no fewer than 10,000 Athenians and 3,000 metics, there being a further 3,000 Athenian hoplites at Potidaea (31.1–2).

According to 13.6–7, the oldest and youngest Athenians, with the metics, significantly outnumber Athenian hoplites of standard military age (16,000 as against 13,000); this apparent anomaly has long divided scholarly opinion.² On one point there is consensus: 13.6–7 distinguishes between, on the one hand, Athens' 13,000 'active' troops, and, on the other, the 'reserve', and it is the latter that mans the rampart.³ The figure of 13,000 for the 'field army'⁴ is taken to be corroborated by the figures Thucydides gives in Chapter 31: 10,000 Athenian hoplites in the Megarid, with 3,000 at Potidaea.

One might however question the validity of such a distinction in the present context. So far as we know, the only Athenian hoplites deployed in the field when Pericles was speaking were precisely those at Potidaea, who, it seems reasonable to suppose, then as later that year numbered 3,000.⁵ The bulk of Athens' 'active' troops were thus at home; what role, one wonders, did Pericles envisage for them in the event of enemy invasion? They were of course absolutely not to defend Attica (13.2); they were not, it seems from our passage, to defend the city, this being the responsibility of the reserve; what then were they to do? Seaborne expeditions against enemy territory hardly provide the answer, to judge by the expedition of 431: this did not sail until the critical phase of the Pelo-

¹ References in this form are to Thucydides, Book 2.

² Discussion and bibliography in U. Fantasia, *Tucidide: La Guerra del Peloponneso Libro II* (Pisa, 2003), ad loc.

³ For the terms 'active' and 'reserve' see e.g. A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1956), 35.

⁴ For this term see e.g. A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford, 1957), 162.

⁵ 31.2 suggests (to put it no more strongly) that in the autumn of 431 no other at all significant force of citizen hoplites was in being; 6.4 perhaps suggests that the *phrouroi* the Athenians left in Plataea were citizen hoplites.

ponnesian invasion of Attica was over, and then involved only 1,000 hoplites (23.2). If there were indeed some 10,000 'active' but militarily unoccupied hoplites inside the rampart while Archidamus was ravaging Acharnae, most of them, moreover, with the evacuation of Attica (14–17), presumably without their normal peacetime occupations to attend to, little wonder, one might think, that Pericles' success in restraining the Athenians from marching out to confront him in battle was the very close run thing Thucydides describes (21–2). Would it indeed not have been foolish in the extreme to seek to prevent Athens' 'active' hoplites from confronting the enemy invader in battle, while excluding them from any share in guarding the city?

Further points may be noted. First, the 'reserve' force manning the rampart included metics. Greece had just had a most dramatic reminder of the need to guard against treachery; with many metics likely to be from states subject to Athens' *arche*,⁶ were rotten apples less to be expected among Athenian metics than among Plataean citizens?

Second, it is not Pericles, but Thucydides, who identifies the troops at the rampart as coming from the oldest and youngest, and the metics; indeed, Pericles himself, it seems, said nothing as to the provenance of any of the troops mentioned in 13.6: contrast his analysis of Athens' financial resources in 13.3–5, which goes into considerable detail as to the sources and elements of Athens' wealth.

Consider, finally, the words τὸ πρῶτον ὅποτε οἱ πολέμοι ἐσβάλοιεν in 13.7. The indefinite ὅποτε clause makes it clear that Thucydides is not referring to the first invasion alone: τὸ πρῶτον seems to denote the initial phase of a series of invasions (contrast τὸ πρῶτον in 13.9, and at 47.2 and 5.20.1, where the reference is to the invasion of 431 alone). If τὸ πρῶτον refers to the period 431–425, which saw the five invasions of the Archidamian War, Thucydides will presumably be implying a contrast with the situation that obtained during the Decelean War—which was, however, a matter not of repeated invasion but of permanent occupation; moreover, this interpretation implies that the number of defenders was the same after the Plague as before. If, on the other hand, τὸ πρῶτον refers, precisely, to the period before the Plague, only the first two invasions come into question—barely sufficient, one might think, to account for the indefinite ὅποτε clause (and the Plague struck Athens in the early days of the second of these, 47.3).

