THE PRICE OF FAILURE:
CONCEPTIONS OF NICIAS’ CULPABILITY IN ATHENS’ SICILIAN DISASTER

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ABSTRACT

Modern scholarship has long identified Nicias’ failures as general as the principal cause of Athens’ catastrophic defeat in Sicily. Surviving data does not suggest, however, that Nicias, who died in Sicily, suffered any posthumous condemnation for the defeat, nor does any extant source explicitly blame Nicias for the defeat. That Nicias’ contemporaries seem not to have blamed him, contrary to the assumptions of traditional scholarship, demands an explanation. A careful examination of the trials of generals at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries suggests that generals were tried not for defeat or failure, as is usually asserted, but rather for treason, that is for apparent efforts to undercut or disobey the assembly. Furthermore, no good examples exist of a general clearly punished or blamed for defeat beyond those trials. A further evaluation of classical Greek sources demonstrates a set of criteria according to which fifth and fourth century Greeks in fact evaluated their generals. These criteria appear to enforce a particular set of behaviors as well as keep the generals under rigid control. Given the high social status of most of these generals, the interaction between assembly and general thus defined provides insight into the interaction between assemblies and aristocrats in classical Greek democracies.
For my Family
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INTRODUCTION

THE PRICE OF FAILURE:
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Had Nicias Niceratou died in 415 BCE, he would have left to history a legacy as one of the greatest statesmen, politicians, and generals produced by classical Athens. He had already gained a reputation as the most effective general in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, and he had assumed a position of tremendous importance within the polis, emerging as one of the foremost of Pericles’ political heirs. His greatest accomplishment had been the peace with Sparta that bears his name. Nicias seems to have viewed that peace as his crowning achievement, and Plutarch observes that his name was in the mouths of his grateful people. Had Nicias’ career ended at that point, he might have taken his place in history as one of the great men of antiquity, his accomplishments celebrated by historians along with those of Themistocles and Pericles.

Nicias’ career, of course, did not end at that point. He was elected against his will to help lead Athens’ expedition to Sicily in 415. In Sicily he met with a series of reverses and ultimately lost his life amidst the greatest single disaster suffered by Athens in the Peloponnesian war to that point. The price paid by Nicias for this failure, in addition to

\(^1\) Plut. Nic. 9.6-7.
his life, was the destruction of his historical reputation. Pausanias, in his descriptive account of Athens, discusses an honorary stele listing those Athenians who had died in various theaters of military action, including Sicily. Pausanias says that he agrees with Philistus, who says that Nicias’ name did not appear on the stele because he had surrendered voluntarily in Sicily, and was therefore considered an unworthy soldier. Plutarch, the great biographer who helped immortalize so many figures from antiquity, condemns Nicias’ failures as a general, deplores the surrender that ended his life, and attacks the weaknesses in Nicias’ character that seem to him to have contributed to Nicias’ downfall. Modern scholars have for the most part followed Plutarch’s lead. Any assessment of Nicias’ career must necessarily conclude with a discussion of his performance as general in Sicily, and these assessments seldom reflect well on Nicias. Scholars generally agree that Nicias performed very poorly as general in Sicily and that the disaster was in fact Nicias’ fault. A.W. Gomme, Jacqueline de Romilly, Donald Kagan, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, just to name a few of the most influential scholars, all either assert or assume that the Athenian citizens of the late fifth century blamed Nicias for the Athenians’ terrible defeat in Sicily in 413.

Although Pausanias and Plutarch contribute to this conclusion the text of Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War usually supplies the most significant evidence. Thucydides’ insightful narrative includes an extended presentation of the Sicilian expedition that ultimately cost Nicias his life. Most recent scholars who have

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2 Paus. 1.29.12.  
3 Plut. Nic. generally, especially 14.4 and 16.3, and Comp. with Crass. 5.2.  
dealt with Thucydides and his account of the Sicilian expedition (with a few notable exceptions) have identified Nicias as the cause of the Athenian defeat. This identification follows from what has seemed to most commentators a natural reading of the narrative of Thucydides, particularly book seven. Nicias’ inadequacy as a general appears to emerge from both specific errors, including his poor choice of camp sites, his failure to prevent a Spartan fleet from reinforcing his Sicilian enemies, and his critical decision to wait for an eclipse rather than escape once victory lay out of reach, as well as the hesitancy and lack of initiative that characterized his overall conduct and undermined his leadership.

Thucydides’ presentation of Nicias, however, and his explicit explanations for the failure in Sicily, contradicts the picture created by such analysis. Thucydides explicitly ascribes the disaster in Sicily not to Nicias’ mistakes but rather to political divisions at Athens that deprived the expedition of necessary support. And after relating Nicias’ execution the historian states that Nicias deserved such a fate less than any other Greek of the age because he had accustomed himself entirely to the pursuit of virtue. The intense apparent disagreement between the basis of the modern arguments, the proposition that Nicias was obviously at fault for Athens’ defeat in Sicily, and the ancient sources, which seldom if ever blame Nicias, preserve a generally positive impression of the Athenian aristocrat, and repeatedly, explicitly blame other agents for what happened in Sicily demands a reassessment of the modern argument.

The conclusion that Nicias’ defeat earned condemnation in Athens follows in part from the belief that military failure deserved and received harsh treatment in Athens and that any unsuccessful military commander could look forward to a trial and probably both

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5 For references and discussion of this scholarship see below pp. 77-104. .
6 Thuc. 2.65.11.
7 Thuc. 7.86.5.
popular and legal condemnation. It is axiomatic to most students of classical Athenian society that the Athenians treated their generals very harshly, and evaluated them according to very exacting standards. Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, John Finley, and Charles Hignett, among many others, conclude that Athenian generals consistently suffered zealous and even unjust prosecution at the hands of the citizenry.  

Most scholars who have studied the trials of Athenian generals have concluded that military failure most typically motivated such trials. W. Kendrick Pritchett formulates this position most concisely, asserting that “a reasonable conclusion to draw from the available facts seems to be that any general who demonstrated incompetence in the field or suffered a major defeat was likely to be brought to trial.” Charles Fornara, in his study of the Athenian board of generals, seconds this opinion: “cashiered generals seem in most instances to have deserved it.” Nicias’ failure seems so complete and so obvious to modern commentators that the conclusion to be drawn seems equally obvious: Nicias, had he survived Sicily, would have faced trial and condemnation at Athens. If Nicias would certainly have been tried for his failure, it follows that he, although dead and beyond trial (at least probably beyond trial), must have been blamed for the disaster that, more than any other event or circumstance, caused Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War.  

Again, however, contemporary evidence provides little support for the idea that Nicias’ peers in and soon after 413 blamed or condemned the general. There are

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10 Fornara, 38.
relatively few negative comments about Nicias recorded before the time of Plutarch, especially considering the political awareness and aggressive humor of the Athenian comic poets of the late fifth century. The only significant literary source before Plutarch (and, given that it forms the bulk of Plutarch’s source material, perhaps even after Plutarch), that provides any evidence for the critical view of Nicias espoused by modern scholars is Thucydides himself, and as I will discuss in chapter two Thucydides himself very explicitly does not blame Nicias for the defeat. Without an examination of the fifth and fourth century BCE thought-world that would have guided contemporary interpretations of Nicias both as a prominent politician and as a general, we cannot resolve this tension between intuitive modern conclusions and the evidence.

We can use several approaches to reconstructing these elements of Athenian culture. First, the career of Nicias himself, and explicit Athenian evaluations of that career where they survive, can provide some insight into the way those Athenians understood military success and failure. Nicias’ career contains excellent examples of both. He was Athens’ most successful general during the period between Pericles’ death and the Sicilian Expedition itself, and then participated in probably the Athenians’ worst failure of the war at the end of his career. Contemporary evaluations do not seem to condemn Nicias, but more significantly the principles according to which Nicias’ contemporaries judged him should provide some evidence of the broader social structures that lay behind such evaluations. Nicias thus provides an ideal object for examination. When and why the Athenians thought him successful, and when and why they thought him unsuccessful, demonstrate the evaluative criteria they applied to their generals. Nicias by himself, however, and Athenian reactions to him do not establish the complete
cultural context for Thucydides’ evaluation of generals. Establishing this context requires a broader study of Athenian generalship, in order to answer the questions: how did the Athenians define failure in a general? How did they explain it? What made a successful general succeed?

This study attempts to answer these questions. Chapter one undertakes a broader examination of Athenian generals and Athenian attitudes toward those generals during the fifth and fourth centuries. First I will examine the argument, presented above, that the Athenians aggressively tried and punished unsuccessful generals. The Athenians certainly did engage in a large number of trials against generals. These trials, however, do not seem to have concerned exclusively, or even regularly, generals who lost direct military engagements. The Athenian people seem to have been much more anxious to punish generals for treason – for either failing to accomplish what the demos wanted accomplished out of apparent sloth or reluctance or overstepping the authority granted them by the demos – than for incompetence. As Westlake observed, “accusations against generals were normally the outcome of dissatisfaction when they failed to achieve what was expected of them.”

Thus, rather than evaluating the activities of their generals in a modern, cause-and-effect way and attacking those who made mistakes or generally exhibited incompetence in command, the Athenians put on trial those who had failed in some respect to do what the demos wanted. This conclusion again suggests that Athenians evaluated generals differently than do modern scholars. Then chapter one will examine the explanations offered by the fifth and fourth century sources for military successes and failures, and the reasons presumed to lay behind the reputations of successful generals of the period. It will be seen that victory and defeat, in modern minds

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the consequence of specific tactical and strategic decisions as they interact with (mostly knowable) circumstances, were understood by the classical Athenians to have proceeded from largely uncontrollable factors, in particular “chance” (*tyche*, a concept rather distant from the modern idea of randomness or luck) and divine will.

Chapter two concerns the ancient evidence concerning Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition. It is necessary to begin by answering some aspects of the modern arguments outlined above. First, an examination of Thucydides will establish both that the historian did not in fact criticize or condemn Nicias explicitly and that his occasional passages either praising Nicias or ascribing the Sicilian disaster to other agencies authentically express Thucydides’ thought. Second, a survey of the other contemporary and near-contemporary evidence will demonstrate that fifth and fourth century Athenian society joined Thucydides in thinking well of Nicias even after his death and blaming other agencies for the defeat in Sicily. Several sources – the fifth-century comic poets and orators, Plato, and Xenophon in particular – discuss or mention Nicias; some display negative evaluations of Nicias, but even those do not seem to hold him accountable for his defeat in Sicily, instead criticizing him on other, non-military grounds. Several later sources (classical and Byzantine *scholia*, later historians, and the Persian *Suda* Lexicon, for example), epigraphy (Pausanias’ *stele* in particular), and the evidence of Nicias’ family history after 413 all demand examination, but none demonstrate any significant condemnation of Nicias before the Roman period. Finally, the evidence of Plutarch must be considered and his critical evaluation of Nicias explained.

Finally, in chapter three I will discuss the most significant implications of my conclusions. The benefits of this study are threefold. First, the study contributes
significantly to the active scholarly debate described above. Second, the study contributes to modern understanding of great figures of classical Athens, Nicias in particular but also other leading aristocrats who served as generals and faced the evaluation of their fellow-citizens, and also to our understanding of the workings of Athenian society. Finally, the study advances modern understanding of Thucydides, providing a clear, historically grounded, and productive explanation for a very significant question in the history of Thucydides scholarship, that of the apparent contradiction between his narrative and his expressed judgements.
CHAPTER 1

THE PRICE OF FAILURE:
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The terrible defeat Athens suffered in Sicily in 413 BCE had a tremendous impact on the course of the Peloponnesian War. Some have seen that defeat as the primary cause of Athens’ eventual loss to Sparta or have suggested Thucydides draws that conclusion in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The defeat in Sicily certainly shocked and dismayed the Athenians, and Thucydides brilliantly recreates the pathos of the experience in his narrative of the events in books six and seven of his *History*.

Given the severity of this defeat, Nicias, Athens’ leading general in Sicily and thus the primary author of the disaster, might be expected to have suffered punishment for the failure. It is, again, axiomatic to most students of classical Athenian society that the classical Athenians treated their generals very harshly and evaluated them according to very exacting standards.\(^{12}\) The Athenians, it is argued, possessed “irrational and

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excessive expectations”13 of even their most inexperienced elected military leaders and punished any general who failed to meet those expectations. Any general who failed or demonstrated incompetence would likely suffer prosecution. Even successful generals might meet public censure and legal attack if they did not accomplish everything they might have or if they failed to execute some facet of their charge as the assembly wished. Fear of such prosecution may well have motivated Athenian generals’ behavior. Some scholars feel the Athenians’ behaved unjustly toward their commanders, while others, such as Pritchett, Fornara, and Roberts, suggest that the Athenians targeted incompetents deserving of public censure.14 Almost all agree that any general who failed would certainly suffer such popular condemnation.

The ancient authors seem to have agreed with this assessment. Demosthenes argued that every Athenian general should expect to be on trial for his life two or three times in his career and observed that an Athenian general was more likely to be killed by his countrymen than in battle.15 Thucydides described five instances in which either generals in fact suffered prosecution or acted out of fear of such prosecution,16 and carefully constructs his presentation of several of these events (including his own trial and exile) to convey the Athenians’ hypercritical evaluation of their commanders.17 Other ancient authors observed that the Athenian assembly easily turned on their leaders

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13 Roberts (1980), 103.
14 W. Kendrick Pritchett, The Greek State at War, Part II (Berkeley 1974), 20; Fornara (1971), 38; Roberts (1982), 122-3.
15 Dem. 4.47.
16 Thuc. 2.70.4, 3.98.5, 4.65.3, 5.26.5, and 7.48.4.
17 Thuc. 4.65.3-4. See also Roberts (1982), 128-32, for a discussion of Thucydides’ presentation of Athenian treatment of their generals as well as modern scholars’ evaluations of this issue.
and condemned them harshly if they seemed unsatisfactory. If, therefore, the late-fifth-century Athenians zealously attacked all unsuccessful and even some successful generals, and felt such hostility towards those generals that they were willing to sentence them to death and the confiscation of property, it stands to reason that they would have condemned at least as severely Nicias, who in Sicily presided over the most terrible Athenian loss of the war.

The evidence, however, that underlies the modern and ancient conclusions cited above does not seem to imply that a Nicias-style defeat at sea or on the field of battle necessarily led to prosecution, nor even that defeat typically formed the ground for such prosecution. References in Thucydides, for example, constitute much of the basis for the argument that the Athenians harshly judged their generals. He provides three examples of generals who suffered censure for their actions and two more motivated by fear of punishment at Athens (not least of these Nicias himself), as reported in Thucydides’ recreation of their thoughts. Thucydides clearly disapproves of the treatment of these generals, and modern scholars have generally either concurred with him that the Athenians treated their generals badly or instead suggested that the generals in question

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18 Including, beyond Thucydides and Demosthenes, [Xen.] Ath. Pol. 1.4, Cicero (De Orat. 2.13.56) and Plutarch (Arist. 26.1 and Nic. 6. 1-2.).
19 Thuc. 4.65.3-4. Thucydides comments that the Athenians condemned the three generals (Sophocles, Pythodoros, and Eurymedon) who accepted Syracuse’s settlement of Thucydides’ first Sicilian war because they (unrealistically) expected to accomplish anything they wished, automatically, regardless of the practical difficulty involved. They thus unjustly convicted the generals for failing to accomplish something they could not have reasonably been expected to accomplish, in Thucydides’ view.
had indeed failed and therefore deserved their punishment.\textsuperscript{20} Thus, either the Athenians interpreted anything less than brilliant performance as failure (and condemned such failures) or these generals in fact failed (and the Athenians condemned these failures). Either way, failure (such as Nicias experienced) led inevitably to odium, censure, and prosecution.

Despite Thucydides’ opinion, however, and modern scholars’ qualified or unqualified agreement, the examples of Thucydides do not prove that generals who lost battles needed to fear prosecution at Athens. Nicias himself did not fear returning to Athens after having been defeated but rather returning to Athens without explicit permission and with a large army while the issue was still in doubt. His concern was that such a departure might lend substance to claims from unhappy soldiers that Nicias had been bribed to depart and thus had willfully undermined the Athenian cause.\textsuperscript{21} The other individual who fears Athenian retribution in Thucydides, Demosthenes, did not return to Athens after a decisive defeat at the hands of the Aetolians. While Thucydides asserts that Demosthenes decided to stay in the vicinity of Naupactus after his loss because he “feared the Athenians because of the things that had happened,”\textsuperscript{22} he does not demonstrate that such fear was justified. His defeat happened in summer 426. The following winter Thucydides reports on Demosthenes’ continuing military activity as general.\textsuperscript{23} Remarkably, the Athenians, given half a year to respond to his failure (which they must have known about, since Thucydides reported that remnants of the force that

\textsuperscript{20} See Roberts (1982), 128-32 and 225 n. 8-10, 12-18 for a discussion of the scholars who support Thucydides on this point (Thirlwall, Classen, Delbrück, Adcock, and Finley) and those who disagree (Busolt, Schmid, Grote, Gomme, Bauman, and Kagan).

\textsuperscript{21} Thuc. 7.48.4.

\textsuperscript{22} Thuc. 3.98.5: ὑπειείθζε ἦνὶ ηνὶ πεπξαγκέλνηο ηνὺο Ἀζελαίνπο.

\textsuperscript{23} Thuc. 3.102.3, 3.105.3, and 3.107.1-114.4.
lost to the Aetolians returned to Athens\textsuperscript{24}, apparently did not impeach him. As Roberts has pointed out, the Athenians had a well-established and well-used procedure, \textit{apocheirotonia}, for removing generals from office;\textsuperscript{25} they chose not to use it in this case despite Demosthenes’ serious defeat. Further, if Demosthenes did fear to return to Athens, it is not clear whether his fear grew from his defeat or (as Roberts suggests) from the fact that the assembly had given him no authorization to attack as he did.\textsuperscript{26} Thus both generals referred to by Thucydides who fear Athenian censure either fear condemnation for something other than defeat or failed to meet such censure even in the face of a clear defeat.

Similarly the three generals or groups of generals discussed by Thucydides who did suffer prosecution or condemnation - the generals who accepted the surrender of Potidea, the members of the first embassy to Sicily, and Thucydides himself – all met censure not for an actual military defeat but for failing to accomplish what the Athenians expected of them. The generals at Potidea had technically experienced success, not failure; their failure lay in accepting a surrender thought by the Athenians to be too lenient. They were tried for having overstepped their authority and for having willingly undercut the Athenian people by not pressing for harsher terms.\textsuperscript{27} The experience of the Sicilian generals was similar. They aided in the settlement of a war between some of Athens’ Sicilian allies and a Syracusan alliance and on their return to Athens were tried and convicted of having taken bribes and so not having conquered the island, which they

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Thuc. 3.98.5.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Roberts (1982), 15.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 99-100.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Thuc. 2.70.4.
\end{itemize}
might have done.\textsuperscript{28} Thucydides’ own generalship and subsequent exile shows many similarities to the first two: sent to prevent Brasidas from taking Amphipolis, he was at Thasos when Brasidas arrived and convinced the inhabitants of Amphipolis to surrender. Although Thucydides did prevent Brasidas from capturing Eion through successful military action the Athenians, nevertheless, exiled him for failing to get to Amphipolis in time.\textsuperscript{29} Although in each of these cases the generals in question may indeed have made mistakes or given the Athenians cause for irritation or resentment,\textsuperscript{30} the fact remains that none actually suffered defeat. Indeed, the Sicilian generals had previously suffered a series of military setbacks without a peep from the assembly.\textsuperscript{31} They suffered prosecution only when they agreed, on behalf of the assembly, to a treaty unfavorable to Athens (see below for a fuller discussion of each of these cases).

Thus Thucydides, a leading witness in the modern case against the Athenian demos in its harsh treatment of its generals, does not demonstrate that defeat, in and of itself, led to prosecution or unpopularity; in fact, Thucydides presents no clear case in which an actual defeat produced any unfortunate result for the defeated general. Most scholars who have studied the trials of Athenian generals, however, have concluded that military failure most typically motivated such trials. W. Kendrick Pritchett formulates this position most concisely, asserting that “a reasonable conclusion to draw from the available facts seems to be that any general who demonstrated incompetence in the field

\textsuperscript{28} Thuc. 4.58-65, esp. 4.65.3  
\textsuperscript{29} Thuc. 4.106.1-107.1.  
\textsuperscript{30} See Roberts (1982), 34-36 (Potidea), 115-117 (Pythodoros, Eurymedon, and Sophocles), 128-132 (Thucydides) for arguments that these generals did indeed perform unsatisfactorily; I will also discuss these generals in more detail below. Even if Roberts, et al., correctly argue that these generals performed poorly as either generals or representatives of the assembly, the critical point, that none lost an engagement for which they suffered prosecution, remains.  
\textsuperscript{31} Thuc. 3.115.6, 4.25.6.
or suffered a major defeat was likely to be brought to trial.” 32 Charles Fornara, in his study of the Athenian board of generals, seconds this opinion: “cashiered generals seem in most instances to have deserved it.” 33 The evidence from Thucydides problematizes these assertions.

If the consensus opinion that defeat motivated the demos to prosecute and/or condemn a general is right then our sources should demonstrate that defeated Athenian generals suffered such punishments. In particular those generals who led Athenian hoplites or ships to major defeats, those producing significant loss of life or territory or that struck the Athenian psyche especially strongly, should have seen their careers and reputations damaged or ruined by such defeat (if they even escaped prosecution with their lives).

The sources do not, however, clearly demonstrate this fact. A survey of six major defeats suffered by Athens between 460 and 348 BCE yields no evidence that the Athenians punished or even blamed the generals involved. These six battles, Tanagra (457), Egypt (456), Coronea (447), Delium (424), Mantinea (418), and Chios (357) produced significant loss of Athenian lives and often territory, constituted serious military and political reverses, and struck both Athenian citizens and other Greeks as disastrous. 34 They resulted, however, in neither trials nor public odium for the generals. Smaller defeats, such as Halieis (460) and Molossus’ defeat and capture in Euboea (348) show the same pattern. Some significant defeats did produce trials, including Notium (406), Aegospotami (404), arguably Abydos (387), and Chaeronea (338) in particular, as

33 Fornara (1971), 38.
34 For example, Coronea: Thuc. 3.62.5, 3.67.3, 4.92.6, Diod. 12.6.2, Plut. Per. 18.1-3; Delium: Thuc. 4.101.1-2, Diod. 12.70.3-5; Chios: Dem. 20.81-82, Diod. 16.7.4. Pausanias references several of these defeats and their significance (1.29.15, in particular).
did a few less disastrous losses such as Athens’ series of setbacks in and around Thrace (361-356). Even in these cases, however, it is not clear that the defeat itself caused the prosecution of the general; they will be examined later in this chapter along with the other trials of Athenian generals.

It is of course significant that in the six major defeats in question the general or generals involved often either died in the battle or escaped our sources entirely. Charitimides, the Athenian general in Egypt in 456, died in his defeat, as did Tolmides at Coronea, Hippocrates at Delium, Laches and Nicostratus at Mantinea, and Chabrias at Chios. The defeated general at Tanagra remains anonymous. Only one known general from any of these battles lived, that one being Chares, Chabrias’ colleague at Chios.

While these circumstances permit only an argument from silence, these six battles nevertheless do suggest that defeat as such was not held against a general. About the general or generals at Tanagra nothing can be said except that there is no evidence that they were blamed, condemned, or prosecuted. The six generals who died in battle could not, of course, stand trial, so the absence of such proceedings does not surprise. That they had certainly avoided trial, however, does not mean that they had escaped all punishment. If defeat produced public hostility toward a general we might expect to discover some record of blame, of public hostility toward the memory of these generals. We might also expect that some of that hostility would attach to the generals’ families,

35 Ctes. Pers. 32.
36 Diod. 12.6.2.
37 Thuc. 4.101.2.
38 Thuc. 5.74.2
39 Dem. 20.81-2, Diod. 16.7.4, Plut. Phoc. 6.1, Nep. Tim. 4.
40 Diod. 16.7.3.
41 Thuc. 1.108, Diod. 11.80, 11.83.1, Plut. Cim. 17, Per. 10.
either in the form of disgrace and diminished status or even through fines or confiscation of property, levied against the deceased generals but visited on their heirs.\textsuperscript{42}

There is, however, no evidence that these six generals or their families fell into such disgrace. Nothing further is known of Charitimides, Laches, Nicostratus, or Hippocrates, and there is no evidence that their children or families suffered from their losses. Pausanias records the existence of a memorial in Athens to Tolmides along with the rest of the dead at Coronea,\textsuperscript{43} hardly suggesting that the general was condemned. The Athenians granted the sixth of these generals, Chabrias, immunity from paying public obligations in return for his services. That immunity passed to his son, Ctesippus,\textsuperscript{44} strongly suggesting that no condemnation, immediate or lasting, attached to Chabrias for his defeat at Chios.

Those rare Athenian generals who survived defeat could also avoid both trial and condemnation. While one of the generals at Aegospotami, Adeimantus, did have to face a trial\textsuperscript{45} (eleven years after the battle), another survivor, Conon, did not. Conon fled after the battle\textsuperscript{46} (whether from the Athenians or from their new Spartan masters, whom Conon would have expected to execute him, is unclear) but returned in 393 to charge

\textsuperscript{42} Examples of fines assessed against generals and collected from their sons include Miltiades and his son Cimon (Miltiades was fined in 489, died in prison without paying, and Cimon had to settle the debt, Herod. 6.136, Plut \textit{Cim}. 4.3) and Timotheus and his son Conon (Timotheus was fined 100 talents in 355 but died away from Athens in 354, when his son Conon paid a reduced version of the fine. Isoc. 15.129, Lys. 12.480, Diod. 16.21.4, Dion Hal. \textit{Dein}. 13.667, Nep. \textit{Tim}. 3.4). Furthermore, the fact that honor for positive performance, such as Ctesippus' inheritance of his father Chabrias' immunity from public obligations (see below, and n. 33), could be passed down from a father to a son suggests that dishonor might do the same.

\textsuperscript{43} Paus. 1.24.3, 1.29.15. Pausanias also describes tombs memorializing the dead of other battles, both victories and defeats, in the same area, which include in some cases defeated generals such as Tolmides, further evidence that the Athenians did not feel at least postmortem hostility toward defeated generals.

\textsuperscript{44} Dem. 20.80-2.

\textsuperscript{45} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 2.1.32, Dem. 19.191.

\textsuperscript{46} Dem. 20.68.
Not only did Conon avoid prosecution, but his son Timotheus became one of Athens’ leading generals himself until his death in 354. Both Conon and Timotheus seem to have been free from any stigma connected with Conon’s disastrous defeat. Conon and Timotheus were furthermore memorialized together at Athens with monumental graves, the only such pair, according to Pausanias, in addition to Miltiades and Cimon.

The best example, however, of a general who lost, survived, and both avoided prosecution and kept his reputation intact is Chares. Chares survived his colleague Chabrias at Chios but was not prosecuted. He then led a fleet to the Hellespont in 356 along with Iphicrates, Timotheus, and Menestheus. Chares rashly attacked with his ships while the other three generals held back because of a storm. Defeated, he charged his colleagues with treason but avoided prosecution himself. Despite this performance Chares continued to serve as a general and in 348 lost again, at Olynthus. Again there is no evidence of a trial and Chares continued to function as a general, eventually contributing to the defeat at Chaeronea. Despite all his struggles no evidence suggests any contemporary condemnation, although later writers seem to have concluded that he was not an exceptional military leader. Certainly, the Athenians did not hesitate to continue to entrust him with military leadership despite his periodic defeats.

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47 Dem. 19.191.
49 Paus. 1.24.3, 1.29.15.
50 Dem. 20.81, Diod. 16.7.3-4, Plut. Phoc. 6.1, Nep. Tim. 3.4.
52 Polyaeus 3.9.29, Diod. 16.21.3-4, Nep. Tim. 3.2-5.
53 Lys. Fr. 128, Diod. 16.21.4, Nep. Tim. 3.4.
54 Philoch. Fr. 132.
55 Schol. Dem. 7.15, Polyaeus 4.2.8.
56 Diod. 16.85.7. While Diodorus regards Chares as less able than Iphicrates, Timotheus, and Chabrias, he does suppose that Chares was the best general remaining to the Athenians.
Smaller defeats show the same pattern. Often, as at Halieis,\textsuperscript{57} the identity of the general escapes the sources. When the general can be identified no evidence suggests he endured prosecution, blame, or infamy. Molossus, for example, led Athens to a defeat in Euboea in 348 and was captured in the process.\textsuperscript{58} Ransomed back to the Athenians, he apparently died in Athens with his status undiminished. Pausanias records his grave monument as well, with a note about his good reputation with the Athenians.\textsuperscript{59}

This evidence suggests that, despite the Athenians’ harsh treatment of their generals, defeat in and of itself invited neither prosecution nor condemnation. Indeed, ten of the greatest defeats suffered by the Athenians between 460 and 338 – Tanagra, Egypt, Coronea, Delium, Mantinea, Notium, Aegospotami, Abydos, Chios, and Chaeronea – collectively produced a grand total of one general (Lysicles, after Chaeronea) that we know to have been executed,\textsuperscript{60} and even in that one case it is unclear that his trial and execution resulted from the defeat.\textsuperscript{61} The majority of the generals involved in these defeats avoided trial and seem to have suffered no damage to their reputations or (where applicable) their careers because of their losses.

Many generals, of course, did suffer prosecution, and many of those died at the hands of their fellow-citizens. The Athenians did deal harshly with their generals under some circumstances. The cases described above suggest instead that the Athenians prosecuted generals primarily for reasons other than military failure. Westlake in fact suggests such a conclusion when he observes that “accusations against generals were

\textsuperscript{57} Thuc. 1.105.1, Diod. 11.78.2.  
\textsuperscript{58} Plut. Phoc. 14.1.  
\textsuperscript{59} Paus. 1.36.4.  
\textsuperscript{60} Diod. 16.88.  
\textsuperscript{61} For a discussion of this issue, see below number 28 in the catalogue of generals who stood trial for their performance as generals.
normally the outcome of dissatisfaction when they failed to achieve what was expected of them,” although he does not cite any supporting evidence for this conclusion. His point seems quite correct; most generals got into trouble not by suffering military defeat as such, but by failing to move quickly enough to suit the Athenians, by failing to execute their tasks with sufficient severity, by being outmaneuvered by their opponents, or by overstepping their authority and making decisions that should have been left to the assembly. In each of these situations, the assembly seems to have been concerned not with military failure but with the appearance of an effort on the part of the general in question to undercut the authority of the Athenian people – which is to say, treason.

If the Athenians typically condemned generals for such treasonous behavior (or its appearance) rather than for military defeat, then it is no longer clear that they would have condemned Nicias for his defeat in Sicily. If there is no direct evidence that Nicias was blamed for the defeat in Sicily, and the famous Athenian willingness to condemn their own generals did not apply to cases such as Nicias’ defeat, then it cannot be maintained that he was held culpable by his contemporaries. It remains to examine fifth and fourth century impeachments and trials of generals to establish that such trials did in fact follow various other kinds of misbehavior or perceived misbehavior rather than actual military defeat.

63 M.H. Hansen also suggests that the Athenian impeachment trials of their generals had little to do with strictly military performance, observing that “[t]he sources do not provide us with a single example of a general being convicted because he was honest but unqualified.” Mogens Herman Hansen, Eisangelia: The Sovereignty of the People’s Court in Athens in the Fourth Century B.C. and the Impeachment of Generals and Politicians (Copenhagen 1975), 65. Hansen corrects here the argument that these many trials resulted from the incompetence of inexperienced generals (so Fornara, cited by Hansen, p. 64 n.53). Roberts disagrees (1982, 122-3), suggesting that the charge of treason was intentionally excessive, designed to impress upon generals “the extremely high standards by which their conduct in office would be judged.” This debate underlies the summaries and conclusion that follow. I think neither view is entirely correct; Hansen’s conclusion does not take into account the possible failures by these generals argued by Roberts, while Roberts produces no context or further argument to support her interpretation of the remarkably severe charges levied against often marginally unsuccessful generals.
Any discussion of legal attacks on fifth and fourth century Athenian generals must begin with Hansen’s examination of the process of eisangelia and the generals who stood such trials and Roberts’ study of the Athenians’ methods and motivations in keeping their officials, particularly generals, under firm control. Several other studies deal with these trials, including sections of Pritchett’s work on classical Greek warfare, Fornara’s and Hamel’s studies on the Athenian generals, and Bauman’s study of classical Athenian political trials. These studies provide the background for the discussion to follow, although they are interested in aspects of the trials different from this examination. For the sake of convenience I will first discuss those trials appearing in Hansen’s catalogue as eisangelia proceedings. I will then discuss other generals who either stood trial for their actions or were removed from their offices, primarily following Roberts.

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64 Hansen (1975) and Roberts (1982).
66 I must make three observations about my use of Hansen’s catalogue as one of my starting points for this study. First, although Hansen argues that each of the 34 trials against generals that he studies were in fact eisangelia, or treason trials, it is quite possible (as Hansen himself admits, on p.63) that some of these trials in fact took place at euthynai, the final audits to which all generals submitted. Second, it is arguable in a few cases whether the individual involved in the trial was in fact a general. Third, the nature of the eisangelia proceeding, which existed specifically to try treason, might tend to prejudice my argument (since I argue that generals went to trial for treason, rather than failure, if the trials in question were all specifically treason trials then my conclusion might be an artifact of the nature of the trials, and hence the evidence, rather than a real characteristic of Athenian society). I respond to these issues as follows. Regarding points one and three, I am not very concerned to establish the particular type of procedure used against the generals. I have tried to collect all instances of generals either standing trial or being removed from office between 490 and 337 BCE, and thus anticipate that I have avoided biasing my study toward eisangelia proceedings (beyond the fact that, as the Athenians themselves believed, eisangelia was the proper forum for trying generals, and therefore comprises the bulk of proceedings against generals. The fact that the Athenians seem to have had no other charge, besides treason, for attacking a general who failed is itself suggestive. There existed no charge or process for trying a general for failure or simple defeat, and there existed no forum for investigating a general’s strategic, tactical, or logistical decisions per se.). I have studied each instance of a tried or deposed general to decide (1) whether the general suffered a defeat, and was tried on the basis of that defeat, and (2) whether the general, although not clearly defeated, suffered trial on the pretext of defeat, or for some other reason. I am therefore unconcerned whether the Athenians chose to try the general through eisangelia or in connection with the euthyna or in some other way; if the general was not defeated or tried on the pretext of defeat, then this cannot be evidence that generals were condemned and tried for their defeats, regardless of the venue or method of the trial, and if the general was defeated or said to have been defeated, then I have had to identify the cause of the trial regardless of the venue or method of the trial. While including a few euthynai or other proceedings not
1) Miltiades (490/89). In 490/89 Miltiades, a hero of Marathon and a member of the Athenian board of generals, convinced the assembly to give him a fleet and money for an expedition. Miltiades apparently did not explain exactly what he intended to do but promised that his plans would produce a great deal of wealth for the Athenians. He took his force to Paros, Herodotus says because of a personal grudge but on the pretext that Paros had Medized. Miltiades laid siege to Paros and demanded a ransom. After roughly a month he lifted the siege and returned to Athens without ransom, plunder, or anything else that might have justified the expedition or fulfilled his promise to the assembly. Our two primary literary sources for this series of events, Herodotus and Cornelius Nepos (following Ephorus, very likely), disagree on the cause of Miltiades’ flight. Herodotus tells a story in which Miltiades sneaks into the Parian temple of Demeter the Lawgiver (invited by a priestess, and for no explicit reason), panics, and hurts himself getting away; he then maintained the siege as long as he could, and returned

normally connected to military failure (for example, euthynai typically dealt with financial misbehavior, especially embezzlement) might indeed tend to drive down the percentage of my trials which could prove to have sprung from indignation over a military defeat, they will not impact the total number of trials and depositions in which a general was defeated and then suffered trial. In other words, I can avoid the distorting effects of a sample watered down by essentially non-military trials by citing my final conclusions as raw numbers rather than percentages. Regarding the second point, I have accepted Hansen’s and Roberts’ conclusions about the status of the officials tried (in each case by eisangelia); where there is significant doubt I will provide citations.

