

DEXIPPUS AND PRISCUS AND THE THUCYDIDEAN ACCOUNT OF THE SIEGE OF PLATAEA

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AMONGST THE FRAGMENTS of the *Scythic War* of P. Herennius Dexippus and the *Byzantine History* of Priscus of Panium there are descriptions of sieges of cities which show knowledge and imitation of the account of the Spartan siege of Plataea in Thucydides. Both later historians were Thucydidean insofar as they imitated his style, borrowing constructions, words, and even phrases. This has been satisfactorily demonstrated by the scholars named below; and in the case of Dexippus was stated in the second half of the ninth century A.D. by Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 82).

As a result of this imitation the historical accuracy of the details given in the "Thucydidean" passages of these writers has been questioned, in Dexippus by F. J. Stein and in Priscus by E. A. Thompson.¹ According to these critics both historians, in their eagerness to emulate Thucydides, lifted material straight from his narrative and unhistorically transplanted it into their own accounts. Writers of the second century A.D. did this on a large scale according to Lucian (*Hist. conscr.* 15), who says that they thought that they were writing like Thucydides if they plagiarized his text, making only small alterations. Nevertheless the case against Dexippus and Priscus is not strong, as is shown by a close examination of the nature of the imitation in the "Thucydidean" accounts of sieges in these writers and through observation of its effect upon the reliability both of the general outline of the account and of the details.

Firstly it will be convenient to summarize the first part of Thucydides' account (2.75–76), to which most of the imitations look, in order to be able later to refer back to it:

The attackers (the Spartans) build a wooden palisade around the city to prevent anyone from leaving.

The attackers build a mound up to the city wall. Firstly they cut wood from Kithairon and make parallel retaining walls for the mound. Then they fill the space between with wood, stones, soil, etc. They work for seventy (?) days and nights in relays.

¹F. J. Stein, *Dexippus et Herodianus rerum scriptores quatenus Thucydidem secuti sint* (diss. Bonn 1957) esp. 61–63; E. A. Thompson, "Priscus of Panium, Fragment 1b," *CQ* 39 (1945) 92–94. Dexippus is quoted from *FGrH* 2 A 452 ff. (commentary at 2 C 310 ff.). Priscus is quoted from L. Dindorf (ed.), *Historici Graeci Minores* 1 (Leipzig 1870). His text is also printed in C. Mueller (ed.), *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 1–5 (Paris 1848–1883) (hereinafter *FHG*); most of the fragments are in volume 4, but fr. 1b is printed as fr. 2 in volume 5.

Opposite the mound the defenders build a brick wall strengthened by timber and screened by hides and leather to protect their workers and the wood from fire arrows.

The two buildings keep pace in growth.

The defenders break through their own wall at the point where the mound rests against it and draw the soil into the city.

The attackers pack clay into wattles and throw them into the gap created by the mining, so that they should not be as easily removed as the earth, which crumbles up.

The defenders dig further out from the wall and remove soil from the rear of the mound which thus fails to rise since the earth keeps slipping backwards from the front. This is undiscovered for a long time.²

The defenders abandon their high wall and build a crescent wall running from the ends of the high wall, so that if the first wall is taken, the attackers will have to begin a second mound up to the second wall.

The attackers bring up rams, one of which begins to shake the high wall.

The defenders lasso and draw up some of the machines.

The defenders attach beams to chains and hang them out over the wall on cranes. When a ram is about to strike, they release the chains and the beam falls, snapping off the head of the ram.

Dexippus fr. 27. The subject of the fragment is a siege of Philippopolis by the Goths, perhaps during the reign of Decius (A.D. 249–251).³ A summary of the action is as follows:

The attackers approach the wall with shields over their heads in order to see where the wall might be easily broken through⁴ because of its thinness or scaled because of its lowness.

