

# DIPLOMACY IN THUCYDIDES<sup>1</sup>

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THE political organization of the Greek world, with its multitude of independent states, was highly conducive to the development of diplomacy. Equally conducive was the Greek temperament. From the earliest times the Greeks displayed an instinctive love of argument, which was later stimulated by the study of rhetoric and philosophy. It is true that they had no professional diplomats and that in their diplomatic exchanges frankness was more conspicuous than finesse.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, a surprisingly complicated code of rules governing inter-state relations was already in operation in the fifth century; and while Greek diplomacy often seems futile, even childish, some of it had a deep and lasting influence over wide areas of the Greek world, occasionally involving contacts with other peoples.

Thucydides possessed an expert knowledge of Greek diplomacy, just as he possessed an expert knowledge of Greek warfare. His public career, which included a term of office on the board of strategoi, must at least have brought him into contact with inter-state relations. More conclusive evidence is provided by many passages in his *History* which prove that he was thoroughly conversant with every known aspect of Greek diplomacy as practised in his day. He evidently found this knowledge an asset valuable to him as a historian, largely because examination and analysis of diplomatic exchanges helped him to explain the course of events. From the outset he was evidently interested to some extent in diplomacy as a skilled technique demanding the exercise of intellectual qualities, but his interest in it seems to have developed and deepened as his work progressed. In the first half of the *History* (1.1—5.24), which covers the Archidamian war and its antecedents,<sup>3</sup> he is concerned mainly

<sup>1</sup> The substance of a lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 14th of January 1970.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. Grant, *C.Q.*, xv (1965), 261-6.

<sup>3</sup> Reasons for dividing the *History* into two halves are given in my *Individuals in Thucydides* (1968), 1-2.

with the results of negotiations, together with the general lessons about political behaviour emerging from the exercise of open diplomacy in public assemblies. In the second half (5.25—8.109), covering the period between the Peace of Nicias and the autumn of 411 where the unfinished work breaks off abruptly, he includes far more and much fuller information about diplomacy conducted by very small groups, often in secret and sometimes with wholly negative results. He seems to be deliberately carrying his investigations at least one stage further back. He tends to account for the relations between one state and another by reporting diplomatic contacts between leaders whose views, sometimes prompted by personal motives, are often seen to have been of crucial importance. Such, in broad outline, are the conclusions which this paper will attempt to establish.

The general interest of Thucydides in diplomacy may be illustrated by studying a passage belonging to the first half of the *History*. He gives a detailed account of an incident which occurred immediately after the battle of Delium in 424 (4.97.2—99). The victorious Boeotians refused to hand over for burial the bodies of Athenians killed in the battle on the ground that by occupying and fortifying the sanctuary of Apollo the Athenians had violated established practice and committed a religious crime. The Athenians repudiated the charge, arguing that the Boeotians were guilty of much graver impiety by declining to grant the conventional request for the bodies unless the sanctuary was evacuated. The Boeotians, however, were unmoved and persisted in their refusal. More than one fifth of the entire narrative on the important and disastrous Athenian offensive against Boeotia is devoted to these negotiations after the battle, with their charges and counter charges. Their influence upon the course of events was negligible, since the Boeotians eventually abandoned their attempt to get rid of the Athenians by diplomatic blackmail and expelled them by force. The dispute hardly seems to deserve to be treated so fully. Few modern scholars make any comment on the incident: there is a tendency to ignore less obviously interesting passages of Thucydides as though he had never written them. A. W. Gomme evidently found the passage

tiresome, since he stigmatizes the arguments used in the negotiations as "sophistical stuff"<sup>1</sup>; but he does at least seek to account for the prominence given to "this argument of words", as he calls it.<sup>2</sup> He maintains that the attitude of the Boeotians exemplifies once more the demoralizing effects of war, on which so much emphasis is laid in this part of the *History*. That factor has doubtless influenced Thucydides. Indeed some censure seems to be attached to the Athenians as well: they too, if less blatantly than the Boeotians, were erecting a bogus façade of religious scruples, while really pursuing selfish interests.