Roberts, examining the mechanisms of accountability in classical Athens more broadly than Hansen, includes a number of additional generals. I will discuss, at least in passing, a few generals not included in Hansen and either not included or not extensively discussed by Roberts. There really are only a few of these, though; Hansen and Roberts, between them, get to most of the generals who suffered any kind of legal trauma in connection with their generalships. For this reason Hansen and Roberts must form the starting point for a study such as I attempt here, and I am deeply indebted to both scholars for their excellent work. In my catalogue below I will provide the reference to the discussion of the general in Hansen (1975) and Roberts (1982), where it exists, by the labels Hansen Catalogue #, page(s), and Roberts, page(s).

Hansen Catalogue #2, p. 69; Roberts, 78-81.
68 Hansen Catalogue #2, p. 69; Roberts, 78-81.
69 Herod. 6.132.
70 Herod. 6.133.
to Athens when his wound got worse and he had to depart. Nepos claims that Miltiades fled because he thought a Persian force was about to arrive. On his return Miltiades suffered popular odium for his failure. Xanthippus led the prosecution, either for “deceit” (Herodotus) or treason (Nepos). The Athenians convicted Miltiades, commuted the death penalty out of gratitude for his service against the Persians, but fined him (probably fifty talents). Miltiades died in prison without paying the fine.

Miltiades’ case suggests that defeat did not form the basis for the charges against some Athenian generals who suffered trial. Unlike Nicias, Miltiades did not exactly lose. He fought no significant battle, and we hear nothing of casualties. He failed in that he did not accomplish what he set out to do (or better, what the assembly sent him out to do), in this case either because of injury or flight in the face of an enemy. Upon returning to Athens Miltiades suffered odium and trial, not because of defeat, nor even because of his more general failure, but rather for either deceit or treason (or perhaps, as Bauman argues, both). As poor as his generalship may appear to a modern analyst, and as plain as his failure seems, Miltiades’ trial does not seem to have focused (and his conviction does not seem to have turned) on the details of his generalship, his specific strategic mistakes, his apparently unusual decisions, nor even the fact of his flight. Herodotus reports that the Athenians condemned him for deceit, an unknown charge but probably a consequence of his tricking the assembly into funding the settlement of his

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73 Herod. 6.134-5.
74 Nep. Milt. 7.3-4.
75 Herod. 6.136.1.
76 Nep. Milt. 7.5.
78 Herod. 6.136, Plut. Cim. 4.3.
80 Herod. 6.136.1.
81 That is, it is unclear what the nature of an apate charge might have been in 489 BCE.
personal grudge. Nepos gives treason as the charge, but gives as the substance of that charge the suggestion that Miltiades accepted bribes to leave and thus willfully failed to capture territory that he could and should have taken.\textsuperscript{82} Despite Miltiades’ totally unsuccessful and in some respects bizarre conduct of his mission the Athenians did not attack his generalship or condemn his failure in and of itself.

Modern scholars typically argue that the more severe charges such as those leveled against Miltiades follow naturally from defeat. Although the Athenians did not explicitly attack the general’s strategic or tactical decisions or the other specifics of his execution of his command, scholars suppose that disapproval of these aspects of a general’s behavior motivated and underlay the charges of treason (and in this case deceit).\textsuperscript{83} Thus, popular recognition of a general’s mistakes and failure led to odium, and that odium either led to impeachment and conviction in the courts directly after the general’s return to Athens or made the general vulnerable to political attack, and thus public prosecution, which could proceed on the pretext of the general’s military actions. Failure would be met with prosecution; the charge would be treason or something like it. Although there may have been no evidence of treason, although the general may in fact not have committed treason, the Athenians nevertheless tried their generals for this capital crime rather than on any lesser charge. The severity of the charge measured the Athenians’ anger toward generals who failed them. Roberts presents this argument most clearly. Regarding Miltiades’ trial in 489, she argues “that his conviction was a clear statement by the Athenians to future generations both of private citizens and of military leaders . . . extraordinary commands . . . were to be undertaken in the understanding that

\textsuperscript{82} Nep. \textit{Milt.} 7.5-8.4.

\textsuperscript{83} See above, footnotes 1 and 3, for citations of scholars presenting aspects of this composite argument. Roberts (1982) summarizes this position most thoroughly (see below).
extraordinary . . . consequences would attend on defeat.”

Regarding such proceedings generally, she suggests

“That suspicions of inadequacy in the discharge of an office might be a more important factor in an Athenian impeachment trial than actual guilt on a specific count. The charges of bribery and treason which the Athenians leveled against their officials, we must conclude, were intentionally extreme. We must not imagine that the men who brought these accusations necessarily believed that the defendants were guilty as charged. Extreme charges against Athenian officials with whom the people were dissatisfied were evidently something of a formality – a grim tradition intended to remind Athenians of the extremely high standards by which their conduct in office would be judged.”

Thus, even though most generals, like Miltiades, were tried for treason or on a similar capital charge, it was not overt treason but simple failure or defeat that really caused their downfall, and an unsuccessful general had to expect or at least fear such a prosecution.

The fact remains, however, that Miltiades suffered trial for treason, not defeat. I suggest that the evidence about Miltiades and his should be read more simply. The Athenians condemned Miltiades for treason because they saw evidence (real or convincingly insinuated by individuals who brought prosecutions against generals for political reasons, but with military pretexts) of treason. If defeat naturally produced a trial for treason, if treason were merely a pretext for the Athenians and simple defeat or

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84 Roberts (1982), p. 81.
failure constituted a severe enough offense to warrant the execution of the general, then
evidence of defeat or failure should have been enough, by itself, to support Miltiades’
trial and conviction. In theory, Miltiades’ misadventures as a general around Paros and
then his hasty departure created popular odium and political vulnerability concretized in a
trial for treason (or capital deceit). Miltiades’ prosecutors, however, presented with many
specific, embarrassing episodes from Miltiades’ actual campaign they might have been
expected to use in the trial to establish the general’s offense (his panicky flight from the
temple of Demeter, possibly his flight from the region because of a rumor of Persian
forces, certainly his abrupt departure from Paros with nothing accomplished), in a trial
supposedly made possible by popular outrage over precisely those actions, apparently
rested their prosecution on entirely different grounds. Either they attacked him for
deceiving the assembly, presumably for claiming to intend to win wealth for the
Athenians in order to get troops and funds for settling a personal score with Paros,86 or
they prosecuted him for treason on the charge that he had left Paros, not out of his own
failure or fleeing from a rumored Persian force, but because he took bribes.87 In this case
failure would have been much easier to demonstrate than treason (Bauman argues that
Xanthippus first charged Miltiades with treason then switched to deceit when he realized
treason was such a weak case88). Failure supposedly formed the basis of the prosecution,
but nevertheless the prosecutors pursued charges of treason and deceit that rested on their
own, separate evidence. They seem not to have addressed his failure. The fact that the
charge of treason rested on its own evidence, separate from the evidence of failure,

86 Herod. 6.136.1.
87 Nep. Milt. 7.5.
88 Bauman (1990), p.22. Bauman’s specific point is debatable, but the larger point, that
Herodotus’ “deceit” was viewed as a severe, indeed capital charge roughly equivalent, in the case of
Miltiades, to treason, seems clear.
suggests that the charge of treason was separate from the failure; in other words, simple failure did not itself motivate a charge of treason, and hence did not motivate prosecution.

To the extent that Miltiades’ prosecutors contemplated charging him with treason, that treason seems to have occurred in connection with his decision to leave Paros. It seems unlikely that he took bribes to leave, but his decision to depart, with his force intact and his target unconquered, apparently invited popular suspicion and ultimately prosecution. It is significant that this possible treason did not arise out of an actual defeat, but rather out of a conscious decision (in this case, departure) to suspend his engagement (mandated, at least to some degree, by the assembly) short of its intended goal. Failure, rather than defeat, formed the basis of his crime, and specifically failure that resulted from or could be easily interpreted as resulting from a conscious decision on the part of the general not to accomplish or try to accomplish something the assembly wanted done. Miltiades’ prosecution, it will become clear, fits a pattern. Miltiades’ performance produced hostility not because it was “defeat”, but precisely because it appeared to the assembly to be treasonable. Miltiades had not tried to do what the assembly sent him to do, he had left his siege without adequate cause, and he had in so doing undermined the authority of the assembly and betrayed the charge given him by the Athenian people – in other words, he had committed treason.

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89 No other source corroborates Nepos’ assertion. Bauman (1990, p.22) is probably correct in suggesting that, if prosecutors pursued a treason charge in court, it probably led to acquittal. The claim may have been made, but no one seems to have believed it, necessitating the more demonstrable apate charge.

90 Roberts (1982), pp. 78-81, and Bauman (1990), pp. 18-22, discuss the extent to which the assembly knew what Miltiades intended. It suffices for my purposes to observe that at a minimum the assembly accepted Miltiades’ proposal to bring home loot and in supplying him with ships, men, and money effectively charged him with this task.
2) **Cimon** (463/2).\(^{91}\) The trial of Cimon, prosecuted by Pericles and others for either bribe-taking or treason, provides another example of a general prosecuted for the appearance that he defied or subverted the will of the assembly. As general in 463/2, Cimon won engagements against Persian and Thracian forces and subdued Thasos, capturing in the process a total of 46 ships, Thasos itself, and significant northern territory, including Thasos’ gold mines.\(^{92}\) Despite these successes, Cimon’s political enemies prosecuted him upon his return to Athens\(^{93}\) (and may have officially removed him from office via apocheirotonia\(^{94}\)). Pericles and Cimon’s other opponents may have tried him for treason in an eisangelia proceeding,\(^{95}\) or (as Aristotle suggests) for bribe-taking as a part of Cimon’s audit (euthyna).\(^{96}\) In either case, the charge was capital, and arose from the claim that Cimon had taken bribes from King Alexander of Macedonia and thus had not gone on to subdue that territory as well as Thasos.\(^{97}\) Cimon in his defense argued that he admired the Spartans and their simplicity rather than Ionians or Thessalians and their money,\(^{98}\) which is to say that he was not a bribe-taker. He was

\(^{91}\) Hansen Catalogue #5, p. 71; Roberts, pp. 55-9.


\(^{94}\) This point is uncertain; see Roberts (1982), p. 56 and p. 204 nn. 7 and 8.

\(^{95}\) Perhaps implicit in Plut. *Cim.* 14.2-15.1 and suggested by a host of modern scholars. See Roberts (1982), p. 56 and pp. 203-4, nn. 4-6, and Hansen, pp. 46 and 71 for discussions of this issue.

\(^{96}\) Arist. *Ath Pol.* 27.1. In this case, as I indicated above (p.8, n.27), I am not very concerned to resolve the uncertainty about the charge or the precise proceedings of the trial. My thesis concerns the relationship between Cimon’s acts and experiences as general and the charges made against him at Athens. It suffices, therefore, to establish that the charge was capital in nature and on what grounds it proceeded. I indicate the debates on other, peripheral issues, generally well summarized by Roberts, but do not pursue them unless they become relevant to my point.

\(^{97}\) Plut. *Cim.* 14.2-3. Demosthenes (23.205) records a different story entirely, that Cimon escaped death by three votes and was fined 50 talents for disturbing either the ancestral or the Parian constitution. Demosthenes almost certainly confuses Cimon with his father (50 talents, Paros) and his description almost certainly records nothing about Cimon’s trial of 463 (except, perhaps, correctly recalling the charge of treason, which may have been at least one of the charges in 463). See also Roberts (1982), p. 203 n. 1., and Bauman (1990), p. 56 and p. 179 n. 55.

\(^{98}\) Plut. *Cim.* 14.3.
acquitted, perhaps in part because of the actions of his sister, Elpinice, who took the trial seriously enough to plead with Pericles for mercy. \textsuperscript{99}

Cimon’s experience parallels Miltiades’ in several respects. Cimon, like Miltiades, suffered no defeat. His opponents charged him with treason or a similar capital charge (deceit against Miltiades, bribe-taking against Cimon). This charge of treason stemmed from charges that he had accepted bribes and so failed to accomplish what he might have. In both cases the alleged bribery probably did not happen. \textsuperscript{100} Most significantly, in both cases the alleged treasonous behavior had nothing to do with the general’s actual military acts. Cimon’s strategies, tactics, and accomplishments were not attacked or condemned (as indeed they could hardly have been, since unlike Miltiades Cimon had succeeded brilliantly), but rather he as prosecuted for failing to do more. The primary differences between the two were Cimon’s success and the fact that Cimon was acquitted (perhaps because he had done much less to irritate the Athenians).

I argue above that the trial of Miltiades suggests that the Athenian charges of treason arose from causes other than military defeat because the basis of the charge (bribery) was different from Miltiades’ military actions (unsuccessful as they were). Cimon’s trial makes that point much clearer. Cimon’s success in the field makes it unlikely that his prosecution grew out of popular discontent with his campaign. Instead, the trial has generally been regarded as purely political in nature. \textsuperscript{101} This political attack

\textsuperscript{100} The thrust of Plutarch’s (\textit{Cim.} 14.3) version of Cimon’s self-defense is that Cimon was generally incorruptible, was sufficiently wealthy anyway not to be swayed by bribes, and was moreover philosophically and politically opposed to expansion and thus would not have wished to annex Macedonia regardless of bribe attempts. The Athenians, in acquitting Cimon, seem to have accepted this argument, and so have most modern scholars (see Roberts (1982), p. 57 and p. 204 nn. 11 and 12). There exists also some evidence that Cimon engaged in corrupt behaviors at other times, but there is little evidence that these references refer to 463/2 (see Bauman (1990), pp. 28-9 and 179 n. 56).
\textsuperscript{101} Roberts (1982) p. 57.
still needed some basis, some charge of wrongdoing to go forward, however. Thus, it appears, Cimon’s political enemies invented the charge of bribery to justify their attack. In these two examples we see treason charges arising from essentially similar grounds – the failure entirely to satisfy the assembly – against generals despite the very different outcomes of their efforts. In these two cases at least it seems that charges of treason and military defeat were not necessarily connected, and thus that the trials of generals, so celebrated as indicators of public hostility because of defeat, may not in fact have stemmed from defeat.

3) Pericles (430/29). Sometime during late 430 and early 429 the Athenians deposed Pericles, a member of the board of generals for twelve years, and put him on trial. The assembly’s motivation in deposing Pericles has been variously reported. Thucydides argues that the Athenians became distressed after the Spartans twice invaded their territory, repented of the war, and blamed Pericles for getting them into it. Diodorus ascribes the Athenians’ hostility to Pericles to the war and the plague. Plutarch provides multiple motivations, mentioning Athenian distress at the Spartan invasion and the plague, Cleon’s efforts to use these events to stir up popular sentiment against Pericles, and finally Pericles’ failure to capture Epidaurus (because of the plague, according to Plutarch). Modern evaluations of the cause of Pericles’ legal

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102 Hansen Catalogue #6, pp. 71-3; Roberts, pp.30-4.
103 I follow Hansen’s suggestion (1975, p. 72) that the two trials of Pericles reported in Plutarch (Per. 32 and 35) and Diodorus (12.39.2 and 12.45.4, following Ephorus) represent doublets and that only one trial should be reported for Pericles, that in 430/29.
104 Thuc. 2.59.1-2.
105 Diod. 12.45.4.
106 Plut. Per. 33.5-6, 34.4.
107 Plut. Per. 33.7.
108 Plut. Per. 35.3-4.
downfall have been similarly varied. Roberts suggests that the trial represents a policy
disagreement between pro- and anti-war factions within Athens, made possible by
Athenian angst over Spartan invasions.\textsuperscript{109} Several modern scholars have followed
Thucydides, interpreting the trial as an emotional Athenian response to their misfortunes
during the first few years of the war.\textsuperscript{110} Gomme argued that the trial stems from Pericles’
management of funds in the Argolid campaign.\textsuperscript{111} Bauman sees the attack on Pericles as
a resumption of an older concern, Pericles’ involvement with Pheidias and their alleged
embezzlement of funds while creating the Athena Parthenos statue.\textsuperscript{112} Pericles was
probably charged with embezzlement,\textsuperscript{113} and possibly also with deceit or treason.\textsuperscript{114}
Although the trial seems to have dealt largely with Pericles’ management of funds, it
seems to have been more likely an \textit{eisangelia} than a \textit{euthyna} proceeding.\textsuperscript{115} The
Athenians convicted Pericles, did not execute him,\textsuperscript{116} but did fine him somewhere
between 15 and 80 talents.\textsuperscript{117}

The differing accounts in the ancient sources and the significance of Pericles to the political history of
fifth-century Athens have combined to create a very extensive and very diverse body of modern
scholarship regarding each aspect of this trial. Despite the complexity of this trial, however, and the
tremendous attention paid it by modern scholars, it does not merit extensive investigation for the
purposes of this study. It seems very clear that military failure did not provide the motivation for the
attack on Pericles. Only one source, Plutarch, suggests any military failure in connection with the trial,
specifically Pericles’ failure to capture Epidaurus, and even Plutarch specifically ascribes that failure to
the plague rather than to any act or negligence on Pericles’ part. No other ancient source suggests that
Pericles’ military success or failure played any role in the trial, even as a pretext.

Pericles’ trial does conform to the pattern of Miltiades’ and Cimon’s trials in one
respect. Once again, a general suffered trial for his life and then a heavy fine based on

\textsuperscript{109} Roberts (1982), pp.31-2.
\textsuperscript{110} For example, Curtius, Bury, and Laistner; see Roberts (1982), p.33.
\textsuperscript{111} A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, and K.J. Dover. \textit{A Historical Commentary on Thucydides},
\textsuperscript{112} Bauman (1990), pp.44-5.
\textsuperscript{113} Plat. \textit{Gorg.} 515E.
\textsuperscript{114} Plut. \textit{Per.} 32.2.
\textsuperscript{115} Hansen’s (1975, pp.71-2) discussion of this point is excellent.
\textsuperscript{116} Plat. \textit{Gorg.} 515E.
\textsuperscript{117} 15 or 50 talents, Plut. \textit{Per.} 35.4. 50 talents, Dem. 26.6. 80 talents, Diod. 12.45.4.
charges that bore no relationship to his performance of his military duty. The Athenians most likely convicted Pericles for irregularities in his accounts (“trivial grounds”, as Diodorus calls them).\textsuperscript{118} While these charges may have been technically accurate,\textsuperscript{119} there had been no event immediately prior to the trial, and certainly no military failure, to suggest that such an account was necessary. Once again, a general’s opponents, probably for political reasons, created capital charges against a general and put him on trial for reasons having no direct relationship to his performance as a general. Of these first three, the Athenians convicted Miltiades, acquitted Cimon, and convicted Pericles but then quickly returned him to his office. The three capital trials proceed from similar grounds, with similar charges to decisions that seem based largely on the evidence in support of the actual, capital charge, despite totally different military experiences and outcomes for the three generals in question. These trials thus do not seem to constitute a referendum on the generalship of Miltiades, Cimon, and Pericles. The trials instead seem unconnected to the generals’ military action.

4) Laches,\textsuperscript{120} Eurymedon, Pythodorus, and Sophocles,\textsuperscript{121} Athenian generals in Sicily during the Archidamian War. (426-424). Sent to aid the Leontines in their war with Syracuse, Laches enjoyed considerable success as general of an Athenian force in Sicily in 426/5, winning multiple engagements and capturing Messina.\textsuperscript{122} The Athenians,

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\textsuperscript{118} Diod. 12.45.4.
\textsuperscript{119} As Roberts puts it (1982, p. 31), “No doubt accounts were not in the best of order after twelve years: Diodorus’ anecdotal account suggests that Pericles was not subjected to audit during this time, and it was an easy matter for the Athenians to find some irregularity to countenance a charge of κλοπή if they wished to bring one.”
\textsuperscript{120} Not in Hansen’s catalogue, because there is no direct evidence for any trial, let alone \textit{eisangelia}. Roberts, p. 116 and p.219 n. 35.
\textsuperscript{121} Hansen catalogue #7-9, p. 73; Roberts, pp. 115-7.
\textsuperscript{122} Thuc. 3.90.
\end{flushleft}
however, recalled him in 425 and replaced him with Pythodorus. The assembly also decided to send another force to Sicily as well, under the command of Eurymedon and Sophocles. The three new generals experienced less success than had their single predecessor. Pythodorus had mixed success, losing more battles with the Syracusans than he won while losing Messina to revolt. Eurymedon and Sophocles also performed somewhat unevenly. They were ordered to assist Demosthenes with his (unspecified) operations in the Peloponnesus, to assist Corcyra with their political exiles who were causing trouble in the countryside, and then to go to Sicily to assist Pythodorus. The two generals discovered that Corcyra was also threatened by a Spartan fleet of 60 ships, but were blown off course to Pylos before they could do anything about it. Their troops helped Demosthenes invest Sphacteria (against their wishes), and then the fleet sailed for Corcyra. Before they got there, however, the Spartan fleet broke off and, avoiding the Athenians, threatened Demosthenes, who had to recall Eurymedon and Sophocles for assistance. After assisting in Cleon and Demosthenes’ success at Pylos the two generals sailed for Corcyra and helped the Corcyreans destroy the outpost from which their exiles had been harassing them (and incidentally contributed to the execution of many of those exiles). Then they sailed to Sicily and “fought the war with their allies.” The following summer those allies elected to make a treaty with Syracuse.

123 Thuc. 3.115.1-3, Philochoros Fr. 27.
124 Thuc. 3.115.4.
125 Thuc. 3.115.6, 4.1.1, 4.25.
126 Thuc. 4.2.2-3.
127 Thuc. 4.3.1.
128 Thuc. 4.4.2-4.5.2.
129 Thuc. 4.8.2-4.
130 Thuc. 4.44-48.
131 Thuc. 4.48.6: ἀποπλεύσαντες μετὰ τῶν ἐκεῖ ἔξωμάχων ἐπολέμουν.
132 Thuc. 4.58.
along the lines suggested by the anti-Athenian Syracusan general Hermocrates. The allies informed the three Athenian generals that they were making peace and that the treaty would include Athens. The generals agreed, and with the treaty complete sailed for Athens. Upon their return the Athenians tried the generals, exiling Pythodorus and Sophocles and fining Eurymedon.

No evidence directly testifies that the Athenians put Laches on trial after his recall. Many, however, have seen a trial for embezzlement, moved by Cleon, reflected in the dog trial in Aristophanes’ *Wasps*. In this fantasy, Kuon, of Cleon’s *deme*, prosecutes Labes, obviously a close parallel for Laches, on that charge. Roberts makes a better suggestion. Official recall from office almost certainly implies trial. Since Laches was impeached, he was therefore almost certainly tried (and presumably acquitted, since he was subsequently active both as a politician and a general). If indeed he suffered trial, neither the charge nor the pretext will have concerned his military activity, in that he did not suffer defeat or fail in any way that might have occasioned such an attack. It is striking, nevertheless, that his military success did not prevent his recall and probably a trial.

Laches’ immediate successors, of course, certainly did stand trial. The Athenians, however, having just impeached a very successful general, did not impeach his successors despite their much less impressive performance. Thucydides suggests that Pythodorus, Eurymedon, and Sophocles had performed their office reasonably well – he

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133 Thuc. 4.65.1.
134 Thuc. 4.65.2-3.
certainly condemns the Athenians for their conviction\textsuperscript{137} – but his narrative also records that they had suffered several defeats, had lost territory captured by Laches,\textsuperscript{138} and had on occasion at least temporarily failed to accomplish, or even attempt, mission objectives.\textsuperscript{139} Roberts, Kagan, and others go further, suggesting that the generals had in fact performed very poorly. Pythodorus, they suggest, nearly lost Camerina and Rhegium in addition to Messina. Eurymedon and Sophocles, meanwhile, were responsible for preventing the Spartan fleet from Corcyra from getting to Pylos and by the lateness of their arrival in Sicily caused the (unfortunate, for Athens) peace settlement.\textsuperscript{140} The Athenians, in either case, allowed the generals to serve for the full year and return in 424 after the conclusion of the peace process.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{137} Thuc. 4.65.4.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Specifically Messina. Thuc. 4.1.1.
\item \textsuperscript{139} For example, their argument with Demosthenes, at whose discretion they were supposed to assist (Thuc. 4.4.1), and their failure to get to Corcyra after leaving Pylos (Thuc. 4.8.2).
\item \textsuperscript{140} Donald Kagan, The Archidamian War, Ithaca, 1974, pp. 269-70, and Roberts (1982), pp. 116-7. I do not agree with this assessment, particularly that of Eurymedon and Sophocles. That the two fleet commanders had any responsibility for preventing the Spartan fleet at Corcyra from doing anything in particular is speculative. When they returned to Pylos at Demosthenes’ request they were following their orders to let Demosthenes use their 40 ships in the Peloponnesus (Thuc. 4.2.4), which does not imply that they had failed in allowing it to get past them. There is in fact no evidence that they or the Athenians knew about the Spartan fleet before sending out Eurymedon and Sophocles; Thucydides (4.2.3) reports that they were supposed to help the Corcyreans deal with their exiles on Mount Istone. Only after a break in the sentence, including a new subject (\textit{nees}) does Thucydides indicate that the Spartans had already gotten there, a fact which subsequently surprises the generals. Nor does it seem reasonable that the assembly believed that this force of 40 ships could have helped Demosthenes in the Peloponnesus, defeated the troublesome Corcyreans and 60 Spartan ships, then headed for Sicily all in the same summer. Roberts and Kagan agree that their resulting tardiness in getting to Sicily caused the Athenians’ allies there to give up; Roberts specifically claims that (p. 116) “Thucydides stresses the fact that by the time Sophocles and Eurymedon arrived – in the summer of 425, for the Pylos campaign had intervened – it was too late to prevent Athens’ war-weary allies in Sicily from reaching a settlement.” Thucydides does not stress any such thing, reporting that they arrived in summer 425 and carried on the war with their allies (4.48.6). The peace does not develop until the following summer, and then at the instigation of other parties (4.58). Since the two generals were supposed to help Demosthenes at Pylos and deal with Corcyra on the way, were sent no earlier than spring 425, and arrived in summer 425, and since the peace did not develop until summer 424, it is hard to see how their delay, whether or not it was their fault, caused the Sicilian allies to sue for peace. For my purposes here, however, the significant fact is not the final quality of their performance in the field but rather the fact that their trial did not derive from any details of their actual generalship but rather from the probably spurious suggestion that they accepted bribes.
\end{itemize}
When Laches’ three successors did stand trial they faced a charge of treason. The Athenians alleged that they had taken bribes to depart when they had had the ability to conquer Sicily. Here again there is a considerable distance between a general’s military performance and the charges faced in trial. The defeats the three generals had suffered do not seem to have convinced the Athenians that total victory in Sicily was beyond the power of these generals, nor do their victories seem to have vindicated their performance. Thucydides suggests that the Athenians condemned the generals because, at the height of their good fortune after Pylos, they simply believed that they would automatically win any war they fought, and by implication, that if they failed to accomplish their wishes it must indicate treason, wilfull subversion of their interests, by the generals in the field. Others have suggested that the Athenians found the peace settlement unacceptable and punished the generals for accepting it on their behalf. In either case, the real military failures of the three generals in Sicily do not seem to have formed the basis of their condemnation, as the failure to recall them suggests. The fates of the four Athenian generals in Sicily in 426-424 demonstrate again that performance in the field, and in particular wins and losses in battle, were essentially unrelated to the trials of Athenian generals.

5) Thucydides (424/3). Thucydides served as general along with Eucles in Thrace in 424/3. At least part of his assignment seems to have been the maintenance of Amphipolis against the threat of the Spartan general Brasidas. While Eucles was at

141 Thuc. 4.65.3.
142 Thuc. 4.65.4.
143 Roberts (1982), p. 117.
144 Hansen catalogue #10, p.74; Roberts, pp. 117-20, 128-32.
145 Thuc. 4.104.4.
Amphipolis and Thucydides at Thasos, nearby, Brasidas moved quickly up to the walls of the city and gave terms for its surrender. Thucydides set sail from Thasos, but the citizens of Amphipolis were persuaded to surrender by Brasidas’ favorable terms.\textsuperscript{146} Thucydides arrived too late to prevent the surrender and instead invested Eion. He subsequently defended Eion against an attack by Brasidas.\textsuperscript{147} Thucydides probably did not return to Athens.\textsuperscript{148} The assembly tried and convicted him for treason,\textsuperscript{149} and Thucydides went into exile.\textsuperscript{150}

We know very little about Thucydides’ trial and the substance of the charge against him. The charge was certainly treason, but no source records the evidence provided in support of that charge. That the Athenian citizens generally condemned Thucydides for the loss of Amphipolis is at least suggested by Aristophanes, who in the \textit{Wasps} has a character issue a hostile remark about “betrayal in Thrace,” which may refer to the fall of the city.\textsuperscript{151} Although this trial might appear to parallel the situation of Nicias in Sicily – a conservative aristocratic general fails and loses a significant asset or territory, and then suffers trial and popular odium (rather than simply a political attack) even despite his subsequent victory over Brasidas in defending Eion – there is a significant difference between the two cases. Where Nicias stayed in Sicily and fought until suffering final, total defeat and death, Thucydides failed even to engage Brasidas in defense of Amphipolis, arriving too late to contest the Spartan. Thus the charge of treason, literally the giving over of the city. There is no suggestion in Thucydides’ brief

\textsuperscript{146} Thuc. 4.103.1-106.2.  
\textsuperscript{147} Thuc. 4.106.3-107.2.  
\textsuperscript{148} Hansen argues that, had he stood trial, exile was probably not an option, but only fine or death, and so his exile implies that he fled, or stayed away, before trial (Hansen[1975], p. 74.).  
\textsuperscript{149} Marc. Vit. Thuc. 55, Anon. Vit. Thuc. 3.  
\textsuperscript{150} Thuc. 5.26.5.  
\textsuperscript{151} Aristophanes \textit{Vesp}. 288-90.
report, in the other sources on Thucydides, or in Aristophanes that Thucydides was guilty of or condemned for the commission of any error, which forms the basis of modern critiques of Nicias, as well as the modern assumption that he must have been condemned for his failure. The charge of treason and the reference from Aristophanes suggest that the emphasis in Thucydides’ trial was on his apparent failure to try hard enough to save Amphipolis.

Indeed, as we will see, this is the first of several trials in which generals met condemnation and treason charges for failing to move fast enough, to arrive soon enough, to try hard enough, or to engage the enemy. For this fault, these generals faced charges of treason that appear to have been meant entirely literally. As in the case of Thucydides there will almost never appear any actual defeat (as Nicias suffered) that might lie behind these charges. Error leading to defeat is never alleged. Instead, such failures without engagement (and thus without the appearance of fighting to uphold Athens’ interests) routinely produce charges (both popular and legal) that the general in question was actively trying to undercut the assembly, actually trying to commit treason.

6) Alcibiades (415/4). Alcibiades, elected general for 415/4, left Athens at the head of the expedition to Sicily he had done so much to create but under a legal cloud because of allegations that he had profaned the Eleusinian Mysteries. His first impeachment occurred before his departure in the summer of 415 but trial was postponed. He was then re-impeached, but evaded capture and fled to Sparta.
The assembly charged him with profanation of the mysteries,\textsuperscript{157} tried him in absentia via \textit{eisangelia}, and sentenced him to death.\textsuperscript{158}

Alcibiades, who did not in the Sicilian campaign even get to the point of engaging the enemy and met impeachment and trial for offenses predating his generalship, obviously does not fit in this group of generals who suffered trial for what they did as generals. It is nevertheless interesting that the Athenians used the same process, \textit{eisangelia}, to attack Alcibiades that they used to attack most of the other generals in this list. The Athenians condemned Alcibiades’ impious act because they felt he had intended by his act to damage the demos, that is, to overthrow the democracy.\textsuperscript{159} Although the treason of Thucydides or the bribe-taking of Pythodorus and associates appear to be very different crimes from that of Alcibiades, the Athenians punished them the same way – \textit{eisangelia} leading to conviction – and seem to have viewed them the same way, as each was accused of intentionally trying to injure the demos.

7) \textbf{Anytus (409/8).}\textsuperscript{160} The Athenians in 409/8 sent Anytus to bolster the defenses of Pylos against a Spartan attack.\textsuperscript{161} Anytus failed, however, to get around Cape Malea because of a storm and returned to Athens. On his return to Athens Anytus was charged with treason and tried in court.\textsuperscript{162} The court acquitted him, allegedly because he bribed them.\textsuperscript{163}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Thuc. 6.61.7, Diod. 13.5.4, Plut. \textit{Aec.} 22.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Plut. \textit{Aec.} 21.7.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Thuc. 6.61.7, Diod. 13.5.4, Plut. \textit{Aec.} 19.2, 22.5, Corn. Nep. \textit{Aec.} 4.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Thuc. 6.61.1, Isoc. 16.6, Diod. 13.5.1, Corn. Nep. \textit{Aec.} 3.6.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Hansen catalogue #65, p. 84; Roberts, pp. 62-4.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Diod. 13.64.5-7, Arist. \textit{Ath. Pol.} 27.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Diod. 13.64.6, Plut. \textit{Cor.} 14.6.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Diod. 13.64.6, Arist. \textit{Ath. Pol.} 27.5, Plut. \textit{Cor.} 14.6, Schol. Aeschin. 1.87.
\end{itemize}
Like Thucydides, Anytus met a charge of treason not because he suffered a defeat but because he failed to get where he was supposed to go. Although it is difficult to know whether Anytus should have been able to overcome the storm and get to Pylos, the Athenians were angry at his apparent lack of effort and attacked him for intentionally undercutting their interests. Again, it is neither defeat nor error but rather the appearance of malicious intent, whether in action or, as in this case, passive failure to accomplish what the Athenians thought should have been accomplished, against the *demos*, that drew the anger of the assembly.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, it is not unusual for modern scholars to argue or suppose that the treason and other related charges made against generals in fifth and fourth century Athens were often symbolic, and that the underlying causes of those trials were either military error and/or defeat or, occasionally, unrelated domestic issues. Anytus’ trial presents an excellent example of such a case. There is very little reason to suppose that Anytus’ failure to get to Pylos was really the result of active treason on his part, and he did nothing else as a general, committed no error or failure, that might support the charge. Scholars have naturally concluded that the charge was therefore specious and that other antagonisms lay behind the trial. Following many others, Roberts argues that Anytus’ trial was primarily political. She suggests that “there is no particular reason to think that he was guilty of treason,” and that the trial reflects a political war in Athens in which the ascendant radical democrats were systematically attacking moderates like Anytus. While this argument is very likely correct, popular hostility toward Anytus remained necessary for such a political trial to go forward. In this case,

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164 See above, p. 11.
166 Ibid., pp. 63-4.
that popular hostility, enough that Anytus may have needed bribery to secure acquittal, emerged in response to his inability to sail around the Peloponnesus. There seems little doubt that Anytus’ trial really concerned the issue of his treason and the evidence of his failure to get to Pylos. Although his accusers may have been motivated by political concerns to exploit his temporary weakness, the Athenian citizens who formed his jury were angry at Anytus and judged Anytus on the basis of his treason or its appearance. This case actually demonstrates very clearly that the Athenians did not view the treason charges against their generals as symbolic or as pretexts, and at least suggests that those treason charges did not have any necessary connection with defeat.

8) The Victors of Arginusae (406/5).167 The Athenians in 406 impeached collectively the eight generals who had led a naval victory at Arginusae in response to the generals’ failure to prevent the drowning of thousands of Athenian soldiers who had survived their ships and been left in the water.168 The six generals who returned to Athens endured a long and complex trial. The precise charge is unknown, although it certainly stemmed from the failure to pick up survivors.169 The mechanics of the trial were irregular, the result of a special decree by Callixenos in apparent contradiction of existing procedures (depending on what the “Cannonus Decree” may have been).170 The Athenians nearly acquitted the generals, but before a final vote could be taken the assembly had to disperse because of darkness.171 Before the next assembly meeting

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167 Hansen catalogue #66, pp. 84-6; Roberts, pp. 64-9.
168 Xen. Hell. 1.7.1-2, Diod. 13.101.5.
169 Diod. 13.101.5.
171 Xen. Hell. 1.7.4-7.
political enemies of the generals used emotional distress generated by the Apaturia
festival to build up hostility to the generals\textsuperscript{172} and the assembly subsequently voted to
execute the six.\textsuperscript{173}

It would be unsafe to draw any significant principle from the example of
Arginusae. The Athenians, carried away by emotion, suspended the normal rules
governing assembly trials, and they later repented of their actions and launched legal
attacks against those who had led the prosecution.\textsuperscript{174} Their regret lasted through the reign
of the thirty tyrants, as Callixenos apparently returned to Athens after their overthrow but
died a pariah because of his role in the Arginusae trial.\textsuperscript{175} Although the charge in the trial
was obviously capital, it is unclear how it related to treason; the Athenians seem to have
acted not out of concern for state security but rather in emotional retribution for the
deaths they felt the generals had caused.