²The words of Thucydides are: *καὶ ἐλάνθανον ἐπὶ πολὺ τοὺς ἔξω, ὥστε ἐπιβάλλοντας ἡσσαν ἀνύτειν ὑπαγομένου αὐτοῖς κάτωθεν τοῦ χώματος καὶ ἰζάνοντος αἰεὶ ἐπὶ τὸ κενούμενον*. Gomme in his commentary says that the mound would have been level, so that the heavy ram could be brought up, and that the Plataeans would merely have been able to reduce the level at spots and spoil the efforts of those who tried to bring up the ram. But if this were the case the Spartans, who had already discovered that the Plataeans were excavating the mound, would quickly have realized what they were doing. Moreover, would the reduction of the level of the mound in a few places have seriously hampered the advance of the ram? Rather, the mound rose up towards the wall like a ramp, with perhaps the very last portion level, and the Plataeans, by removing earth from the centre or rear of it, caused the higher level of earth at the front to sink slowly backwards, as it obviously could not have done when they made their first attempt, since then they took earth from the front (i.e. the highest point), with the result there was nothing at a higher level to slip down.

³Cf. *FGH* 2 C 310–311.

⁴*Dexippus* uses the word *εὐαποτερίχιστον*, which C. Mueller, *FHG* 3.678, translates *circumvallari facile*, the meaning which the word carries at *Thuc.* 6.75.1 and *Xen.*

The attackers throw missiles, but are driven back when they approach the city.

The attackers bring forward scaling ladders and machines. The latter are described as square wooden shelters, covered with hides to protect those battering at the gates and moved by levers and wheels.

Other attackers use iron-reinforced wooden rams.

Others use ladders, some set straight against the city wall, others brought up on wheels and then raised up by means of ropes attached to the ends.

The attackers also bring up wheeled wooden towers with bridges to lower upon the city wall.

The defenders destroy some of the machines and their occupants by means of huge rocks and by fire, pitch and brimstone. Upon those scaling the wall they roll transverse beams and stones, which crush the shields and ladders of the attackers.

The attackers build a mound, first erecting retaining walls in the ditch and then filling the space with earth and wood.

The defenders build a higher wooden counterwall against the mound.

During the night the defenders lower from the wall a man supplied with fire and combustible materials, who fires the wooden retaining walls so that the mound collapses.

The attackers kill the useless pack animals and old and sick captives, and cast the corpses into the ditch, throwing wood upon them. After three days the bodies swell and cause the wood to rise.

The defenders break a hole in the wall and draw the earth inside.

From this fragment Stein lists the following imitations of the Thucydidean siege of Plataea:⁵

Dexippus fr. 27

- a. ἐδόκει χώματα χούν
μετέωρα πρὸς τὴν πόλιν (7)
- b. ξύλα . . . εἰς τὴν τάφρον
κατ' εἰθὺ καὶ παράλληλα,
ὅπη συμβαίνει (7)
- c. ὁρῶντες δὲ τὸ πραττόμενον
οἱ Θραῖκες (8)
- d. οἱ δὲ Θραῖκες . . . εἰσεφόρου
. . . τὸν χούν (11)

Thucydides 2

- ἔπειτα χῶμα ἔχουν πρὸς τὴν
πόλιν (75.1)
- ξύλα . . . παρῳκοδόμουν
ἐκατέρωθεν (75.2)
- οἱ δὲ Πλαταιῆς ὁρῶντες τὸ
χῶμα αἰρόμενον (75.4)
- καὶ οἱ Πλαταιῆς . . . ἐσεφόρου
τὴν γῆν (75.6)

Hell. 2.4.31 (the only passages and meaning cited by *LSJ*⁹). However in Dexippus the word is qualified by the phrase διὰ στενότητα, and must mean that the attackers looked to see where the wall was "easy to break through because of its thinness." The model for this meaning is ἀποτειχίζω and ἀποτείχισις, which according to *LSJ*⁹ are used by Polyaeus of the razing of fortifications.

⁵Stein, *loc. cit.* (above, n. 1).