The ὅποτε clause is noteworthy in another respect: its reference to οἱ πολέμοι. Thucydides, writing (it is agreed) in his own person, uncharacteristically refers to the Peloponnesians from an Athenian point of view; contrast the passage in 13.9 quoted above, where, commenting on Pericles' account of Athens' material resources, Thucydides, in his usual neutral way, speaks of the 'the Athenians' and, not οἱ πολέμοι, but 'the Peloponnesians'. The Peloponnesians have indeed figured as οἱ πολέμοι earlier in this chapter: Pericles began by announcing that if οἱ πολέμοι refrained from ravaging his own property he would transfer this to the state (13.1). There, of course, the use of the term οἱ πολέμοι is in no way surprising: Thucydides is reporting Pericles' words.

A radical but simple solution to the various puzzling features we have noted in our passage is re-punctuation, to produce not as at present two sentences, the first reporting what Pericles said, the second giving Thucydides' elucidation of this, but a single sentence reporting Pericles, with a parenthesis in the middle in which Thucydides interjects a comment of his own (as in 13.3 Thucydides inserts a parenthetical comment of his own in the middle of Pericles' reported statement on Athens' financial resources). I suggest that our passage should read as follows:

⁶ Cp. R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 271f.

χρήμασι μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἐθάρσυνεν αὐτούς, ὀπλίτας δὲ τρισχιλίους καὶ μυρίους εἶναι ἄνεν τῶν ἐν τοῖς φρουρίοις καὶ τῶν παρ' ἑπαλξίν ἐξακισχιλίων καὶ μυρίων (τοσοῦτοι γὰρ ἐφύλασσον τὸ πρῶτον) ὁπότε οἱ πολέμιοι ἐσβάλοιν, ἀπὸ τε τῶν πρεσβυτάτων καὶ τῶν νεωτάτων, καὶ μετοίκων ὅσοι ὀπλῖται ἦσαν.

With regard to money he encouraged them on these lines; as to hoplites, there were <he continued>13,000 over and above those in the forts and the 16,000 at the rampart (this was in fact the original number of defenders) when the enemy should invade, <these 13,000> comprising a portion of the oldest and youngest and all the metic hoplites.

This turns our passage back to front: it is now the 13,000 who constitute the reserve, and it is their provenance that is given, not by Thucydides but by Pericles himself, at the end of the sentence: they are (a) part of the oldest and youngest (*scil.* Athenian hoplites); (b) all metics who were hoplites (i.e. those of standard age plus the oldest and youngest), μετοίκων ὅσοι being in effect an accusative in apposition to ὀπλίτας (cp. 4.90.1: ὁ δὲ Ἱπποκράτης ἀναστήσας Ἀθηναίους πανδημεί, αὐτούς καὶ τοὺς μετοίκους καὶ ξένων ὅσοι παρήσαν). For the imperfect indicative ἦσαν in indirect speech cp. e.g. 7.60.2, ἐβουλεύσαντο ... τὰς ναῦς ἀπάσας, ὅσαι ἦσαν καὶ δυναταὶ καὶ ἀπλωότεραι, ... πληρώσαι: 'a past tense of historical narration is often used as a *statement of fact* by the writer from his own point of view, though the rest of the sentence may be given in indirect discourse after a secondary verb from the point of view of the subject of the leading verb'.⁷ The point Pericles is making is not that the metics were hoplites (that goes without saying), but that all metic hoplites belong to the reserve—as opposed to the oldest and youngest, only some of whom do so, the rest, we are I suggest to understand, being already accounted for (together with all Athenian hoplites of standard age) in the earlier part of the sentence (we shall consider how they are accounted for below). Pericles has there referred to two categories of hoplites, 'those in the forts' and 'the 16,000 at the rampart ... when the enemy should invade' (ὁπότε οἱ πολέμιοι ἐσβάλοιν, the ὁπότεν with subjunctive of direct speech becoming ὁπότε with optative in reported speech); the article before παρ' ἑπαλξίν makes it clear that the 16,000 do not include 'those in the forts'.⁸ Thucydides' parenthetical comment concerns only the 16,000 at the rampart: he is interjecting the point that this was indeed the number that manned the rampart during the first invasion—τὸ πρῶτον, as at 13.9 and elsewhere, now refers to a single invasion, that of 431. For the parenthesis one can compare 4.110.2: ἐσκομίζουσι παρ' αὐτοὺς ἐγχειρίδια ἔχοντας ἄνδρας ψιλοὺς ἑπτὰ (τοσοῦτοι γὰρ μόνοι ἀνδρῶν εἴκοσι τὸ πρῶτον ταχθέντων οὐ κατέδεισαν ἐσελθεῖν ἦρχε δὲ αὐτῶν Λυσίστρατος Ὀλύμπιος), οἱ διαδύντες διὰ τοῦ πρὸς τὸ πέλαγος τείχους ...; the parenthetic γὰρ is confirmatory, that at the beginning of the following sentence (τοῦ τε γὰρ Φαληρικοῦ τείχους ...) explanatory, Thucydides there going on to account for the very large number of troops assigned to the rampart (and, crucially, *not* to the battlefield) in the event of enemy invasion. I suggest that the point of the opposition Pericles draws in stating the provenance of the 13,000—these comprise *a portion of* the oldest and youngest and *all* metic hoplites—is that the total figure for the 16,000 at the rampart together with 'those in the forts' exceeds the available number of Athenian hoplites of standard military age: in other words, some of the oldest and youngest citizen hoplites are needed to reach the combined number required for these two duties. The remainder of the oldest and youngest Athenians, as we have seen, form one element of the 13,000 reserve hoplites, the other element of this force being the entire body of metic hoplites. As with Athens' financial position, the point Pericles is concerned to make in our