The apparent hostility the Athenians felt for the generals of Arginusae because of
their role in causing the deaths of Athenian citizens at war could establish a principle
relevant to military defeat as well. One might argue that generals who lost battles also
caused Athenian deaths, and thus should be supposed to have incurred the same sort of
hostility evidenced over Arginusae. Arginusae seems different from normal defeat,
however, in that while the victors of Arginusae chose to allow the deaths of the Athenians
in their care (for what they thought were good reasons, certainly) defeated generals are
unlikely to have chosen defeat. If other cases appeared in which defeat produced the
same hostility experienced by the victors of Arginusae one might successfully argue that

\textsuperscript{172} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 1.7.7.
\textsuperscript{173} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 1.7.35, Diod. 13.102, Philochorus Fr. 142, Plat. \textit{Axiochus} 368E.
\textsuperscript{174} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 1.7.34.
\textsuperscript{175} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 1.7.35.
the events surrounding Arginusae and defeat could be classified together, held to have invited punishment because both caused loss of Athenian life. Absent supporting examples, however, either in the cases of defeat and trial examined above or in those trials still to be considered, it is best to regard Arginusae as a special case, dependent on unique circumstances and not helpful in explaining the typical characteristics of the trials of generals.

9) The Conspirators of 404 (404).\textsuperscript{176} The Council of 500 put several generals of this year on trial, along with several other individuals, for conspiring to overthrow the democracy. The real revolution, establishing the thirty tyrants, interrupted the trial, after which the suspects were summarily convicted and executed.\textsuperscript{177} These generals obviously did not get into trouble over their military performance, and their treason was alleged to be of the most direct sort.

10) Adeimantus (393/2).\textsuperscript{178} Adeimantus and Conon both served as generals of the Athenian force that lost to Lysander at Aegospotami in 405/4.\textsuperscript{179} Conon escaped the battle and fled into exile.\textsuperscript{180} Adeimantus stayed with the fleet and was captured by Lysander,\textsuperscript{181} then was the only Athenian Lysander released after the battle. Lysander let Adeimantus go on the grounds that he had opposed the idea of mutilating any captives taken in battle by the Athenians, and thus was not as bad as the rest of the captured

\textsuperscript{176} Hansen catalogue #67, p. 86. Roberts does not discuss this episode.
\textsuperscript{177} Lys. 13.4-38.
\textsuperscript{178} Hansen catalogue #68, p. 87; Roberts, pp. 75-6.
\textsuperscript{179} Dem. 19.191.
\textsuperscript{180} Dem. 20.68.
\textsuperscript{181} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 2.1.30.
Athenians. The Athenians, however, suspected that Adeimantus received lenient
treatment because he had betrayed the fleet to Lysander.\textsuperscript{182} Adeimantus returned to
Athens after the passage of the amnesty of 403, which barred any prosecution for crimes
committed before the fall of the thirty. Conon returned to Athens in 393 and, according
to Demosthenes, charged Adeimantus with treason in connection with Aegospotami.\textsuperscript{183}
The outcome of the trial is unattested.

Here, at last, is a general brought to trial after suffering a defeat, and in fact a
devastating defeat that might serve as a parallel for Nicias. That comparison, however, is
difficult to make.

First, the trial of Adeimantus may not have taken place at all. Roberts observes
that such a trial would have violated the amnesty, and such a violation would hardly be
known only from one comment in Demosthenes. She further argues that Conon had little
motive in making such an accusation. An attack on Adeimantus could have served to
protect his own position in Athens, since he served as general over the same fleet.
Conon, however, had had sufficient success since 404 (particularly at Cnidus) that he
should not have needed such a measure.\textsuperscript{184} Further, the amnesty should have protected
him from legal attack (as the only potential violation of the amnesty was his own attack
on Adeimantus). Finally, since his return to Athens was temporary anyway (he left again
in 392 and there is no evidence that he returned\textsuperscript{185}), Conon had little apparent reason in
any case to want to solidify his position there. Hansen supposes the trial to be real

\textsuperscript{182} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 2.1.32.
\textsuperscript{183} Dem. 19.191.
\textsuperscript{184} Roberts (1982), pp. 75-6.
\textsuperscript{185} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.8.16.
despite the fact that it would have violated the amnesty. The safest course is to accept the trial as genuine. That the sources provide no solid motive for the trial does not certainly demonstrate that there was no such motive. Demosthenes, although not always reliable, cannot be supposed to have made up out of whole cloth a significant trial that he uses as an example in his own defense, justifying his impeachment of Aeschines. Without proof that the trial did not occur, we must presume that it did occur.

Second, although Adeimantus did suffer a defeat, that defeat and any errors he or the other generals may have made to bring it about did not provide the basis for the charge of treason he faced. Xenophon explicitly reports that Adeimantus, having served as general in the loss at Aegospotami and having returned to Athens, suffered unpopularity because he was suspected of having betrayed the fleet to Lysander. That suspected act of betrayal, rather than any error or the simple failure of having suffered a defeat, informed both Adeimantus’ popular odium and the charge of treason he faced. Thus the Athenians clearly saw a significant difference between defeat, which seems not to have been actionable, and treason, which they could and did prosecute.

11) Ergocles (390/89). Ergocles was probably a general and certainly served with Thrasyboulus of Steiria in command of an Athenian fleet operating off the coast of Asia Minor. Ordered to Rhodes, Thrasyboulus and Ergocles instead went north and then worked their way down the coast, raising money (sometimes by violent means)

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186 Hansen (1975), p. 87 #68 n.5.
187 Xen. Hell. 2.1.32.
188 Hansen catalogue #73, p. 88; Roberts, pp. 96-100.
along the way.\textsuperscript{190} When their terms expired (either after one or two years) they were ordered home to undergo a \textit{euthyna}.\textsuperscript{191} The Athenians probably did not impeach the generals. Thrasyboulos, apparently expecting legal trouble,\textsuperscript{192} did not immediately return to Athens, and Lysias alleges that Ergocles tried to convince him to rebel from Athens and take Byzantium for himself.\textsuperscript{193} Thrasyboulos, however, was murdered by irate locals\textsuperscript{194} and Ergocles returned to Athens to stand trial. He was charged with treason,\textsuperscript{195} attempting to overthrow the democracy,\textsuperscript{196} embezzlement,\textsuperscript{197} and bribe-taking,\textsuperscript{198} convicted, executed, and his property confiscated.\textsuperscript{199}

Ergocles obviously got into a great deal of trouble with the Athenians. Sealey, Accame, Roberts, and others have seen the conflict between the two generals and the assembly as fundamentally political,\textsuperscript{200} which may be correct, but the pretexts of treason, corruption, and so forth that carried a conviction and execution cannot have rested entirely on political grounds. Ergocles did not suffer defeat, so the source of his unpopularity must rest in his behavior as general. The two generals had exceeded the authority given them by the assembly, at least technically, in their fund-raising trip\textsuperscript{201} (justifying the charge of treason). They had upset the north and eastern Aegean allies of the Athenians in the process\textsuperscript{202} (perhaps justifying the charge of treason as well). They had plundered Athenian and allied territory for money and then could not adequately

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{190} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.28.25-30, Lys. 28 and 29 generally.
\item\textsuperscript{191} Lys. 28.5.
\item\textsuperscript{192} The inference is Roberts’ (1982, p. 99), with which I agree.
\item\textsuperscript{193} Lys. 28.6-7.
\item\textsuperscript{194} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.8.30.
\item\textsuperscript{195} Dem. 19.180.
\item\textsuperscript{196} Lys. 28.7.
\item\textsuperscript{197} Lys. 28 and 29, repeatedly.
\item\textsuperscript{198} Lys. 28.3, 11, and 29.11.
\item\textsuperscript{199} Lys. 29.2, Dem. 19.180.
\item\textsuperscript{200} See Roberts (1982), p. 216 nn. 63 and 65 for a summary of these arguments.
\item\textsuperscript{201} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.8.25-6 suggests this.
\item\textsuperscript{202} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.8.30.
\end{enumerate}
account for the money\textsuperscript{203} (justifying the charges of embezzlement and perhaps bribe-taking). Lysias, at least, interpreted their slow return as indicative of a desire to overthrow the democracy.\textsuperscript{204} Ergocles, although not perhaps in fact a traitor, certainly gave his political enemies (and, more significantly, Thrasyboulos’) room to allege plausibly that he had committed several capital crimes. His trial and conviction rested solidly on that evidence, rather than on any purely military failings as a general.

\textbf{12) and 13) Dionysius and Thrasyboulos of Collytus (388/7).}\textsuperscript{205} Dionysius and Thrasyboulos of Collytus commanded an Athenian fleet in and around the Hellespont at the end of the Corinthian War.\textsuperscript{206} Dionysios along with three other generals (whose legal fates are unknown) commanded a fleet of 32 ships which in 387 had bottled their opponent, Antalcidas, at Abydos. Antalcidas intended to cut off Athens’ access to grain from the Black Sea and had arranged support from both a Syracusan and a Persian fleet, but because of the Athenian blockade at Abydos could not combine those forces and thus overwhelm the Athenian fleet. Antalcidas decided to trick the Athenians, feeding them information that he planned to sail for Chalcedon and then setting out in that direction. After drawing the Athenian fleet into pursuit, however, Antalcidas hid, let the Athenian fleet sail past, and then returned toward Abydos. On the way Antalcidas encountered Thrasyboulos’ fleet of eight ships which had been guarding the entrance to the Hellespont and had sailed up to join the larger Athenian fleet before the arrival of the larger Syracusan fleet. Antalcidas repeated his hiding trick, caught up to Thrasyboulos from

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\textsuperscript{203} Lys. 29.2.
\textsuperscript{204} Lys. 28.5-7 in particular.
\textsuperscript{205} Hansen catalogue #s 74 and 75, pp. 88-9; Roberts, 102-4.
\textsuperscript{206} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.1.26.
behind, captured his leading ships and thus forced the rest to surrender. Antalcidas then combined his fleet with his Syracusan and Persian allies, blocked the Hellespont, and effectively ended the Corinthian War. Both Dionysius and Thrasyboulos stood trial when they returned to Athens, Dionysius for treason (the betrayal or giving up of Thrace, literally) and Thrasyboulos for treason (the betrayal of ships) and for embezzling ransom money. Dionysius was convicted and either executed or fined. No source records the outcome of Thrasyboulos’ trial. Hansen suggests plausibly that Lysias would have mentioned the sentence if Thrasyboulos had been convicted and thus that he was probably acquitted; even if he was convicted the penalty cannot have been too severe because he was still active enough politically to stand trial again on a different matter in 382.

Here is another case of a general who did suffer a defeat (Thrasyboulos) standing trial for treason. Again, however, the case for treason seems to have had little to do with the defeat itself or any errors committed by Thrasyboulos in his command. Dionysius’ trial, on the other hand, is clearly a legitimate treason case. Dionysius did not suffer a direct defeat. His failing was in falling for Antalcidas’ trick. This failure itself might or might not have justified a treason trial, but the circumstances of Dionysius’ actions certainly created the impression of treason. Phanocritus of Parium had warned the Athenian generals ahead of time that Antalcidas would do exactly what he did. The generals ignored this warning and fell directly into the Spartan’s trap. The Athenians

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apparently interpreted the decision to ignore the warning as active treason, tried and
convicted Dionysius for it, and passed a decree honoring Phanocritus for his efforts.\textsuperscript{212}
The decree heroizing Phanocritus clearly suggests that the Athenians took his warning
seriously and thought Dionysius should have done the same. The active, willing decision
not to do so marked Dionysius as a traitor. Thrasyboulos, however, had not been warned
by Phanocritus and had no way of anticipating Antalcidas’ presence in the Hellespont.
His defeat is made more understandable by the fact that he was significantly
outnumbered\textsuperscript{213} and justifiably taken by surprise. If this defeat created a charge of
treason, then we might be correct in asserting that the Athenians were exceptionally harsh
with their generals and punished defeat with treason trials. Thrasyboulus, however, stood
trial not only for treason but also for the more concrete, provable charge of
embezzlement. Despite the double charge he was probably acquitted or at most lightly
fined. This suggests that the Athenians, although they may at first have bundled
Thrasyboulus with his more liable colleagues and charged him with treason, saw that
there was no real evidence here of such treason. At most, the defeat that ended the
Corinthian War \textit{combined} with a charge of embezzlement could only bring a mild fine,
and probably did not secure a conviction – hardly evidence that any defeat would bring
down harsh punishment on the defeated general.

\textbf{14) Two Athenian Generals at Thebes (379/8).}\textsuperscript{214} Two Athenian generals of
this year cooperated with the anti-Spartan faction in Thebes in killing off several leading

\textsuperscript{212} M.N. Tod, \textit{A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions}, Oxford, 1948, #116.
\textsuperscript{213} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 4.8.34, 5.1.27.
\textsuperscript{214} Hansen catalogue #s 77 and 78, p. 90; Roberts, pp. 81-3.
Spartan sympathizers in that city and freeing it from Spartan control.\textsuperscript{215} The generals probably did not have approval from the assembly for this act.\textsuperscript{216} The Athenians impeached the generals. One fled into exile before trial. The other stood trial, was convicted on an unknown charge, and executed.\textsuperscript{217}

Obviously these two generals did not suffer a defeat but were in fact successful. The Athenians probably put them on trial for fear of Spartan reprisal.\textsuperscript{218} This trial does demonstrate, however, that a general might expect severe punishment for disobeying the assembly. Several of the generals discussed above met with capital charges for failing to do what the assembly wanted (Miltiades and Anytus provide excellent examples).\textsuperscript{219} While those other generals had failed in some respect to do everything the assembly had commissioned them to do, the trial of the two Athenian generals at Thebes, who met charges for exceeding their authority rather than for falling short, demonstrates that it was not so much failure as intentional disobedience of any sort that drew the assembly’s wrath.

15) Timotheus (373/2).\textsuperscript{220} Timotheus in 374/3 won election to the board of generals on the strength of his political support for a pro-Theban policy.\textsuperscript{221} The assembly voted him a mission to aid Corcyra against a Spartan siege. The assembly did not,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.4.9-10.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Diodorus 15.25-6 tells a very different version of the story, in which the two generals were on an official mission to liberate Thebes. He places the events in 377 and does not mention the trials. Either Diodorus is wrong (the majority modern opinion) or the Athenians did intend to liberate Thebes but repudiated the decision later in the face of Spartan hostility. See Roberts (1982), p. 81 and p. 212 nn. 118-21 for a discussion of Diodorus as a source for this sequence of events and the scholarship on each side of the question.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.4.19, Plut. Pelop. 14.1.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Roberts (1982), pp. 81-3.
\item \textsuperscript{219} See above sections 1) and 7).
\item \textsuperscript{220} Hansen catalogue #80, p. 91; Roberts, pp. 40-5.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Plut. \textit{De genio Socr.} 575E; Roberts (1982), pp. 43-5.
\end{itemize}
however, vote him the money or manpower to carry out such a mission. Timotheus spent a significant amount of time in the Aegean collecting men and money. While he was thus occupied his political opponents at Athens, led by Callistratos and Iphicrates, gradually won the assembly over to a less pro-Theban position. Callistratos and Iphicrates then had Timotheus impeached and put him on trial for treason. Timotheus was convicted but escaped capital punishment, instead just losing his spot on the board of generals for 373/2.

Timotheus did not suffer any defeat or fail in a meaningful sense. His opponents clearly put him on trial for political reasons. The pretext of treason, however, did support his conviction and might have been strong enough to have him executed had he not had influential supporters at his trial. The evidence for Timotheus’ treason closely resembled that for Miltiades, Cimon, the Sicilian generals, Thucydides, and Anytus; Timotheus had betrayed Athens (or in this case an ally, Corcyra) by failing to act quickly enough, that is, by his (presumably intentional) failure to get where he was supposed to be going or conquer as much as the assembly expected him to conquer. Although political concerns may have motivated his accusers, the appearance of intentional subversion of

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222 Dem. 49.6-9, Xen. Hell. 6.2.13, Diod. 15.47.3. The chronology of events regarding Timotheus’ generalships and his trial present severe problems. I provide a compromise generally following Roberts (see Roberts, pp. 200-1, n. 54 for a discussion of the problems and her suggestions about the correct sequencing for this episode). Difficult political questions also complicate Timotheus’ trial (examined by Roberts on pages 43-5 of her book). I do not delve into these issues here because the precise chronology and the political machinations that may have motivated the trial do not bear directly on my primary interest in the trial. Regardless of the chronology the general shape of events seems clear; no defeat or egregious failure emerges from any rearrangements of the sequence of events, and so my assertion that Timotheus did not suffer censure for defeat remains unaffected by the chronological debate. Similarly, whatever the precise political causes for the trial, the pretext remained military and evidence for and against that military pretext, and popular evaluation of that pretext, would carry conviction or acquittal in the trial. Thus, the political atmosphere that caused the trial does not impact my assessment of that trial’s outcome.

223 Dem. 49.9, Lys. Fr. 228; Roberts, pp. 40-5.

224 Dem. 49.9.

225 Lys. Fr. 228.

226 Dem. 49.10, Lys. Fr. 228.

227 See above, sections 1, 3, 5, and 7.
Athens’ interests, however slight, moved the assembly, which had no particular political axe to grind, to convict and even execute these generals. The trial of Timotheus thus provides further evidence that the Athenians meant their treason charges, even where they appear trivial or even baseless to modern eyes, literally and seriously, and that such charges did not have any intrinsic connection to military defeat.

16) Callistratus and Chabrias (366/5). \(^{228}\) In 366 the pro-Theban faction in the town of Oropus apparently resolved a long-running internal dispute over leadership by seizing power and giving control of the town over to Thebes. \(^{229}\) The Athenians, who had a long-standing claim to Oropus, reacted by sending an army to Oropus under the command of Chabrias. \(^{230}\) Although some have suggested that Callistratus may have been Chabrias’ colleague he was very probably not a general but rather a *rhetor* who had either urged the mission to Oropus or advised the assembly afterwards, or both. \(^{231}\) The Athenians also requested the assistance of their allies in subduing Oropus. When Chabrias got to Oropus he found the Thebans in control and no allied assistance. The Thebans offered to submit control of Oropus to arbitration and Chabrias apparently accepted. \(^{232}\) When the Thebans neither entered arbitration nor surrendered the town the Athenians put Callistratus and Chabrias on trial for treason. \(^{233}\) Both were acquitted. \(^{234}\)

Like so many other generals who were charged with treason, Chabrias suffered no defeat in his *strategeia*. Oropus surrendered before Chabrias even had a command

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228 Hansen catalogue #s 83 and 84, pp. 92-3; Roberts, pp. 69-73.
230 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.1, Diod. 15.76, Schol. Dem. 21.64.
232 Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.1, Diod. 15.76.
against them so he could hardly be blamed for losing the town. His failure seems to have consisted of accepting the Thebans’ offer of arbitration (perhaps on Callistratus’ advice\textsuperscript{235}); since this offer never materialized the Athenians may well have suspected that Chabrias had sold them out. There is no reason to suppose, however, that Chabrias was or should have been expected to do anything else especially given the lack of allied support he encountered. There seems to have been a significant delay between the offer of arbitration and the trial,\textsuperscript{236} suggesting that the Athenians themselves were reasonably content with the offer, attacking Chabrias only when no arbitration hearing happened. Roberts again argues that the trials were primarily political in nature;\textsuperscript{237} she is certainly correct. The Athenians acquitted Callistratus and Chabrias on the pretextual treason charge, very likely because they could see that little real evidence stood behind it. Once again we see the assembly judge a charge of treason on its own merits and evidence, rather than reacting to any defeat the general may have experienced in his command (even in combination with a political attack).

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\textbf{17 and 18) Callisthenes and Ergophilus} (363/2).\textsuperscript{238} Callisthenes and Ergophilus both served as generals in the northern Aegean in 363/2.\textsuperscript{239} Callisthenes, fighting against the Macedonian king Perdiccas, a former ally who had agreed to assist Amphipolis in its rebellion against Athens, performed well in the field. After defeating Perdiccas he forced the king to promise to leave Amphipolis alone in return for a truce. Returning to Athens in the belief that he had won a victory, Callisthenes discovered on his return that

\textsuperscript{235} Roberts (1982), p. 70.
\textsuperscript{236} See Roberts (1982), p. 71 and p. 208, n. 71 for discussion and scholarship on this point.
\textsuperscript{237} Roberts (1982), p.71-3.
\textsuperscript{238} Hansen catalogue #s 85 and 86, pp. 93-4; Roberts, pp. 113-4.
\textsuperscript{239} Dem. 19.180, 23.104, Aeschin. 2.30.
Perdiccas, freed from Callisthenes’ fleet, had ignored his promise and invested Amphipolis.\footnote{Aeschin. 2.30.} Ergophilus’ actions are unattested. The assembly impeached both generals. The charge against Callisthenes is unattested but was very likely treason.\footnote{Aeschin. 2.30.} He was convicted and executed.\footnote{Aeschin. 2.30, Arist. Rhet. 1380B10.} The next day Ergophilus faced a treason charge,\footnote{Dem. 19.180.} was convicted, but was heavily fined rather than executed.\footnote{Arist. Rhet. 1380B10.}

The case of Callisthenes once again demonstrates the distance between military action and treason charges. Callisthenes performed well as a general in his military engagements, defeating Perdiccas. He met trial, conviction, and death not for defeat or military error but because he willingly abandoned the field to Perdiccas and allowed his opponent to capture an important city without resistance.\footnote{Aeschines actually says that the Athenians did not condemn Callisthenes because of his truce with Perdiccas. Aeschines, of course, wrote to gratify the Macedonian king and seems to be attempting to play down past hostilities between Athens and Macedon. Hansen (1975, p. 93, #85, n. 4) argues that “Aeschines’ attempt to explain to Philip that Callisthenes was not tried because of the armistice is almost a proof of the opposite.” Roberts does not even bother to argue the point, asserting (what is certainly the modern assumption) that the Athenians did try Callisthenes because of his truce with Perdiccas.} As so many generals before him Callisthenes suffered, in this case despite clear victories, for giving the appearance of real treason by not executing his command strenuously enough (in this case out of foolishness rather than sloth). The case of Ergophilus, little attested, sheds little light on the relationship between Athens’ assembly and its generals. Ergophilus may have been involved in Callisthenes’ failure, or he may have served independently and experienced some other failure. Demosthenes lists him as one of the generals who faced trial for betraying Thrace.\footnote{Dem. 19.180.} The precise nature of that failure is unknown. Certainly there exists no positive evidence that Ergophilus suffered a defeat in Thrace, but it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from his trial.

The next five generals, trials 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23, generals Leosthenes, Autocles, Timomachus, Timotheus, and Menon, all served as general in or shortly before 360. All five stood trial for their execution of that office, although their performances seem to have differed significantly. Most of our evidence about their trials comes from Demosthenes and Aeschines. These trials might collectively be taken to demonstrate that generals who lost (as Leosthenes) or failed in some other significant respect (as was
alleged of Autocles) did subsequently undergo prosecution, partly because our evidence about those trials is limited. The ways Demosthenes and Aeschines present their arguments, however, suggest another interpretation. I will first discuss the particulars of each general’s experiences and trial, and then discuss the larger arguments that apply to them as a group.

19) Leosthenes (361). In either 362/1 or 361/0 Leosthenes commanded an Athenian fleet at Peparethus. He was supposed to be punishing Alexander of Pherae for several hostile acts against the Athenians and relieving Peparethus from Alexander’s siege. Instead Alexander surprised Leosthenes by attacking at night and captured five Athenian and one allied ship as well as 600 captives. Alexander then pressed on to the Piraeus, looting and taking a few more captives. The Athenians tried Leosthenes for treason (literally, for the betrayal of ships), convicted him, and sentenced him to death commuted to exile since Leosthenes fled before trial.

This trial appears closest to the traditional understanding of the trials of Athenian generals. Leosthenes, a general, accepted a fleet and a mission, lost a battle, was tried for treason and convicted. We do not, however, know enough about this trial to be certain what facts supported the charge. Hyperides asserts that Leosthenes betrayed Athenian ships, a phrase which could refer to his defeat or could refer to some laxity on

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247 Hansen catalogue #88, p. 95; Roberts, pp. 73-5.
248 361/0 according to Diodorus 15.95.1-2. More probably the correct date is 362/1, following Demosthenes 51.9. See Hansen (1975), p. 95, #88, n. 5, and Roberts (1982), p. 209, n. 82.
249 Diod. 15.95.2.
250 Polyaeus 6.2.1, Diod. 15.95.2.
251 Diod. 15.95.2-3.
252 Diod. 15.95.3.
253 Hyp. 4.1.
254 Diod. 15.95.3.
255 Aeschin. 2.124.
256 Hyp. 4.2.
Leosthenes’ part, not preserved in any source, that convinced the Athenians that his failure was treasonable. Just so was Dionysius, (12), charged with betraying Thrace despite the fact that he had suffered no defeat; the phrase “betraying X” does not necessarily imply a defeat. Further, Thrasyboulos, (13), did suffer a defeat and was charged with betraying Athenian ships, but when it became clear he had not been warned about Antalcidas’ tactics as had Dionysius he was presumably acquitted of the treason charge despite the reality of his defeat. The Athenians do seem to have distinguished between defeat and treason in other cases. There is no direct evidence in the case of Leosthenes, however, to indicate such a separation.

20) Autocles (360). Autocles sailed at the head of a fleet (of which Leosthenes commanded a part) ordered to protect Athenian interests in the Aegean and Hellespont generally and in particular to control the activities of Alexander of Pherae. Autocles sailed to Thrace, where Miltokuthes had revolted against Athens’ enemy, Kotys. Miltokuthes requested Athenian assistance. The Athenians passed a decree as Autocles was about to depart that apparently had something to do with the war in the north. Whatever was in the decree, Demosthenes says it so discouraged Miltokuthes that he retreated in fear. Later in the year Apollodorus impeached Autocles. After Autocles and Apollodorus returned to Athens Autocles stood trial on the charge that he destroyed

257 Hansen catalogue #90, pp. 95-6; Roberts does not discuss Autocles.
258 Dem. 23.104, 50.4.
259 Dem. 23.104.
260 Dem. 50.12.
Miltokuthes,\textsuperscript{261} which seems to have been concretized in the form of a charge of treason.\textsuperscript{262} The outcome is unknown.\textsuperscript{263}

It is impossible to identify the nature of Autocles’ failure or the evidence that supported the unknown charge against him. It seems unlikely, since Miltokuthes apparently withdrew rather than suffering defeat, that Autocles actually lost an engagement that could have led Apollodorus to allege that he had “ruined Miltokuthes.”\textsuperscript{264} Hansen supposes that the discouraging Athenian decree contained instructions for Autocles, which would suggest that Autocles got into trouble for failing to do what the assembly wanted done.\textsuperscript{265} Even if this supposition is true, however, it does not imply that Autocles suffered a defeat. The case of Autocles ultimately fails to provide any concrete information about the reasons the Athenians put their generals on trial.

\textbf{21) Menon (360).}\textsuperscript{266} Menon replaced Autocles as general in Thrace in 362/1.\textsuperscript{267} Like Autocles Menon faced trial in 360 at the hands of Apollodorus, who served as his trierarch.\textsuperscript{268} The substance of the trial is entirely unclear. Hansen argues that the trial must have concerned Menon’s military actions because his accuser was his own trierarch.\textsuperscript{269} No source attests to this, however, and Apollodorus in 360 brought several

\textsuperscript{261} Dem. 23.104, 50.1,12.
\textsuperscript{262} Hyp. Fr. 67.
\textsuperscript{263} Although Hansen (1975) argues that Demosthenes implies that Autocles was acquitted (p. 96, #90, n. 11).
\textsuperscript{264} Dem. 23.104.
\textsuperscript{265} Hansen (1975), p. 96, #90, n. 9.
\textsuperscript{266} Hansen catalogue #95, p. 98. Roberts does not discuss this trial.
\textsuperscript{267} Dem. 50.12.
\textsuperscript{268} Dem. 50, 12-4.
\textsuperscript{269} Hansen (1975), p. 98.
generals to trial on various (and also in some other cases unclear) charges. No source records anything about Menon’s performance in office, the charge against him, or the result of the trial. That Menon served as general again in 357/6, however, suggests acquittal or at worst a small fine.

22) Timomachus (360) Timomachus replaced Menon as Athenian general in Thrace in 361/0. Although Timomachus was unfortunate enough to inherit Apollodorus as a trierarch his trial depends on more serious problems in the execution of his office. Timomachus actually performed well militarily, doing the job the assembly had sent him to do, albeit with little military action. He also, however designated at least one ship to convey his political ally and relative by marriage, the exiled Callistratus, from Methone to Thasos. He tried to force Apollodorus to carry Callistratus. When Apollodorus refused, because such assistance to an exile would have been illegal, Timomachus instead ordered the more pliable trierarch Callipus to ferry Callistratus. Apollodorus subsequently charged Timomachus with treason, embezzlement, and the illegal transportation of Callistratus. Timomachus fled and suffered conviction in absentia.

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270 Including Autocles (above, number 20), Timomachus (below, number 22), Timotheus (below, number 23) as well as the trierarch Callipus. Dem. 36.53.
273 Dem. 50.14.
274 Dem. 50.17.
275 Dem. 50.46-52.
276 Dem. 19.180, Schol Aeschin. 1.56.
277 Aeschin. 1.56.
278 Dem. 50.46-52.
279 Hyp. 4.2.
280 Schol. Aeschin. 1.56.
None of the charges against Timomachus appear to depend on the general’s military action in Thrace. The charge of treason probably grew to at least some degree out of Timomachus’ indisputably illegal act in aiding Callistratus.\(^{281}\) The formal charge was that he had betrayed Thrace to Cotys.\(^{282}\) Cotys during 361/0 sent a letter to Athens that indicated that he would not accept Athenian alliance or an Athenian presence in Thrace.\(^{283}\) While this unfortunate development happened on Timomachus’ watch, there is no evidence that Timomachus did anything to inspire Cotys’ letter or that he suffered any defeat or lost any territory to Cotys. The charge of embezzlement seems to have been substantiated. Aeschines argues that it was Timomachus’ *tamias* Hagesandros who did the actual embezzling, but even so Timomachus would likely have borne some of the blame for his action.\(^{284}\) Not only, in fact, did Timomachus not earn his trial through military incompetence but had in a previous generalship actually experienced military failure without suffering trial. In 367/6 Timomachus and another general had been charged with preventing the Thebans from getting access to the Peloponnesus. They had, either out of laxity or in a direct defeat, lost the passage and allowed the Thebans access.\(^{285}\) There is no evidence that Timomachus suffered impeachment or trial for that failure, and there is no evidence of any military failure in 361/0 that might have motivated his condemnation.

\(^{281}\) Roberts (1982), p. 111.  
\(^{282}\) Dem. 19.180, Schol. Aeschin. 1.56.  
\(^{283}\) Dem. 23.115.  
\(^{284}\) Aeschin. 1.56.  
\(^{285}\) Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.41.
23) **Timotheus** (360). Timotheus served as Athenian general in Thrace, probably in 360/59 replacing Timomachus. He was sent to capture Amphipolis but was defeated. He stood trial, probably in 360 in connection with his defeat at Amphipolis. The charge and result of the trial are unattested, but it seems probable that the charge was treason and that the result was acquittal. 

Like Leosthenes, Timotheus seems to present the expected sequence of defeat followed by trial for treason. There is no evidence concerning the details or justification of the treason charge against Timotheus, and therefore no direct way to demonstrate that the defeat itself supported the charge. Indirect evidence, however, about each of these last five trial events does suggest that even in these cases the charges of treason did not stem directly from the defeat.

Demosthenes says in his speech in defense of Phormio that Apollodorus made false charges against Timomachus, Callipus (Timomachus’ trierarch), Menon, Timotheus, and others. Apollodorus did in fact bring charges, two for treason and two on unknown charges but probably treason, against each of these three generals and one trierarch in 360. The “others” indicated by Demosthenes may well include Autocles, also charged with treason by Apollodorus in 360. Aeschines makes a similar claim for Leosthenes, arguing that he had been forced to flee into exile because of false

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286 Hansen catalogue #93, pp. 97-8. Roberts does not discuss this trial.
287 Schol. Aeschin. 2.31.
288 Hansen (1975, pp. 97-8, #93, nn. 2, 4, and 5) argues that the citation in Schol Aesch. 2.31 should indicate that the trial took place in the archonship of Callimedus, that is, in 360/59, and that such a date would be consistent with the fact that the other trials mentioned with this one in Dem. 36.53 also took place in 360. I see no reason to dispute this conclusion.
289 A good suggestion offered by Hansen (1975), p. 97, #93, n. 3.
290 Acquittal is made probable by Timotheus’ presence as a general in the Hellespont in 356/5 (Dion. Hal. Dein. p. 667-8, Diod. 16.21.4.
291 Dem. 36.53.
292 See above, sections 22 (Timomachus and Callipus), 21 (Menon), and 23 (Timotheus).
293 See above, section 20.
accusations.\textsuperscript{294} Leosthenes, too, faced a charge of treason.\textsuperscript{295} Thus between them Demosthenes and Aeschines assert that these five generals (leaving out the trierarch), Leosthenes, Autocles, Menon, Timomachus, and Timotheus, suffered trial on treason charges that were the result of false witness (sycophancy) – that is, that the claims of treason against them were baseless.

Of these generals, Timomachus certainly did not lose any battles but did engage in illegal behavior and at least indirect embezzlement and was convicted. Autocles and Menon stood trial (and were probably acquitted) for unknown offenses. Leosthenes and Timotheus present the two most difficult cases for the argument I am trying to make, that defeat did not create odium or treason trials. Both suffered defeat, both stood trial, and the evidence for each is too thin to demonstrate that their trials and their treason (at least one, Leosthenes, was convicted) rested on anything other than that defeat.

The assertions of Demosthenes and Aeschines, however, suggest that there was some supporting evidence for those charges of treason other than simple defeat, that the charges of treason were in fact, as we have seen in the better-documented earlier cases, separate from the generals’ defeat. Demosthenes and Aeschines in fact suggest that defeat itself could not have supported treason proceedings against a general. One might well object that neither Demosthenes nor Aeschines can be trusted in this case. Demosthenes, engaged in defending Phormio from another attack by Apollodorus, has obvious reasons for wanting to suggest that Apollodorus has brought false charges in the past. He might well be expected to be exaggerating or lying in suggesting that Apollodorus was lying in the past, and thus his assertion provides no evidence that the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[294] Aesch. 2.124.
\item[295] See above, section 19.
\end{footnotes}
four generals accused by Apollodorus were in fact innocent of treason. Aeschines was a supporter of Macedon and a pro-Macedonian policy. Macedon, however, was the residence of Leosthenes, tried and convicted for treason by the Athenians. Aeschines was trying to make Macedon look better by asserting that Leosthenes was blameless. Since Aeschines, like Demosthenes, has a readily apparent ulterior motive for claiming that Leosthenes was innocent and falsely accused, he, like Demosthenes, very well could have been lying himself, and Leosthenes in fact guilty of treason.

However, if defeat naturally produced a trial, if defeat were sufficient grounds for charging a general with treason, Demosthenes and Aeschines could hardly have made such claims. Leosthenes and Timotheus, in particular, indisputably lost, and Leosthenes at least lost ships and men in addition to a military engagement. If such defeats were essentially equated with treason, Aeschines and Demosthenes (respectively) would have had no ability to assert that the charges against them had been false. What, for example, could Demosthenes have been asserting in court that Apollodorus lied about in 360? Timotheus’ generalship, which was a matter of record? His defeat, which would have been well-known both to the citizens who served in Timotheus’ army and to the citizens who formed his jury? Similarly, Aeschines could hardly have suggested that Leosthenes’ treason prosecution had been “sycophantic” if simple defeat (and Leosthenes’ had been severe) justified treason proceedings. To suppose that defeat naturally produced trials and charges of treason assumes that Demosthenes in court and Aeschines in the assembly could make blatantly counterfactual claims about famous battles and trials involving significant aristocratic generals, in front of precisely the same citizens who had evaluated those generals’ performances.
It is much more reasonable to suggest, instead, that the assertions of Demosthenes and Aeschines imply the existence of just such a distance between military defeat (which is usually indisputable) and treason charges against generals as I have hypothesized in this chapter. Demosthenes and Aeschines must have been claiming that, whether or not the five generals in question suffered defeat, there was no evidence of treason. Demosthenes’ assertion implies that Apollodorus exploited popular fear and upset after the long series of Thracian problems, 362-360 BCE, to make false charges of treason against generals, some of whom merely suffered defeat, and thus should not have been liable to prosecution. Similarly Aeschines’ argument about Leosthenes must suggest that evidence was provided in support of the treason charge other than the fact of Leosthenes’ defeat, because Leosthenes’ defeat was real, severe, and memorable. Although both Demosthenes and Aeschines may well have been insincere in their claims of these generals’ innocence, the fact that they could make such a claim at all strongly implies that treason charges did not arise naturally from military defeat.