*Dexippus fr. 27**Thucydides 2**e.* δοκοὺς ἐγκαρσίας (6)

δοκοὺς . . . ἐγκαρσίας (76.4)

f. καθήκαν . . . ἄνδρα . . . δόντες

ἐμβαλόντες δὲ πῦρ ξὺν θείῳ

αὐτῷ φέρειν ἐπὶ τὸ χῶμα

καὶ πίσση ἤψαν τὴν ὕλην (77.3)

δῶδα ἡμέμενην καὶ σκεύος,

ἵνα πίττα τε ᾗν καὶ θεῖον

καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. ἐμβάλλει δὴ

οὖν τὸ πῦρ τοῖς ἀνέχουσι

τὸ χῶμα ξύλοις (9)

g. τὸ χῶμα ἀντετειχίζετο (8)

τῷ χῶματι τὸ ἀντιτείχισμα

ἐγίγνετο (77.1)

h. ξύλα ἐκ τῶν πέριξ

ἐσφοδόμουν ἐς αὐτὸ πλίνθους ἐκ

οἰκοδομημάτων συνεφόρου (7)

τῶν ἐγγὺς οἰκιῶν καθαιροῦντες (75.4)

Of these eight points of imitation, in *a*, *c*, and *d* there is correspondence both of word and content in the decision to build the mound, in the observation of enemy activity in the building of the mound, and in the extraction of the earth. These by themselves do not prove imitation of material, since their validity or otherwise depends upon the authenticity of other elements in the siege. In *b* there is correspondence of action but not of words. In *e* there is correspondence of words and object, but the object itself is used differently: in Dexippus the beams are rolled on to the scaling ladders, in Thucydides they are dropped on to the heads of the rams. In *f* there is some verbal correspondence, but in Dexippus the stratagem is used by the defenders to destroy the retaining walls of the mound, whereas in Thucydides the attackers have filled the ditch with wood which they fire in an attempt to burn out the defenders (this part of the account was not summarized at the beginning of the essay). In *g* there is verbal correspondence, but in Dexippus the words refer to the mound of the attackers, in Thucydides to the counter wall of the defenders. In *h* there is slight verbal reminiscence and some correspondence of action, but in Dexippus the attackers are obtaining wood for the retaining walls of the mound, whereas in Thucydides the defenders are obtaining bricks for the wall to counter the mound.

That there are verbal reminiscences is clear,⁶ and one would expect such in Dexippus who, like Priscus, in general eschewed current technical jargon, preferring the classical term even if somewhat imprecise. From the summaries of the two passages it is clear that, although the courses of the two sieges differ, there are some points at which the action is similar and there is some correspondence of activity and objects used during them. Nevertheless in almost every case of verbal parallelism the situations described

⁶With the exception of fr. 27 most of the parallels adduced by Stein come from speeches and letters (esp. frs. 6, 26, 33).

differ. Where the actions are similar, as in the use of the mound and of fire and flammable materials, these are commonplace both in the age of Thucydides and of Dexippus; and details found in Dexippus' fragment also occur in writers other than Thucydides. For instance the burning of the mound is advised in a late Byzantine military manual;⁷ and an earlier Byzantine work recommends the use of ξύλα ἐγκάρσια.⁸ Indeed, if beams were to be dropped on the enemy, how else could they be effective unless they were transverse? Many of the other measures taken are equally commonplace.

It is unreasonable to impugn Dexippus' account solely on the grounds of verbal imitation of Thucydides, and, unless his material can be shown to be unhistorical on other grounds, it should be accepted that he has merely used Thucydidean expressions to communicate authentic material. In general the techniques described as in use at the siege of Philippopolis are such as Vitruvius refuses to detail on the grounds that they are simple and common knowledge;⁹ and E. W. Marsden is probably correct to regard them as barbarian attempts (not wholly successful) to imitate the Romans.¹⁰ By this criterion the only technique which might be suspected is the use of siege towers with drawbridges. But even in this case there is no reason why the invaders should not have had access to Roman expertise through deserters, captives, and so on.¹¹

Priscus fr. 1b. The subject of the fragment is a siege of Naissus in A.D. 441 by the Σκύθαι, who are the Huns of Attila and his brother Bleda. A summary is as follows:

The attackers bridge the river so that a large number of men can cross easily.

The attackers mount wooden beams on wheels, and men, standing on these beams and protected by screens of willow branches covered with rawhide and leather, shoot arrows at the defenders. The men working the other end of the beams push the wheels with their feet to manoeuvre the machine.¹²

⁷Cecaumenos, *Strategicon* 79 Wassiliewsky/Jerenstedt.