Other reasons may be suggested to explain why Thucydides has devoted so much space to this dispute. His report on it, though written in *oratio obliqua*, is similar in tone to the paired speeches representing opposing points of view to which the term antilogy is often applied. It resembles even more closely the brief dialogue in which the Spartan Archidamus and the Plataeans argue about his threat to their city (2.71—74) and indeed the much longer Melian Dialogue (5.85—113). Controversy of this kind, in which disputants vied with one another in their use of debating tactics and scored debating points, was an integral element in the intellectual atmosphere of contemporary Athens, as may be seen not only from Thucydides but also from Antiphon, Euripides and Old Comedy. A further reason for the detailed treatment of the dispute between the Athenians and the Boeotians may be suggested. Thucydides was interested in legal problems, especially those of inter-state relations, on which he was impressively knowledgeable. This interest is attested elsewhere in the *History*, as in his reports on the debate between Archidamus and the Plataeans and on a wrangle between the Corinthians and the Athenians after the battle of Sybota (1.53.2—4). Similar considerations doubtless account for the detailed treatment of an incident involving the exclusion of the Spartans from the Olympic festival of 420 by the Eleans (5.49.1—50.2). Legal arguments with a religious undertone are seen to have been put forward with the sole aim of securing political advantages.

The passage on the dispute after the battle of Delium has

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, iii (1956), 569.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 571.

some Thucydidean characteristics, but in one important respect it is exceptional. It belongs to the first half of the *History*, and yet it deals fully with negotiations which, while not in the least secret, were conducted through heralds representing the leaders on each side: because the armies were still under arms, the issues at stake were not publicly debated. The first half of the *History* contains many references to diplomatic exchanges between small numbers of negotiators, and in most cases Thucydides evidently believed them to be of considerable importance; but he hardly ever supplies any details about the arguments used in the course of these exchanges. Normally he is content with a bare statement of their outcome. He mentions a number of embassies from Sparta to Athens and vice versa in the last few months before the outbreak of war (1.126.1—2; 127.1; 128.1—2; 139.1—3),<sup>1</sup> but his accounts of them are brief and are far exceeded in length by the digressions on past history in which he explains the trumped up charges of sacrilege brought by each side against the other. He also dismisses in a few words many embassies belonging to the first years of the Archidamian war. Among the more important are the following: from Athens to Sparta at the height of the plague (2.59.2); from Athens to Mytilene (3.3.1) and from Mytilene to Athens and Sparta (3.4.4—5.1; 5.2); from Corcyra to Athens (3.71.2—72.1); from some western Greek states to Athens (3.86.3; 115.3).<sup>2</sup> A passage in the *Acharnians* (652—4) has been widely accepted as evidence that in 426 Sparta made at least a tentative offer of peace to the Athenians: Thucydides makes no mention of it.<sup>3</sup> He reports that in 425 the Spartans sent many deputations to Athens with the object of securing the restoration of Pylos and of the prisoners captured on Sphacteria, but he supplies no information whatever

<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence that any of these embassies was invited to address a public assembly, though the message brought by the last Spartan embassy was debated in the Athenian ecclesia (1.139.3).

<sup>2</sup> Other brief references to embassies are: from Athens and Sparta to allies or potential allies at the outbreak of war (2.7.1-3); from Athens to Sitalces (2.67.2); from Trachis and Doris to Sparta (3.92.2-3); from Aetolia to Corinth and Sparta (3.100.1); from Perdiccas to Sparta (4.83.4).

<sup>3</sup> Embassies to which Thucydides makes no reference are attested by inscriptions, cf. R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* (1969), 65.50-1.

about these overtures except that they were unsuccessful (4.41.3—4).

The diplomatic contacts between Greeks and Persians during the Archidamian war are notoriously obscure,<sup>1</sup> and Thucydides has been criticized by modern scholars for having failed to give a more satisfactory account of them. He mentions only that at the outbreak of war both sides were preparing to send envoys to the Persian king (2.7.1); that in 430 a Peloponnesian embassy on its way to Persia was intercepted in Thrace (2.67.1—3); that in 425/4 the Athenians captured a Persian envoy journeying to Sparta and sent him back to Asia accompanied by ambassadors of their own, who abandoned their mission on learning that Artaxerxes was dead (4.50). From other sources there is evidence, which has been generally accepted, that the Athenians sent another embassy to Persia and concluded an agreement with Darius in 423.<sup>2</sup> Thucydides mentions neither the embassy nor the agreement. If, as seems probable, he more or less completed the first half of his *History* before 412, the year in which the Persians first played a leading part in the war, he cannot have been in a position to appreciate the significance of earlier contacts with them. The sketchiness of his account may be partly attributed to this factor. On the other hand, it is entirely consistent with his treatment of other diplomatic exchanges during the Archidamian war.