24) and 25) Philon (361/0) and Theotimus (361/0 or 360/59). Nothing is known of these two generals beyond their mention in Hyperides. Hyperides lists them among generals who betrayed Athenian ships or cities. No further data describes Philon. Hansen supposes him to have been roughly contemporaneous with the other generals mentioned by Hyperides, and thus dates his trial to 361 or 360. Hyperides

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296 Hansen catalogue #89, p. 95; Roberts does not discuss this trial.
297 Hansen catalogue #94, p. 98; Roberts, p. 112.
298 Hyp. 4.1-2.
299 Hansen (1975), p. 95, #89, n.9.
specifies that Theotimus was the general responsible for the loss of Sestos, an event dated by other sources to either 361/0 or 360/59. Both generals presumably faced charges of treason, and both fled before trial, which presumably led to their conviction.

The extremely limited nature of the evidence here precludes identifying the grounds and evidence behind the charges of treason. It is unclear whether Philon lost any battles. Theotimus apparently was involved in the loss of Sestos, but it is unclear what that means. Several of the generals listed elsewhere in this chapter “lost”, “ruined”, or “betrayed” cities, regions, or ships, but none suffered a treason trial for a defeat. Without clear evidence for defeat or treason charges based on such defeat these two trials cannot serve as evidence that defeat motivated such trials.

26) Cephisodotus (360/59). Cephisodotus was another in a long line of unsuccessful Athenian generals in Thrace. Cephisodotus apparently went north expecting to receive assistance against Cotys from mercenary soldiers under Charidemus. Charidemus instead allied himself with Cotys’ son Cersobleptes (Cotys had died) and attacked Cephisodotus. Cephisodotus lost a series of engagements over the course of seven months and ultimately signed a treaty with Cersobleptes. The Athenians immediately repudiated the treaty, which apparently treated the Athenians as the weaker, conquered party, and impeached Cephisodotus. Cephisodotus was probably charged

300 Hyp. 4.1.
302 Hyp. 4.1-2, inferences drawn by Hansen (1975), pp. 95, 98.
303 See above, sections 20, 21, and 23, for example, and below, section 26.
304 Hansen catalogue #96, pp. 98-9; Roberts, pp. 114-5.
305 Dem. 23.163-9.
306 Dem. 23.157-69.
with treason for betraying Thrace.\textsuperscript{308} He was convicted and nearly executed\textsuperscript{309} but instead fined five talents.\textsuperscript{310}

Cephisodotus’ generalship and trial again demonstrate the Athenian tolerance for defeat and intolerance for any behavior hinting at subversion or disloyalty. The assembly allowed Cephisodotus to stay in office through, according to Demosthenes, seven solid months of defeat and poor judgement.\textsuperscript{311} When, however, he accepted a dishonorable treaty the Athenians immediately recalled him and put him on trial for treason. Cephisodotus’ treason clearly had nothing to do with his losses or his lapses in strategic judgement. Only when he betrayed Athens by giving up and signing a demeaning treaty did he draw legal fire.

\textbf{27) Iphicrates, Timotheus, and Menestheus (356/5).}\textsuperscript{312} The assembly sent Iphicrates, Timotheus, Menestheus, and Chares to Thrace\textsuperscript{313} in command of a huge fleet. They were to suppress the revolt there and stop the raiding of Chios, Rhodes, Cos, and Byzantium. As they were preparing to meet the rebel ships in or near the Hellespont a storm came up. Timotheus, Iphicrates, and Menestheus elected to hold back and wait for better circumstances,\textsuperscript{314} but Chares aggressively kept going, attacked alone, and was

\textsuperscript{308} As were so many other generals, Cephisodotus was attacked for betraying Thrace. Hansen consistently interprets this phrase of Demosthenes (19.180) to indicate a charge of treason. Although it is certainly possible that in some of these cases the charges may have included the taking of bribes, some form of treason (which would include taking bribes) seems a reasonable supposition.

\textsuperscript{309} Dem. 23.167, Aeschin. 3.52.

\textsuperscript{310} Dem. 23.167, Androtion Fr. 19, Schol. Aeschin. 3.51.

\textsuperscript{311} Dem. 23.157-69. So Roberts (1982), p. 115: “a sober consideration of the evidence presented by Demosthenes himself suggests that Cephisodotus exercised extremely poor judgment throughout in dealing with Charidemus.”

\textsuperscript{312} Hansen catalogue #100, 101, and 102, pp. 100-102; Roberts, pp. 45-9.


\textsuperscript{314} Polyaeus 3.9.29, Diod. 16.21.3.
defeated. The subsequent chronology is disturbed, but it can be stated with relative
certainty that Chares condemned his colleagues to the Athenians. Aristophon charged
all three generals with treason on the grounds that they accepted bribes from the Chians
and Rhodians and had not attacked for that reason. Iphicrates and Menestheus were
acquitted. Timotheus was fined 100 talents and died soon after (354).

While some of the details of these trials remain unclear, there is little doubt that
Iphicrates, Timotheus, and Menestheus, who were impeached, did not lose any battle,
that Chares, who did lose a battle, was not impeached, and that the charges of treason
against Iphicrates, Timotheus, and Menestheus rested not on their military decisions but
rather on the claim that they accepted bribes. It is significant that Chares and Antiphon
did not attack the three generals for bad generalship or bad decision-making, or even for
cowardice, in connection with their failure to engage their opponents because of a storm.
Instead, they created the claim of bribery, for which there was probably no real
evidence. Chares himself never seems to have been attacked for his defeat, not even
by his fellow generals (who had after all expressly disagreed with his judgement in
attacking at the Hellespont). Once again Athenian generals could have been attacked for
poor military decisions or judgement or for an actual defeat, but were not.

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315 Diod. 16.21.3-4, Corn. Nep. Tim. 3.2-5.
316 See Roberts (1982), pp. 46-7 for a discussion and reasonable reconstruction of these events,
beyond the scope of the present study.
317 Lys. Fr. 128, Diod. 16.21.4, Corn.Nep. Tim. 3.4.
    Dein. 1.14, 3.17.
319 Isocr. 15.129, Corn. Nep. Iph. 3.3.
28) Lysicles (338/7). Lysicles was tried, probably for treason, in 338/7 following his participation as general in the crushing Greek defeat by Philip of Macedon at Chaeronea. Lysicles was convicted and sentenced to death. Although Lysicles certainly suffered a defeat it is unlikely that the fact of his defeat led to his trial and execution. First, the defeat at Chaeronea happened in large part because of another trick. Philip allowed a false dispatch to fall into Athenian hands. He pretended that he intended to return to Thrace. When the Athenians relaxed their guard on the hills Philip swept them down into the plain and then defeated them there. It is entirely possible that Lysicles’ conviction resulted from falling for this trick rather than from the defeat (the sources do not explain which). Second, while Lysicles did stand trial, Chares, also a general at Chaeronea, did not. If the defeat had been enough to sustain a charge of treason against the generals Chares should have suffered prosecution as well.

No other generals are known to have suffered eisangelia trials, and no other known general who met any sort of legal difficulty (impeachment, deposition, or trial) suffered a true military defeat. A few other generals do merit brief mention, however.

29) Phrynichus and Scironides were impeached for allegedly political reasons in 412/1 on the argument that they had allowed the Persians to capture Iasus by their inaction. They were never defeated, and never tried. 30) Xenophon, Hestiodorus, and Phanomachus accepted the surrender of Potidea in 430/29. They were attacked and

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322 Hansen catalogue #112, pp. 103-4; Roberts, pp. 77-8.
323 Lyc. Fr. 75-7, Diod. 16.88, Ps. Plut. 843D.
324 Diod. 16.88.
325 Lyc. Fr. 75.
326 Polyaenus 4.2.8,14.
327 Polyaenus 4.2.8.
328 Thuc. 8.27, 48, 50.4, 54.3-4, Lys. 20.11-12, 25.9, Plut. Alc. 25.5-9. Roberts (1982), pp. 36-40.
may have been tried either for exceeding their authority or for excessive leniency toward Potidea. The mechanics of any trial are unknown, but if they were tried they were certainly acquitted. Obviously they suffered no defeat.\textsuperscript{329} \textbf{31) Paches} apparently suffered attack in 427, either during his \textit{euthyna} or at a subsequent trial that grew from his audit. Little detail is known about this incident other than Paches’ suicide, the historicity of which Roberts rightly questions. Paches suffered no defeat; any attack on him must have grown either from unknown financial misbehavior or, more likely, from either overstepping his authority (as the generals at Potidea) or failing to press some action with sufficient vigor.\textsuperscript{330} \textbf{32) Aristarchus} was impeached sometime after 411 for betraying a city to the Thebans. That he ever stood trial (even in absentia) is unclear. His treason seems to have been real.\textsuperscript{331} \textbf{33) Alcibiades}, having suffered one treason trial already, may have fled a second in 407/6. He commanded a fleet in the eastern Aegean, but left it, after an uneven performance, to go north, probably to Cume, with a small force in an effort to win over allies and raise money. Remarkably Alcibiades left the fleet in command of his own ship’s pilot, Antiochus, rather than another general or a trierarch. In Alcibiades’ absence Antiochus disobeyed his orders to stay put, engaged in a battle with Lysander, and lost. Alcibiades was impeached and probably charged with treason. Alcibiades did not return to Athens, and the trial may never have happened. Although Alcibiades’ forces were certainly defeated, the charge of treason seems to rest on his mistreatment of several allied cities and the fact that he had left the fleet, irregularly, in the control of someone not given their position by the assembly. The fact of the defeat seems the least of Alcibiades’ crimes in and around Notium, and the only one in which he

\textsuperscript{329} Aristoph. \textit{Knights} 438, Thuc. 2.70.2-4, Diod. 12.47.3. Roberts (1982), pp. 34-6.
did not personally take part.\textsuperscript{332} 34) \textbf{Nicophemus and Aristophanes} were executed by the Athenians sometime around 390. The charges are not clear; Lysias claims that they were executed without trial. Father and son, they appear to have been friends of Conon and were involved with him in an unfortunate effort to assist Evagoras that ultimately resulted in a serious defeat at the hands of the Spartans. It is not at all clear, however, that either man was a general in this case, and neither seems to have been directly involved in the fighting. Lysias claims that Aristophanes helped conceive and fund the campaign then went to Cyprus as an ambassador; Nicophemus’ role in the disaster is totally unknown. This unusual episode provides no significant information about generals or the standards to which the Athenians held them.\textsuperscript{333} 35) \textbf{Pamphilus} performed poorly as general in 389/8. Commissioned to control Aeginetan piracy, he built a fort and was promptly placed under siege by the Spartan Teleutias. Rescued by another fleet, he led a second force against the Aeginetans but still could not stop their piracy. He was impeached, tried, convicted, and fined, but on a charge of embezzlement rather than a capital charge relating to his poor conduct of his office. Again poor performance in some respect produced impeachment and trial, but there is no clear defeat and no charge apparently related to that performance.\textsuperscript{334} 36) \textbf{Agyrrhius} was charged with embezzlement, perhaps at his audit, and was fined. Nothing more is known of the circumstances of his case.\textsuperscript{335}

\textsuperscript{335} Dem. 24.134.
In addition to these several other generals suffered some sort of difficulty at their euthynai not resulting in charges beyond financial misbehavior. A few others suffered deposition or prosecution but do not add much to this study either because their trials were neither treason proceedings nor related to defeat, or because too little is known about their situations to make any firm statement about them.

Leaving aside the minor cases, this study examines 35 trial events including 50 different generals. Of these, the generals on trial in only seven actually suffered a defeat in the field (numbers 4, 10, 13, 19, 23, 26, and 28, leaving aside Alcibiades’ defeat in absentia at Notium). Of those seven trial events involving a general or generals who had suffered defeat, in none did the trial or a conviction clearly depend on that defeat. The Sicilian generals Eurymedon, Pythodorus, and Sophocles were very specifically not punished for their defeats but for the treaty they accepted on behalf of the assembly. Cephisodotus similarly was allowed to stay in office through defeats but not through a humiliating treaty. Adeimantos lived in Athens for a decade following his defeat and was only eventually tried by one of the other generals who had shared in his defeat and then on the grounds that he had intentionally betrayed the fleet to Lysander. Lysicles could hardly have been tried just on the basis of his defeat, since at least one other general who shared in that defeat, Chares, stayed in Athens and did not suffer prosecution. Thrasyboulos of Collytus suffered trial primarily on a charge of embezzling ransom money, may have shared in his colleague Dionysius’ treason in ignoring warnings about Antalcidas’ intentions, and was in any case acquitted, all of which tends to suggest that

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337 Including Hegesilaos, Hippocrates, Laispodias, Philocles, and Proxenus. See also Hansen (1975), pp. 43, 61-3.
his loss to Antalcidas in a naval engagement was not a serious legal problem for him. Only two of the 50 generals discussed here suffered defeat and then stood trial for treason without any other known evidence or circumstances to cause the trial: Leosthenes (who was convicted in absentia) and Timotheus (who seems to have been acquitted). Both of these generals were claimed, by Aeschines and Demosthenes, respectively, to have been accused falsely, implying that, since their defeats were real, the treason charges must have depended on other evidence. While several other generals in the list suffered prosecution for unknown offenses, it is nevertheless true that none of the 50 generals who took part in the 36 trial events detailed in this chapter seem to have been charged, been deposed, stood trial, or suffered punishment because of defeat in a direct military engagement.

This is not to say that the Athenian generals who stood trial were generally innocent of wrongdoing or failure, or that the Athenian assembly and courts were so rapacious as to convict and execute a long series of generals who had done nothing wrong. Ten of these 36 trial events concerned generals who had failed in some measure to accomplish what was expected of them (numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 15, 27, 30, and 35). Seven lost either a city or territory, but not due to defeat (generally arriving late, inaction, or outright treason, numbers 5, 16, 20, 24, 25, 29, and 32). A few had overstepped their authority (14 and 30), and several more embezzled, engaged in illegal activities, or just generally performed poorly (numbers 6, 9, 18, 21, 22, 33, 34, and 36). I would hardly care to disagree with the assessments cited earlier, that those generals who were deposed or put on trial generally deserved it; a clear majority had failed in some respect or
committed illegal acts, and the rest certainly gave their enemies the opportunity to suggest that they had.

It seems clear, however, that, despite the reputation of the classical Athenians and the essentially unanimous opinion of modern scholars, a defeat, such as the one Nicias suffered in Sicily, would not have brought odium or trial without some evidence of financial wrongdoing or direct betrayal. Only by undercutting the authority of the assembly, by disobeying its orders, could a general draw a charge of treason. Between 490 and 337 BCE Generals got into trouble by not doing as much as they were expected to do, by not trying hard enough to accomplish their mission, by overstepping their authority, by committing illegal acts in office, and by accepting treaties when they still possessed soldiers and ships with which to fight, but they did not get into trouble by losing.

Thucydides reports that Demosthenes wanted to leave Sicily after the defeat of his night attack on Epipolae. Nicias refused, however,

“for he knew well, he said, that the Athenians would not approve of the generals withdrawing without any vote of their own to that effect. . . . and of the soldiers now present in Sicily, many, he said – aye, the majority – who were now crying out that they were in a desperate plight, as soon as they arrived in Athens would cry out just the reverse, that their generals had been bribed to betray them and withdraw. Accordingly, he at any rate did not wish, knowing as he did the character of the Athenians, to be put to death on a shameful charge and unjustly at the hands of the Athenians, but

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338 Thuc. 7.47.3-48.4.
rather to fight and die, if so he must, his own death at the hands of the foe.”

Roberts argues that

“in view of his fears, however, Nicias would have done well to withdraw from public life. He failed to understand what the Athenians had tried to make clear already half a century before by the conviction of Miltiades – that a heavy responsibility went along with the *strategia*, a responsibility not only to mean well but to do well. No Athenian who was not willing to accept the risks that went with the job should have stood for the generalship. Nicias did not perceive this, nor did Thucydides, but that is no reason why we should be unable to see it from a greater distance today . . . Nicias’ conduct, then, arose not really from the frequency of impeachment trials but from his own natural timidity and from his inability to perceive the principles by which the democracy functioned.”

The evidence presented so far in this study suggests otherwise. Nicias, and Thucydides, understood perfectly how the democracy functioned.

339 Charles Forster Smith’s excellent translation from the 1923 edition of the Loeb Classical Library of 7.48.3-4. I could write my own translation, but Smith’s really gets the point across. The text reads as follows:

εὐ γὰρ εἰδέναι ὅτι Ἀθηναίοι σφῶν ταῦτα οὐκ ἀποδέχονται ὡστε μὴ αὐτῶν ψηφισαμένων ἀπείρει . . . τῶν θεν μερόντων στρατιωτῶν πολλοὺς καὶ τοὺς πλείον ἔρη, οἱ νῦν βοῶσιν ως ἐν δεινοῖς ὅντες, ἐκεῖσε ἀφικομένους τάναντια βουλεύοντος ὡς ὑπὸ χρημάτων καταπρόσωπας ὁι στρατηγοὶ ἀπῆλθον. Οὐκον βούλοντο αὐτὸς ὁ Εὐπρίος καὶ ἄλλος ὅτι ἀποδέχοντο τὰς Ἀθηναίων φύσεις ἐπὶ αἰσχρῷ τε αἰτίᾳ δαι δίκως ὑπὸ Αθηναίων ἀποδέχοντας μᾶλλον ὡς ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, εἰ δὲ, κινδυνεύοντα τοῦτο παθὲν ἴδια.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRICE OF FAILURE:
CONCEPTIONS OF NICIAS’ CULPABILITY IN ATHENS’ SICILIAN DISASTER

The examination of the fates of Athenian generals who lost battles in the fifth and fourth centuries as well as of the nature of the many trials of Athenian generals during this period suggest that defeat in and of itself typically did not produce either trial or public censure of any type for the defeated general. The Athenian demos, in short, does not seem to have held their generals responsible for defeat in the same way that a modern, western person would.

Such a conclusion, however, contradicts virtually all of the considerable modern scholarship concerning Nicias, arguably Athens’ most famous defeated general. Many scholars, as we shall see, specifically evaluate evidence about Nicias in the context of this presumptive blame and the resulting popular condemnation of Nicias. The foregoing evidence suggests, however, that such a context of blame and hostility should not in fact have existed. If the demos did not blame generals for defeat as a modern observer would then Nicias’ defeat would not have produced such blame, and thus the sources should
reflect no significant hostility towards Nicias (and none based specifically on his generalship). The evidence of the first chapter, then, demands an investigation of the modern conclusion that Nicias was blamed and condemned for his defeat, and of the ancient evidence for attitudes towards Nicias after his defeat and death. It will be seen that the ancient evidence does not in fact demonstrate or even suggest that the late fifth-century Athenians condemned Nicias for his defeat.

Thucydides’ narrative of Athens’ Sicilian Expedition forms the bulk of the source material for modern arguments that Nicias caused and suffered popular, contemporary condemnation for that expedition’s defeat. This conclusion proceeds from what is seen as the natural reading of Thucydides’ text. Nicias, upon his arrival in Sicily with an overwhelming force, did not immediately attack Syracuse, but delayed while attempting to build up an alliance or at least a secure footing in Sicily and then had to wait out the winter in Catana. After nearly defeating the Syracusans the following year, Nicias failed both to complete his siege walls around the city and to prevent Gylippus, in command of a rather small Spartan relief force, from reaching the Syracusans. He made a mistake in moving his base to the promontory of Plemmyrium, a location with limited access to water and timber, then lost that base and had to transfer to a shoreline camp in a swampy area that caused widespread illness among his troops. As the military situation in Sicily deteriorated for Athens, Nicias neither made any bold move to correct the situation nor yielded to the advice of his colleague, Demosthenes, that the

341 Thuc. 6.44.4, 6.47-50, 6.62.3-5.
342 Thuc. 6.69-70, 6.102, 7.1.2, and generally.
343 Thuc. 7.4.4.
344 Thuc. 7.24.3, 7.47.2.
force should depart while retreat remained possible. Nicias’ unwillingness to leave Sicily grew equally from his hope that Syracuse might surrender and his fear of prosecution at Athens should he leave without permission. When Nicias did finally agree to leave, an eclipse prevented the departure, leading to another, ultimately fatal, delay. Unable subsequently to escape the harbor, Nicias led the army on a retreat inland that resulted in its near total destruction. When the very few survivors carried word of this catastrophe back to Athens the citizens reacted with shock, dismay, and outrage. The defeat in Sicily can be seen as the turning point between Athens’ successful prosecution of the war against Sparta up to and including the Peace of Nicias and the disasters and eventual loss that followed. Presented with this narrative, modern scholars have naturally concluded that Nicias was at fault for the disaster. According to modern interpretations of this evidence, Thucydidès’ contemporaries, and probably Thucydidès himself must have seen in Nicias’ actions as general the causes of Athens’ failure.

Such a conclusion, however, creates an immediate problem for scholars. Thucydidès, the best extant narrative and analytical source describing the Peloponnesian War, discusses the Sicilian expedition and Nicias’ actions in Sicily in great detail. He does not, however, seem to blame Nicias for the defeat. Instead he identifies political instability and consequent lack of support for the expedition at Athens as the primary cause of the defeat (in a passage both tremendously important and notoriously difficult

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345 Thuc. 7.47.3-4, 7.48.1-4.
346 Thuc. 7.47.1-4.
347 Thuc. 7.50.4.
348 Thuc. 7.75-7.85.
349 Thuc. 8.1.1-2.
350 Thuc. 2.65.10-11: οι δὲ ύστερον ἵσοι μάλλον αὐτοὶ πρὸς ἄλλης ὀντες καὶ ὀρεγόμενοι τοῦ πρῶτος ἐκάστος γίγνεσθαι ἐτράποντο καθ’ ἕδονας τῶν δήμων καὶ τὰ πράγματα ἐνδιδόναι. Εξ
to interpret) and honors Nicias with a remarkable and, for Thucydides, unique eulogy at his death, calling him the Greek least deserving of such a fate.\textsuperscript{351} The historian moreover almost never criticizes Nicias, and those few statements and passages that have been seen as critical are in fact ambiguous. If taken at face value, this evidence suggests that Thucydides did not hold Nicias responsible for the defeat.

Scholars are naturally at pains to explain why the best contemporary observer and most astute surviving analysis of the events fails to reach the same conclusion that they do about the cause of the disaster. The problem has generally been regarded as historiographical or philological in nature. Because the historical reality is regarded as given - Nicias, by his errors of commission and omission, created the Athenian catastrophe at Syracuse - the question becomes an analysis of Thucydides, an effort to identify the bias, ideology, or error that causes Thucydides to present a different conclusion.

Efforts to account for the apparent discrepancy between Thucydides’ narrative and his expressed judgments have typically followed one of three primary lines of argument. Most scholars argue either (argument number one) that Thucydides recognized Nicias’ culpability, and did in fact blame him for the defeat in Sicily despite the apparent evidence to the contrary, or (argument number two) that Thucydides recognized Nicias’ culpability but resisted that conclusion as the result of some bias, usually identified as class or other social affinity. A few modern authors argue (number

\textsuperscript{351} Thuc. 7.86.5.
three) that Thucydides in fact failed to recognize that Nicia caused the disaster, again because of sympathy for the general.

Many scholars have suggested that Thucydides did not regard Nicia as highly as some of his statements in the *History* at first lead one to believe. Such arguments generally claim that the events of the narrative are to be taken as representing Thucydides’ true evaluation, superseding the historian’s explicit positive statements. This class of argument can be further subdivided into a strong and a weak version. The weak version suggests that Thucydides felt some sympathy toward Nicia, visible in the eulogy and elsewhere, but could not ultimately suppress his awareness of Nicia’s fundamental culpability, as J.E. Atkinson, for example, has contended in a 1995 article.352 Atkinson, drawing on arguments made by scholars such as Jaqueline DeRomilly, W.R. Connor, Donald Kagan, and H.D. Westlake (see below), suggests that Thucydides’ eulogy of Nicia, along with his general reluctance to criticize Nicia explicitly, indicates some sort of personal sympathy, but that Thucydides nevertheless “provided the evidence which would draw the reader to a negative verdict.”353 Despite his sympathy, Thucydides was “well aware that he could not suppress detail that revealed Nicia’s weaknesses and failures.”354 Atkinson’s formulation of the argument suggests that Thucydides realized that Nicia caused Athens’ disaster in Sicily and that the events he narrated demonstrated that culpability. Thucydides’ expressions of sympathy were thus personal, and not meant to explain away Nicia’s guilt. DeRomilly goes a bit further in her assessment, arguing that Thucydides even constructed his narrative in such a way

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353 Ibid., 56.
354 Ibid., 56.
as to minimize Nicias’ apparent culpability in addition to making several explicit statements in Nicias’ favor. Despite this “consistently sympathetic”\textsuperscript{355} attitude, Thucydides finally could not suppress the fact that Nicias was to blame for the defeat.

H.D. Westlake best expresses the strong version of this type of argument. Thucydides, Westlake asserts, “ignores opportunities of defending or commending Nicias, attributes discreditable motives to him, disagrees with his opinions, underlines his strategic errors, and, most frequently of all, allows his failures to speak for themselves.”\textsuperscript{356} Westlake regards the transmission of this impression as intentional on Thucydides’ part. This assertion, or statements like it, appear also in works by W.R. Connor,\textsuperscript{357} A.W. Gomme,\textsuperscript{358} and others. This version of the argument denies that Thucydides in fact made any statements that were intended to praise or exculpate Nicias. While those scholars who make this argument can argue (or assume) that Thucydides’ narrative of events in Sicily in fact condemns Nicias implicitly, they must argue directly against two passages in Thucydides that seem explicitly to praise or exonerate the general.

The first of these positive passages in Thucydides occurs at 2.65.11, where Thucydides suggests that the Athenian Demos itself was responsible for the disaster in Sicily. The most popular argument offered by those who believe Thucydides blamed Nicias, advanced primarily by Gomme and Westlake, suggests that Thucydides’ explicit statement about the cause of the failure of the Sicilian expedition, while appearing to lay

\textsuperscript{356} H.D. Westlake, “Nicias in Thucydides,” \textit{Classical Quarterly} 35 (1941), 64.
\textsuperscript{358} Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover vol. 4, 242-245.
the blame elsewhere, in fact implicitly identifies Nicias as the party at fault. At 2.65.11, Thucydides states that the expedition, while certainly a blunder, was not an error in judgment but rather one of management, in that the Athenians who sent it failed to support it adequately, falling instead into factional strife over political authority in the city. Because this statement can hardly be true in material terms (the Athenians first approved an immense force for Nicias, and then, after Nicias explained in a letter the difficulties he had encountered, approved a second force almost as large under the command of Demosthenes), it has generally been regarded as referring to the recall of Alcibiades, one of the three original generals and primary author of the entire undertaking, to face charges. That Thucydides thought that Alcibiades’ absence doomed the expedition could be argued to imply that he thought that Nicias’ generalship was at fault, since it was so inferior to Alcibiades’ as to condemn the army to failure.

The most typical response to this argument suggests that 2.65.11, although it may refer to the recall of Alcibiades, displays a positive attitude toward Alcibiades rather than a negative assessment of Nicias. Thucydides may have seen Alcibiades’ recall as crucial either because Alcibiades’ plan for reducing Sicily, which depended heavily on diplomacy rather than military strategy, could not have succeeded without Alcibiades’ charismatic presence (regardless of Nicias’ performance), or because Thucydides had a

360 Thuc. 6.43-44.1, 7.16.1-2.
362 Westlake (1958), 105.
363 P.A. Brunt, “Thucydides and Alcibiades,” Revue des Etudes Grecques 65 (1952), 63ff., provides a good assessment of Thucydides’ very positive, and perhaps inaccurate, evaluation of Alcibiades’ generalship.
very high regard (as his peers seem to have had) of Alcibiades’ abilities as a general. Proponents of the theory that 2.65.11 implicitly criticizes Nicias respond first that Thucydides seems to have preferred fellow general Lamachos’ plan of immediate attack to Alcibiades’ coalition-building scheme, and thus would not have regarded Alcibiades’ absence as crucial in this regard (that is, that Alcibiades’ talented leadership, and not his plan for the assault on Sicily, was critical to Athenian success). Westlake would further argue that Alcibiades could not have been regarded as a great general in 415 and that Thucydides’ judgment in 2.65.11 (and amplified at 6.15.4) that Alcibiades’ recall ruined the Sicilian expedition must represent a significantly later period, subsequent to the events of 411-407, when Alcibiades did demonstrate his military ability. The narrative of the expedition, written earlier, reflects Thucydides original, contemporary judgment, that Nicias was to blame.

Tim Rood provides a final, interesting, response to the argument that Thucydides’ puzzling assertion that factional strife at Athens led to failure in Sicily implicitly blames Nicias for the defeat. Rood’s thesis is essentially literary. He observes that Thucydides develops the theme of deep divisions between contestants for power at Athens throughout his History, and that the failures in Sicily in book seven represent an escalation of trends already in place. Nicias’ divided mind, as he deliberates different courses of action, longs for and fears a return to Athens, and gives different motivations.

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for his decisions in his speeches than are reported in his own deliberations, comes to represent abroad the divisions in Athens. 366

Daniel Tompkins provides another example of the strong argument described above. Tompkins argued in a 1972 article that Thucydides used stylistic characterization to identify the flaws in Nicias that led to the Sicilian defeat. He demonstrated that Nicias, in his direct speeches in Thucydides, used language and syntax more complex than that of any other character in the History. 367 This syntactical complexity contributes to Thucydides’ presentation of Nicias as hesitant and self-absorbed, and his unusual vocabulary demonstrates Nicias’ commitment to a world-view dominated by “vague moral concepts” like fitness, necessity, and justice, concepts Tompkins believes Thucydides dismissed as empty. 368 Nicias’ speech is also characterized by concessions and admissions of weakness that further deflect his speech. 369 The self-concern, lack of forcefulness, and outdated morality apparent in Nicias’ language mirror the same flaws in his character, the same flaws that caused the problems in Sicily. 370 Thucydides, according to Tompkins, thus fully recognized Nicias’ failures and weaknesses and blamed him for the defeat, very consciously constructing Nicias’ speech in the History in such a way as to communicate the sources of the general’s failure.

Thucydides’ eulogy of Nicias in book seven is the second passage in which the historian seems to present Nicias in a positive light. After narrating Nicias’ death Thucydides says that, “in my opinion,” Nicias deserved his fate (literally, misfortune)

366 Rood, 187-188.
368 Ibid., 193.
369 Ibid., 194-200.
370 Ibid., 204.
less than any other Greek of his time because of his consistent pursuit of virtue. An argument put forward in various forms by H.A. Murray, Westlake, Lowell Edmunds, and others contends that Thucydides’ eulogy of Nicias, typically regarded as reflecting Thucydides’ positive evaluation of Nicias, is in fact limited or ironic, or both, suggesting that Thucydides did not have a positive view of Nicias. However, A.W.H. Adkins argues convincingly, on the basis of an examination of contemporary modes of moral evaluation, that the eulogy is not ironic. The term arete, used by Thucydides to describe Nicias’ achievement, described at that time a collection of virtues, both active virtues (courage, political skill) and passive virtues (piety, good citizenship), all of which had equal significance to the community. Even if Nicias only accomplished passive virtues (a debatable point for a previously successful military commander who achieved almost heroic status in rallying his troops in Sicily at the end, according to so harsh a critic as Westlake), that would hardly undermine Thucydides’ assessment. Thucydides praises Nicias in terms entirely understandable to his fellow Athenians.

Contra Adkins, however, Murray, Edmunds, and Westlake contend that Nicias’ virtue was entirely moral (or passive/cooperative, in Adkins’ scheme), and that Thucydides’ statement should not be taken to contradict the obvious conclusion to be drawn from the narrative, that Thucydides blamed Nicias for the defeat. Murray argues that Thucydides’ praise of Nicias leaves out the term xynesis, or political insight,

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371 Thuc., 7.86.5.
373 Adkins (1975), generally, esp. 388.
374 Westlake (1968), 201, 206.
375 Adkins (1975), 388.
376 See above, note 32.
which is elsewhere used to praise effective leaders, suggesting that Nicias was not, in
Thucydides’ estimation, an effective leader.\textsuperscript{377} Westlake and Edmunds suggest that
Nicias’ virtues - piety, in particular - are very passive, and that they will naturally be the
object of Thucydides’ praise.\textsuperscript{378} While none of these arguments denies that Thucydides
sincerely felt sympathy for Nicias and meant to express his admiration for some aspects
of Nicias’ character, each argues that, in one way or another, Thucydides consciously
limited that positive statement to aspects of the general’s personality and career that did
not bear on his performance in Sicily. A few scholars, most notably Frances Titchener in
her historical commentary on Plutarch’s \textit{Nicias}, go further. Titchener states flatly that the
eulogy “is surely ironical, not literal.”\textsuperscript{379} Thucydides thus intentionally supported his
narrative with a statement designed to create incredulity and rejection, highlighting, at the
point of Nicias’ final appearance in the \textit{History}, the general’s poor performance and
responsibility for the disaster.

Donald Lateiner, in addition to reprising arguments by Westlake, Murray,
Gomme, and others discussed above, makes a final argument suggesting that Thucydides
held Nicias culpable for the Sicilian defeat. He suggests that Thucydides criticizes
Nicias’ oratory in preparing his men for their final naval battle against the Syracusans,
describing it as inadequate. Lateiner argues (following Tompkins) that Nicias’ speech
reveals his preoccupation with an obsolete moral code and his inability to devise a speech
appropriate to the demands of his situation, and hence the flaw in Nicias that led to

\textsuperscript{377} Murray, 33-46.
\textsuperscript{378} Edmunds, 142; Westlake (1968), 210.
\textsuperscript{379} Titchener, Frances, \textit{A Historical Commentary on Plutarch’s “Life of Nicias”}. (Ann Arbor,
1988), 87.
Athens’ defeat (as well as Thucydides’ awareness of same, made explicit in his criticism of the speech, according to Lateiner).\textsuperscript{380}

On the other hand, many scholars, usually citing the eulogy in book seven and his refusal to blame Nicias explicitly for the Sicilian disaster and occasionally suggesting that he suppresses Nicias’ mistakes and emphasizes his successes, have concluded that Thucydides is sympathetic to Nicias, and does not in fact blame him for the defeat.\textsuperscript{381} A few of these scholars argue that Thucydides was correct in not blaming Nicias, usually on the grounds that better options were not available to Nicias than the ones he selected (for example the argument that Athenian cavalry inferiority would have prevented them from succeeding even had they attacked immediately\textsuperscript{382}). Many others have regarded Thucydides’ conclusions as representing an error, and tried to discover the bias that led the historian to such a conclusion. Donald Kagan provides the most extensive example of this type of treatment. Kagan discusses Thucydides’ narrative of the Sicilian expedition almost line by line, and draws what he regards as the natural conclusion: “Thucydides’ own interpretation [that internal divisions at Athens doomed the expedition] stands at odds with the judgment that arises most readily from his narrative [that “Nicias’ errors of omission and commission” were to blame].”\textsuperscript{383} Kagan, like many other scholars, identifies class affinities as the source of Thucydides’ error.\textsuperscript{384} Both Nicias and Thucydides were wealthy, both drew their wealth from control of mines in the

\textsuperscript{380} Donald Lateiner, “Nicias’ Inadequate Encouragement (Thucydides 7.69.2),” Classical Philology 80 (1985), 201-208.