⁸*Sylloge Tacticorum*, ed. A. Dain (Paris 1938) 53.7. In general on the use of heavy beams to drop on the enemy see *Anon. de obsidione toleranda* 68 H. van den Berg, and Anonymus Byzantius 13.16 Köchly/Rüstow (= *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller* 2.2 [Leipzig 1855]).

⁹Vitr. *De Arch.* 10.16.1: *scalarum autem et carchesiorum et eorum quorum rationes sunt imbecilliores . . . haec etiam milites per se solent facere.*

¹⁰E. W. Marsden, *Greek and Roman Artillery* (Oxford 1969) 184 n. 4.

¹¹I cannot comment on the use of rotting bodies to raise the level of the mound, since I do not know whether corpses have the properties there ascribed to them.

¹²Priscus' description of this machine is as follows: δοκοὺς, ἐπὶ τροχῶν κειμέναι διὰ τὸ πρόχειρον αὐτῶν εἶναι τὴν προσαγωγὴν, αἷς ἐφεστῶτες ἄνθρωποι ἐς τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπάλλεων ἀμυνομένους ἐτόξευον, τῶν ἐξ ἐκατέρας κεφαλῆς ἐστῶτων ἀνδρῶν

The defenders are driven from the battlements by the missiles.

The attackers bring up the rams. Description of a ram: a metal headed beam is suspended by loose chains from timbers inclined towards each other and protected by screens like those already described. The ram is swung back by small ropes attached to the rear.

The defenders drop huge stones on the machines, crushing some and those working them. But there are too many.

The attackers bring up scaling ladders.

Parts of the wall are toppled by the rams; elsewhere the defenders are overcome by the siege engines; elsewhere the wall is scaled by the ladders.

The Thucydidean imitations listed by Thompson are:

Priscus fr. 1b

Thucydides 2

- a.* λύγοις διαπλόκοις ἐκαλύπτοντο
 ἔρρεις καὶ διφθέρας ἐχούσαις
b. ὥστε καὶ τοῖς . . . ἀκίνδυνον
 εἶναι τὴν μάχην . . . κώλυμα
 τῶν τε ἄλλων βελῶν καὶ ὅσα
 ἐπὶ σφᾶς πυρφόρα ἐκπέμποιτο
c. καὶ μηχανὰς τῷ περιβόλῳ
 προσῆγον
d. δοκὸς ἐκ ξύλων πρὸς
 ἄλληλα νευόντων χαλαραῖς
 ἀπηωρημένῃ ἀλύσεσιν¹³
e. προκαλύμματα δὲ εἴρηται
 τρόπον ἔχουσα ἀσφαλείας
 ἕνεκα τῶν ἐργαζομένων
f. τῇ ῥύμῃ πᾶν τὸ ἐμπίπτει
 τοῦ τείχους ἀφανίζεσθαι
 μέρος¹⁴

- προκαλύμματα εἶχε δέρσει
 καὶ διφθέρας (75.5)
 ὥστε τοὺς ἐργαζομένους καὶ
 τὰ ξύλα μήτε πυρφόροις
 οἰστοῖς βάλλεσθαι ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ
 τε εἶναι (*ibid.*)
 καὶ μηχανὰς προσῆγον . . .
 τῇ πόλει (76.4)
 δοκοὺς μεγάλας ἀρτήσαντες
 ἀλύσει μακραῖς σιδηραῖς
 ἀπὸ τῆς τομῆς (*ibid.*)
 ἀφίεσαν τὴν δοκὸν χαλαραῖς
 ταῖς ἀλύσεσι (*ibid.*)
 προκαλύμματα . . . τοὺς ἐργαζομένους
 . . . ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ τε εἶναι (75.5)
 ἡ δὲ ῥύμη ἐμπίπτουσα
 ἀπεκαύλιζε τὸ προὔχον τῆς
 ἐμβολῆς (76.4)

ὠθοῦντων τοῖς ποσὶ τοὺς τροχοὺς καὶ προσαγόντων ὅπῃ καὶ δέοι τὰς μηχανάς. It seems to have been some sort of crane—a beam pivoted upon another upright beam, like the arm of a balance. The upright beam was mounted upon a wheeled platform. Those who were to shoot at the enemy were positioned on the forward part of the horizontal beam, the rear part of which, called by Priscus *ἐκατέρας κεραίας*, was raised and lowered by other men, who also propelled the wheels of the machine with their feet.