The One Year's Truce in 423 (4.117—119) and the Peace of Nicias in 421 (5.14—19) involved a considerable amount of preliminary negotiation. In each case Thucydides gives a full account of public opinion at Athens and Sparta and quotes verbatim the terms of the agreement. He seems, however, disinclined to throw any light whatever upon the course of the negotiations on either occasion. The Peace of Nicias was concluded after protracted bargaining lasting throughout the winter, but almost the only information given by Thucydides is that

<sup>1</sup> A. Andrewes, *Historia*, x (1961), 1-18, provides a most illuminating study of the problems arising from relations with Persia and the treatment of them by Thucydides.

<sup>2</sup> H. Bengtson, *Die Staatsverträge des Altertums*, ii (1962), no. 183, gives the evidence and a bibliography.

each side put forward many claims and that the Spartans tried to exert pressure on the Athenians by ostentatious preparations for military action (5.17.2). The conferences which he mentions must have been attended by small groups of delegates, perhaps confined to those whose names are recorded as signatories of the final agreement (5.19.2). They include some leading personalities, notably Nicias and Pleistoanax whose motives for advocating peace are analysed in detail.<sup>1</sup> Thucydides may possibly have been hampered by lack of information about these important negotiations. When they occurred, he had already become an exile, so that he no longer had easy access to Athenian sources, and he may not at this stage have yet established the contacts with the Peloponnesians which he claims to have furnished him with special qualifications for writing his *History* (5.26.5). It is, however, very difficult to believe that his knowledge of these negotiations can have been limited to what he had recorded.

When in the first half of his *History* he is dealing with negotiations of another kind, his practice is quite strikingly different. He often becomes almost diffuse in his treatment of open diplomacy, in which embassies are brought before large bodies such as the Athenian assembly.<sup>2</sup> Of the speeches in *oratio recta* a considerable proportion are delivered by ambassadors or delegates in public: the speaker, who is normally unnamed, acts as spokesman for his colleagues in presenting a case on behalf of his city. An early example is the pair of speeches in the Athenian assembly in 433, when Corcyrean envoys endeavour to persuade the Athenians to conclude an alliance with them and Corinthian envoys seek to deter the Athenians from accepting this proposal (1.31—44). In the report on the conference of allies at Sparta in 432 to discuss charges against Athens, Thucydides includes a speech by Athenian ambassadors who are present on other business (1.73—78). Another example is the speech of the

<sup>1</sup> The treatment of Nicias in this passage is discussed in *Individuals in Thucydides*, 93-96, and that of Pleistoanax in my *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History* (1969), 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> It was customary for embassies sent to Athens to confer in the first instance with the Boule (cf. 5.45.1), but Thucydides nowhere supplies any account of these preliminary discussions.

Mytileneans who at the invitation of Sparta make an appeal at Olympia for support in their revolt from Athens (3.9—14). Perhaps the most remarkable speech by anonymous envoys is that of the Spartans in the Athenian assembly at the time of the Pylos episode, who strike an incongruously intellectual note when making a somewhat vague offer of peace (4.17—20). On this occasion Cleon charges them with dishonesty when they propose that a small meeting of representatives should work out the terms of peace in secret (4.22.1—2). It is natural for a demagogue to distrust any form of diplomacy other than open diplomacy, but this attitude may well have been shared by many less extreme democrats. Two speeches in the first half of the *History* by leaders whom Thucydides admired are designed to influence inter-state relations, namely those of Hermocrates at Gela (4.59—64) and Brasidas at Acanthus (4.85—87). Hermocrates, addressing a meeting of representatives from Siceliot cities, urges them to conclude a general peace,<sup>1</sup> while Brasidas calls upon the Acanthian assembly to support his mission of liberation by throwing off the Athenian yoke. Thucydides refers to speeches by Brasidas at Torone (4.114.3) and Scione (4.120.3), but he does not report them fully because they were similar in tone and substance to the speech at Acanthus.