\textsuperscript{382} Liebeschutz, 299-302.


northern Aegean basin, and both may have had affinities with the conservative segment of the Athenian _polis_.\textsuperscript{385} Kagan and others believe Thucydides and Nicias shared one more similarity: both were condemned for their performance in military command.\textsuperscript{386} Even those scholars who argue that Thucydides was sympathetic to Nicias agree that Nicias’ reputation, at least in the fifth century, suffered for his defeat in Sicily, and that contemporary Athenians saw in his generalship evidence of his culpability.\textsuperscript{387}

Nanno Marinatos argues that Thucydides consistently suppresses Nicias’ mistakes, rarely criticizes him, and occasionally confirms Nicias’ judgments,\textsuperscript{388} while Gabriel Herman further suggests that Nicias had been the “almost criminally incompetent” but anonymous general who struggled in his efforts to capture the town of Cydonia in Crete while on his way to reinforce Phormio and that Thucydides suppressed his name in order to protect him.\textsuperscript{389} Both of these scholars, along with Allen West, suggest that the eulogy in book seven represents Thucydides’ judgment on Nicias’ generalship and political career as well as his lifestyle and moral status.\textsuperscript{390} West supports this argument by observing (in contradiction to Murray, who is also rebutted by Marinatos) that the eulogy is presented in Periclean terms and seems to make Nicias Pericles’ political heir,\textsuperscript{391} which would constitute enormous praise given the historian’s clear belief in Pericles’ brilliance as a leader. Anastasios Nikolaides also argues that Thucydides ascribes no part of Nicias’ earlier military success to luck, and thus implicitly

\textsuperscript{386} Atkinson, 56; Kagan, 370.
\textsuperscript{387} Gomme, Dover, and Andrewes, vol. 4, 464; Kagan, 370.
\textsuperscript{388} Marinatos, 307.
\textsuperscript{389} Herman, 83-89.
\textsuperscript{390} West, 228; Marinatos, 310; Herman, 91.
\textsuperscript{391} West, 228.
praises his generalship. None of these scholars, though they all argue that Thucydides did not himself blame Nicias, denies the contention that Thucydides provides in his narrative the evidence that would have condemned Nicias in the eyes of his contemporaries (indeed, Herman and Marinatos specifically refer to Nicias’ mistakes and incompetence, both of which they see as obvious in the narrative). Even those scholars who see Thucydides as positive about Nicias accept Nicias’ factual culpability and assume, implicitly or explicitly, that that fact was clear and understood by Nicias’ and Thucydides’ contemporaries.

An evaluation of this set of modern arguments about fifth-century attitudes towards Nicias requires two tasks be completed. First, the text of Thucydides itself must be reevaluated to assess the historian’s conclusions about Nicias. If Thucydides wrote to an Athenian audience that condemned Nicias that fact should appear, either directly (in Thucydides’ agreement and condemnation) or indirectly (in the historian’s efforts to overcome that hostility) in the text. Second, the evidence beyond Thucydides must be assessed. Modern conclusions based on the text of Thucydides, as described above, tend to focus intensely on that text without considering the significant evidence provided by other sources about contemporary attitudes toward Nicias.

At no point, with two possible exceptions, does Thucydides explicitly criticize Nicias’ leadership. One of these possible exceptions can be dealt with quickly. At the occurrence of the eclipse Thucydides notes that Nicias “was excessively fond of divination,” perhaps implying that Nicias was to be blamed for not following through with the retreat, but says this only after reporting that most of the Athenian soldiers had taken the omen seriously and urged their generals to wait. This minor comment, standing alone, can hardly be taken to indicate that Thucydides disapproved of Nicias as a general; no consistent pattern of such comments exists which might provide confirmation that this single comment, which certainly appears more an observation of a personality quirk than a condemnation, represents Thucydides’ conclusions about Nicias’ overall performance.

392 Nikolaides, 322.
393 Marinatos, 307; Herman 92.
394 Thuc. 7.50.4: ἥν γὰρ τι καὶ ἄγαν θειασμῷ τε καὶ τῷ τοιούτῳ προσκείμενος.
Furthermore, even if Thucydides did think reliance on divination a serious mistake on Nicias’ part the overwhelming agreement of his soldiers suggests that the Athenians in general would have agreed with Nicias. Certainly divine messages legitimately influenced the behavior of fifth-century Athenians and their leaders. Thus even if this comment did reflect Thucydides’ larger judgment, which seems unlikely without corroborating evidence, it could not be held to be representative of contemporary Athenian thought or to form the basis of any public blame or condemnation of Nicias. Thucydides furthermore explicitly ascribes the disaster in Sicily not to Nicias’ mistakes but rather to political divisions at Athens that deprived the expedition of necessary support.  

The second possible case of explicit criticism of Nicias by Thucydides requires more detailed consideration. The historian reports the general Demosthenes’ strategic considerations upon his arrival in Sicily in 413 with the second Athenian force. After reporting, largely in indirect discourse, that Demosthenes did not want to waste time and suffer what Nicias had suffered, Thucydides goes on to described the difficulties suffered by Nicias, using indicative verbs, in what have generally been regarded as critical terms. Nicias, according to this parenthetical statement, had caused the Syracusans to fear at his first arrival, but saw that fear dissipate when he did not attack at once and wintered in Catana. The delay also allowed the Syracusans to perceive the magnitude of the Athenian threat and so send for assistance, which arrived in the form of the Spartan Gylippus. Had the attack come at once, Syracuse might have been walled in before help

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395 Thuc. 2.65.11.
could have arrived, rendering Gyippus’ assistance much less valuable. Although it constitutes a part of a long, complex sentence relating Demosthenes’ motives for deciding to attack the Syracuseans as quickly as possible after his arrival, this passage has been interpreted on linguistic grounds as providing a direct statement of Thucydides’ opinion, and therefore an example of explicit criticism of Nicias’ generalship by the historian.

The linguistic argument in favor of this interpretation essentially suggests that the abrupt change from indirect discourse to direct (in this and six similar passages from Thucydides) means that Thucydides has stopped reporting the thoughts of the character in question and has inserted his own explanatory comment, which naturally appears in direct discourse. This argument seems to me plausible but far from certain. The indicatives in the Demosthenes passage depend on the final verb clearly within Demosthenes’ own discourse, which is in a subordinate clause (Demosthenes wanted to avoid suffering “what Nicias suffered”) and is consequently indicative. Their mood needs no further explanation than this. Further, the material presented in the direct address portion of the sentence clearly provides the basis on which Demosthenes makes his decision, and therefore must be held to be going on inside Demosthenes’ head; whether or not

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396 Thuc. 7.42.3. The text reads: ὁ δὲ Δημοσθένης ἰδὼν ὡς ἦς τὰ πράγματα καὶ νομίσας ὡς ἕγε τὰ πράγματα καὶ νομίσας ὡς ἕγε τα ἰδιαῖα διατρίβειν οὐδὲ παθεῖν ὄπερ ὁ Νικίας ἐπαθεῖν (ἀφικόμενος ξάρ τὸ πρῶτον ὁ Νικίας φαβερός, ως οὐκ εὐθὺς προσέκειτο τοῖς Σαρακούσιοις, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν Κατάνῃ δειχεῖας, ὑπὲρώθη τε καὶ ἔφθασεν αὐτόν ἐκ τῆς Πελοποννήσου στρατιά τὸ Γυλίππος ἀφικόμενος, ἴ ὃ οὐδὲ ἄν μετέπεμψαν οἱ Σωρακόσιοι, εἰ ἐκεῖνος εὐθὺς ἐπέκειτο ἢ ἵκανοι γάρ αὐτοί οἴσμοντο ἢμαι ἀμα τ’ ἄν ἔμαθον ἰδιούς ὄντες καὶ ἀποτελεῖσθαι ἀν ἦσαν, ἠστε μηδ’ ἐι μετεπείπαν ἢτο ἀμοίος ἃν αὐτοὺς ὄρθελεν), τοῦτα οὖν ἄνασκοιν ὁ Δημοσθένης καὶ γιγνόσκων ὃτι καὶ αὐτοῖς τῷ παρόντι τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ μᾶλιστα δεινότατος ἢτο τοῖς ἑαντικοῖς, ἐβούλετο ὁ τι τάχος ἀποχρήσασθαι τῇ παρούσῃ τοῦ στρατεύματος ἐκλήξει.

398 Donini, 116-118.
399 A statement with which Donini agrees (Donini, 116).
Thucydides agrees with this proposition, and despite the absence of indirect discourse, the passage must be relating the thoughts of Demosthenes.

Although I regard the linguistic argument as somewhat open to question, there is a better reason to regard the passage as recording the thoughts of Demosthenes, not of Thucydides. At the beginning of the direct address portion of the sentence it is asserted that Nicias was feared after arriving but became despised when he failed to attack immediately. It is clear, however, from the narrative of book six that Nicias was not the one who failed to attack immediately. The three generals, Alcibiades, Nicias, and Lamachos, held a strategic conference before arriving in Sicily, at which Alcibiades presented the plan of delaying and building up an alliance rather than attacking immediately, and was seconded by Lamachos, who supported Alcibiades despite his own belief in the value of an immediate attack.\footnote{Thuc. 6.47-50.} Further, it was not just Nicias, but Nicias and Lamachos who wintered in Catana.\footnote{Thuc. 6.62.3-6.63.1.} The passages’ ascription of these actions to Nicias alone is inaccurate, and contradicts Thucydides’ narrative. Thucydides obviously knew these facts, but Demosthenes may well have not. Both the conference and the decision to winter in Catana occurred after the expedition had left Athens; depending on how specifically Nicias discussed these events in his letter to Athens (it is hard to see why he would have discussed them in any detail, as they were largely irrelevant to his purposes at that time; in any case, we do not know\footnote{Thuc. 7.11-15.}), Demosthenes probably had no knowledge of whose plan was being followed in Sicily or how the decision had been reached. To Demosthenes, upon arriving in Sicily, it must have been apparent that the Athenians were in a difficult situation, that they had not attacked immediately back in
415, and Nicias was the only general still around. That he identified all of the campaign’s strategic decisions as the result of Nicias’ leadership is natural, but not accurate. The ascription of the decision not to attack immediately, which occurs in the direct discourse passage usually thought to represent the opinion of Thucydides, is a focalization. Containing an error that would make Thucydides contradictory but is perfectly understandable coming from Demosthenes, the sentence appears to have been presented from Demosthenes’ point of view. Despite the direct discourse, the passage should therefore be regarded as reflecting the thought of Demosthenes, not Thucydides.

It may be argued, however, that Demosthenes, himself a fifth-century Athenian, after all, must therefore have blamed Nicias for the troubles in Sicily, which, even if based on an erroneous understanding of the sequence of events in 415, constitutes just the sort of contemporary blaming of Nicias that I have been arguing did not exist. It may further be argued that Thucydides might have agreed with Demosthenes’ assessment of the situation. Viewed in the larger context of Thucydides’ narrative approach to the Sicilian expedition, however, this passage seems to suggest quite the opposite. Thucydides’ artfully contrived indicatives (Donini claims that Thucydides could easily have written the passage in indirect discourse,\(^{403}\) which is perhaps true; instead, with the deft use of a subordinate clause to change both the grammatical structure and apparent focus of the sentence he created an unusual and interesting string of indicative clauses) create a vivid passage that, as so often occurs in book seven, personalizes, in extreme fashion, the hopes, beliefs, and fears of the Athenians in Sicily.\(^ {404}\) Upon arriving and

\(^{403}\) Donini, 116.

\(^{404}\) Both the examples in the text of this sort of vividness in book seven and the modern bibliography discussing it are extensive. A representative example from the text would be 7.69.2-3, where Thucydides provides a close look at Nicias’ anxieties and hopes before the decisive naval battle at
seeing the severity of the Athenian difficulties, Demosthenes decides, hopefully, that the accomplishments so narrowly missed by the policy of delay incorrectly attributed to Nicias could be achieved through a new, aggressive strategy. Demosthenes creates this hope by expressing the failures of the passive policy and the prospective successes of an aggressive policy as realities, rather than possibilities. Led by the vivid presentation and apparent reality of his beliefs, the audience shares in his confidence. Very soon, however, their certainty is destroyed along with Demosthenes’ as his aggressive policy proves more immediately disastrous for the Athenians than the more passive approach he discarded.405 If Demosthenes does criticize Nicias in his deliberative passage (however unusually and incorrectly), the events of Thucydides’ narrative soon prove him wrong. This sequence of events suggests that Thucydides did not view any one policy as having caused the Athenian defeat. Demosthenes’ consideration of the causes of the Athenians’ troubles in Sicily does not demonstrate that Thucydides blamed Nicias for those troubles, and seems not to constitute reliable evidence that any contemporary Athenian did so.

Demosthenes, after considering the difficulty of the Athenian position in Sicily, recommended to Nicias that the expedition return to Athens. He felt it better to fight a difficult war against the suddenly aggressive Spartans in Greece than against the distant Syracusans in Sicily, and further argued that to continue to attempt the conquest of Sicily would be a waste of money.406 Nicias declined to return, however, from fear of prosecution at Athens. Nicias’ attitude has been seen both as blameworthy in and of

405 Thuc. 7.43-45.
406 Thuc. 7.47.4.
itself and as indicating the blame Nicias’ actions would have accrued among fifth-century Athenians.\textsuperscript{407} Nicias was not afraid, however, of returning to Athens after suffering a defeat but rather of returning to Athens without the express permission of the \textit{Demos} and with a force that might be expected to have defeated the Syracusans, while the issue was still in doubt. His concern was that such a departure might lend substance to claims from unhappy soldiers that Nicias had been bribed to depart, and thus undermine the Athenian cause.\textsuperscript{408} Nicias’ action in this case is hardly discreditable; Athenian generals had suffered prosecution and exile for far smaller breaches of faith with the \textit{Demos} than those of the accusations he feared,\textsuperscript{409} and Demosthenes himself had gone into self-imposed exile earlier in the war rather than face the wrath of the Athenians.\textsuperscript{410} The Athenians had also exiled Thucydides, not for a defeat but for failing to accomplish all that the assembly hoped he would,\textsuperscript{411} it would be remarkable indeed if Thucydides, in suggesting that Nicias feared to suffer what he himself had suffered, meant to condemn the man or portray his reaction as selfish or unrealistic. Further, neither Nicias nor Thucydides seem to believe that it is his military actions that will form the basis for popular hostility.

Thucydides clearly states that Nicias feared to cross the \textit{demos}, to leave without permission.\textsuperscript{412} This passage suggests, again, that there was no expectation that the fifth-

\textsuperscript{407} For example, Westlake (1941), 64.
\textsuperscript{408} Thuc. 7.48.1-4.
\textsuperscript{409} For example the Athenians’ first embassy to Sicily. After helping to settle a war between some of Athens’ Sicilian allies and a Syracusan alliance, the ambassadors were tried and convicted on their return to Athens for having allegedly taken bribes and so failing to conquer the island, which the Athenians decided they might have done. Thuc. 4.65.3.
\textsuperscript{410} Thuc. 3.98.5 and 4.29.1.
\textsuperscript{411} Thuc. 4.106.1-4.107.1. Sent to prevent Brasidas from taking Amphipolis, he arrived to find the Spartan already in control of that city. Although Thucydides had not delayed in sailing north and did prevent Brasidas from capturing the important city of Eion through successful military action, the Athenians, nevertheless, exiled him for failing to get to Amphipolis on time.
\textsuperscript{412} Thuc. 7.48.4.
century Athenians would have evaluated Nicias’ actions in Sicily as a cause for condemnation or criticism.

Another potential source of criticism in Thucydides, this time implicit rather than explicit, occurs in book two. Thucydides, in discussing the problems behind Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War, identifies the Sicilian disaster as Athens’ greatest blunder of the war and thus a major cause for the ultimate loss. Thucydides ascribes the failure of the expedition not to Nicias or any party in Sicily, however, but rather to the demos, the Athenian people themselves. He argues that those who sent out the expedition (hoi ekpempantes) failed to support it adequately, instead engaging in contests over popular leadership and creating civil strife.\(^{413}\) These persons who sent the expedition were probably both such leaders as stayed (the primary mover behind the expedition, Alcibiades, went along) in Athens and the voters who approved the armada. Thucydides’ explicit statement that the Athenians who stayed behind caused the disaster has generally not been taken literally, because it is hard to see how the Athenians failed to support the expedition in material terms. Instead, the statement that factional strife and contest for leadership eroded the quality of Athens’ military leadership has been taken to refer implicitly to the recall of Alcibiades from the expedition, a crippling blow to its success.

Thucydides, however, blames people at Athens for the failure of the Sicilian expedition in another passage. When the Athenians learned of the disaster, Thucydides relates, they blamed those - politicians, orators, diviners, and prophets - who had talked them into hoping to conquer Sicily and voting for the armada. Thucydides comments, while reporting this reaction, that the Athenians decried their advisers and leaders “as if

\(^{413}\) Thuc. 2.65.7-11.
they had not voted for it themselves,”⁴¹⁴ that is, he observes that the Athenians
themselves were to blame, having made the mistake of deciding to send the expedition in
the first place. This evaluation resembles the explicit placement of blame at 2.65.11,
where Thucydides ascribes the failure to factional strife at Athens. In both cases,
Thucydides makes a point of blaming Athens’ weak post-Periclean leaders and the mob
they let out of strict Periclean control for the problems the city suffered. This repeated
emphasis suggests that the historian’s statement at 2.65.11 is not a covert admission of
Nicias’ guilt but a straightforward assertion of what he saw as the root cause of Athens’
decline.

Most typically 2.65.11 is thought to refer to the catastrophic effects of Alcibiades’
absence from the expedition.⁴¹⁵ It is, however, difficult to understand why Thucydides
would have left Alcibiades implicit at 2.65.11 if the statement were intended to refer
specifically to his recall. Elsewhere Thucydides does not seem shy about indicating
Alcibiades’ importance quite explicitly.⁴¹⁶ It seems best, therefore, to suppose that
Thucydides in this crucial passage in book two meant to condemn Athenian leadership
and popular government, the *demos* and its behavior, collectively, rather than indicating a
particular instance of its misbehavior.

As we have seen, other scholars have argued that Thucydides’ entire presentation
of Nicias was designed to portray the general in a negative light. The strongest of these
arguments is that produced by Tompkins and Lateiner, who argue that Thucydides

⁴¹⁴ Thuc. 8.1.1: ὥσπερ οὐκ αὐτοὶ ψηφισάμενοι.
⁴¹⁵ See above, p. 83.
⁴¹⁶ The best example of this occurs at Thuc. 6.15.4: “[out of mistrust the Athenians] gave over the
city to others [other than Alcibiades] and soon destroyed the city.”
characterizes Nicias as weak and self-centered. Thucydides’ Nicias speaks in heavily
subordinated clauses and exhibits marked concern for himself and for security, styles and
ideas theoretically disparaged by the historian. These flaws contributed, according to this
presentation, to Nicias’ failure. This argument obviously only demonstrates that
Thucydides thought Nicias was to blame in Sicily if one first assumes that Nicias’
(undeniable) hesitancy and concern for his own safety (that is, his self-absorption)
appeared to Thucydides to be the causes of the problems in Sicily, which is to say that
Tompkins begins by assuming that Thucydides blamed Nicias for the failure in Sicily.
That Nicias had an outmoded concept of justice and fairness seems not to have an impact
on the disaster, since it only arose in Nicias’ speeches to his men after they had failed to
escape the harbor, and hence after their fate was already settled (the concepts
Tompkins alludes to also appear faintly in Nicias’ speech of exhortation before the final,
unsuccessful naval battle, but not to so great an extent that one could suggest they
impacted the battle). The idea that Nicias’ hesitancy in attacking caused the defeat has
only limited merit as a causative agent in Thucydides’ mind, as discussed above. And
other scholars have pointed out that Nicias’ self-absorption, for example in refusing to
retreat when he could have out of fear that he would be prosecuted, however
blameworthy it may appear to us, was very typical in an Athenian leader and to be
expected in a competitive, shame-based society. It would have been remarkable for
Thucydides to have regarded such self-concern as a causative agent in the disaster or
worthy of criticism, and there is no suggestion that he does so (Thucydides does seem,

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417 Tompkins, 184-200.
418 Thuc., 7.77.1-4.
419 Thuc. 7.69.2.
and with reason, to suggest that the Athenians were too harsh in dealing with their generals, a position that would suggest that he would have regarded Nicias’ care for his own reputation and safety as entirely appropriate). Tompkins’ article does not demonstrate that Thucydides blamed Nicias for the Sicilian disaster, but again assumes a modernistic interpretation of events in Sicily by Thucydides and his readers.

Scholars who contend that Thucydides in fact blamed Nicias must argue against the evidence of the historian’s remarkable eulogy for Nicias in book seven. These scholars suggest that this eulogy was meant as irony, to throw Nicias’ failures into bolder relief, or more typically that the eulogy was moral in nature. Nicias’ virtue, celebrated in the eulogy, was not active, but personal, exhibited in his private life rather than his public service or military activity. Thucydides’ statements thus would not contradict the evidence of his narrative. This argument, again, obviously rests on the assumption that Thucydides and his contemporaries would have read the narrative the same way modern critics do. Further, the explicit evidence supporting even this flawed conclusion is weak. Murray develops this type of argument most fully, arguing that Thucydides’ praise of Nicias leaves out the term xynesis, or political insight, which is elsewhere used to praise effective leaders, suggesting that Nicias was not, in Thucydides’ estimation, an effective leader. This conclusion, however, proceeds from far too little evidence. Thucydides uses the word xynesis to praise individuals on only six occasions. It appears in these cases to be used to describe specifically political, not military leadership. Thucydides describes Pericles as qualified by his insight to deliver the funeral oration; Themistocles is described as a great leader and decision-maker (that is, blessed with the

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421 Thuc. 3.98.5, 4.65.3, 7.48.4.
422 Murray, 33-46.
423 Thuc. 2.34.6.
insight to make decisions quickly and well);\footnote{Thuc. 1.138.3.} Brasidas displayed great political insight in his mild treatment of the Chalcideans, who were thus encouraged to desert Athens;\footnote{Thuc. 4.81.1-3.} and Thucydides describes Hermocrates, Phrynichos, and Theramenes as good political leaders (only Phrynichos is described thus in a military context, and then for persuading his colleagues not to undertake a dangerous attack).\footnote{Thuc. 6.72.2, 8.27.5, and 8.68.4.} Thucydides also describes several individuals’ political and leadership talents (Pericles, Antiphon, and Alcibiades, for example) without the use of the term \textit{xynesis}.\footnote{For example, Thuc. 1.39.4, 2.65.5-9, 6.15.4, and 8.68.1.} That Thucydides does not use it to describe Nicias in his eulogy may demonstrate that Thucydides did not think Nicias had great political insight (although, because Thucydides did not always use the term to describe political leaders and because one can question the appropriateness of such a term in the context of a eulogy, whether it would have been accurate or not, this conclusion is not inevitable), but does not demonstrate that Thucydides thought Nicias was a bad military leader, much less that he blamed Nicias for the defeat in Sicily. Westlake and Edmunds suggest that Nicias’ virtues - piety, in particular - are very passive, and that they will naturally be the object of Thucydides’ praise,\footnote{Edmunds, 142; Westlake (1968), 210.} but Thucydides explicitly praises Nicias’ lifelong pursuit of virtue. Nicias’ life included, in addition to piety, an impressive previous track record of military success,\footnote{For example, Thuc. 3.51, 4.53-54, and 4.129-131.} hardly an example of passive virtue. There is no reason why Thucydides should have excluded such accomplishments from his assessment of Nicias, and no evidence that he did so - and thus, no evidence that
Thucydides, in offering his eulogy of Nicias, did not refer to his military leadership in Sicily.

The preceding discussions have dealt with all of the passages from Thucydides that have been seen by modern scholars as directly critical of Nicias or that have been cited and discussed prominently in the modern arguments described at the beginning of this chapter. Thucydides does not seem to have intended in any of these passages to criticize Nicias’ execution of the Sicilian Expedition. It remains to examine briefly a few sections of Thucydides’ narrative of the expedition for evidence of direct criticism.

Of all the events from Thucydides’ narrative of the Sicilian disaster modern scholars identify two as particularly damaging to the Athenian cause: the arrival at Syracuse of the Spartan relief force under Gylippus and the decision to fortify the headland of the Plemmyrium. Both of these events represent mistakes by Nicias. Nicias, by modern standards, should absolutely have prevented Gylippus from landing at Syracuse. He could have done so, but mistook Gylippus’ intentions and then failed to react quickly enough once it became apparent that the Spartan general intended to fortify Syracuse. If Thucydides believed that Nicias’ actions directly caused the failure in Sicily he might be expected to have observed that Nicias thus damaged the Athenian cause. The historian, however, simply describes the Spartans’ journey to Syracuse, observing that Nicias first did not try to guard against them, thinking that they were engaged in piracy, and then that the ships Nicias did send out did not reach the Spartans. Damning as this evidence looks to a modern reader, Thucydides presents it dispassionately, narratively, with no statements of evaluation or criticism.

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430 It would take at least a page to cite most of the scholars who draw this conclusion. Suffice it to say that this conclusion is commonplace and unanimous among Thucydidean scholars.
431 Thuc. 6.104.4, 7.1.2.
Soon after the arrival of Gylippus Nicias decided to fortify the Plemmyrium. Thucydides records Nicias’ reasoning, that both supply of the Athenian force and surveillance of Syracuse would be easier from that position. Thucydides records that Nicias moved most of the Athenians’ supplies, ships, and troops to three forts built on the Plemmyrium. Thucydides then observes that it was on account of the Plemmyrium that the Athenian forces began to decline. The Athenians had to go out from their fortifications on the Plemmyrium for water and firewood, in the process of which they suffered attacks from Syracusan troops who were stationed nearby as a response to the new Athenian forts.\footnote{432 Thuc. 7.4.4-6.} Again, to modern eyes this evidence effectively condemns Nicias’ generalship but Thucydides presents it with no explicit reference to Nicias, specifically identifying the site and the Syracusan response as the agents of Athenian suffering.

Thucydides thus consistently ignores obvious opportunities to criticize Nicias and instead identifies other agencies for Athens’ difficulties. This narrative presentation is consistent with the other passages discussed above. Thucydides, though he provides the evidence that condemns Nicias in the modern world, does not himself condemn the general. He blames other sources for the defeat, fails to criticize Nicias’ errors or even describe them as such, and occasionally even praises the Athenian aristocrat.

There thus exists a significant contradiction between modern arguments, which see evidence of condemnation in Thucydides’ treatment of Nicias, and the apparent conclusions arising from the text itself, which, read without assumption of general condemnation of Nicias, does not suggest such condemnation on its own. In fact the modern arguments described above share two common flaws.
The most fundamental of these problems is their over-emphasis on Thucydides, their Thucydides-centrism. Scholarship on the question of Nicias has naturally tended to focus on Thucydides; Thucydides provides an excellent narrative of the events in Sicily, contained in a larger discussion of the Peloponnesian War renowned for its excellence of presentation and analysis. Thucydides, moreover, acts as the primary source for the other extant narrative of the expedition and the career of Nicias, the Plutarch’s Life of Nicias. The other contemporary and near-contemporary sources for both Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition are scattered, fragmentary, and limited compared to Thucydides’ extensive narrative. Thus, Thucydides became the basis for any examination of the Sicilian Expedition and Nicias’ part in it.

Furthermore, modern conclusions about Nicias and the condemnation they embody depend on, and generally assume rather than argue, an anachronistic reading of Thucydides’ narrative. Thucydides himself, as several scholars note, refrains from making very many judgements about the cause of the war and does not typically pass judgement on the specific actions taken by Nicias in Sicily. If there were direct evidence that Thucydides’ contemporaries would have read his narrative as modern readers do, that they in fact blamed Nicias, it would perhaps be legitimate to assume that such a reading was historically accurate, that the Athenians of more than 2400 years ago evaluated the events of the Sicilian Expedition, and indeed any other military action, as we do. The lack of such evidence suggests that the events of the expedition and Nicias’ decisions in Sicily may well have been analyzed differently.

Because Thucydides serves as the primary source for all of the examinations of questions about Nicias and Sicily, and because modern scholarship regarded the narrative
of events in Sicily as capable of only one interpretation (that Nicias caused Athens’
defeat by his errors as general), the significant question of how to reconcile the narrative
with the explicit judgements that did not blame Nicias became a literary rather than a
historical investigation. Thucydides’ failure to blame Nicias explicitly must have arisen
from his own personal biases or his analytical approach. Thus, as in the arguments
outlined above, scholars examine Thucydides on the basis of internal evidence, trying
either to explain away the historian’s judgements as representative of personal affinity for
Nicias or to convert them into covert condemnations in agreement with the tone (as they
see it) of the narrative.

This approach does not yield satisfactory results. In fact, as we shall see (and as
is suggested by the evidence from the trials and defeats of generals that has already been
presented), Thucydides in failing to condemn Nicias follows the apparent majority
conclusion of his time. The apparent contradiction between the implication of the events
of the expedition and the judgement of Thucydides does not arise from any characteristic
of Thucydides himself or his thought, but rather from modern misunderstanding of fifth
century conceptions of military causation and generalship, and thus cannot be explained
through examination of material exclusively from Thucydides. Thucydides, in fact,
cannot be adequately understood (or at least his attitudes toward Nicias and Sicily cannot
be understood) without a clear picture of his cultural context. In order to explain why
Thucydides evaluates Nicias as he does we must first examine how Thucydides and his
contemporaries understood the events of the Sicilian Expedition. We must reconstruct
how late fifth-century Athenians evaluated their aristocratic generals and how they
understood causation as it applied to military activity.
It could be supposed that Thucydides was suppressing criticism of Nicias that he knew could be made, as a result of social affinity, personal friendship, or for some other reason, if it could be established that Thucydides’ contemporaries were critical of Nicias’ performance in Sicily. In fact, however, there is very little extant contemporary evidence that expresses such an opinion; further evidence condemning Nicias’ leadership in Sicily, or Nicias at all, before the time of Plutarch is not forthcoming. The authors of the Historical Commentary on Thucydides correctly observe that fourth-century opinions about Nicias were quite positive, and they supply evidence that his repute was high in the fifth century as well, at least before 413.433

One comment from Xenophon has sometimes been taken as negative. Xenophon mentions that Nicias’ son Niceratos, like his father, had never done anything demotikon.434 While this final word could be translated “for the people,” and thus perhaps recording a negative judgment, it is more typically and better translated as something like “on the popular side,”435 or populist, which is to say Niceratos, like Nicias, was a conservative. Plutarch asserts that Nicias was never demotikon, setting the word opposite to oligarchikon (“oligarchic” or “aristocratic”)436 and, I think, accurately reflecting the meanings of these words in the late fifth and fourth centuries.

Every other reference to Nicias in the late fifth and early and middle parts of the fourth century is either neutral or positive toward Nicias. It is difficult to infer Plato’s evaluation of Nicias from the latter’s role in the Laches, where he plays the part of an

434 Xen. Hell. 2.3.39.
436 Plut. Nic. 11.2.
older citizen taking part in a debate on the merits of a new fighting technique.\textsuperscript{437} Plato’s attitude in the \textit{Laches} has generally been interpreted as favorable to Nicias,\textsuperscript{438} and certainly the opinions he voices in the dialogue, that learning fighting and military techniques constitutes a noble accomplishment and that military pursuits are honorable and valuable, do not reflect badly on him. A more positive statement appears in Plato’s \textit{Gorgias}, where Nicias appears along with Aristocrates and the members of the house of Pericles on a list of men of great reputations.\textsuperscript{439} Demosthenes in his third Olynthiac oration describes Nicias, Aristides, Pericles, and the general Demosthenes as famous orators of the past who set the welfare of the state above their own personal popularity, a clearly positive statement.\textsuperscript{440} The Old Oligarch, author of the \textit{Athenian Constitution}, also held a high opinion of Nicias. He clearly deplored the Sicilian expedition, referring to it as a disaster,\textsuperscript{441} but does so without mentioning Nicias, and at another point states that Nicias died in Sicily,\textsuperscript{442} without at that point even going into detail about the circumstances, which, as an author clearly hostile to the expedition, he might have been expected to do had he held Nicias accountable. He elsewhere lists Nicias as one of the three best Athenian leaders of recent times (the second half of the fifth century is apparently indicated), describing him in very favorable terms. Andocides, who several times attacks the Sicilian expedition and claims that the survivors returned to Athens in shame,\textsuperscript{443} does not censure Nicias even when discussing him directly. The Suda, in its narrative entry about Nicias, does record that the Athenians regarded Nicias as cowardly

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{437} Plat. \textit{Lach.} 181E-182D.
  \item \textsuperscript{438} For example, see Westlake (1941), 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{439} Plat. \textit{Gorg.} 472A.
  \item \textsuperscript{440} Dem. 3.21.
  \item \textsuperscript{441} [Arist.] \textit{Ath. Pol.} 29.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{442} [Arist.] \textit{Ath. Pol.} 28.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{443} Andoc. 3.30.
\end{itemize}
because he loved peace.\textsuperscript{444} Although this passage could refer to Nicias’ surrender, which the Suda does not mention, it appears early in the entry and seems most likely to refer to an earlier phase of Nicias’ career.\textsuperscript{445}

Later sources preserve only limited criticisms on Nicias. Nothing in them seems to preserve viable evidence of a contemporary tradition hostile to Nicias. Diodorus Siculus, who provides a narrative of the Sicilian expedition very dependent on Thucydides, gives few evaluations of Nicias, other than to fix responsibility for the eclipse delay more squarely on Nicias’ shoulders (he does not mention, as Thucydides does, the desire of the Athenian soldiers to wait because of the eclipse, but neither does he describe Nicias as being excessively fond of oracles)\textsuperscript{446} and to emphasize Nicias’ performance of his civic duty in leading an expedition he opposed, in a speech of the Syracusan Nicolaus on Nicias’ behalf.\textsuperscript{447} Plutarch records that the Athenians praised Nicias for his peace with Sparta,\textsuperscript{448} and so the period of contempt for Nicias’ opposition to war, reflected in the Suda, probably came during the Archidamian war, in a context more eager for the conflict. In any case, the comment does not appear to reflect criticism of Nicias’ generalship in Sicily. The scholia on Aristophanes, Thucydides, and Homer preserve no negative comment regarding Nicias. Lysias, in discussing the execution of Niceratos by the thirty tyrants, says that Niceratos was held in very high regard by the Athenian citizenry both on his own account and on account of his ancestors and that

\textsuperscript{444} Suda Lex. \textit{mu} 534.2.
\textsuperscript{445} [Arist.] \textit{Ath. Pol.} 28.5.
\textsuperscript{446} Diod. Sic. 13.12.6.
\textsuperscript{447} Diod. Sic. 13.27.4.
\textsuperscript{448} Plut. \textit{Nic}. 9.6-7.
Niceratos’ whole family was honored by the city because of their notable public service and performance of civic duty.\(^{449}\)

The life of Niceratos in several ways suggests that Nicias was not regarded as culpable by the Athenians. Xenophon and Lysias both argue that the thirty tyrants’ arrest and execution of Niceratos created problems for them because of Niceratos’ standing within the city,\(^{450}\) and Diodorus, discussing the same event, describes Niceratos as fair and generous, and “perhaps first of all the Athenians in wealth and reputation,”\(^{451}\) a reputation that might not have been expected of the son of a general bearing the blame for one of Athens’ greatest tragedies. Although he does not seem to have had a substantial impact on the governance of the city, Niceratos was a trierarch at Samos, giving evidence (as is suggested by Lysias\(^{452}\)) that he suffered no bar from participation in public life. It might be conjectured that, had Nicias been held accountable for the failure in Sicily, he might have been tried posthumously and his fortune (reputedly around 100 talents\(^{453}\)) confiscated or diminished by fine; at least one general in this period was tried posthumously\(^{454}\) and there is ample evidence that the sons of fathers notorious for one reason or another could face charges from persons interested either in much-delayed justice or in using the father’s reputation for their own financial gain.\(^{455}\) While Niceratos left only fourteen talents to his son at his death, as compared to the 100 talents he is thought to have inherited from Nicias,\(^{456}\) this diminution seems to have been the result of

\(^{449}\) Lys. 18.6-7.
\(^{450}\) Lys. 18.6; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.39.
\(^{451}\) Diod. Sic. 14.5.5.
\(^{452}\) Lys. 18.6. See Davies, 403-406.
\(^{453}\) Lys. 19.47.
\(^{455}\) One thinks here particularly of the younger Alcibiades, as defended in Lys. 4.
\(^{456}\) Lys. 19.47.
instability in the north, the location of the family’s mines, during the Deceleian war rather than extortion or trial decisions.\textsuperscript{457} Lysias gives Niceratos’ surprisingly small legacy as an example of a person who was supposed in life to be very wealthy but turned out not to be,\textsuperscript{458} suggesting that there had been no significant confiscation of money from Niceratos (which would have dispelled the notion that he was wealthy). Niceratos’ good standing in society and apparent freedom from legal attack in connection with his father does not make a positive case that his father escaped blame for Sicily, but his case at least provides no evidence at all that Nicias did suffer odium.