¹³δοκοί are also used in Priscus' cranes (above, n. 12). The word *κεραία*, which he also uses, is found at Thuc. 2.76.4.

¹⁴Thompson, "Notes on Priscus Panites," *CQ* 41 (1947) 62, notes that the use of the word *ἐμπίπτει* is influenced by Thucydides' use of *προὔχον*.

There is also imitation of Dexippus fr. 27.6:

Priscus

οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τειχῶν
ἀμυνόμενοι ἀμαξιαίους λίθους
. . . ἤνικα τῷ περιβόλῳ προσ-
αχθείη τὰ ὄργανα, ἐνέβαλλον,
καὶ τινα μὲν αὐτοῖς
ἀνδράσι συνέτριψαν¹⁵

Dexippus

τὰ μὲν τινα τῶν μηχανῶν
λίθοις μεγάλοις ἀμαξιαίοις
συναράσσοντες αὐτοῖς
ἀνδράσι

To take the Dexippian imitation first. There is clearly parallelism here, both of language and content. Nevertheless that is no indication that Priscus' material is unhistorical. The dropping of heavy rocks on the machines of the attackers was an obvious defence and a regular practice in ancient siege warfare;¹⁶ and ἀμαξιαῖος is regularly used of such huge stones.¹⁷ The practice itself and the similarity of language which is used to describe it are well illustrated by a passage of Aeneas Tacticus, which also shows some parallels with Priscus: καὶ παρασκευάζεσθαι δὲ ὅπως λίθος ἀμαξοπληθὴς ἀφιέμενος ἐμπύπτῃ καὶ συντρίβῃ τὸ τρύπανον (32.5).¹⁸

In all the Thucydidean examples there is linguistic imitation. But a glance at the summary will show that the actions described are on the whole very different; and even the points of verbal contact concern differing circumstances. Thus in *a*, *b*, and *c* Thucydides uses the skins and hides to protect the defenders working on the wall opposite the mound and the wall itself from fire arrows, while Priscus uses them to ward off fire arrows aimed at firstly the attackers on the cranes and then those working on the rams. In *d* Thucydides hangs beams by iron chains from poles projecting from the city wall and drops them on the heads of the rams when the defenders release the chains, which run slack (χαλαραῖς); whereas Priscus uses the beams as part of the cranes and then as the ram, which is suspended by loose chains (*i.e.* swinging as opposed to bound tight).¹⁹ In *f* Thucydides is describing the force of the beams dropped by the defenders which break the heads of the rams, while Priscus is describing

¹⁵Thompson, *CQ* 39 (1945) 93 n. 4, also notes individual words and meanings of words borrowed from Dexippus fr. 29 (a siege of Side).

¹⁶Amm. Marc. 24.4.16; *Sylloge Tacticorum* 53.6–7; *Anon. de obsidione toleranda* 68.150; Anonymus Byzantius 13.4, 27; Maurice 10.3 (p. 245 Scheffer); etc.

¹⁷E.g., Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.27; Dem. in *Calliclem* 20; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.67.4; Diod. Sic. 17.68.2.

¹⁸The editor of Aeneas Tacticus in the Loeb volume notes (175 n. 2) the influence of the Thucydidean account of the siege of Plataea in the chapter on counter-devices during a siege.

¹⁹Thus, although the word χαλαρός is "Thucydidean," its precise meaning here is not the characteristically Thucydidean one.

the force of the ram which is smashing the wall of the city. Only in *c*, describing the moving up of the machines, is there clear parallelism of situation.

Thus beyond linguistic imitation the elements in common are the use of skins and hides to protect the workers against fire arrows; the notion of safety; the bringing up of the machines to the wall; the use of beams; suspension by chains; and the destructive force of an object. If one accepts that a siege, conducted by the Huns, could have taken place in the fifth century A.D., then these elements would reasonably be expected to occur.