⁷ H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, MA, 1956), 591, #2624.

⁸ So e.g. Fantasia (n. 2), at 284.

passage is that, very substantial as Athens' hoplite requirements for purposes of defence will be in the event of war, she is in a position to meet these demands and still have a very comfortable reserve at her disposal.

In 13.7 Thucydides makes the point that, given the length of rampart to be defended, the figure of 16,000 was by no means excessive for this task; at the same time it clearly very much suited Pericles' interest that all, and more than all, Athenian hoplites of standard military age not serving outside Attica should in the event of invasion find themselves deployed on defence duty, whether at the rampart or in the forts, and thus as far as possible kept out of mischief. Of course, the ample hoplite reserve meant that, if occasion arose, Athenian hoplites of standard military age could be despatched abroad even while an invasion was in progress, their place in the forts or at the rampart being filled by reserve oldest/youngest or by metics—this I take to be what happened in 431 when the 1,000 hoplites were sent out with the force of 100 ships to ravage the Peloponnese (23.2; cp. 56.2: in 430 the expedition to Epidaurus sailed with 4,000 Athenian hoplites during the Peloponnesian invasion).

An obvious objection is that on the reading proposed Pericles ignores the 3,000 hoplites at Potidaea. The answer, I suggest, is that Pericles does indeed ignore them: he is concerned with forces *currently available for deployment at Athens*—and of course the occasion of Athens' needing to have these troops at Potidaea was not anyway a matter Pericles would wish to bring to the forefront of his audience's mind.⁹ Similarly, the 300 seaworthy triremes Pericles refers to at 13.8 do not, I take it, include the ships engaged at Potidaea (presumably in fact few in number).

It follows that the forts of 13.6 are the forts of Attica, such as Oenoe, garrisoned in time of war (18.2). On the reading proposed, the hoplites manning these are, like the 16,000 at the rampart, Athenians; there is I think no suggestion that these two categories are correlated with the distinction between citizen hoplites of standard military age, on the one hand, and the youngest and oldest citizen hoplites on the other.

At 13.8 Thucydides insists that Pericles' report of Athens' resources was well-founded.¹⁰ The figures he gives in Chapter 31 confirm those of 13.6–7: the 13,000 hoplites Athens deploys in the Megarid are the maximum available over and above the number required to man the forts and, in case of need, the rampart. Indeed, Thucydides notes that Athens was simultaneously fielding a force of 3,000 citizen hoplites against Potidaea. I take it to be coincidence that 3,000 is also the number of metic hoplites in the Megarid (Thucydides seems not to connect the two figures); it may well however not be coincidence that this metic contingent constituted one quarter of the hoplite force that Pericles originally led against Megara: significant metic participation made good propaganda (while involving little risk). The proposed reading of 13.6–7, it is to be noted, implies that the 3,000 metic hoplites who served in the Megarid formed only a portion of the total number of metic hoplites at Athens' disposal;¹¹ this point, and other related matters, I hope to consider elsewhere.

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⁹ At 13.3 it is Thucydides, not Pericles, who refers to the revolt of Potidaea.

¹⁰ Contrast the comments by Thucydides (5.68.2) and Alcibiades (6.17.5) on the general unreliability of such statements.

¹¹ Cp. R. P. Duncan-Jones, 'Metic numbers in Periclean Athens', *Chiron* 10 (1980), 101–9.