The treatment of diplomacy in the first half of the *History* seems, from the evidence which has been considered, to fall into a more or less uniform pattern. It is the practice of Thucydides to select for presentation in detail a limited number of great occasions when major issues were publicly debated. His accounts of such great occasions normally include at least one speech in *oratio recta*. These speeches, in which he follows the principles defined in a famous passage in the first book (1.22.1), are used by him as a means of providing his readers with enlightenment on various themes, both particular and general. They contribute to his analysis of the situation which gave rise to each debate, and they help to elucidate the problems under discussion. The speeches of the Corcyrean and Corinthian envoys at Athens thus provide an illuminating introduction to his long and complex

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History*, 177-9.

investigation of the causes of the war. At the same time all the speeches involving inter-state relations to which attention has been drawn touch on issues of a more general character which are relevant outside their immediate context. For example, the speech of the Athenians to the conference at Sparta defines their attitude towards their own empire, while the reaction of others towards Athenian imperialism is admirably illustrated by the speech of the Mytilenean envoys at Olympia. It is true that this theme figures prominently in one antilogy in the second half of the *History*, namely the speeches of Hermocrates and Euphemus at Camarina (6.76—87), where diplomacy conducted in a public assembly is treated in much the same way. There is, however, no similar case in the second half of the *History*. The Melian Dialogue, though mainly concerned with imperialism, does not belong to the same category. It is unique in many ways, not least because it took place, if indeed it ever did take place, in private session at which the number of Melians present was strictly limited (5.84.3).

These considerations suggest that in the first half of the *History* Thucydides shows intense interest in the political lessons to be learned from occasions when Greek states were engaged in diplomatic negotiations, especially in lessons which had wider implications. He is much less concerned with the negotiations themselves or with the diplomatic skill, or lack of skill, exhibited by the negotiators. Another factor lends some support to this conclusion. He normally reports at length only negotiations involving debates in public assemblies where the ultimate decisions were made. He tends to deal briefly with preliminary stages involving discussions, which might indeed have been equally or even more significant, between small groups of negotiators. It would be a mistake to conclude that diplomacy as an intellectual technique did not appeal to him at all as a subject worthy of study when he was writing the first half of the *History*. Evidence to the contrary has already been cited, notably his account of the dispute between the Boeotians and the Athenians after the battle of Delium.<sup>1</sup> A more acceptable conclusion is that, although interested in diplomatic technique, he normally chose to suppress

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 228-30.



this interest. It probably did not seem at the time to be altogether consistent with his interpretation of his function as a historian or with his views on the topics suitable for searching investigation in a historical work. In much the same way, and for much the same reason, he chose to suppress his unmistakable interest in biography.<sup>1</sup>

The second half of the *History* provides plenty of evidence that the practice of Thucydides in his treatment of diplomacy has undergone significant changes. The character and extent of these changes may be illustrated by examining several accounts of inter-state negotiations. The first of these records a series of developments in the winter of 421/20 (5.36—38). Some of the more powerful states hitherto allied with Sparta, indignant because they considered their interests to have been betrayed by the Peace of Nicias, were disposed to join a coalition with Argos. A conference was held at Sparta attended by delegates from most of the principal cities. Thucydides dismisses this conference in a few words, noting only that no agreement was reached, but he proceeds to describe in detail some devious manoeuvres which ensued. Two newly appointed ephors, who deplored the conclusion of peace with Athens, made private proposals to the Boeotian and Corinthian envoys, urging them to approach the Argives and to pave the way for an alliance between Sparta and Argos. The evident intention of the ephors was to bring into being a coalition against Athens which, in addition to Sparta and Argos, should include the former allies of Sparta to whom the Peace of Nicias was unacceptable. The Boeotians and Corinthians then started on their homeward journey when they were intercepted on the road by two influential Argives, who invited the Boeotians to join the association which Argos had already made with other states. This coalition, they maintained, if strengthened by the support of Boeotia, could at will make war or peace with Sparta or with any other power. The Boeotian envoys were delighted because they believed that they were now being requested to take the same action as had been advocated

<sup>1</sup> Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, i (1945), 26-27.

by the Spartan ephors.<sup>1</sup> They then reported to the Boeotarchs, who were equally pleased, and preliminary negotiations were initiated to bring Boeotia into the Argive coalition. When, however, the Boeotarchs submitted the proposals to the four Councils of the Boeotians, which was their sovereign body, without mentioning the private contacts with the two Spartan ephors, they received an unwelcome and unexpected shock. The Councils were afraid of alienating Sparta if they joined a coalition which included Corinth, a former ally of Sparta but now in revolt. Consequently, they rejected the recommendation of their magistrates, and the whole scheme was abandoned.

