

## THE STRATEGY OF THE BATTLE OF CYZICUS

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There are three major accounts of the battle of Cyzicus: Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.1.11-18, Diodorus Siculus 13.49-51, and Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades* 28.<sup>1</sup> In general most historians reject the accounts of Diodorus and Plutarch in favor of Xenophon.<sup>2</sup> This rejection is based on the belief in the general reliability of Xenophon and the unreliability of Diodorus, rather than on the actual merits of the accounts. However, Jean Hatzfeld chooses to follow Diodorus' account and remarks that it contains many interesting and unique details and is in general a very detailed account of the battle, while Xenophon's seems to be sketchy and incomplete.<sup>3</sup>

According to Xenophon (1.1.11-18), when the Athenians at Sestus learned that Mindarus was planning to sail against them with 60 ships, they withdrew at night to Cardia. Alcibiades joined them there, coming from Clazomenae with five triremes and a dispatch boat. Learning that the Peloponnesian fleet had sailed from Abydos to Cyzicus, he ordered the ships to sail to Sestus while he traveled there overland.

<sup>1</sup> Other derivative and inferior accounts: Polyæn. *Strat.* 1.40.9; Ael. Arist. 1.264; Justin 5.4.1-3. The battle took place in spring 410 B.C. W. S. Ferguson, *CAH* 5.485, places the battle in April by accepting Wilhelm's attribution of IG 1<sup>2</sup> 105 (Tod 91) to 411/10 B.C. B. D. Meritt, *Athenian Financial Documents* (Ann Arbor 1932) 94-115, places this inscription in 407/6 B.C. However, he still follows Ferguson and places the battle in late April 410. It appears that, although the battle should not be as narrowly dated as Ferguson proposes, we can fairly confidently place it about March-April 410 B.C. For the importance and place of Cyzicus in the Hellespontine campaign see A. Andrewes, "The Generals in the Hellespont, 410-407 B.C.," *JHS* 73 (1953) 2-9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. Busolt, *Griech. Gesch.* 3.2.1527, who calls Diodorus' account "ein wertloses Phantasiestück des Ephoros." K. J. Beloch, *Griech. Gesch.* 2<sup>2</sup>.1 (1914) 394, W. S. Ferguson, *CAH* 5.343, G. Glotz and R. Cohen, *Histoire Grecque* 2 (1948) 735, N. G. L. Hammond, *History of Greece* (1967) 411, note 1, all prefer Xenophon's account.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Hatzfeld, *Alcibiade* (Paris 1951) 271.

After they arrived, Alcibiades was ready to put out to sea for battle, when Theramenes sailed in from Macedonia with 20 more ships and Thrasybulus from Thasos with 20. Alcibiades and his ships sailed to Parium, and Theramenes and Thrasybulus soon followed; when the ships all came together at Parium, 86 in number, they set sail for Proconnesus. When they had come to Proconnesus, Alcibiades seized all the vessels in the harbor, even the small ones, in order that no one should report the size of the fleet to the enemy. He made a proclamation that any one caught sailing across to the other side of the strait would be put to death. In the midst of a heavy rain they set out for Cyzicus. When he was near Cyzicus the weather cleared and he sighted the 60 ships under Mindarus exercising at some distance from the harbor and already cut off from the harbor by his ships. But when the Peloponnesians saw that the Athenian ships were far more numerous than before, they fled to shore, moored their ships together, and engaged in battle. Alcibiades with 20 ships sailed around the fleets and landed on the shore. Mindarus saw this and also landed and fell fighting on the shore; those with him fled. The Athenians took away with them to Proconnesus all the Peloponnesian ships, except those of the Syracusans, which were burned by their own crews.

Diodorus' account of the engagement contradicts Xenophon's, though there are similarities in the preliminary descriptions. In Diodorus 13.49, when the Athenian generals in Sestus learned that Mindarus was assembling a great fleet, they were alarmed and retreated to Cardia; from there they sent triremes to Thrasybulus and Theramenes in Thrace, urging them to come with their fleets as soon as possible; and they summoned Alcibiades from Lesbos with what ships he had. Meanwhile Mindarus had sailed to Cyzicus and laid siege to the city and with the help of Pharnabazus took it by storm. The Athenian generals put to sea. They arrived at Eleus first and then made sure to sail past Abydos at night, so that the enemy would not learn the number of their fleet. When they arrived at Proconnesus they disembarked the soldiers and gave orders to Chaeareas to lead the army against the city. The generals divided the ships into three groups, with Alcibiades commanding one, Theramenes another, and Thrasybulus the third. Alcibiades with his own squadron advanced far ahead of the others to draw out the Lacedaemonians to battle, while Theramenes