There are, finally, a few pieces of evidence relating to popular explanations for the defeat in Sicily. Thucydides, as has been noted above, states that the Athenians, upon receiving news of the defeat, blamed their leaders and advisors for convincing them to vote for the expedition in the first place. The Athenians here do not make any statement about the perceived causes of the defeat, but significantly do not express any thoughts whatsoever about Nicias.\textsuperscript{459} In a more concrete expression of the perceived causes of the disaster, Plutarch quotes an epitaph written by Euripides for the Athenians who died in Sicily. Euripides claims that the Athenians defeated the Syracusans eight times while the gods favored both sides equally,\textsuperscript{460} implying that the vicissitudes of divine assistance destroyed the Athenian army. Two other sources, Aeschines and Isocrates, describe the expedition as a military mistake, as the Athenians had enemies nearer home and could

\textsuperscript{457}Thuc. 7.27.5; Davies, 405-406.  
\textsuperscript{458}Lys. 19.47.  
\textsuperscript{459}Thuc. 8.1.1.  
\textsuperscript{460}Plut. Nic. 17.4.
not afford to make an attempt at Sicily, characterized by Isocrates as greedy. Neither address the issue of causation.\footnote{Isoc. 8.84; Aesch. 2.76.}

The only potentially significant example of contemporary condemnation of Nicias’ generalship is the Athenian stele recorded by Pausanias. Pausanias records that he agrees with Philistus that the Athenians left Nicias’ name off of the stele erected to honor those who died in Sicily because Nicias’ personal surrender in Sicily made him unworthy of such an honor, an unworthy soldier.\footnote{Paus. 1.29.12.} Modern scholars often cite this piece of evidence in support of the contention that Nicias’ contemporaries blamed him for the disaster in Sicily. Kagan presents the evidence of this stele as one of the foundations of his theory about Thucydides’ treatment of Nicias - the stele provides evidence that late fifth-century Athenians blamed Nicias, a tradition Thucydides, in very typical fashion, attempts to correct by suggesting, in part out of class affinities, other agents of Athens’ destruction\footnote{Kagan, 368-371.}. Gomme, Dover, and Andrewes regard the stele as evidence of a brief “phase of ill-repute”\footnote{Gomme, Dover, and Andrewes, vol. 4, 464.} based on his failures. Atkinson asserts that “this damnatio memoriae shows that he [Nicias] was held responsible for the disaster at Syracuse.”\footnote{Atkinson, 62.} Westlake provides the only dissenting voice, suggesting that the stele Pausanias saw was not complete and that Nicias’ name might well have been inscribed originally, but was no longer apparent in Pausanias’ time. Westlake offers this suggestion in the context of a broader argument about Thucydides, that the historian’s negative evaluation of Nicias

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Isoc. 8.84; Aesch. 2.76.}
\footnote{Paus. 1.29.12.}
\footnote{Kagan, 368-371.}
\footnote{Gomme, Dover, and Andrewes, vol. 4, 464.}
\footnote{Atkinson, 62.}
\end{footnotes}
was all the more striking in that it emerged from a culture otherwise very positive about Nicias, as indicated by other late fifth- and fourth-century writers.466

This evidence certainly could suggest the existence of a tradition that the Athenians condemned Nicias’ surrender. That Pausanias’ stele reflects Athenian censure of Nicias’ generalship is, however, a very uncertain conclusion. Pausanias records a tradition that Nicias’ omission resulted from the shame arising from his cowardice, revealed in his personal surrender to Gylippus. Other authors, too, record condemnation of Nicias’ shame resulting from his surrender. Intense disapproval of this act certainly forms part of the basis for Plutarch’s negative impression of Nicias. Plutarch argues that Nicias’ end was particularly shameful by reason of his surrender, a negative evaluation with which Plutarch ends his treatment of Nicias.467 But Plutarch manifestly separates Nicias’ surrender, which he argues made Nicias’ death worse than that of his parallel, Crassus,468 from his performance as general and his military and political career in general, which Plutarch regards as having been better than that of Crassus.469 Nicias’ surrender could have brought him some personal, posthumous odium, but there is no reason to suppose that his shame in this regard retroactively influenced perceptions of his performance as a general (his personal surrender was, after all, an independent event, after he had ceased to function as a general and did not impact his generalship in a material way). Thucydides, for example, wrote his eulogy praising Nicias’ virtue in the chapter immediately following the narrative of Nicias’ surrender (a surrender which he

466 Westlake (1941), 64.
467 Plut. Comp. Nic. and Crass. 5.2.
468 Plut. Comp. Nic. and Crass. 5.2.
469 Plut. Comp. Nic. and Crass. 2.1-5.1.
Furthermore, the fact that Nicias’ surrender was intended to save the lives of the other surviving Athenians may well have removed much of its stigma. While Nicias still acted shamefully in surrendering (reflected in his absence from the stele and perhaps in Plutarch’s assessment of his death), his acceptance of that personal shame in the (ultimately futile) hope of saving his soldiers’ lives may well have counted to his credit as a general and thus saved him from popular censure for that surrender. Such an accounting could explain the lack of other evidence of condemnation. Thus, Nicias’ omission from the stele, even if legitimate, reflected a limited criticism of his quality as a soldier, separate from an assessment of his leadership to that point and not representative of blame. Without other evidence equating Nicias’ surrender with bad generalship the evidence of Pausanias cannot be held to reflect Athenian condemnation of Nicias’ performance.

Contemporary Athenians did not blame Nicias for the defeat in Sicily. The extant evidence clearly documents both Nicias’ popularity before the Sicilian disaster and his good reputation (and that of his family) after. Despite the nearly unanimous opinion of modern scholarship, neither Thucydides nor the fragmentary evidence of other contemporary authors condemns Nicias’ execution of the Sicilian Expedition. Within a few hundred years, however, evaluations of Nicias changed radically. Beginning with Polybius and Diodorus Siculus and culminating in the aggressive hostility of the biographer Plutarch, a tradition developed condemning Nicias’ generalship in Sicily along with the balance of his military and political career. Plutarch’s account in particular, echoing many of the details of Thucydides’ account but evaluating them in a manner much more hostile and critical than that of Thucydides, has

\[470 \text{ Thuc. } 7.85.1.\]
provided the basis for most subsequent evaluations of Nicias’ performance in Sicily.\footnote{Plut. \textit{Nic}, generally, esp. 14.4, 16.3. For a discussion of Plutarch’s hostility toward Nicias and its lack of basis in his sources, see Luigi Piccirilli, “Nicia fra astuzie, ricatti e corruzioni,” \textit{Museum Helveticum} 54 (1997), 1-8, and Piccirilli, “Nicia in Filisto e in Timeo,” \textit{Rivista de Filologia e di Instruzione Classica} 118 (1990), 385-390.} There exists the possibility that this apparently later historiographical tradition may find its roots in no longer extant fifth century sources that did contain the kind of criticism and blame of Nicias not apparent in the extant sources.

In his \textit{Life of Nicias}, Plutarch makes numerous explicit criticisms of the general and displays a generally hostile tone.\footnote{For example, Plut. \textit{Nic}, 6.2, 8.1-3, 14.2-3, 21.4, 23.1, and 26.2.} Plutarch certainly blamed Nicias for the Athenian failure in Sicily,\footnote{Plut. \textit{Nic}, 14.2.} and his criticisms, his analysis of the events and Nicias’ actions on the campaign, closely resemble modern conclusions about the disaster. Plutarch, of course, wrote centuries after the fact; in and of themselves, his criticisms, while interesting, have no relevance to the evaluative systems and criteria of Nicias’ time. It is a truism, however, that, in examining ancient history before the second century CE, Plutarch’s value is the value of his sources. Plutarch seems to have relied in his discussion of the Sicilian expedition almost entirely on two sources: Thucydides and Philistus (with a few references to Timaeus, not very significant to this study).\footnote{An excellent discussion of Plutarch’s sources for Nicias appears in Frances Titchener, \textit{A Historical Commentary on Plutarch’s “Life of Nicias”} (Ann Arbor, 1988), pp. 17-30 and in particular 23-5 on Philistus and Timaeus.}

Plutarch’s use of Thucydides presents no difficulty; Thucydides’ text exists and can be analyzed on its own (as above). We can, therefore, refer to the original and determine whether Plutarch’s hostility to Nicias depends on that source. As we have seen, it does not; Thucydides did not criticize Nicias as Plutarch does, and so cannot form the basis of Plutarch’s judgements. Philistus’ history, however, has disappeared except for fragments
such as those found in Plutarch. It is, therefore, difficult to determine how much of Plutarch’s negative, critical attitude toward Nicias derives from his Sicilian source.

Some scholars have suggested, in fact, that Philistus will naturally have provided Plutarch with his negative views. Plutarch was a philosopher, biographer, and historian. He possessed limited military expertise and therefore limited capacity to criticize military activity in his subjects. Plutarch’s criticisms of Nicias’ generalship must therefore come from his sources, and therefore from Philistus, his only significant, no longer extant source for the Sicilian Expedition and a military man.\textsuperscript{475} If Philistus did supply Plutarch with criticisms of Nicias, if, in short, he did blame Nicias for Athens’ defeat in Sicily, then Philistus provides an example of a contemporary (Philistus fought against Nicias’ army in Sicily and witnessed the events of the disaster) who evaluated Nicias’ generalship just as do modern investigators. Philistus would thus counter the argument so far presented here, that Nicias’ contemporaries did not blame Nicias for the defeat.

Few, however, of Plutarch’s criticisms of Nicias require, or even suggest, the existence of a source critical to the Athenian general. A careful examination of Plutarch’s treatment of Nicias reveals that that treatment depends almost entirely on Thucydides.\textsuperscript{476} Plutarch simply seems to have read Thucydides very much as do modern scholars. Plutarch’s interpretation of Thucydides proceeds from his own beliefs, his own evaluative criteria, which he clearly displays in his \textit{Moralia}. Plutarch, as the \textit{Moralia} make clear, disapproved of Nicias, both as an aristocratic leader and as a general, because of Nicias’ personal habits, his way of life, his beliefs, and some of his personal actions, in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Titchener} Titchener (1988), pp. 15-6.
\end{thebibliography}
particular the personal surrender that ended his career.\textsuperscript{477} Plutarch’s prejudices have nothing to do with Philistus or his supposed criticisms of Nicias but are rather a function of Plutarch’s time, place, and training, the Roman culture in which he was embedded, and the philosophical arguments he had developed.\textsuperscript{478} Because Plutarch’s own preconceptions, as applied to Thucydides, explain his attituds toward Nicias, Philistus’ attitudes toward the Athenian general must remain uncertain. Philistus may have blamed Nicias, but we do not have any certain evidence that he did, since Plutarch’s negativity (which can be explained internally) does not demand that Philistus blamed Nicias. Since no other contemporary source blames Nicias for Athens’ defeat, there is no compelling reason to assume, without evidence, that Philistus did so.

There are many examples of passages in the \textit{Life of Nicias} in which Plutarch provides material clearly drawn from Thucydides but gives that material his own, negative interpretation. In chapters seven and eight, for example, Plutarch recounts Nicias’ resignation of his command in Pylos to Cleon.\textsuperscript{479} Thucydides, describing this series of events,\textsuperscript{480} provides a rather flat narrative broken only by moments in which he either derides Cleon or reports that the Athenian crowd did so. Plutarch, on the other hand, describes the debate in the assembly, summarizes Cleon’s success at Pylos,\textsuperscript{481} and then reports that this sequence of events caused Nicias’ contemporaries to look down on him as having done something even more disgraceful than throwing his shield away.\textsuperscript{482}

In support of this contention Plutarch quotes two passages from Aristophanes that do not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{477} See below pp. 121ff.
\item \textsuperscript{478} See D.A. Russell, \textit{Plutarch} (London, 1973) pp. 63-99 for a discussion of how Plutarch uses his biographies and his other works to make significant philosophical points within the context of his contemporary academic and intellectual world.
\item \textsuperscript{479} Plut. \textit{Nic}. 7.2-8.2.
\item \textsuperscript{480} Thuc. 4.27.3-28.5, 4.39.3-40.1.
\item \textsuperscript{481} Plut. \textit{Nic}. 8.1.
\item \textsuperscript{482} Plut. \textit{Nic}. 8.1.
\end{itemize}
Plutarch recounts essentially the same events as had Thucydides, but he does so in a manner much more critical of Nicias.

In chapter 14 Plutarch blames Nicias for the failure of the expedition to Sicily. He recounts Nicias’ hesitation and unwilling departure for Sicily and ascribes to Nicias’ feelings and manner the “blunting of his colleagues’ enthusiasm.” Plutarch then reproduces the three different plans for the expedition promoted by the three generals, almost precisely as Thucydides had (Plutarch alters their order). Plutarch, unlike Thucydides, however, proceeds to imply that the Athenian force followed Nicias’ plan, and that plan, which was hesitant and inconsequential and generally in keeping with Nicias’ attitude toward the expedition, leads in Plutarch to the failure of the expedition. Plutarch here again tells the same story Thucydides does, but alters the story slightly to make Nicias to blame for the unfortunate outcome, which Thucydides does not do. Plutarch then uses this story as the basis for a direct condemnation of Nicias’ performance.

Both Plutarch and Thucydides tell essentially the same story about what happened after Demosthenes’ arrival in Sicily with the second Athenian army. In Plutarch’s version, Demosthenes wanted either to attack immediately or leave immediately. Nicias preferred to wait, however, because he had information from theoretical Athenian

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483 Plut. Nic. 8.2. In the first passage a character says “we have no time to niciasize,” i.e., we have no time to drag our feet. This passage is not particularly harsh nor does it seem especially relevant to the debate over Pylos. The second passage is more topical, as one character, irritated at delay, offers a crowd 1000 drachmas to “release him from his office”; the crowd responds that that will make 2000, counting Nicias’. This seems a relatively mild jibe, certainly by the standards of classical political comedy in the theater; at the very least, it is hardly evidence of “shame greater than if he had thrown his shield away in battle.”

486 Thuc. 6.46.5-50.1, Plut. Nic. 14.3.
sympathizers within Syracuse that the Syracusans were near surrender. Thucydides explains that Demosthenes got his wish to attack first, then Nicias would not depart at first because of his inside information. Thucydides’ version, as discussed above, is not designed to condemn Nicias’ actions or put the Athenian general in a bad light. Plutarch, however, reports that the other generals thought Nicias a coward for his refusal to act and then forced him to accept Demosthenes’ plan to attack immediately. Titchener believes that this passage represents knowledge Plutarch gained from Philistus, but it is difficult to see how Philistus might have known about Demosthenes’ and Eurymedon’s personal feelings about Nicias. The evidence typically assumed to arise from Philistus usually concerns inside information about the Syracusans and their allies – names, strategies, and actions that the Athenians would not have known. These passages are usually not judgmental in any respect, but simply narrative. Plutarch altered the story of Demosthenes’ arrival in Sicily and Nicias’ reasons for wanting to wait for Syracusan capitulation by providing extra detail about the inner workings of the Athenian command’s decision-making process and the attitudes of individual Athenian generals. This material was probably not available to Philistus and is presented in a manner very different from the other, almost certainly “Philistian” passages. Plutarch has altered the story, moreover, in such a way as to present Nicias as a coward, one of his favorite personal criticisms of Nicias and further to assert that Nicias’ contemporaries thought he

489 Thuc. 7.43.1-48.3.
492 For example Plut. Nic. 24.2, a brief story about a Syracusan boy, Heracleides, and his uncle Pollichus and their actions in battle, or Plut. Nic. 25.2, which describes how the Syracusans used techniques learned from Ariston of Corinth to defeat Athens in a naval engagement. This sort of behind-the-scenes information on Syracusan behavior, offered without any sort of judgment about relative moral worth or the location of blame, certainly comes from someone with direct knowledge about the Sicilian side of the war, and thus from Philistus.
was a coward. This passage, like the first two, looks much more like Plutarch’s personal adaptation of Thucydidean material to fit into his own, moral and critical, presentation of Nicias.

Plutarch’s criticisms of Nicias are informed by Plutarch’s well-developed ideas about what a good (and a bad) aristocrat, politician, statesman, and general ought to be like. Many of the elements of Nicias’ character, behavior, and personality presented in the biography correspond directly to Plutarch’s type of the bad leader, as drawn in his other works.\textsuperscript{493} Put simply, Plutarch disapproved of nearly every aspect of Nicias’ career, from his private life and his financial situation to his public actions as a general and a politician. Several examples of the biography demonstrate this fact.

Regarding Nicias’ military and political career, Plutarch has to admit that Nicias was a successful general (although Plutarch attributes that success to good luck and an avoidance of difficult campaigns). Plutarch complains, however, that Nicias was hopeless as a political speaker. Unlike Pericles, Nicias was “nervous” and “easily confused” in public discourse.\textsuperscript{494} Plutarch felt this was the hallmark of a bad statesman; a quality politician would have been a confident, courageous leader in the public arena.\textsuperscript{495} Plutarch argues that Nicias, despite his shortcomings, won political prominence with his wealth.\textsuperscript{496} Plutarch elsewhere condemned such avenues to power.\textsuperscript{497} Nicias was superstitious,\textsuperscript{498} where a good leader (in fact, for Plutarch, a quality person) should scorn

\textsuperscript{493} Titchener (1988) makes many of these individual observations, but does not draw the same overall conclusion that I do.
\textsuperscript{494} Plut. Nic. 2.4.
\textsuperscript{495} Plut. Mor. 800A-B, 802C-D, 815C-816B. Titchener (1988), pp. 89, 92.
\textsuperscript{496} Plut. Nic. 3.1.
\textsuperscript{498} Plut. Nic. 4.1.
superstition.\textsuperscript{499} Plutarch interestingly condemned both Nicias’ almost manic commitment to public service\textsuperscript{500} (overzealous commitment to politics is the mark of evil ambition and a source of public scorn\textsuperscript{501}) and his preference for staying home when he had no public business to conduct\textsuperscript{502} (because a leader should be in public at all times, not a recluse hiding behind barred doors).\textsuperscript{503} Finally, Plutarch sees confirmation of Nicias’ cowardice in the general’s personal surrender. Plutarch’s final word on Nicias, at the end of his comparison between Nicias and Crassus, is that Nicias was more deserving of condemnation because he “was led by the hope of a shameful and inglorious safety to put himself into the hands of his enemies, thereby making his death a greater disgrace for him.”\textsuperscript{504} Here again Plutarch casts an event narrated by Thucydides in a wholly different light without adding any significant details. Thucydides made Nicias’ surrender relatively heroic, motivated by concern for his soldiers rather than his own safety.\textsuperscript{505} Plutarch, however, because of his own moral and philosophical convictions, saw Nicias as deeply flawed. The biographer thus selected his material and altered the sense of his primary source to fit his own personal evaluation of the Athenian general.

Both the moral criticisms of Nicias and the condemnations apparent in Plutarch’s Thucydidean material can be explained by reference to Plutarch’s moral and philosophical convictions, and the few passages clearly drawn from Philistus do not seem judgmental at all, let alone harshly critical toward Nicias. One critical passage in the biography, however, does not necessarily come from Thucydides or present a value

\textsuperscript{500} Plut. Nic. 5.1.
\textsuperscript{502} Plut. Nic. 5.1.
\textsuperscript{504} In Bernadotte Perrin’s elegant translation of Plut. \textit{Comp. Nic. et Crass.} 5.2, from the 1916 Loeb Classical Library series.
\textsuperscript{505} Thuc. 7.85.1, 86.5.
judgment but does record condemnation of Nicias. After the Athenian failure at the
Olympieum, their withdrawal to Naxos, and the resulting loss of Catana, Plutarch states
that “everyone blamed Nicias for these things,” because of his hesitation. This at first
seems like possible evidence of contemporary censure. It seems unlikely, however, that
this statement comes from Philistus. Supposing that “everyone” refers to the Athenians
generally or the Athenian soldiers, Philistus would not likely have known about this
conclusion, nor, writing a Sicilian history, should he be expected to have cared. Plutarch
could be paraphrasing Demosthenes’ thoughts on arriving in Sicily, as reported by
Thucydides. If so, however, Plutarch gives the criticism his own moral thrust (Nicias’
hesitation), and moreover misinterprets the passage from Thucydides, as previously
discussed. The assertion could, of course, rest on no longer extant evidence from Attic
comedy. Such a passage would be surprising, however, given that other sources from the
fifth century do not record this sort of condemnation of Nicias’ performance. If Plutarch
does draw this conclusion from comedy it is more likely based on marginally critical
scraps like the ‘niciasizing’ comment referenced earlier, which do draw a picture of
Nicias’ deliberate or hesitant personality but fail to blame or condemn him for anything.
Plutarch, who does blame Nicias for the defeat in Sicily and abhors that element of
Nicias’ personality, may have extrapolated such comments into a condemnation that does
not appear elsewhere. In fact, as Titchener says, “most likely it is Plutarch himself who
blames Nicias,” either out of personal disapproval or in an effort to create a contrast as he
reaches the end of a narrative section. This conclusion seems clear. Plutarch’s

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507 Thuc. 7.42.3.
hostility toward Nicias derives, not from a missing fifth-century source, but from the biographer’s convictions themselves.

Careful consideration of all available evidence regarding Nicias’ life and military career suggests that his contemporaries did not blame Nicias for the failure of the Sicilian Expedition. This conclusion contradicts the majority opinion of modern scholarship concerning Nicias. It also appears to violate what is nearly an axiom in the study of fifth-century Athens: that the classical Athenians judged their generals very harshly and punished failure severely. The conclusions of this chapter, however, are consistent with the expectations suggested by the preceding chapter. The classical Athenians did not condemn their generals for military defeat, they put those generals on trial for the appearance of treason rather than for simple failure, and they thus naturally did not condemn Nicias for his defeat, however spectacular.
CHAPTER 3

THE PRICE OF FAILURE

CONCEPTIONS OF NICIAS’ CULPABILITY IN ATHENS’ SICILIAN DISASTER

While the conclusion that Athenian generals were not condemned nor generally put on trial for military defeat, and the following conclusion that Nicias would not have been condemned by the Athenians for his part in the disaster in Sicily, is consistent with the evidence from impeachment trials and that regarding Nicias’ posthumous reputation, that conclusion still demands an explanation. As we have seen, most modern analysts have found Nicias at fault in Sicily, and have assumed that, whether or not Thucydides condemned him, the average Athenian would have agreed with them. If, as seems to be the case, Athenian society did not blame the errors of commanders for defeats, that implies that the ancient Athenians understood the role of the general, military causation, or both very differently from the way the modern readers apparently do. Thus, this study’s next task is to examine the interaction between the Athenian demos (and those of other poleis) and their designated military leaders. What expectations did generals face, and how were they evaluated? What were the characteristics of a good general, and what
were the characteristics of a bad one from the perspective of Greek citizens in the fifth and fourth centuries? How did those Greek citizens understand the causes of victory and defeat? Once those questions have been answered the resulting authentic contemporary evaluative criteria can be applied to defeated generals, and particularly to Nicias to explain why, even in the face of what seem glaring mistakes, defeat did not typically result in blame, odium, or punishment for the defeated general.

Expectations

One way to look at both the specific expectations for commanders in the field and the relationship between the *demos* and the general is to consider the orders, or perhaps better, the tasks given those generals by the assembly. These orders typically outlined what the assembly wanted the general to accomplish and must therefore have formed the basis for subsequent evaluation of the generals’ performance. Such orders took two different forms. In some cases the assembly produced very specific, detailed descriptions of tasks to be performed. These specific orders can yield a great deal of insight into what fifth and fourth century Greek citizens wanted from their general and how they perceived their relationship with those generals. Orders could also be very broad, assigning a general command of what we would call a theater or campaign. Broader orders presumably gave generals more autonomy and reveal fewer details about the expectations those generals faced. Generals operating under such broad orders, however, were still basically under the control of their *polis*,\(^509\) at least until the second half of the fourth century.

\(^{509}\) For example, in 362 the Athenians sent Timotheus to help Ariobarzanes in punishing several mutual enemies. This command implied very broad responsibility, but the assembly still took care to limit
century, as we will see, and their behavior in reaction to those orders, along with a few more detailed versions of these broad orders, demonstrates that generals and assemblies alike saw both types of orders as placing the same types of expectations on the general sent out.

Specific orders appear slightly less frequently in the sources than do broader orders, although very likely this reflects the limited nature of the sources, which probably fail to provide the specifics of given orders a significant percentage of the time. Although the lack of a really sharp line between specific and broad orders makes statistical evaluation difficult, a sample of 33 cases, including some already discussed in chapter one, from Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Demosthenes, and a number of lesser orators and authors yields about 16 specific orders and 17 broader examples. Specific orders are at least as well-represented, however, down to the end of the fifth century, with broader orders becoming more typical around 390 and continuing to be the more numerous type through the fourth century. Although, again, the nature of the sources may color this picture – Thucydides, for example, may simply be a more accurate reporter than the fourth-century sources, leading to a higher concentration of specific examples from the fifth century - other sources, in particular Demosthenes’ pleas in his *Philippics* to the Athenians to get their generals under control,\textsuperscript{510} suggest that the fuzzy statistical picture presented here is essentially correct. Even ‘specific’ orders after 390 become relatively broader than their fifth century counterparts. In the fifth century we see generals given very specific, even step-by-step instructions, as in 425 the assembly sent Eurymedon and Sophocles as generals to Sicily to assist Pythodorus in retaking

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\textsuperscript{510} Dem. *Phil.* 1.42, 4.22.
Messina and ordering them further to assist Demosthenes in the Peloponnesus and then help Corcyra put down some political exiles who were stirring up trouble in the countryside while on their way.\footnote{Thuc. 4.2.3-4, 48.6, 58.1.} Later specific orders are often either trivial, as in 380 when the Spartans ordered Phoebidas to collect soldiers and join his brother Dudamias in Thrace,\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.2.24.} or debatable cases, as in 381 when Athens ordered Pamphilus to besiege Aegina.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.1.1. These orders could be categorized as broad, except that the task involved is specific to one location and one mission there. Still, Pamphilus seems to have been free to act as he wished in carrying out these orders.}

Specific orders, while mostly early, still provide the greater direct insight into the expectations the \textit{demos} had for its generals. In addition to Eurymedon, Sophocles, Phoebidas, and Pamphilus, examples of specific orders include the following: in 424 Athens sent Thucydides to support Eucles in defending Amphipolis against Brasidas.\footnote{Thuc. 4.104.4.} In 409 Athens sent Anytus to help defend Pylos against a Spartan attack.\footnote{Diod. 13.64.5-7, Arist. \textit{Ath Pol.} 27.5.} In 406 Athens sent Adeimantus to assist Alcibiades in suppressing a revolt at Andros.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 1.4.21.} In 397 Sparta ordered the general Dercylidas and the naval commander Pharax to invade Caria and pressure Tissaphernes into surrender as part of a larger Spartan plan to avoid fighting multiple satraps at once.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 3.2.12.} In 394 Athens ordered Conon to blockade Abydos and Sestos, and then to take charge of the Athenian fleet in the area and use it to take (unoccupied) cities.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 4.8.6.} In 392 Sparta sent Agesipolis to ‘enforce the ban’, i.e. to attack the Argives, in retaliation for Argos’ aggressive behavior toward the Spartans.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 4.7.2.}
the Spartans sent Thibron to engage the Persian Satrap Struthas.\textsuperscript{520} In 374 Athens sent Timotheus to Corcyra to help defend it against a Spartan siege.\textsuperscript{521} In 366 Athens sent Chabrias to take the town of Oropus back from the pro-Theban faction that had allied the town with Thebes\textsuperscript{522} and sent Chares to escort a Phlian supply caravan.\textsuperscript{523} In about 361 Athens sent Leosthenes in command of a fleet to help defend the town of Peparethus against a siege and punish Alexander of Pherae for damage he had done to the Athenians.\textsuperscript{524} And, in 356 Athens sent Iphicrates, Timotheus, Menestheus, and Chares with a large fleet to suppress revolt in Thrace and deliver Chios, Rhodes, Cos, and Byzantium from raids.\textsuperscript{525}

Strikingly, many of the tasks assigned these generals could be accomplished without direct military confrontation, and some were not entirely military in nature. Most of those orders that did promise fighting sent generals to help allied cities under siege, a discrete task that could be simply evaluated, accomplished or not accomplished, rather than directing a general against a specific enemy or army. Those generals who were sent against specific forces were as likely as not to be sent against raiding parties or political rebels rather than armies as such. And even when the assembly did send a general specifically to fight another force, as in the cases of the three Spartan forces under Dercylidas and Pharax, Agesipolis, and Thibron, and arguably Athenians Eurymedon and Sophocles and Thucydides, the goals of the orders was often political – changing the diplomatic situation in Asia Minor or reminding allies to be loyal via an object lesson, for

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{520} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 4.8.17.
\item \textsuperscript{521} Dem. 49.6, Xen. \textit{Hell}. 6.2.13, Diod. 15.47.3.
\item \textsuperscript{522} Dem. 20.76, Xen. \textit{Hell}. 7.4.1, Diod. 15.76.
\item \textsuperscript{523} Xen. \textit{Hell}. 7.2.18.
\item \textsuperscript{524} Dem. 51.9, Diod. 15.95.1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{525} Dion Hal. \textit{Lys}. 480, \textit{Dein}. 667-8, Diod. 16.21.1, Nep. \textit{Tim}. 3.2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
example. Athenian tolerance for defeat becomes more understandable in light of the fact that *poleis* seem never or almost never to have sent out a general specifically ‘to defeat X’, and rarely even ‘to engage X’. Specific orders tend instead to list tasks for the general to accomplish which would further the political or material interests of the *polis*, securing resources (as Chares), helping allies, or establishing a position relative to the nearest Persian satraps. The citizens who made up the assemblies assigning these orders were not professional military leaders, obviously; their goals in assigning tasks to generals naturally reflected the assemblies’ political and material concerns. Thus, generals represented their *poleis* as much politically as militarily.

Thucydides records specific orders, given by the Athenians, that best demonstrate what the assembly wanted to accomplish with specific orders to their generals and what they expected of the generals they sent out. In 434 Athens sent Lacedaemonius, Diotimus, and Proteas with a small fleet to help their ally Corcyra against Corinth, the conflict that ultimately touched off the Peloponnesian War. The generals’ military instructions, which were to assist Corcyra against a Corinthian fleet, were hedged around with conditions designed to create a political, rather than military, outcome. Specifically, the Athenian assembly ordered their generals not to attack the Corinthians, in order to maintain Athens’ careful adherence to its treaties and to keep Athens essentially neutral as long as possible, but to defend Corcyra and its possessions if the Corinthians attacked or tried to land on Corcyrean territory.526 Thus, the assembly took care to provide detailed instructions in order to secure a desired political result. Militarily, however, the assembly appears to acknowledge in its orders that victory or defeat, that is, the

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526 Thuc. 1.45.3: προειπον δὲ αύτοις μὴ ναβαχεῖν Κορινθίοις, ἤν μὴ ἐπὶ Κέρκυραν πλέωσι καὶ μέλλοσιν ἀποβαίνειν ἢ ἐς τῶν ἐκείνων τι χωπίων’ οὔτω δὲ κωλύειν κατὰ διδακμίν. προειπον δὲ ταύτα τοῦ μὴ λύειν ἑνεκα τὰς σπονδάς.
accomplishment of the military goal of the mission, lay beyond the control of the generals. Athens ordered the generals, if forced to fight the Corinthians, then to prevent their landing in Corcyrean territory to the best of their ability. This phrase, “to the best of [our] ability,” recurs in the generals’ own description of their task.\textsuperscript{527} In the event, the Athenian ships would not actually participate in the ensuing naval battle for fear of disobeying their orders.\textsuperscript{528} They thus failed to accomplish their primary military task, but they do not seem to have been condemned for it, because they followed their orders. Clearly, the point of these specific orders, and others like them, was fundamentally to bend the fleet, through its generals, carefully and legally to the complex and largely political desires of the \textit{demos}. The expectation for the generals created by these orders was thus not really military victory, which this order acknowledges was not entirely under the generals’ control. Rather, the \textit{demos} demands of the generals that they make their best effort to comply with the \textit{demos}’ intent and execute its desires.

Broad orders, obviously, contain less specific information, and might therefore be assumed to communicate less about the expectations they created. This is in some cases true; in 407, for example, the Athenians ordered Eumachus and Theramenes to stay in the area of the Bosporus, where they had been active the previous year, to garrison the area, collect money, and do whatever damage they can to elements hostile to Athens.\textsuperscript{529} Similarly, the next year Athens conferred upon Alcibiades a ‘supreme command’, with authority to ‘save the city’,\textsuperscript{530} no more specific orders apparently included.

\textsuperscript{527} Thuc. 1.45.3, 53.4. \textsuperscript{528} Thuc. 1.49.4. \textsuperscript{529} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 1.1.22. \textsuperscript{530} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 1.4.20.
The formulae by which the sources report such broad commands, however, sometimes demonstrate that they were meant to control and direct generals in the field in the same way as were more specific orders. Even the most sweeping and open-ended of orders nevertheless implied the ultimate control of the *demos*; the sources record numerous generals who returned home, even in the middle of campaigns, when their term expired, or yielded to replacements sent by the assembly simply because the original general’s time was up. Broad orders also often command a general to advance the *polis*’ interests, even though the means of that accomplishment are left to the general. In 399, for example, Sparta sent Thibron to Asia Minor in order to extend Spartan influence versus that of the Persians. Similarly, in 390, Sparta sent Anaxibius to the Hellespont in order to increase the Spartan influence in that area; when he had some success, the Athenians sent Iphicrates to the same area to reinforce Athenian authority. In 390 the Athenians ordered Thrasyboulos to take a fleet into the Aegean to counter Sparta’s growing power on the sea. Significantly, in only one of these three cases did the general actually fight a direct battle against his primary enemy in the area in short order. Iphicrates did quickly bring Anaxibius to battle, but Thibron and Thrasyboulos understood their orders differently. Thibron collected soldiers and garrisoned territory rather than fighting, then captured a few towns and collected pledges of loyalty from local petty kings. Although the Spartan ephors were apparently unhappy with his lack

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531 Among many, many examples, the Thebans ordered Epaminondas to return in the middle of a campaign in the Peloponnesus because his term had expired (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.18).
532 As when the Spartans sent Hierax to replace the successful Teleutias (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.3).
533 Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.4.
538 Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.5-7.
of action, ordering him to move into Caria, he was not deposed and put on trial until he
made himself obnoxious to Sparta’s allies, who complained to Sparta. Obviously,
Thibron’s failure here was not military, but diplomatic; even his passivity was tolerated,
if not applauded, but aggravating allies proved unacceptable. Thibron, who served as
governor in addition to his generalship, could perhaps have been expected to work more
through diplomacy and indirect improvements in the Spartans’ situation in Asia Minor.
Thrasyboulos, however, was specifically sent ‘against the Spartans’ because of their
growing naval power. Yet, although he did eventually fight a naval engagement against
the Spartan general Therimachus, Thrasyboulos’ first actions were to collect troops,
and money, capture a few non-Spartan cities, and use diplomacy to make allies for
Athens. He considered that he was thus achieving what was expected of him,
‘accomplishing useful service for his polis’. Again, generals given broad orders were
apparently expected, not necessarily to win or even fight battles, but to achieve the
demos’ often political or diplomatic ends.

Scholars have long recognized, of course, that assemblies, and particular the
Athenian assembly, tried before the mid-fourth century to control its generals through
their orders. Generals were motivated by fear of punishment, usually couldn’t negotiate
on their own authority, and could neither achieve less nor, in a sense, more than
ordered. This rigid control, however, and aggressive punishment of generals is often
related today to victory or defeat. In fact, however, generals’ disobedience, their failures,

539 Xen. Hell. 3.1.7-9.
540 Xen. Hell. 4.8.29.
542 See broader discussion of modern scholarship above; for example Hamels (1998), pp. 44, 115-118.
and the ensuing punishment, as we have seen, did not in fact typically have to do with
defeat.