This abortive series of manoeuvres is described with a wealth of detail which is indeed surprising. It is true that the outcome, though purely negative, was important: if the Boeotians, whose hoplite army was second only to that of Sparta, had joined the Argive coalition, the balance of power would have been substantially altered. Thucydides could, however, have reported in a couple of sentences that approaches were made to the Boeotians but without success. Alternatively, he might have given a somewhat fuller account but have confined it to the part of the episode enacted in public at the meeting of the Boeotian Councils, omitting the preliminary intrigues. If the episode had belonged to the first half of the *History*, he might perhaps have treated it in one of these two ways. Here, however, some change of attitude is traceable. He seems to have felt that, because the episode with its secret intrigues was characteristic of the period immediately after the Peace of Nicias, full information about it would be instructive to his readers. The Archidamian war had ended somewhat abruptly,<sup>2</sup> creating a situation of widespread uncertainty and distrust in which major and minor states, as well as rival factions inside each state, made frantic endeavours to promote their own interests and to avoid the dangers of insecurity and isolation. Much of this effort was

<sup>1</sup> The Boeotians seem to have failed to appreciate that the two Argives did not envisage an alliance between Sparta and Argos which the ephors desired (cf. Steup, n. on 5.37.3). This difference between the two propositions is fundamental and could have proved a stumbling block.

<sup>2</sup> K. von Fritz, *Griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, i (1967), 705.

wasted, since most of the diplomatic moves were unsuccessful. They failed, it seems, because they were ill-conceived and ill-directed and because the political leaders were deficient in statesmanship. Such is the general impression which the narrative of Thucydides creates in the middle of the fifth book, and it is doubtless the impression which he intends it to create. His treatment of the Boeotarchs in the episode which has been discussed is especially instructive. They fail to anticipate the reaction of their fellow countrymen to their recommendations, believing, as he expressly states (5.38.3), that whatever they advise will be accepted. When this unexpected difficulty arises, they are incapable of devising any means of extricating themselves from its consequences, and they lapse into inactivity.

Another noteworthy feature of this episode is that Thucydides traces the scheme laid before the Boeotian Councils back to its origins in the private consultations between small groups of leading personalities acting on their own initiative, and that he records the proposals made at these meetings, together with the arguments by which they were supported and the reactions to them, even though the outcome was so negative. In the first half of the *History* he often refers to public opinion, analysing the views held in various cities or by various factions within the same city. In the second half his interest in public opinion continues unabated, but he is far more inclined to dwell upon what was said and felt at small gatherings of leading individuals. This development is important, since it involves some shift of emphasis in his treatment of causation.

The eighth book abounds in detailed accounts of more or less secret diplomacy. The first of these accounts, which is among the most instructive, is concerned with the aftermath of the Athenian disaster in Sicily. Some allies of the Athenians were encouraged by the disaster to approach the Peloponnesians with offers to revolt if granted Peloponnesian support (8.5—8). Strict measures of security were maintained throughout these negotiations, since the Athenians must not be allowed to become aware of them (8.7). Indeed the Athenians, although in the spring of 412 a Peloponnesian fleet was being openly equipped for use against them (8.8.4), remained for a long time almost

entirely ignorant of enemy plans (8.9.2). It was only in the summer, when there was a truce while the Isthmian games were held, that they obtained a clearer picture of these plans from their delegates who were invited to attend the festival (8.10.1). During the preceding months there had developed a ferment of diplomatic activity, which is fully reported by Thucydides. First, the Euboeans approached Agis at Decelea with proposals for revolt. He began military preparations to assist them but changed his mind when a more attractive proposal was delivered by a deputation from Lesbos, supported by the Boeotians. Meanwhile envoys from Chios arrived at Sparta with a similar proposition, bringing with them a representative of the satrap Tissaphernes, who promised to defray the cost of a Peloponnesian expedition to Ionia. Finally, two Greek exiles came to Sparta representing Pharnabazus, satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia; on his behalf they urged the dispatch of a fleet to the Hellespont to support revolts by Athenian allies in that area, and they brought with them a sum of money. After much deliberation the Spartans decided, largely, it seems, through the influence of Alcibiades, to accept the overtures from the Chians and Tissaphernes and to prepare for an expedition to Ionia. This decision was later confirmed by a meeting of allies at Corinth, doubtless a private session of representatives, where it was also agreed that the fleet should continue its mission by sailing on from Chios to Lesbos and thence to the Hellespont (8.8.2). The second and third stages of the programme, which were not implemented until much later than had been expected, were presumably intended to conciliate Agis and the two Greeks representing Pharnabazus, who might have felt aggrieved. Agis raised no objection, but the envoys of Pharnabazus were so dissatisfied that they refused to support the expedition to Chios.