and Thrasybulus were to encircle the enemy. Mindarus, seeing only the 20 ships of Alcibiades approaching and being ignorant of the others, set sail with 80 ships to attack. Alcibiades pretended to flee and the Peloponnesians followed. When Alcibiades had drawn them a considerable distance from the city, Theramenes and Thrasybulus closed their retreat. Mindarus was forced to land near Cleri, where Pharnabazus had his army; Mindarus was killed. Diodorus continues with further details of the fighting.

Plutarch's account of the preliminary to the battle is very similar to Xenophon and probably taken directly from him. However, in 28.4-9, for the description of the actual battle, Plutarch draws on another source, probably Ephorus, who was also Diodorus' source.<sup>4</sup> His account also is irreconcilable with Xenophon's, though it follows it in some details. He records that there was a storm which helped keep secret the plan; the Athenians had even given up the idea of fighting on that day, when Alcibiades ordered them on board and put out to sea. After a while the gloom lifted and the Peloponnesian ships were sighted off Cyzicus. Alcibiades was afraid that if the enemy caught sight of the full strength of the fleet, they might run for shore; and so with only 40 ships, he sailed into view of the enemy and challenged them to battle. Plutarch then relates that the Peloponnesians were completely deceived, and scorning what they thought was the small number of their enemy, went out to meet them. When they engaged, the rest of the fleet bore down on them, and the Spartans turned and fled. Then Alcibiades with 20 ships broke through their line and put in to shore, where he disembarked and engaged the enemy. Mindarus was slain, but Pharnabazus escaped. The Athenians had possession of a great many of the dead, arms, and enemy ships.

The description of the actual engagement is the basic and irreconcilable difference between Xenophon's account on the one hand, and Diodorus' and Plutarch's on the other. Diodorus and Plutarch describe a stratagem whereby Alcibiades lured out Mindarus, while the other Athenian ships surrounded Mindarus, and cut off his retreat. Xenophon is aware that Mindarus was cut off from the harbor; but

<sup>4</sup> See C. A. Volquardsen, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen der griechischen und sicilischen Geschichten bei Diodor, Buch XI bis XVI* (Kiel 1868). G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus* (Cambridge 1935).

he attributes this to chance, relating that Mindarus happened to be exercising some distance from the harbor, and Alcibiades found himself between Mindarus and the harbor when the weather cleared.

Xenophon's account of the preliminaries is very precise. However, these preliminaries are not consistent with his strategy of the battle. Theramenes and Thrasybulus each came with reinforcements of 20 ships (*Hell.* 1.1.12) which, together with Alcibiades' own six, brought the total number of ships to 86. Mindarus must have been aware of the approximate size of the original fleet, since Xenophon says that during the battle the Spartans saw that the enemy fleet was much more numerous than before (1.1.17). The Athenian fleet withdrew from Sestus to Cardia (1.1.11) because they were outnumbered. However, when Alcibiades joined them he took command and, despite the numbers, decided to fight without waiting for reinforcements. Alcibiades was on the point of setting out with 46 ships to do battle, when Thrasybulus and Theramenes arrived with 20 ships each (1.1.12). Thus, as far as Mindarus knew at this point, the Athenians had only 40 ships, since he did not know of the arrival of Alcibiades, Theramenes, or Thrasybulus. Alcibiades' next move was to keep this information secret, and this was his motive for restraining the boats and small craft at Proconnesus. This is clear, since Xenophon (1.1.15) says that Alcibiades did this so that no one should report the size of the fleet.

Thus far Xenophon's account seems very plausible. However, what follows is not. Parts of Xenophon's account are very improbable. It is unlikely that Mindarus would hold maneuvers some distance from the harbor during a heavy rain. If the weather worsened we would expect that Mindarus would return his fleet to the harbor. Also it seems incredibly fortuitous that Alcibiades' fleet should find itself between Mindarus and the harbor when the storm lifted. Alcibiades' embarking in the rain is not in Diodorus' account. The particular weather involved is integral to each account. In Xenophon, in order for Alcibiades to cut off Mindarus from the harbor by accident, there must be the cover of bad weather. In Diodorus, the stratagem depends on Mindarus' seeing the apparent size of the fleet, for which the weather must be reasonably clear. Alcibiades' embarking without some definite plan, such as the strategy in Diodorus and Plutarch, makes no sense in the light of the naval warfare of the time. Outnumbering