However Thompson does not accept that such a siege could have taken place. He offers four arguments against it: 1). The metal working ability of the Huns was extremely poor and they would have been unable to construct a machine such as *δοκὸς χαλαραῖς ἀπηωρημένη ἀλύσειν*. 2). One should not assume that the Huns used Roman renegades to build siege weapons or knew how to operate those captured in Roman fortresses since Priscus does not say so. 3). There is no indication that at this period the Huns showed any ability at siege warfare and it is unlikely that the Hunnic archers, who rarely dismounted, would on this occasion have left their horses for a totally alien form of warfare. 4). It is highly unlikely that the flying columns of horsemen would have encumbered themselves with a heavy siege train.

These arguments are not convincing: 1). Even if their own metal working ability was not high, the Huns could certainly appreciate the utility of metal, and during the fifth century, when they ruled a considerable empire, they held sway over people such as the Ostrogoths who could work metal.²⁰ 2). The argument *ex silentio* is very dangerous here since Priscus' fragment only describes one incident in a campaign and is itself under 350 words long. The Huns certainly appreciated some Roman skills and made use of them, as for example in the bath which was made for the Hunnic noble Onegesius by a craftsman who was captured at Sirmium (Priscus fr. 8 = Dindorf 1.303–304, Mueller 4.85). Even if the idea of Roman renegades helping the Huns is dismissed, skilled captives must have been taken at Viminacium, Singidunum, Sirmium, and perhaps at other forts and towns which were overrun. Moreover, at this time Attila controlled former Roman territory in Pannonia.²¹ Machinery must have been

²⁰A secondary point here (which does not however affect Thompson's general argument) is that Priscus might not be using the words quoted to describe the rams which the Huns actually used. It seems to me that the specific use of rams by the Huns has led Priscus to insert a general digression on a ram, not necessarily that used by the Huns (cf. a description of another type of ram in Procop. *Goth.* 1.21.6–12, which also utilizes words and phrases from Thuc. 2.75–76). Priscus is obscure; contrast the superior procedure of Ammianus Marcellinus (23.4), who, in the Polybian manner, discusses a number of types of siege weapons together in a separate digression.

²¹A. Alföldi, *Der Untergang der Römerherrschaft in Pannonien* 2 (Berlin/Leipzig 1926) 90; E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford 1948) 64.

taken in the captured towns, and it is hard to believe that even the Huns could not have learned to use some of this. The weapons used at Naissus, cranes, rams, and scaling ladders, were amongst the simplest available, a fact which lends credibility to Priscus' account. 3). If this point is accepted it follows that all the fortified places taken by the Huns (including the great towns of Viminacium, Singidunum, Sirmium, Ratiaria, Serdica, and later Aquileia²²) fell either without a regular siege, presumably by treachery such as at Margus,²³ which is unlikely, or as a result of the defeat of the defenders outside the walls, which Thompson insists happened at Naissus, despite the intimation of Priscus that it did not.²⁴ The Roman towns of the period were not unprepared for sieges and it seems strange that the defenders should all commit themselves outside their walls against an enemy whom they feared, but whom they knew to be inept at siege operations. Thus it would seem likely either that the Huns were not so inept or that some of their allies or subjects had siege-skill. 4). Would the Huns have undertaken a long campaign with only flying-columns? Surely these were only detachments from the main army which were bent on harassment and plunder. There is literary evidence that the Huns did make use of wagon trains. The best example is at Jordanes *Get.* 40.210, where Attila, who had invaded Gaul in order to attack Orleans and had been defeated on the Catalaunian Plain, withdrew to his circle of wagons. Obviously this invasion was encumbered with wagons.²⁵

Although his conclusions are not satisfactory, Thompson's approach to the problem is clearly the correct one. Verbal imitation by itself is no proof of historical unreliability, and the authenticity, or at least the historical probability, of the material must be independently tested where this is possible. Nevertheless that is not to say that the verbal imitation can cause no difficulties whatsoever. For example the clumsy use of a borrowed word or phrase might create unintentional distortion. I have not found a good example of this in either Dexippus or Priscus, but an excellent instance occurs in Procopius, another atticizing historian who imitates Thucydides. In *Vand.* 1.11.15–16 the writer, describing the Byzantine invasion of Africa in A.D. 533, says that the Byzantines had, as

²²Capture of Viminacium—Priscus fr. 2; of Singidunum—Marcellin. *Chron.* s.a.441; Sirmium—Alföldi, *op. cit.* (above, n. 21) 96; Ratiaria—Priscus fr. 8 (Dindorf 1.318, Mueller 4.93); Serdica—Priscus fr. 8 (Dindorf 1.290, Mueller 4.78); Aquileia—Procop. *Vand.* 1.4.30–35, Marcellin. *Chron.* s.a. 452.