The quasi-military nature of generals’ orders helps to explain why assemblies,
which did not prosecute generals for defeat, did charge with treason those generals who
failed to act strenuously enough, however innocently, to accomplish the *polis*’ goals or
who overstepped their authority, even with positive results. Chapter one describes a few
examples of the first case, in particular that of Timotheus, tried in 372 for his failure to
round Cape Malea because of weather after the assembly ordered him to proceed to
Corcyra.543 Similarly, the Spartan Pausanias in 395, ordered to reinforce Lysander at
Hilartus, arrived too late. Lysander had been defeated and killed; outnumbered,
Pausanias retreated, then was condemned at Sparta for getting to Hilartus late, in addition
to cowardice and other, similar counts of treason.544 While this sort of failure seems to us
trivial relative to a defeat, to the fourth-century Greeks Timotheus’ failure really did
contravene his orders, in a way that defeat clearly did not. We have several examples of
the second case, generals attacked for overstepping their authority. These include the two
Athenian generals who liberated Thebes from Spartan control without orders in 379,545
the Spartan general Sphodrias, who in 387 took bribes from the Thebans to attack Athens
without orders from Sparta,546 and Phoebidas, another Spartan general in 387 who, sent to
reinforce his brother Eudamias instead involved himself in Theban politics as well and
ultimately won its surrender, made by the pro-Spartan element in the city.547 The

543 See above, pp. 42-44.
544 *Xen.* *Hell.* 3.5.17-25.
545 See above, pp. 41-42.
546 *Xen.* *Hell.* 5.4.23-4.
547 *Xen.* *Hell.* 5.2.26-32.
Athenians condemned their two generals and executed the one who stayed to face trial.\textsuperscript{548} The Spartan ephors and assembly were angry at Phoebidas, but were prevented from impeaching him by Agesilaus, who argued that generals could exercise independent authority in the field, provided that on review by the assembly their action proved to have benefited the \textit{polis}.\textsuperscript{549} Sphodrias’ own officers assumed he’d stand trial for exceeding his authority and the Spartans did recall him, but he was acquitted in what Xenophon called the most unjust trial in Sparta’s history.\textsuperscript{550}

The charge against Sphodrias, and the basis of Xenophon’s condemnation, was that as general he had enriched himself at the expense of his \textit{polis}.\textsuperscript{551} It is this failure to work for the betterment of the \textit{polis} that consistently forms the core of the trials of generals in chapter one, because the imperative to benefit the \textit{polis}, in whatever theater presents itself, whether military, political, or financial, forms the real basis of both the specific and the broad types of orders given to generals. The expectation generals faced was that they should obey the \textit{demos} and benefit their \textit{polis} to the best of their ability.

Several pieces of evidence, however, suggest that these expectations shifted somewhat during the last few decades before Chaeronea. Debra Hamels has calculated that Athenian deposition of generals, steady at roughly four to seven percent of all generals during the Peloponnesian War, jumped to between 17 and 19 percent during the next fifty years before dropping off dramatically to three percent thereafter. This period of intensified oversight of generals coincides with two other developments: a decline in the frequency of significant battles, and an increasing dependence on mercenary rather

\textsuperscript{549} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.2.32.  
\textsuperscript{550} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.4.24, 30.  
\textsuperscript{551} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 5.4.30.
than citizen soldiers.\textsuperscript{552} Many authors in the fourth century decried the use of these mercenaries, mostly out of fear that the mercenaries posed a threat to the persons and property of citizens, regardless of what side they theoretically fought for. By the second half of the century, though, Demosthenes was attacking Athens’ use of mercenaries for a different reason. He argued that Athens had struggled to control Philip and their allies because the Athenians had lost control of their army.\textsuperscript{553} He suggests that by the 340’s Athenian generals were pursuing their own designs in the field and that, because their soldiers were mercenaries, neither motivated by Athenian interests nor really accountable to the Athenian assembly, the assembly could not adequately control the behavior of those generals, who proceeded to disturb and alienate Athens’ allies for personal profit.\textsuperscript{554}

Although Demosthenes may have overstated his case, this set of circumstances suggests a trend in the interaction between the Athenian assembly and their generals, likely replicated to a greater or lesser degree in most other \textit{poleis}, that both explains the growing use of broad orders in the fourth century and indicates the possibility that later fourth-century Greeks may have begun to change the ways in which they evaluated those generals.

As we have seen, during the fifth century assemblies issued relatively specific orders to citizen soldiers commanded by largely aristocratic generals. These individuals were presumably motivated by patriotism or public spirit and could be controlled by the assembly, at least to an extent, by the threat of social consequences for disobedience or other misbehavior, the soldiers no less than the generals. After the Peloponnesian War,

\textsuperscript{552} Hamels (1998), pp. 126-135, although the large assertions here – fewer decisive battles during the first 40 years of the fourth century, the increase in Greek use of mercenary soldiers at that time – are so common that they appear in the \textit{Cambridge Ancient History}.  
\textsuperscript{553} Dem. \textit{Phil.}, 4.22, 23.198-9.  
\textsuperscript{554} Dem. 2.46, 13.6.
however, the assembly found itself in a new situation. Its soldiers were increasingly mercenary, and thus not motivated by patriotism nor intimidated by social consequences, as they did not necessarily have public lives in the *polis* to come back to. In response, the assembly tried to exert control over these soldiers through the generals. While powerful citizens had always tended to serve in multiple commands over time, the fourth century saw the emergence of generals like Chabrias, Timotheus, Chares, and Iphicrates, men who held office for years at a stretch and repeatedly. The assembly apparently preferred to rely on experienced commanders to deal with these mercenary soldiers to a degree far beyond what had been true in the past. These generals seem also to have been able to act more independently than had been the case. For example, the Phlians whose supply caravan Chares was escorting in 366 persuaded him to attack their enemies, the Sicyonians; he did this on his own authority, and does not seem to have suffered for it.\textsuperscript{555}

The assembly then turned up the heat on these generals, subjecting them to much more serious scrutiny than had been the case in an effort to control the otherwise uncontrollable mercenaries by controlling the generals.\textsuperscript{556} In the 350’s, however, for reasons that are not immediately clear, the Athenians seem to have accepted their new situation. They continued to use experienced generals frequently and continued to rely on mercenaries but stopped prosecuting all but a few of their generals.\textsuperscript{557} Thus, in the 340’s and 330’s Demosthenes could rail at out-of-control soldiers and generals with private agendas who did little service to Athens. The development of their military, however, into a more autonomous and professional group partially separated from the concerns of the rest of the *polis* and particularly the emergence of a semiprofessional

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{555} Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.20-22.
\item\textsuperscript{556} Hamels (1998), p.131.
\item\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., p. 132.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
group of generals suggest a new conception of what it meant to be a general, and thus new expectations for those generals. Such new expectations do not appear in the treason trials we have already looked at, but as we will see later, there are a few indications that a new standard in evaluating generals had emerged as a consequence of these fourth-century developments.

While assemblies, at least until about 350, clearly expected their generals primarily to do their best to benefit their polis, it is fair to observe that nevertheless those assemblies did not send generals into the field to lose. The sources reflect a clear understanding of the principle that defeat hurts the polis and victory benefits it; if generals had a decisive role in victory and defeat, then surely leading soldiers to victory must have constituted benefiting the polis, and thus ‘following orders’, while defeat equated to damaging the polis, and thus failing to follow those orders. As defeat clearly did not bring this sort of treason charge, fourth and fifth-century assemblies must have viewed the role of the general differently, in such a way that generals, while sometimes praised in victory, were not responsible for defeat.

The Role of the General

Fifth and fourth century conceptions of the role of the general can be accessed in two principal ways. First, the apparent qualifications the Greeks looked for in their generals should indicate what they wanted those generals to be able to do, which would

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558 For example, Xen. Mem. 3.1.3 and Dem. 20.78-80.
indicate those aspects of the job the Greeks felt the general could and should control.

And second, several classical authors explicitly discuss the role of the general.

Some have argued that Athens, at least, looked for military experience as well as potentially useful knowledge or experience outside the army in prospective generals. While the fact that Athens selected their generals by election rather than sortition is certainly significant, there is very little evidence to suggest that any polis held previous experience to indicate proven ability as a general. Xenophon records that the Athenian generals on trial after Arginusae called their former trierarchs “competent” and “former generals”, but there is no clear statement that the latter caused or indicated the former; their past service could have been cited to demonstrate several points, including their social status or their acceptability to the Athenians, both of which could have justified the generals’ choice of the trierarchs to rescue their drowning soldiers. In any case this evidence is hardly clear, and there are no other examples that demonstrate a preference for experienced generals before the later fourth century.

The dominant modern conclusion is that the classical Greeks required extraordinarily little from their prospective generals. Roberts, for example, has argued that “the dokimasia was in no way intended as a scrutiny of a man’s general competence; it would appear that issues of stupidity, ignorance, or political inexperience did not arise”. Instead, voters seem to have regarded all or most citizens as fit to serve as general. This is not to say that incompetence would serve as well as competence. If Greek voters had seen incompetence as a possibility they would certainly have screened candidates carefully. They did, after all, place a high value on winning battles; Demosthenes, for example, in praises Chabrias by claiming (inaccurately) that “he alone of all our generals never lost a city, fort, ship, or man, leading you; he won many battles and did not lose.” Obviously, while generals were not condemned for losing, winning a battle had significant value. They thus would certainly have tried to avoid electing someone who was more likely than the average to lose them. Instead, these voters apparently regarded all citizens as equally competent. These assumptions suggest that classical Greek society had, from a modern point of view, an unusual conception of the role of the general and in particular of the relationship between a general and the outcome of battle.

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559 Thus Hamels (1998), p. 16.
560 Xen. Hell. 1.7.5.
562 Dem. 20.78.
In fact, the conceptual role of an ancient Greek general in actual battle appears to have been remarkably limited. Throughout most of the classical period, for example, the entire polis claimed ownership of victories, rather than attributing them to the general in charge. Demosthenes suggests this understanding several times, operative both early – as when the Greeks turned against Pausanias for claiming credit for victory against the Persians when “it belonged to all the allies”\(^{564}\) – and late – as he claims that while once people used to speak of Athenian victories, “now Timotheus took Corcyra, Iphicrates defeated the Spartans, Chabrias won at Naxos”, giving away successes belonging to the citizens\(^{565}\) – in the classical period. During most of that period generals neither suffered for losing nor truly owned the victories they led.

Yet generals were clearly important; Xenophon states baldly that “without leaders nothing fine or useful can be accomplished in any field, certainly not in warfare”.\(^{566}\) The unique aspect of the classical Greek concept of the role of the general is its separation of the general’s important responsibilities and the cause and credit for victory.

Instead, classical Greek citizens saw the general’s importance in leading the army prior to battle. The most succinct discussions of the role of the general appear in the works of Xenophon, a general himself and an expert and interested analyst of Greek military activity. Although other sources echo his assertions, Xenophon’s several essays on generalship describe all the critical functions of a general. According to Xenophon tactics and other elements of leadership during a battle comprise in insignificant part of a general’s real job. A general’s important contribution begins with the construction of the army and its supplies.

\(^{564}\) Dem. 59.97-8.
\(^{566}\) Xen. An. 3.1.38.
In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon has Socrates explain the role of a general in dialogue form. Socrates begins by observing that because the polis benefits from a general’s correct actions and suffers for his mistakes a prospective general should learn how to be a general. He asserts that tactics and the like comprise only a small part of generalship. A general, or at least a good general, has first of all to be an admirable individual, possessed of a variety of character traits that make him strong, brave, and energetic – essentially, that make him a good soldier – and that would make others likely to admire or obey him. His primary activity should then be to keep the soldiers happy. The general can achieve this in a variety of ways, including justice, motivation, speaking well, and inspiring obedience. These means will best preserve the soldiers’ physical well-being, since obedience creates safety, and their mental or emotional state, since a commander who acts with justice, speaks well, and motivates his men will create in them a sense of confidence and energy. In fact, Socrates/Xenophon argues that victory itself is a valuable goal in that it will create happiness in the soldiers and the polis, because they benefit from it. In actual battle activity, Socrates’ only advice is to place the best men in the front and back of the formation, with the inexperienced in the rear, and that he should avoid situations or actions that lead to defeat. Ultimately, he states, the skills of a good general do not differ from those of a good businessman or a good choregos.

Similarly, in his *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon relates a discussion between the young Cyrus and his father about how the son should learn to be a good general. Again, the

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567 Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.3.
569 Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.6, 3.3.7-8.
570 Xen. *Mem.* 3.2.1-4, 3.3.10.
general’s primary responsibility is to his soldiers, whom he must keep well-provisioned, healthy, and in good physical condition. These goals may be accomplished through sanitation, exercise, and inspirational leadership. Leadership comes largely through force of personality. The general should seem wise, be energetic, speak well, and demonstrate strength by sharing the burdens of the soldiers. Thus the general can make certain his soldiers are ready to fight battles and that they obey him willingly; disobedience in the soldiers marks a poor general. Tactics, he again asserts, take a secondary role in generalship, although he addresses tactical issues more fully here than in the Memorabilia. In battle a general should use deceit and cunning, taking advantage of times when he knows the opponent is vulnerable, such as when they are sleeping or eating. Still, he argues, planning and preparation matter a great deal more than what happens in battle; the general does not act to win in battle as much as he makes sure his soldiers are prepared for battle.

Elements of Xenophon’s description of generalship appear elsewhere in classical texts. Examples include Thucydides, who in the fourth book of his History has the Spartans imply that military activity depends on group strength and planning. Later, Hyperides, in his Funeral Speech from the late fourth century, praises the deceased Athenian general Leosthenes. Leosthenes’ greatness as a general lay in his strength, his ability to inspire his soldiers, and his planning; Hyperides specifically says that “the general is responsible for planning well.” And Demosthenes in his Exordia describes

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574 Xen. Cyr. 1.6.18-21.
575 Xen. Cyr. 1.6.27-36.
577 Thuc. 4.18.2-4.
578 Hyp. 1.15, 24, 38.
the role of leaders, including generals, as “explian[ing] to you the best thing to do,” that is, planning and using speaking skills to communicate the plan.

The foregoing appears to suggest that the Athenians, at least, and perhaps other poleis as well since Xenophon had a greater affinity for Sparta than for Athens, thought that generalship did require special skills and that these skills had a great deal to do with success in battle. If a general, through his particular skills, directly caused, or even significantly contributed to, victory or defeat, we should then expect that generals should receive credit for victories and blame for defeats. Two factors, however, remove both credit and blame from the general. First, while the task of a general did require skills, the Greeks did not perceive those skills as special or specific to the general. And second, for the ancient Greeks the causes of victory and defeat lay beyond the general’s control.

Xenophon listed the many tasks a general had to perform well, some of them in battle. Yet those tasks, and the skills needed to perform them, were even in his view common to all citizens. He implies this conclusion in several places. Socrates in his dialogue on generalship indicates that correct troop disposition is fairly common knowledge; elsewhere he dismisses alternative dispositions by another general as innovations, implying a common standard to which generals typically adhered. Cyrus’ father, after discussing all the other elements of generalship, dismisses tactical concerns by observing that Cyrus will have heard about how to lead in battle frequently and from many different sources, again implying that this information was common knowledge. The average citizen was thought to understand not only conflict but every aspect of

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579 Dem. 25.2.
580 Xen. Mem. 3.1.7.
581 Xen. Hell. 6.2.19.
582 Xen. Cyr. 1.6.43.
military leadership. In his *Oeconomicus* Xenophon simply states this directly: “generals and soldiers alike know how to run an army; how to march, how to post sentries, how to go through a defile . . . differences between generals are just how careful and thorough they are, not differences in strategic ability.”

This conclusion that the citizens of a polis believed that they and their fellows were entirely capable of military leadership emerges from a much broader range of evidence that just Xenophon, although in no other source is it so clearly stated. After examining the processes by which the Athenians created and organized their generals in the fifth century, Charles Fornara concluded that “the belief that no man is inadequate in the selection of his military leaders and the conviction that of those elected all equally and together possess capacity for leadership so that no one of them need be elevated above his peers argues extraordinary self-reliance and utter faith in the tenets of democracy.”

The Athenians felt no need to rank their generals by ability because they assumed such ability to be ubiquitous.

Of course, as the quote from Xenophon demonstrates, they also understood that the actions of a general could lead to defeat; if the general were not careful or thorough, or implicitly from Xenophon’s other discussions if he entered situations that led to defeat, then the general could cause his soldiers to lose. Such a defeat, however, did not result from the general’s lack of ability. The general was assumed to know how to run the army, and knew which situations would result in defeat. If he did not run the army correctly or entered such a situation, therefore, that was not correctly interpreted as failure, but must have been willful (although, as we will see later, there is some

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585 E.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.4.11.
suggestion that certain moral shortcomings could also critically harm a general’s judgement and cause him to fail to do exactly what he knew he should). This is why those generals who stood trial after defeats faced treason charges; incompetent leadership could only result from a choice to harm the polis.

Thus, classical Greek citizens had little ability to blame generals for defeat because every general essentially possessed the same ability to run their armies and fight battles. This removal of defeat, except in cases of treason, from the control of the general implies an alternative system of causation by which the Greeks explained victory and defeat, a mechanism that also had the effect of limiting the credit a general could win for victory. In fact, textual sources suggest a broad range of possible causes for military outcomes, the most important of which were divine intent, the related concept of tuche, and especially the soldiers themselves.

**Causation**

One fundamental cause for military success and failure recognized by the Greeks was divine intent. Divine explanations of material events typify preclassical texts like those of Homer and Hesiod, and they continue to appear throughout the classical period. Herodotus refers many military events to divine causes; when the Spartans could not defeat the Tegeans they responded by asking Delphi what gods needed to be propitiated so that they could succeed, and Sardis fell to Cyrus because the divine protection around its walls was neglected at one point, for example. Thucydides rarely uses the

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586 Hdt. 1.67-68.
587 Hdt. 1.84.
gods to explain events, but late fifth-century playwrights routinely refer to the divine sources of terrestrial occurrences. 588

While Herodotus and the plays may seem close enough to the epic tradition to dispute whether they reflect a real social system of explanation, the many references to divine causation in military activity in Xenophon appear less poetic and more real. Immediately after Cyrus learns how to be a general, he is told that there is a limit to the human ability to plan; however, consulting the gods may reveal the correct course of action. 589 Xenophon has Thrasyboulus tell his soldiers, before engaging the army of the Thirty Tyrants, that they will win because the gods support the just against the unjust. 590 Later, Dercylidas, an unusually clever Spartan general, refuses to attack for four days because of unfavorable sacrifices. 591 Before Leuctra the Thebans observed favorable omens; although Xenophon suspected that they were “devices of the generals,” his account strongly suggests that the Thebans believed the outcome of their battle was in divine hands. 592 Finally, in describing the battle between the Argives and the Spartans at Corinth in 392 he reports that “theos” gave the Spartans an unlikely and unexpected victory against superior numbers. 593 Nor is divine causation in military activity confined to the fourth century and Xenophon; as we saw in chapter two even in Thucydides’ History we see Nicias’ soldiers in Sicily miss their last real opportunity for survival because they refused to sail after the omen of an eclipse. 594

588 A statement that hardly seems to need a textual citation, and I would need pages to begin to list a fair sample of such cases. That divine causation appears on the stage, of course, does only very little to establish that it was thought to act in everyday activities.
589 Xen. Cyr. 1.6.46.
590 Xen. Hell. 2.4.14-16.
591 Xen. Hell. 3.1.17.
592 Xen. Hell. 6.4.7.
593 Xen. Hell. 4.4.12.
594 See above p. XX.
Despite the potency of divine intent, the Greeks do seem to have recognized one material cause: numbers. The only situation that consistently created an expectation of victory was when one force significantly outnumbered another. This explanation of victory appears frequently in a wide variety of sources. Herodotus reports that the Lycians fought bravely against the Persian general Harpagus “despite being one against many.”\footnote{Hdt. 1.176.} Xenophon neatly makes the point in his \textit{Agesilaus}. He calls accepting battle with inferior numbers a “lack of wisdom,” and says he would be foolish to praise a general who did so.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Ages.} 2.7.} He even records that Epaminondas was motivated to attack at Mantinea, an attack that resulted in his death, by his shame at having lost to a smaller force;\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 7.5.18.} although there is no other record that condemns Epaminondas for the earlier defeat, it is clear that numerical superiority created an expectation of victory.

\textit{Tuche}, chance, a concept closely related to divine intent in the ancient world, also could explain military results. At the Arginusae trials, for example, Euryptolemus suggested that defeat created unreason because it was uncontrolable, and equated victory with good fortune, \textit{eutuchia}, and defeat with the opposite, \textit{atuchia}.\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 7.5.18.} Demosthenes several times refers to the causative nature of \textit{tuche}. In the \textit{Exordia}, as noted above, he explains that the task of the general or leader is to explain the best thing to do, but he limits the observation by explaining that humans have their own limits, and cannot entirely know the best course; instead, outcomes depend largely on \textit{tuche}.\footnote{Dem. 25.2.} In a discussion of Chaeronea he says that \textit{tuche} decided the battle by whim, rather than

\footnote{Hdt. 1.176.}
\footnote{Xen. \textit{Ages.} 2.7.}
\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 7.5.18.}
\footnote{Xen. \textit{Hell.} 1.7.33.}
\footnote{Dem. 25.2.}
according to justice,\textsuperscript{600} again making \textit{tuche}, chance or fate, a dominant causative agent in a military context. The use of fate or chance to explain victory or defeat is natural given the belief that all potential Greek generals are entirely capable of being generals. If two generals, both possessing the ability to make correct decisions, do their best, the explanation for the resulting victory by one side and loss by the other, absent clear differences in numbers or, as we shall see, troop quality, must lie beyond the generals themselves. In essence, both generals act correctly and \textit{tuche}, or the gods generally, decide which set of correct actions will result in victory.

The primary cause of military success or failure, however, has to do with the soldiers themselves. Xenophon says that Athens’ “old military excellence” was a function of the virtue of the soldiers.\textsuperscript{601} In particular soldiers were expected to be brave and to fight with spirit (\textit{thumos}); if they did so they should produce victory, \textit{tuche} and the gods willing. Many examples demonstrate this belief. The victory of the Tegean cavalry over Epaminondas at Mantinea is ascribed to \textit{tuche}, in the form of timely reinforcement, but particularly to their own effort and courage,\textsuperscript{602} while Epaminondas was able to defeat the Spartans at Leuctra because the Spartan cavalry lacked both physical strength and bravery.\textsuperscript{603} Demosthenes, in addition to his arguments that victories should belong to the citizens who should make up the army, says that battles are won by soldiers who risk their bodies and lives.\textsuperscript{604} And Xenophon has Agesilaus say that soldiers win victories, and a general’s job is to give them spirit.\textsuperscript{605}

\begin{itemize}
\item Dem. 55.5.
\item Xen. Mem. 3.5.12-14.
\item Xen. Hell. 7.5.15.
\item Xen. Hell. 6.4.11.
\item Dem. Phil. 1.46.
\item Xen. Hell. 4.3.14.
\end{itemize}
As *thumos*, spirit, created victory, so a lack of spirit in soldiers produced defeat. Interestingly, although a general could be described as poor for failing to inspire spirit in soldiers and soldiers could lose battles because of a lack of spirit, generals do not seem to be blamed for losing battles because they had failed to inspire their troops. Soldiers could lose heart because their general had not inspired them, the most extreme example being the Spartan general Mnasippus who hit his own subordinates when they disagreed with his actions, leaving his army unhappy, hostile, and in a state “not conducive to fighting.” Soldiers most typically lost spirit, however, when their commander died in the course of a battle. Numerous battle narratives include such a death as the turning point (Cleombrotus at Leuctra, Epaminondas at Mantinea, and Lysander at Hilartus, among many others).

Finally, while generals were not condemned for losing, soldiers could be. Andocides claimed that the survivors of the Sicilian expedition returned in shame, although whether their shame was losing or surrendering and surviving is not entirely clear. More explicitly, Xenophon records that in 407 Alcibiades’ soldiers at Lampsacus balked at merging with soldiers under the command of Thrasyllus because “they had never known defeat and Thrasyllus’ soldiers had just come from one.” Thrasyllus earns no blame or condemnation here or elsewhere for the defeat, but his soldiers clearly had.

While victory and defeat proceeded largely from divine intention, fortune, and the spirit and strength of the soldiers, or lack thereof, generals obviously did play a role in battles. Many passages in the sources describe generals exercising skill in battle in a variety of ways. We have already seen,

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606 Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.19.
608 Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25.
610 Andoc. 3.30.
611 Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.15.
however, that generals do not typically receive credit for creating victory nor blame for causing defeat, and that the role of a general was seen as organizing and preparing soldiers ahead of battle rather than actually winning battles through tactical devices. Generals clearly did, however, have a role in battle itself, and they were evaluated according to what they did.

Evaluation

Generals did not face evaluation on the basis of their military victories and defeats. Pausanias, for example, describes memorials to Conon and Timotheus, both of whom experienced both victory and defeat as generals, among other memorials to soldiers dead in both victories and defeats.\(^{612}\) Fifth and fourth-century generals could impact the shape of battle and its aftermath through skill, including cleverness and deceit, positive moral and personality traits or the lack of them, loyalty, and through error, however, and their societies did evaluate them by these criteria.

Generals are frequently reported in the sources using some aspect of their skill in battle. Thus, the Spartan Callicratidas cut off the fast-moving Athenian general Conon by getting his ships to move even faster and blockading Conon at Mytilene;\(^{613}\) Cyrus defeated Croesus by marching very rapidly and then setting his camels opposite Croesus cavalry;\(^{614}\) numerous armies won battles after attacking their enemy from the side or from good position;\(^{615}\) and Xenophon has both Cambyses\(^{616}\) and Socrates\(^{617}\) recommend to prospective generals that they attack when the opposition is unready. A particularly common type of skill is the *dolos*, trick, in which a general creates a situation advantageous to himself and unexpected by the enemy. Thus Iphicrates defeated

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\(^{612}\) Paus. 1.29.15.  
\(^{613}\) Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.15-18.  
\(^{614}\) Hdt. 1.79-80.  
\(^{615}\) E.g. the Spartans against the Athenians in 394 at Corinth (*Xen. Hell.* 4.2.21-22).  
\(^{616}\) Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.43.  
\(^{617}\) Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.6, 4.11.
Anaxibius after setting an ambush, Teleutias in 388 destroyed several Athenian ships in the harbor by attacking at night when the ships were unprepared and the captains on shore, Agesilaus lulled the Acarnanians into a false sense of security by moving slowly and cautiously, then seized the animals they grazed unprotected, and Epaminondas pretended to go into camp at Mantinea then suddenly attacked their unprepared enemy, a strategy that was working until Epaminondas died, which removed the thumos from his soldiers.

These applications of skill, however, are not by themselves decisive. Several battle descriptions show both generals or armies acting with skill; that one loses and the other wins is due to the other factors described above. For example, Xenophon states that at Mantinea Epimanondas did everything right but lost because he was not eutuche, fortunate, because the gods wished him to lose, or because of the overwhelming motivation of his opposition, thus citing each of the three major causes of victory or defeat. Similarly Herodotus in his description of Cyrus’ siege of Babylon says Cyrus won after using skill in diverting the river to deprive the Babylonians of water. The Babylonians themselves had, however, prepared well for Cyrus’ siege, and Herodotus says that they would have changed plans and fought Cyrus directly had they known what was coming. Thus both armies acted correctly, with skill, and neither side can be said to have lost due to a lack of ability; instead, both used skill but one side lost. Differences in skill did not cause victory or defeat, but simply described the way battles worked;

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618 Xen. Hell. 4.35-37.
619 Xen. Hell. 5.1.20.
620 Xen. Hell. 4.6.4-6.
621 Xen. Hell. 7.5.21-25.
622 Xen. Hell. 7.5.8,12,15.
623 Hdt. 1.191.
since all generals were assumed to possess skill, the results of their conflict could hardly have depended on one general’s application of it.

This fact is made clearer by the fact that while generals are sometimes victorious after using skill or a trick, with two limited exceptions there is no flip side; generals do not lose nor are they condemned after being tricked or demonstrating bad skill or a lack of skill. The ancient Greeks condemned generals only for treason, or, as we shall see, sometimes for moral failings; error leading to inferior skill or falling for a trick seems not to be a category of evaluation, which it certainly should have been if examples of good skill and deceit were intended to explain victory rather than just describe how it happened. On rare occasions commentators will say that a commander erred, but the classical conception of error seems different from our own. Thucydides provides the best explanation for why generals were not condemned or tried for error leading to failure. In the fourth book of his History Thucydides has Spartan ambassadors, suing Athens for peace, discuss their recent defeat at Pylos.\(^{624}\) After asserting the mutable nature of fortune and characteristically ascribing Athens’ recent success to good fortune, \textit{eutuchia},\(^{625}\) the ambassadors assert that they suffered defeat not due to a lack of power nor because their power made them insolent (that is, not because they were physically weak, an accepted element of causation, nor because of a moral weakness, for which see below), but because of “error, to which all are equally liable.”\(^{626}\) They go on to warn the Athenians that success does not, therefore, predict success; no one, they argue, can simply fight what they planned and then stop, ensuring success, but everyone must accept

\(^{624}\) Thuc. 4.17.1-18.5.  
\(^{625}\) Thuc. 4.17.4.  
\(^{626}\) Thuc. 4.18.2: \καὶ τοῖς ὀοτε δυνάμεως ἐνδείᾳ ἐπάδομεν αὐτὸ ὀοτε μείζονος προσαγωγήνης υβρίσαντες, ὁπό δε τῶν αἰεὶ ὑπαρχόντων γνώμη σφαλέντες, ἐν ὦ πάσι τὸ αὐτὸ ὑμοίως ὑπάρχει.
that fortune will determine your outcome. Thus, while the Greeks did recognize that error could occur they did not understand it as we do, as a source of blame revealing a fault in the one who errrs. Instead, error seems to be an agent of tuche, helping causative fortune create results. If both generals act correctly, for example, one side must lose; if the decisions of one general, made according to the best knowledge and skill available at the time, turn out badly, this is error, but does not reflect badly on the general. Fate simply turned one legitimate course of action into error, a fate, say the Spartans, to which everyone is equally liable. Nicias committed precisely this sort of ‘error’ in Sicily; his decision to fortify the Plemmyrium, for example, was a perfectly reasonable decision at the time it was made but eventually became a damaging error when tuche turned against him. Nicias, thus, naturally was not condemned for making such an error. Error, therefore, which rarely appears in the sources, does not function in classical Greek thought as the opposite of skill, but an example of dustuchia which can afflict even the most astute general.

There are two limited exceptions to the rule that a tricked general or one who loses to a general employing skill is not condemned or tried for that defeat. The first of these concerns deceit. Most tricked generals fail to find condemnation even if defeated; we have no case of a trial, for example, of a general simply because he fell into a trap and thus demonstrated incompetence. A few generals, however, do either stand trial or merit criticism in the sources for defeat following having been tricked, but only if they were first warned of the trick. Aegospotami is the best example of this phenomenon. After

627 Thuc. 4.18.4: σοφορὸν δὲ ἀνδρῶν οἵτινες τ’ αγαθὰ ἐς ἀμφίβολον ἀσφαλῶς ἐθεντο, τὸν τε πόλεμον νομίσωσι μὴ καθ’ ὅσον ἃν τις αὐτοῦ μέρος βουληται μεταχειρίζειν, τούτῳ ἐμνείναι, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἃν αἱ τ’ θεὶς αὐτῶν ἡγήσωνται.
628 See above, Chapter one.
banishing Alcibiades for the last time the Athenians selected new commanders. These new generals, while camped near Aegospotami, received a visit from Alcibiades, who warned them that Lysander was planning to entrap them. The new generals, displaying hubris – insolence or arrogant pride – dismissed Alcibiades, telling him, essentially, ‘get lost; we are in command now, not you.’ The Athenians subsequently put the surviving general, Adeimantus, on trial for treason for betraying the polis. This warning could be divine as well as human; Anaxibius lost to Iphicrates in the Hellespont by falling into his trap after ignoring divine omens, although he expunged the stain of his arrogance by courageously dying in battle. Such warnings could also cause victory if believed, as when Agesilaus defeated Epaminondas at Mantinea after accepting a warning from a Cretan spy. In these cases, however, the causative factor is not incompetence, which does not seem applicable to this situation, but rather a moral flaw. As Aegospotami and Adeimantus’ fate show, in both the text of Xenophon and the minds of the Athenian assembly the fault lay in the hubris, the arrogant pride of the generals who rejected a warning that would have saved them. This is the moral failing of insolence referred to in Thucydides, book four, as well. Thus, while a few generals did suffer for having been tricked, their failing was not being tricked nor being incompetent but rather their immoral behavior that caused them to act in a way harmful to their polis.

This convention by which generals were blamed for hubris in ignoring warnings is on the surface rather difficult to accept. This idea obviously grows from the epic convention of the ‘tragic warner.’ Herodotus provides an excellent example of a tragic

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629 Xen. Hell. 2.1.25-6.
631 Xen. Hell. 4.8.36.
633 Xen. Hell. 7.5.10.
warner in his narrative of Croesus’ hubris and eventual defeat by Cyrus. Croesus, already a powerful king and a fortunate man wished to become still greater by conquering the Persians. This adventure would prove disastrous for Croesus, and before he embarked he ignored three warnings: Solon, visiting the king, warned him that fate was changeable, and that his fortune could easily turn to misfortune, a truth Croesus learns at Cyrus’ feet; an oracle warned him that if he attacked the Persians he would destroy a great empire, which he did not grasp could be his own; and a Lydian adviser warned him not to invade. Croesus ignored the warnings, invaded, and earned defeat and reversal of fortune. This story, obviously, depends heavily on epic; much of it is certainly mythical, and the outline of the story conforms to the patterns of didactic and admonitory parables found in non-historical literature. One might well suspect that the similar ‘tragic warner’ stories in Xenophon and elsewhere represent an epic hangover in classical historiography, a storytelling convention that does not reflect the way real battles, generals, and trials were understood in everyday polis life. In fact, however, while classical sources repeatedly use this tragic formula to describe events, there is no counter-example, no more ‘realistic’ mechanism reflected in battle narratives, trial speeches, or anywhere else to explain such defeats in a more prosaic way. Generals such as Adeimantus really did stand trial, and were executed for failures due to hubris in ignoring a warning when such a failure, absent the warner, seems to have drawn no public

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634 Hdt. 1.32.  
635 Hdt. 1.86.  
636 Hdt. 1.53.  
637 Hdt. 1.71.  
638 Hdt. 1.6, 79-87.
criticism. This morality-based convention appears to reflect the way the classical Greeks actually understood causation and evaluated their generals.\textsuperscript{639}

The other exception to the rule is the case of the Spartan general Thibron. Xenophon describes Thibron’s military career in the third and fourth books of his \textit{Hellenica}. The Spartans sent Thibron to Asia as governor in 399 in order to contest the growing Persian influence there. Thibron at first did not offer battle, then engaged in a few minor sieges and skirmishes but did not accomplish anything important, causing the ephors to order him elsewhere and then replace him with Dercylidas.\textsuperscript{640} Thus far Thibron’s story is typical; given orders, he failed to execute them energetically and was recalled, a course of events that led to the recall and trial of other generals, as we have seen. The Spartans in fact did try and condemn Thibron on a typical treason charge, and he fled into exile.\textsuperscript{641} In 391, however, the Spartans sent an apparently repatriated Thibron back to Anatolia to fight the Persian Satrap Struthas.\textsuperscript{642} Xenophon, oddly critical of Thibron in 399, then launches into an extraordinary condemnation of his actions as general. Thibron raided Persian territory, but his raids were “disorderly and disdainful;” on the last one he played discus with a friend on the way out.\textsuperscript{643} Thibron died in that raid, but earns contempt rather than honor for courage. Xenophon seems to specifically blame Thibron’s defeat on his poor generalship, his own incompetence rather than Struthas’ skill. Part of this portrayal may spring from personal animus; Xenophon served as a subordinate commander under Thibron in 399 after merging his Ten Thousand with

\textsuperscript{639} Space does not permit me to discuss this very large topic in anything like the detail it deserves; my conclusions, however, stand, based on the evidence presented, in this limited context.
\textsuperscript{640} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 3.1.4-10.
\textsuperscript{641} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 3.1.7.
\textsuperscript{642} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 4.8.17.
\textsuperscript{643} Xen. \textit{Hell.} 4.8.18.
Thibron’s Spartan force after the *Anabasis* and apparently did not like him. The fact remains, however, that Thibron seems a unique case of a general portrayed as losing due to a lack of skill.