the ships of Mindarus would be of little use except in a battle on the open sea. If Mindarus were in the harbor, the increased manpower of Alcibiades' fleet would have been of no use because of the confined space, and thus to obtain his advantage Alcibiades would have had to induce him to come out of the harbor to fight. This is shown by an incident after the battle at Notium in 407/6 B.C.<sup>5</sup> Lysander defeated Alcibiades' fleet under Antiochus. On his return Alcibiades discovered what had happened, and tried without success to induce Lysander's fleet to sail out from the harbor at Ephesus (Plut. *Alc.* 35; Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.15). Xenophon says that Lysander did not sail out against him because his fleet was considerably inferior in numbers. Thus we see that, at Ephesus, Alcibiades was very anxious for battle and outnumbered the enemy, yet he would not sail into the harbor. At Cyzicus, if Alcibiades embarked in the rain, he could surely expect the fleet of Mindarus to be in the harbor.

Alcibiades must have had some plan to induce Mindarus to sail out to fight. Mindarus would not attack 86 ships, but when he saw only 40 ships (Plutarch's figure<sup>6</sup>), the number of ships he knew to be in the area, with his own 60 ships he sailed out of the protective harbor and attacked. It was not unreasonable for Mindarus to believe that the Athenians would attack with only 40 ships, since, according to Xenophon, Alcibiades was ready to do this before the reinforcements of Thrasybulus and Theramenes arrived. Thus Alcibiades with these 40 ships lured Mindarus from the harbor. Theramenes and Thrasybulus with their 20 ships each, and six others of Alcibiades, encircled Mindarus and the Spartan fleet, and were victorious.

Xenophon's errors probably came from having good knowledge of the battle preliminaries, but a sketchy account of the battle itself,

<sup>5</sup> The strategy at Notium used by Antiochus appears similar to the strategy at Cyzicus. See D. Lotze, *Lysander und der Peloponnesische Krieg*, in *Abhandl. d. Sächs. Akad. d. Wiss. zu Leipzig*, Phil.-Hist. Kl., 57.1 (Berlin 1964) 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> Diodorus gives a figure of 20 ships with which Alcibiades lured out the Spartans. This is the only apparently incorrect information in Diodorus' account. Diodorus is notoriously careless about his figures. It is unlikely that Mindarus would be deceived by so small a fleet. Diodorus has apparently confused this 20 ships with the figure of 20 ships with which Alcibiades circled and landed on the shore after the battle had begun, which was probably in his source. Diodorus' source, Ephorus, probably had the figure of 40, which is confirmed if Plutarch's source was also Ephorus. Since Diodorus is more careless with figures than facts, this error does not destroy the validity of his account in other respects.

in which he knew only that Mindarus was cut off from the shore. Maneuvers and a convenient covering storm were probably devised to explain this, creating the inconsistency that Mindarus was holding maneuvers in a storm.

There is another apparent divergence between Xenophon and Diodorus. After the battle had begun, in Xenophon (1.1.17) the Peloponnesians fled to shore where they moored their ships together. Alcibiades with 20 ships sailed round the fleet and landed on the shore. Seeing this, Mindarus landed on shore and fell fighting. In Diodorus (13.50.4) the Peloponnesians were cut off from the city. Mindarus was forced to seek safety on land near Cleri. Alcibiades pursued him, sank some ships, and tried to drag other ships from the land with grappling hooks. In Xenophon, because Alcibiades flanked the Peloponnesian ships and landed, Mindarus also landed; but in Diodorus, Mindarus landed first at Cleri and then Alcibiades approached by sea. Xenophon's and Diodorus' accounts can be reconciled. From Xenophon it is clear that there were two stages: first the Peloponnesians retreated to the shoreline and joined their ships together, and second, Alcibiades landed on shore; then Mindarus, coming from the moored ships, also landed. Diodorus' account contains all these elements, but is confused. The ships were moored together by the land (Diod. 13.50.5). Alcibiades attacked these ships from the sea with grappling hooks. Although Diodorus does not say that Alcibiades landed on the shore, it is clear from his account that Alcibiades did do so, since Diodorus (13.50.7) says that Thrasybulus put his marines on shore to help Alcibiades and his men against the land forces of Pharnabazus, and later (Diod. 13.51) Alcibiades killed Mindarus on shore.