²³Priscus fr. 2. Contrast the remarks of Thompson, *op. cit.* (above, n. 21) 54 ff.

²⁴Priscus fr. 1b: τῶν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄσπεως οὐ θαρρούντων ἐπεξίεναι πρὸς μάχην—of their failure to prevent the Huns from bridging the river outside their town. See Thompson, *op. cit.* (above, n. 21) 83. Cf. also Priscus fr. 5, where the men of Aesemus fight the Huns outside their town, an action which Priscus treats as exceptional.

²⁵Cf. Amm. Marc. 31.2.10; 22.8.42 (Scythians); Priscus fr. 8 (Dindorf 1.300, Mueller 4.83), where the Huns are said to carry rafts on wagons in order to cross waterlogged areas.

well as troop ships, 92 warships (called *πλοῖα μακρά* or *δρόμωνες*) which each had one bank of oars and a roof to protect the rowers. Procopius continues: *ἐν τούτοις δὴ Βυζάντιοι δισχιλίοι ἔπλεον, αὐτερέται πάντες· περίνεως γὰρ ἦν ἐν τούτοις οὐδεὶς*. Since no other crew are mentioned, it would seem that 2,000 men were the full complement of the ships, which would give a figure of just over 21 men per ship, rather too small.²⁶ The source of the confusion can be traced to Thuc. 1.10.4 where, speaking of the crews of Philoctetes' ships which sailed to Troy, the writer says: *αὐτερέται δὲ ὅτι ἦσαν καὶ μάχιμοι πάντες . . . περίνεως δὲ οὐκ εἰκὸς πολλοὺς ξυμπλεῖν ἔξω τῶν βασιλέων*. What Procopius presumably intended to say was that in addition to the rowers the dromons carried a total of 2,000 Byzantine fighting men, who could also row if and when necessary. But the desire to introduce a Thucydidean *flosculus* has obscured his meaning.²⁷

However, when this has been said, the fact remains that the grounds for impugning the authenticity of the sieges discussed are weak or non-existent. If it is accepted that the accounts are fabrications, judgement upon the general reliability of their authors is seriously affected. Priscus was primarily a diplomat and, although he had been assistant to a general, he might not have had much contact with military life.²⁸ But he was a travelled and experienced man who had been amongst the Huns, and it would be strange if he were totally ignorant of their alleged ineptitude at siege-warfare. Dexippus had certainly experienced warfare against the barbarians and siege-warfare in particular,²⁹ and he must have had a fairly clear idea of the capabilities of the enemy. Thus neither was in the position of an armchair historian, and, if it is accepted that they did include sieges which were not authentic, it must also be accepted that they consciously lied.³⁰

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²⁶Leo, *Tactica*, Const. 19.8-9 (= PG 107, col. 992-993), mentions large and medium *dromones* which carried 200 and 100 men respectively (or more or less according to circumstances) and which had two banks of oars. On the larger ships 50 men manned the lower deck and 150 the upper. The latter were all fighting men. Leo (*op. cit.* 10) also mentions smaller *dromones* which had one bank of oars, but he does not give the complement. L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Wandalen* (Leipzig 1901) 30 n. 2, suggests that Procopius' *dromones*, which had one bank of oars, carried 50 men.

²⁷Another danger for the modern translator is that he might wrongly translate a "Thucydidean" word as though it still possessed its characteristically Thucydidean meaning. For an example see above, n. 4.

²⁸On Priscus see W. Ensslin, "Priscus" 35, *RE* 23.1 (1957) col. 9.

²⁹On Dexippus see F. Millar, "P. Herennius Dexippus: the Greek World and the Third Century Invasions," *JRS* 59 (1969) 26 ff.

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