A closer inspection, however, suggests that this case, too, boils down not to incompetence but immorality. Xenophon reports that the Spartans sent Diphrades to replace Thibron, and that Diphrades succeeded even though he was “just as pretty as Thibron.” This strange comment becomes clearer when Xenophon explains that Diphrades, unlike Thibron, acted energetically (see above), controlled himself, was not a slave to his body (obsessed with “to soma,” the things of the body), and thus did just what he was supposed to do. Taken together, these comments suggest that Thibron was not actually incompetent; like any general, he knew how to run an army and a battle. He failed to do so, however, apparently because he self-indulgently let himself be distracted by, probably, sexual misbehavior, a shortcoming also suggested, in retrospect, by the comment that he was playing with a friend during the raid on which he died. As in the examples in which an ignored warning reveals *hubris,* in this case too the general is condemned not for failure or incompetence, but for a moral failing. Similarly Xenophon elsewhere ascribes the defeat of Teleutias, an otherwise successful Spartan general, to his inability to control his anger, another example of a lack of self-control.

Elsewhere, good and bad generals are identified openly by moral, behavioral criteria. Good generals were brave and just; Hyperides praises the general Leosthenes’

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646 Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.3-7. Teleutias allowed anger to lead him into a series of aggressive decisions he knew (implies Xenophon) would lead to defeat, another, albeit less striking, example of a general whose lack of self-control was his fatal flaw.
courage, Anaxibius died fighting rather than surrender to Iphicrates. Epimanondas believed that dying in battle constituted a “good end,” Agesilaus at Coronea is commended for showing bravery in fighting Thebans he might have let escape and justice in sparing armed enemies who reached sanctuary in the temple of Athena, and Xenophon described Cyrus as the most worthy to lead, in politics or battle, because of his justice and bravery.

Bad generals, on the other hand, were cruel or unjust, cowardly; thus Lysander and Xenophon both condemn Philocles, who threw captured Corinthian sailors into the sea to drown, Lycurgus attacks Lysicles for surviving after Chaeronea rather than having the courage to die in battle, Callicratidas, advised by his pilot to withdraw from Arginusae, said that while his death would not hurt Sparta flight would be shameful, Herodotus seems critical of Croesus for driving out Syrians “though they were responsible for no harm,” Mnasippus abused his officers, the rebel Athenian cavalry commander drew retribution and upset his soldiers by executing captured soldiers of the Thirty Tyrants, and Herodotus relates that the ancient Egyptian king Sesostris put up columns marked with female genitalia in territories that had surrendered to him in order to mark the people as cowards. These characteristics did not, however, create victory

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647 Hyp. 1.38.
649 Xen. Hell. 7.5.18.
650 Xen. Hell. 4.3.19-20.
652 Xen. Hell. 2.1.31-32.
653 Lyc. Lys. 1.3.
654 Xen. Hell. 1.6.32.
655 Hdt. 1.76.
656 Xen. Hell. 6.2.18.
657 Xen. Hell. 2.4.26.
658 Hdt. 2.102.
and defeat; they simply explained how and why the general, who won or lost for the other reasons explained above, was admirable or not.

**Conclusion**

Thus, we have seen that while generals were necessary in order to provide organization and foster motivation, in the ancient Greek worldview no general achieved anything beyond what any citizen could have and what they received through divine intention, good fortune, or the soldiers themselves. To the extent that generals could be described as good or bad, they demonstrated those qualities through clever application of the tactical skills they shared with all other citizens and through their moral qualities.

The idea that all Greek citizen men possessed the knowledge and ability to lead armies, interestingly, implies that the general of a given group of soldiers had no more ability to lead or fight than did any of his soldiers. Although many of the tasks assigned to a general – inspiration of the soldiers, planning the battle, planning, provisioning, etc. – were not assigned to soldiers, where their tasks do overlap the characteristics of a good general do not differ from the characteristics of a good soldier. In particular, a good soldier, like a good general is brave, loyal, and free from character flaws, while a bad soldier is a coward (and thus shameful), disobedient, and in some way immoral. Archidamus urged his troops before the battle of Argos in 368 to be brave and thus avoid shame just as Agesilaus’ bravery made him a great commander.  

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659 Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19.  
regularly won awards or prizes for conspicuous displays of courage, and Xenophon, discussing the nature of an army, says that effective soldiers are brave soldiers, and success depends on soldiers who focus on valor rather than survival. Bad soldiering and consequent punishment rarely appear in the sources, but when they do the most typical crime is disobedience, as when the Spartans forced Dercylidas “to stand sentry carrying his shield,” a disgraceful punishment for insubordination. Disobedience in a soldier is equivalent to treason, failure to obey the demos’ orders, in a general. Like a bad general, poor soldiers also displayed character flaws like hubris: Spartan troops at Lechaeum were surprised by the Corinthians because they had defeated them once and had contempt for them, while in 392 Argive troops at Corinth lost a battle because they outnumbered the Spartans and were overconfident (although typically Xenophon identifies Spartan *thumos* as the cause of the victory, but uses overconfidence to flag the Argives as poor soldiers).

The qualities that make good generals and soldiers are further similar to those that make good citizens. In fact, it can be difficult to discern any real line between “good soldier” or “good general” and “good citizen.” The orator Lycurgus, for example, in a speech prosecuting Leocrates for fleeing Athens after Chaeronea, equated Leocrates’ cowardice as a citizen to cowardice in a soldier. Xenophon reports that Syracusan troops fighting in the Hellespont regarded Hermocrates as their best general, not because of his tactical ability or skill in battle, but because he was a fine public speaker and

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662 Xen. *An.* 3.1.43.
663 Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.9.
665 Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10, 12.
666 Lyc. *Leosth.* 38, 43.
democratic in allowing his charges to speak in council, in other words, his quality as a general proceeded from virtues relevant more to public life in the polis than military activity as such.

The evidence suggests that the army and military activity were not separate and distinct from any other public activity in the polis, nor was a general really distinct from the soldiers. Instead, both army and general were conceptualized as an extension of the polis itself, its actions designed exclusively to express the will of the demos. Victory was thus corporate, not individual, belonging not to the general but to the demos of which the general and army were a part, and the activities of the army, expressed in the orders given to it, were often political and diplomatic rather than strictly military because the demos’ interests were not simply military. The general emerges not as a powerful individual leading his own army but rather as the contingent agent of the polis, the face of the demos in a particular time and place, tasked with organizing the activity of that portion of the demos, the soldiers, designated to achieve the demos’ goals in that time and place.

Strikingly, this corporate conception of military activity seems to have begun to break down from the middle of the fourth century onwards. As polis armies came more and more to be comprised of mercenaries who in many cases did not share in the citizenship of the polis, the idea of the army as a unit of the polis gradually faded; the army became a partially separate entity, commanded by increasingly professional members of the polis. This separation had two effects. First, the unity between general and soldier broke down; Diodorus, a later source, reflects a late-fourth-century judgement that Chares, the greatest Athenian general at the end of the polis’ independence after the

\[667\] Xen. Hell. 1.1.30-31.
deaths of Iphicrates, Chabrias, and Timotheus, was “no better than an average soldier.”

As we have seen, up to that point a general was precisely an average soldier. Second, since the army was no longer entirely a part of the polis, victory could no longer be corporate. On the one hand this allowed generals to claim ownership of victories and citizens to accept those claims, as Demosthenes observed happening in the second half of the fourth century. On the other, if generals could now claim to be creating victory because they now presumably had knowledge and ability that their mercenary troops did not, generals’ immunity from blame began to fray. While no good example exists of a general blamed for losing a battle due to incompetence or error, Xenophon, an astute military analyst who died as this trend developed demonstrates a new, critical approach to evaluating generals. In a later passage in the Hellenica, likely written within a few years of his death, Xenophon describes the actions of Iphicrates, “at other times a good general,” in and around Corinth in 370 as “futile and ineffective.” Trying to prevent a Theban force from returning home, Iphicrates left the best pass through the intervening mountain range unguarded; he later sent too many cavalry out as scouts, causing the deaths of a few of them. This is an extraordinary passage. Nowhere else does a general fail except intentionally, through treason, or as a consequence of a character flaw, and that rarely. But in this passage Iphicrates clearly fails as a consequence of his own mistakes. This type of thinking seems to have come to Xenophon before the rest of Greece, understandable given his unusual insights into military activity, and it does not develop into a complete system of evaluation, allowing citizens to blame a defeat on the

668 Diod. 16.85.7.
669 Dem. 13.22, 23.198-199.
670 Xen. Hell. 6.5.51.
671 Xen. Hell. 6.5.51-52.
general’s errors, before the end of the Hellenic Period, but it nevertheless represents a profound change in the way classical Greeks thought about their soldiers and their generals.

Up to this late and limited change, however, generals were evaluated along two axes, a treason-loyalty axis and a glory-shame axis. The treason-loyalty axis applied specifically to generals, who alone had the capacity to use an army contrary to the desire and intent of its polis. This axis of evaluation was binary; if a general committed an act of disobedience or aggression against the polis, he was disloyal, and hence treasonous, and stood trial for it or fled into exile, but if he committed no such act he was by definition loyal, with no partial or intermediate status. Along the glory-shame axis a general was evaluated in the same way as a soldier, and in fact as a soldier. Bravery, strength, wisdom, and sacrifice, in particular death in the service of the polis, pushed soldier and general up toward the positive pole, while cowardice, especially surrender, and immorality including arrogance, cruelty, and self-indulgence dropped him toward the negative pole, shame. This axis was not binary, but subtly graduated; a general could be shameful in one sense or for a limited time, but still be praised for later, mitigating, or more significant positives. Thus, Herodotus criticizes Croesus for his cruelty towards the Syrians prior to his defeat at Cyrus’ hands but later praises his wisdom, and the Spartan general Anaxibius arrogantly ignored omens and fell into Iphicrates’ trap in the Hellespont but later earned glory by dying in the ensuing defeat after ordering his soldiers to flee. The glory-shame aspect of evaluation, however, impacted the general only individually, as a soldier; a general who incurred shame was not automatically an

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672 Hdt. 1.76.
673 Hdt. 1.155.
ineffective general, just a bad soldier, and victory and defeat still proceeded primarily from the gods, *tuche*, or the soldiers as a group. Any general, moreover, who did nothing clearly treasonous or shameful was by definition a good general, even if he lost a battle, since citizens elected general were assumed qualified and their actions did nothing to impact that evaluation.

These conclusions about the nature of generals in the classical period explain how Nicias’ peers understood what happened in Sicily, how they evaluated Nicias himself, and why they did not blame Nicias for a defeat that most modern analysts regard as entirely his fault.⁶⁷⁵ Like many battles, to the Athenians the defeat in Sicily seemed to depend on divine disfavor. Plutarch famously quotes Euripides to the effect that the Athenians in Sicily won eight victories while the gods favored both sides alike,⁶⁷⁶ a sentiment Euripides could hardly have expressed in a public play competing for a prize if the audience were inclined to reject divine explanations of defeat and instead blame Nicias. Nicias thus escaped blame for causing the defeat. In terms of the two axes described above, Nicias obeyed the *demos’* instructions and refused to retreat without orders from Athens to do so; while some commentators have condemned Nicias for this action, from the classical Athenian point of view it located him on the “loyal” end of that axis. On the other hand Nicias’ surrender, as recorded by Pausanias,⁶⁷⁷ produced shame that damaged his evaluation as a citizen and soldier. This judgement was not absolute, however. Nicias’ death in service to the state, the balance of his successful military career, and a public life free from any suggestion of arrogance, cruelty, or other immorality more than balanced the shame of his surrender. Therefore, while Pausanias

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⁶⁷⁵ For citations and discussion of these issues, see chapter two.
⁶⁷⁶ Plut. *Nic.* 17.4.
⁶⁷⁷ Paus. 1.29.12.
reflects the limited condemnation of his exclusion from the memorial *stele* as a bad soldier, as the rest of the historical record regarding Nicias suggests, his peers did not condemn him more broadly. Aside from his surrender, Nicias’ behavior as general in Sicily, like the rest of his public career, earned him a reputation for honor that lasted as long as did the social conventions, described in this chapter, by which his peers evaluated him.
Athenians of the late fifth century BCE seem not to have condemned Nicias after the disastrous loss of their fleets and soldiers in Sicily. This fact, carefully considered, has demanded a broad examination of the relationship between classical Athenians, and then classical Greeks of several major poleis, and their elected generals. A careful consideration of the nature and causes of the punishment of Athenian generals in the fifth and fourth centuries suggests that defeat, even when caused by what modern analysts would likely regard as mistakes, failed to produce prosecution. Contrary to the consensus opinion and what seems common sense not only Nicias but all other Athenian generals as well escaped condemnation for defeat and error but did face trial and execution for an array of other, seemingly lesser faults. These aggressively punished shortcomings, including tardiness in accomplishing set tasks, being prevented from carrying out parts of given orders, overreaching or otherwise exceeding the limits of given orders even with positive results, and sometimes even failing to exceed those limits, the Athenians called
treason. This strange pattern of acceptance and punishment demanded a further and broader evaluation of the relationship between general and *polis*, leading to the conclusion that classical Greek society generally, both in Athens and other *poleis*, used criteria in their evaluation of generals very different from those assumed by most modern commentators and understood the role of the general in leading the army, victory or defeat, and as intermediary between the army and the polis itself in an unexpected manner. In light of these broad conclusions about the role, expectations, and evaluation of classical Greek *strategoi* we can see that Athens’ failure to condemn Nicias or blame him for his defeat was not in fact anomalous, but rather was entirely consistent with the norms and assumptions of their society.

Beyond the conclusions already described concerning the evaluation and punishment of generals and classical conceptions of military causation and the role of the generals, this study has significant implications in two further areas. Obviously, the reevaluation of popular conceptions of Nicias and his posthumous reputation developed above significantly impacts any argument that depends on a historical interpretation of Nicias. The new understanding of one aspect of the social and intellectual background of the late fifth century that I propose provides further insight into such arguments. These changes have particular relevance to the evaluation of Thucydides. The assumption of a positive popular interpretation of Nicias and his role in Sicily has several implications for the analysis of Thucydides. The assumption of a positive popular interpretation of Nicias and his role in Sicily has several implications for the analysis of Thucydides as a source. Secondly and more significantly, the relationship between the polis and its generals I have described may shed light on elements of the self-conceptualization of the classical *demos* and in particular its relationship with its social and political elite. While complex new arguments and interesting avenues for
further investigation obviously lie beyond the scope of this conclusion and indeed of this study, I believe it will be valuable to indicate how this study relates to current research in these areas and make a few suggestions about how the conclusions developed here could contribute to those discussions.

Thucydides

In chapter two of this book I discussed a large number of arguments regarding Thucydides’ attitude towards Nicias. Many of these arguments depended on implicit or explicit assumptions about how Thucydides’ contemporaries evaluated Nicias’ performance in Sicily. Most analysts seem to believe that contemporary Athenians would have condemned Nicias; none that I have seen suggests that his contemporaries viewed Nicias’ generalship in a positive light. Any such argument must deal, however, with the apparent absence of any social assumptions in classical Athens that would have created such condemnation. Similarly, the kinds of arguments explored later in that chapter about Plutarch’s interpretation of Nicias can be debated in light of the apparently positive tradition about Nicias inherited by that later period. Many such arguments will of course relate to Thucydides, but of course any reinterpretation of the relationship between assemblies and generals also problematizes the assertions of traditional evaluations of the office of general and Athenian politics regarding generals, such as those quoted above by Pritchett, Fornara, Roberts, and others.678 The use of popular hostility towards and blame of Nicias in support of larger arguments can lead to comfortable but false readings of a number of classical sources.

678 See above, pp. 1-2.
For example, in a recent study of the thought world both created and reflected in the work of Thucydides Kallet builds a complex argument about the historian’s valuation of human life and the role of wealth in the classical world by asserting that the text should be read as hostile to Nicias, a position informed by the long history of scholarship assuming precisely that. Kallet’s larger point concerns the inefficacy of wealth in the Sicilian expedition and the intellectual constructs that support and follow from that impotence. She argues that Thucydides makes Nicias essentially representative of wealth in his narrative of the expedition, and thus uses Nicias’ failure to highlight the failure of wealth.679

Nicias’ obsession with wealth and his failure, she argues, appear most clearly in Thucydides’ presentation of Nicias’ offer to pay off all of Syracuse’s war expenses in exchange for the release of the Athenian soldiers. Obsessed with money, Nicias, in dire straits as his force is suffering its final defeat, offers money to the Syracusans to let the army go as well as hostages equal to the number of talents Syracuse has spent. The Syracusans do not accept this offer, and instead continue to butcher Athenians until they surrender. Kallet argues that Nicias fundamentally erred in this action. He first undervalued human life relative to money, and thus offered the Syracusans less than the value of the Athenian captives (to Athens, that is). In the process Nicias failed to surrender, an error in judgment leading to loss of life, in contrast to Demosthenes’ more praiseworthy surrender, which saved lives. Nicias further miscalculated by underestimating the value of victory to the Syracusans; his offer would have exchanged his status as a conquered enemy for that of the superior (in an echo of the ‘ransom’ of

Achilles in the *Iliad*). The status of victor was sufficiently valuable to the Syracusans that the amount offered fell far short of equivalent value. Thus, Nicias once again overvalued money and encouraged the Syracusans and Spartans to destroy his troops. Thucydides therefore exalts Demosthenes’ surrender, in that he demonstrated concern for human lives, showing “intelligence and judgment”, and condemns Nicias for refusing to do so. Thucydides thus equates the unwise Nicias, once again “the antithesis of Pericles”, with the impotence of wealth.

Broadly speaking, the lack of contemporary condemnation of Nicias’ performance in Sicily and thus the lack of any external impetus to cause Thucydides to develop a critical attitude towards Nicias create some doubt that the historian would have been inclined to use the general as a symbol for failure. More specifically and seriously, Kallet’s argument makes assumptions about the social acceptability of surrender clearly at odds with actual fifth-century attitudes. She argues that Thucydides thought and expected his readers either to already believe or to be open to believing that surrender, Demosthenes’ choice, was better than refusal to surrender, Nicias’ choice, because of the loss of life entailed in refusal. We have seen, however, that surrender was one of the actions for which a general specifically could be condemned. Surrender demonstrated cowardice, one of the moral failings consistently unacceptable in a general. Indeed, Nicias’ own memory suffered criticism for just one thing (that we know of) – his surrender. Kallet’s argument inverts the probable contemporary evaluation of Nicias, suggesting that Thucydides and his audience broadly condemned Nicias, which they did not, but approved of his surrender and thought he should have done it sooner. While Kallet’s larger argument about wealth may in fact be accurate on other evidence, her

\[680\] Ibid. p. 182.
anachronistic interpretation of Nicias and his actions as general produces an inaccurate and untenable reading of a contemporary source in this specific instance.

A reinterpretation of Nicias and the way Thucydides might have expected his audience to understand his narrative of the Sicilian expedition also affects the study of one of the most significant questions in Thucydidean scholarship. While Thucydides comprises our best surviving narrative and analytical source about the Peloponnesian War, the difficulty of ascertaining Thucydides’ own opinions about the causes of Athens’ defeat has long been recognized. The most important passage in this connection occurs in book two. Thucydides ascribes Athens’ defeat more to the Sicilian disaster than to any other cause. He identifies the expedition as the greatest of several blunders made by Athens’ flawed post-Periclean leadership, which was weak and divided and gave the ‘masses’ too much power. The Sicilian expedition was a blunder because “those who sent it” did not adequately support it, but diminished it through “private quarrels over leadership of the state,” stirring up internal divisions within Athens.681 This passage is obviously at best difficult to interpret, and its explanation has occupied many of the most talented Thucydidean scholars.

Most investigations into this issue accept the suggestion that Thucydides saw the Sicilian expedition as the primary cause of Athens’ defeat, but Thucydides’ explanation of the expedition’s failure is problematic.682 Those who accept the idea that Thucydides saw political divisions at home as true causes for the defeat in Sicily tend to interpret that idea in literary rather than practical terms or identify the initial decision to send the expedition at all as the crucial error resulting from political stasis, rather than any

681 Thuc. 2.65.7-12. See above, Introduction and pp. 76-104 for discussion and Greek text.
682 See above pp. 68-78.
subsequent decisions affecting the mission. After all, the Athenians did materially
support the expedition, sending a large second force when Nicias wrote to express
care that the army he had could not do the job. Few have accepted Thucydides’
statements as reflecting his real assessment of the real causes of the loss in Sicily.
Instead, most have examined the balance of the text to identify the author’s true
conclusions about the reason for the loss of the expedition, which, as the root of the
greatest cause behind Athens’ overall defeat, must have been the primary reason, in
Thucydides’ expert, contemporary opinion that Athens lost the Peloponnesian War.

Nicias figures substantially in the causes of defeat that most scholars find. In
reading books six and seven of The History of the Peloponnesian War many, for example
Gomme, Dover, and Kagan, have seen tension between Thucydides’ stated
conclusions, for example his eulogy of Nicias in book seven, and his narrative. It
certainly appears to the typical modern reader that Thucydides’ narrative of the Sicilian
expedition demonstrates Nicias’ culpability, and most modern scholars have been willing
to assume that Thucydides’ audience will have come to that conclusion. Thus, the text
suggests that Nicias in his role as incompetent general in Sicily is that root cause behind
the loss in Sicily and by extension in the Peloponnesian War, both to modern and fifth-
century readers or listeners. It remains only to determine the specific nature of Nicias’
failure, whether Thucydides and contemporary Athenians blamed Nicias directly or
merely saw Nicias’ incompetence as the manifestation of the mistake of exiling the truly
talented Alcibiades en route to Sicily. Furthermore, Thucydides’ apparent sympathy
towards Nicias and his habit of taking positions contrary to popular opinion explain his
opaque assessment of causation at 2.65.11. His awareness of Nicias’ culpability and his

683 See above, p. 71 n.20, 22; p. 77 n.44.
desire to avoid admitting it clearly caused the historian to refer the defeat to political
\textit{stasis} and also created the tension within the narrative; Thucydides, however, recognized
the truth and provided sufficient information for his readers to see it as well. This line of
argument is best and most famously elucidated by Gomme in the \textit{Historical Commentary
on Thucydides} but also appears, explicitly or implicitly, in many other works.$^{684}$

This argument, however, depends on the assumption that Thucydides and his
audience understood Nicias’ generalship, the role of the general in defeat, and military
causation much as modern analysts do. If the Athenians did not blame Nicias or see his
actions as having even potentially caused their defeat then the tension within Thucydides’
text disappears; there is no ‘natural’ reading of books six and seven that condemns Nicias
and contradicts Thucydides’ expressed judgments, which do not blame Nicias. If
Thucydides neither thought Nicias caused the defeat in Sicily nor knew of any popular
conclusion that Nicias was to blame, against which he might be reacting, then there exists
no basis for the argument that Nicias’ failure formed the root cause of Athens’ defeat
either against Syracuse or Sparta. In view of the accepted causes of military success and
failure outlined above, in fact, there was no acceptable military explanation available to
Thucydides that would explain the defeat: he did not see the Athenian soldiers as lacking
in spirit or strength, the Athenians were not meaningfully outnumbered, and the historian
was famously disinclined to refer actions or outcomes to divine will. Even \textit{tuche}, while it
certainly played a role in Athens’ defeat, a role intensely investigated in the text, could
hardly have been a satisfactory primary cause for an analyst like Thucydides. We should
not be surprised, therefore, that the historian looked for social and political causes for the
defeat, root causes he explains in 2.65; absent the possibility that Thucydides’ stated

$^{684}$ Gomme, et al. p. 419.
explanations for the defeat in Sicily concealed his real awareness that Nicias was to blame those stated explanations, political division and lack of support from Athens, must be explained on their own terms and seem to represent the historian’s real conclusions about the causes of Athens’ demise. We must, in any case, conclude that Nicias was not identified as the cause of Athens’ defeat, either implicitly or explicitly, either by Thucydides or contemporary Athenian society.

Conceptions and Behavior of the Democracy

The conclusions drawn above about the relationship between fifth and fourth-century generals and their respective assemblies also have significant utility in examining aspects of the classical Greek system of democracy. The office of general was characteristically filled in the fifth century by citizens from the upper level of society, the political and probably the wealth elite, whom it is reasonable to describe in some sense as aristocrats; this situation continues, if to a lesser degree, in the fourth century. In Athens the elite may have dominated the board of generals because general remained an elected position throughout the classical period and thus allowed aristocrats to take advantage of their social status by winning elections. In all poleis the elite may have been able to monopolize the office of general to some degree because military leadership was traditionally the preserve of the elite. In any case, this ability to monopolize the office provided aristocrats with a rare opportunity to exert disproportionate authority within the democracy through constitutional means. The aristocratic generals thus stand

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as an anomaly within the otherwise politically egalitarian classical *polis*: a group enjoying special privileges and potentially unusual power on the basis of social status.  

The last twenty-five years have produced a great deal of scholarship concerning the interaction between the privileged elite and the democracies in which they acted, as well as the potential threat to democracy posed by these aristocrats, including both those who served as generals and a few other groups of politically active, privileged elites discernable within the *polis* system. The generals and other aristocrats present several puzzles to the modern scholar: how was aristocratic authority of this sort maintained, and why was it tolerated within what were otherwise thoroughly, even radically democratic states? What does the presence of the generals along with a few other small groups of politically powerful elites imply about the nature of these democracies? Some have in fact argued that this aristocratic access to power belies the claim of democracy, that aristocrats essentially ruled the classical *poleis* much as they had the archaic *poleis*, in fact if not in name. And, if classical Greek democracies did manage to reconcile special elite privilege and power with the principles of egalitarian democracy, how did they accomplish that reconciliation? My examination of the interaction between fifth and fourth-century generals and their *poleis* provides significant data relevant to these questions.

A good summary of many of these examinations in current scholarship can be derived from several of Ober’s works, supplemented by Raaflaub, Allen, Christ, Anderson, and others. The archaic *polis* was characterized by an aggressive competition for political authority among elites. Aristocrats competed, in part, by demonstrating a fairly typical set of aristocratic attributes – wealth, birth, education, courage, strength,

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686 Ibid. pp. 119-121, 187.
accumulation of property and accomplishments – that in effect qualified them for a position of leadership and thus encouraged essentially non-political, non-elite citizens to accept their authority. Sometime between 510 and 460 BCE Athens, and presumably other poleis as well, instituted democratic political systems, distributing power among the citizens and curbing the “rampant, sometimes destructive individualism of archaic Athenian political culture”. 687

Aristocrats responded to the new political reality by gradually abandoning their traditional mode of political competition, as the markers of aristocratic status that had won supporters now engendered distrust. 688 Aristocrats did not, however, entirely lose access to unusual power. The new polis system included elected positions, particularly the generalship, and also required, as a means of organization, leadership in debate and legislation, people to lead and frame public discussion in the now dominant assemblies. Aristocrats could and often did dominate these roles in the poleis through the wealth, fame, and other electoral advantages collectively described by the term ‘status’. While those who held such power were not precisely a birth elite – while many certainly seem to have been members of an established elite of wealth, birth and status, such as Alcibiades, others came from very different origins – they functioned as a group as an elite, privileged class, exercising greater political power than their fellow citizens. 689

Throughout the classical period, despite their commitment to diffuse political power, the Athenians yielded positions of special authority to such aristocrats. As Ober puts it, “the demos was in fact willing to grant the elite of ability and education certain tacit privileges

688 Ober, Mass and Elite, p. 86.
689 Ibid. pp. 119-120.
within the framework of the democratic government. The masses seem to have accepted the propositions that individual Athenians could be granted political privileges.\(^{690}\)

The Athenians seem to have tolerated the presence of these aristocrats because they were of use to the state. Thucydides, discussing the organization of the early Greek world, asserts that “in the interests of profit the weaker [citizens] submitted to the dominance of the greater.”\(^{691}\) In the view of the historian, himself a product of a century of democracy, aristocrats existed by the consent of the masses, who tolerated special aristocratic authority because it produced some advantage – for Thucydides, economic advantage – for the masses themselves. It is no great stretch to believe that Thucydides’ opinion here reflects the workings of his own fifth-century democracy; the classical Athenian democracy used these aristocrats for its own advantage.

Such a relationship between mass and elite, of course, implies that aristocrats were only useful when they were working in the best interests of the larger society. Any such aristocrat who, ceded special authority, used it for his own benefit rather than that of the polis not only no longer merited that status and power but in fact represented a threat to the democracy. We would expect, then, that the machinery of Athenian democracy would be very concerned to monitor such aristocrats and to punish them if they seemed to be serving their own interests in preference those of the democracy. Ober identifies public review, treatment, and punishment of the political *rhetors*, political elites who dominated public discourse in the assembly and the law courts, as an example of such democratic oversight\(^{692}\) of what we might call subject aristocrats. The greatest crime a

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\(^{690}\) Ibid. p. 187.

\(^{691}\) Thuc. 1.8.3: ἐφείμενοι γὰρ τῶν κερδῶν οὐ τε ἣσσους ύπεμενον τῶν κρεισσόνων δουλείαν.

\(^{692}\) Ober, *Mass and Elite*, p. 121 and generally.

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rhetor could commit, he notes, is to fail to tell the demos what he thought, to fail to provide honest and absolute service to his community. Such a failure, he observes, was treason.\(^{693}\) The assembly’s treatment of generals provides another excellent example of this phenomenon. We have seen that generals were treated as extensions of the assembly, tasked with the faithful and complete execution of the assembly’s intent. Just as in the case of the rhetors, the assembly naturally and aggressively monitored the behavior of these subject aristocrats. When they seemed to have abandoned their obligation to the polis (by failing to carry out their assignments), when they appeared to be dishonest in their dealings with the polis (as in cases of embezzlement or Miltiades’ deceit in convincing the assembly to fund his Aegean adventure), and when they seemed to be working for their own benefit (as when generals used their commands to extort money from other communities) the assembly moved quickly and harshly to control the aristocrats in question. Although these behaviors do not seem like capital offenses to modern viewers, such failures to serve the polis faithfully, honestly, and unstintingly were, as Ober observes, treason, and were punished accordingly.

These efforts to control aristocratic generals also provide evidence regarding the chronology of the development of the democracy, which remains a matter of considerable debate. While the process certainly seems to begin in Athens with the Cleisthenic reforms of 508/7, inevitable uncertainty about the details of those reforms allows for the possibility that the changes that produced a real or radical democracy were not put in place until 462/1 with the further reforms of Ephialtes.\(^{694}\) While scholars including Ober and Anderson have seen Cleisthenes as the creator of a legitimately democratic system,

\(^{693}\) Ibid. pp. 331.
\(^{694}\) Anderson, pp. 79-80.
Raaflaub and Allen, among others, have seen a slower development. Allen, in fact, argues that the ‘radical’ democracy did not develop until the fourth century, based on the gradual limitation of the authority of generals in the field to punish. The treatment of generals by the Athenian assembly, however, problematizes these arguments. The trial of Miltiades, for example, in 490/89, proceeded along precisely the same lines as later efforts to control aristocratic generals and rested on the same assumptions, particularly the idea that an elite citizen allowed unusual status and authority was thus obliged to serve the demos rather than his own interests and to be entirely honest in his dealings with the assembly. Such efforts by the assembly to punish as treasonous the actions of aristocratic generals that do not conform to the will of the demos appear to reveal a demos that possessed dominant authority within Athenian society and that both used and feared its elites, both critical features of the post-Ephialtic and fourth-century democracy. If we take the relationship between the dominant assembly and its subject aristocrats to signify the presence of a fully developed democratic system, then, the democratic revolution was completed much earlier than these authors suggest.

Additionally, the trials of generals provided the demos the opportunity to manipulate the social memory of each event. It was important for the assembly to publicly identify any aristocratic and potentially popular general who was thought to have failed to serve faithfully or honestly as a wrongdoer, in Allen’s term. Often the incorrect action(s) in question were not precisely illegal; neither the aristocratic imperative to conform the popular will nor apparatus of punishment were entirely constitutional. Instead, trials of generals were public acts of social condemnation,

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696 See above pp. 31-37.
697 Ibid. pp. 197-200 and generally.
designed to brand the rejected elite and write the public narrative justifying his rejection. The otherwise puzzling punishment of the generals Eurymedon, Pythodorus, and Sophocles in 424/3 after they had served in Sicily provides an excellent example of such a trial. 698 The cause of their trial and conviction is otherwise murky; they did nothing obvious to bring on the attack, and can hardly be suspected of having committed some clear crime. As significant citizens who had won election to the board of generals and produced at least some positive results in Sicily, the demos could neither put them on trial for a specific crime such as murder or embezzlement nor simply declare them personae non gratae in response to the failure to conform that had evidently upset the assembly. Through the medium of their trial the assembly was able to retroactively criminalize their performance in Sicily and thus create a popular narrative in support and explanation of their exile and execution.

Similarly, the evidence provided by the interaction between polis and strategos demonstrates elements of the means by which the Athenians constructed what Ober calls democratic knowledge. Ober argues that the functioning of a classical democracy demands that its citizens reject the reality of an objective or transcendent truth in favor of a truth created through the process of public debate, a truth which was thus a “political artifact” created and maintained by “collective, public practice”. 699 He asserts that this system operated on opinion rather than knowledge and the idea that democratic action can turn opinion into reality, and depended on the willingness of the citizenry to accept that reality. 700 Ober maintains that Thucydides rejected such democratic knowledge in

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698 See above pp. 42-45.
700 Ibid. p. 83.
favor of historical knowledge, accepting the existence of an objective truth and believing that expertise, such as his own, would produce correct knowledge while inexpert opinions would produce error. Thus “people (e.g. Cleon) and states (e.g. Athens) who attempt to impose their own speech-dependent meanings on reality tend to come to bad ends”. 701

Leaving aside Thucydides’ opinion and the epistemological problems inherent in dividing opinion and knowledge, Ober’s formulation of the concept of democratic knowledge is corroborated by the evidence from classical evaluations of generals. As we have seen, classical assemblies seem not to have condemned their generals for what we would call mistakes. Instead, they seem to have accepted that, first, virtually any citizen was fundamentally qualified to evaluate any given military situation and, second, that any consequent decision was in effect ‘right’. Failure was a product of subsequent events, unknowable at the time of the decision, which could be collectively described by the term tuche. These assumptions imply that citizen decisions in the military arena, as Ober asserts in politics would, as Ober says, produce “reasonable policy”. 702 Thus classical interactions between assemblies and generals reflect the same assumptions about truth characteristic of the assemblies’ political debates.

The evidence from classical assumptions about generals, however, locates the source of this democratic knowledge differently form Ober’s arguments. Ober suggests that such knowledge was held to arise from public debate among citizens, 703 implying that it was the process of democracy that was, in a sense, special, that created truth. Generals in the field, however, made decisions that were treated by assemblies in exactly the same way without such a dialectic process. This attitude suggests classical Athenians

701 Ibid. pp. 84-5.
702 Ibid. p. 82.
703 Ibid. pp. 82-3.
saw the people as special, not the process. That is, Athenian democracy depended in part on the assumption that the ability to produce acceptable decisions, whether political, military, or in any other area, was a part of the definition of ‘citizen’. If this view is true, then the disagreement between Thucydides and the democratic assembly on the existence of objective truth either did not exist or depended on a different aspect of Thucydides’ mode of creating truth, as Thucydides was simply one of the many citizens blessed with the access to truth that made popular democracy possible.

In each of these cases, the evidence developed in this study concerning the interaction between the assemblies of classical *poleis* and the generals they sent out to lead their military forces yields valuable insights. The striking feature of this interaction is the breadth of issues to which it proves relevant; far from producing insights strictly relevant to ancient military activity or attitudes, the ways classical assemblies tasked, understood, evaluated, and punished their generals demonstrates aspects of a wide range of political and social behavior within the *polis*. This is perhaps natural, because of course any firm separation of military and political or military and social behavior or thought in the world of the *polis* is at best artificial, if not actually misleading. Military activity and behavior thus provides a fertile source for exploration concerning the underpinnings, processes, and consequences of the classical Greek democracies.
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