However, Diodorus neglects Alcibiades' flanking maneuver and merely says that Alcibiades pursued Mindarus. His source probably contained Alcibiades' flanking maneuver; Diodorus says that in the first part of the engagement Alcibiades lured out the Spartans with 20 ships; he may have transferred this number of ships from the account of the flanking maneuver in his source to his own account of the first stratagem. Diodorus has made no distinction between the mooring of ships together and landing on the shore. A probable reconstruction of events is: the Peloponnesians moored their ships near the land (Diod. 13.50.5, *Hell.* 1.1.17); Alcibiades made a frontal attack (Diod.

13.50.5, *Hell.* 1.1.17). Alcibiades now sailed round with 20 ships (*Hell.* 1.1.18, and perhaps Diod. 13.50.2), landed his men to attack from the landward side (*Hell.* 1.1.18), and tried to dislodge and separate the ships with grappling hooks (Diod. 13.50.5, 51.1). Seeing the maneuver, Mindarus, who was with his ships that were moored together, also landed his troops (*Hell.* 1.1.18). Pharnabazus moved up some of his infantry to help Mindarus (Diod. 13.50.6). Thrasybulus now landed his marines to aid Alcibiades (Diod. 13.50.7). Diodorus (13.51) continues with very full details of the land fighting and the death of Mindarus, while the other accounts only say that Mindarus was killed. Xenophon's account is confused through compression and thus he does not clearly distinguish between the ships' mooring by the shore, and Mindarus' leaving his moored ships and landing. Diodorus omits Alcibiades' flanking movement, which was probably in his source, and also does not make the distinction between moored ships and men landing on the shore.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons there is a difference in the two accounts in the order and causation of Mindarus' and Alcibiades' landing.

Diodorus' account is much fuller and more circumstantial than Xenophon's. His account of the preliminaries is better motivated than Xenophon's. For example, Diodorus (13.49.3) explains that Theramenes and Thrasybulus and Alcibiades all arrived at Sestos because the Athenian commanders in the Chersonesus sent for them, and that Mindarus sailed from Abydos to Cyzicus in order to besiege it (Diod. 13.49.4), while Xenophon remains vague or silent. Diodorus describes a well co-ordinated land and sea attack. There is much more detail in all phases of the battle and his account seems generally preferable to Xenophon's, which is sketchy. Diodorus' account for this period derives from Ephorus, who in turn generally draws on the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* for much of his military narrative.<sup>8</sup> The *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* is generally accepted as having unusually accurate descriptions of battles. The coherence of Diodorus' account of the

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch returns to Xenophon as his source for this portion of his account. He uses the word *διεκπλεύσας* for the maneuver, which has the same meaning as Xenophon's *περιπλεύσας* (cf. Hdt. 6.15; Thuc. 1. 50, 7.36; Sosyl. p. 31B).

<sup>8</sup> See G. L. Barber (above, note 4) 55 ff.; also S. Accame, *Ricerche intorno alla guerra corinzia* (Naples 1951); I. A. F. Bruce, *An Historical Commentary on the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* (Cambridge 1967) 21-22.

battle particularly suggests that the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* was the ultimate source of his account. In Diodorus' account Theramenes has more prominence in the battle than in Xenophon's. The idealization of Theramenes in Diodorus may be attributed to Ephorus, or more likely to the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*. Throughout Ephorus (Diodorus), Theramenes plays a more important role in military battles than in other sources. Since many of Ephorus' battle descriptions derive from the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, it is probable that the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* author originated the prominence of Theramenes.<sup>9</sup> Such prominence is therefore another sign that the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* was the source for the battle.

The contrast between the very full and consistent account of the preliminaries to the battle given by Xenophon and the sketchy and incomplete account of the battle itself throws doubt on the accuracy of the latter. The preliminaries are probably as he recounts them. In Diodorus' account the description of the battle is both detailed and consistent; it presents a likely stratagem and a reasonable response. This, together with the probable origin of Diodorus' account in the normally accurate *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, makes his account, on this occasion, preferable to that of Xenophon.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A clear example is perhaps in the trial of the generals after Arginusae (Diod. 13.101-2). Diodorus presents a sober factual narrative, more intelligible than Xenophon's. Diodorus says how fatuous it was for the generals to antagonize Theramenes and Thrasybulus, since they would have been their most important allies. This entire account has the ring of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*; whereas the following chapter contains the last speech of Diomedon, a moralizing speech which probably comes from Ephorus.

<sup>10</sup> I wish to thank the Association's referee for several helpful suggestions embodied in this paper.