In this long series of negotiations not all the proposals were accepted and some of the decisions were sooner or later modified. Thucydides might have confined his account to a bare statement of action taken, but he has chosen to present a full picture of a complex situation, including some references to factors influencing the policy of states or individuals involved. The narrative is valuable to the reader because of the impressions

which it creates. He learns how widespread was the enthusiasm for revolt in the Athenian empire ; how deeply the independent authority enjoyed by Agis at Decelea complicated the Spartan task of considering which appeals should be supported ; how slow the Spartans were to take advantage of Athenian weakness, and indeed how ill-equipped they were to undertake ambitious projects outside their normal sphere of influence. The passage also points forward to factors which were to become important in the next few years : the personal contribution of Alcibiades, in whatever direction he chose to use his diplomatic skill ; the eagerness of both satraps to exploit the situation to their own advantage ; the intense rivalry between them ; the practical difficulties of organizing for service in Asia an expeditionary force composed of contingents from a number of cities. Thucydides uses the information which he has collected about these secret negotiations to provide an introduction to the new and distinctive phase of the war which began after the Athenian disaster in Sicily.

Two further passages illustrating the treatment of diplomacy in the second half of the *History* may be more briefly discussed. Both belong to the eighth book and are among the many accounts of small conferences used by Thucydides to throw light upon the extraordinarily complicated situation which arose largely because Persia was trying to take advantage of the struggle between the Greek powers. Both conferences were abortive but instructive. The first was held at Cnidos between Tissaphernes and a commission of eleven Spartans sent to Asia by their government because of dissatisfaction with the progress of the war (8.43.2—4). Lichas, the leader of the commission, made a violent speech denouncing the existing treaties with the Persian king and Tissaphernes on the ground that they stipulated the re-enslavement of all Greeks living in areas once controlled by Persia.<sup>1</sup> He demanded a new treaty on terms less unfavourable to the

<sup>1</sup> The clause to which Lichas objects occurs in the first treaty with Persia (8.18.1); it is modified in the second, which superseded the first (8.37.2). Thucydides does not draw attention to this illogicality ; the fact that Lichas gave offence to Tissaphernes was more important than the question whether his complaints were justified.

Spartans, insisting that, until it was agreed, they would not accept Persian subsidies. Tissaphernes promptly withdrew in anger from the meeting, which thus achieved absolutely nothing.

The report on this conference helps to explain why the partnership between Sparta and Persia was proving so uneasy and why so little progress was being made in the struggle against Athens. After the Spartans lost the services of Alcibiades as a go-between, they were unable to maintain satisfactory relations with Tissaphernes, whose devious methods of oriental diplomacy they found totally baffling. Of their leaders Astyochus, their weak and incompetent *nauarchos*, allowed himself to be hoodwinked by Tissaphernes, while the typically Spartan bluntness and offensiveness of Lichas on this occasion proved even more disastrous.<sup>1</sup>

The second passage is equally illuminating. It describes a series of conferences when an embassy of Athenian oligarchs headed by Peisander visited the court of Tissaphernes and negotiated with Tissaphernes himself and with Alcibiades, who was now resident there (8.56). Alcibiades had led the oligarchs to believe that he could persuade Tissaphernes to change sides and transfer his support to the Athenians if only the Athenian democracy were overthrown. Before Peisander and his colleagues arrived, Alcibiades had discovered that he no longer had any hope, for the present at least, of inducing Tissaphernes to abandon the Peloponnesians. Accordingly, after contriving that he should himself speak on behalf of Tissaphernes, he raised the price to be paid by the Athenians in return for Persian support higher and higher until finally at a third meeting the envoys, concluding that Alcibiades had cheated them, angrily broke off negotiations.

Here Thucydides makes abundantly clear that at all costs Alcibiades had to conceal the truth, namely that his influence

<sup>1</sup> Tissaphernes was by now pursuing a policy of deliberately exhausting both sides by granting some financial aid to the Peloponnesians but not enough to permit them to end the war rapidly. Accordingly it is possible that on this occasion his anger may have been feigned; but Thucydides, who several times expresses doubts about the motives of Tissaphernes (8.46.5; 56.3; 87.1-5), gives no hint of this possibility.

with Tissaphernes was not so great as he had claimed, and that by adopting a characteristically adroit stratagem he extricated himself from a most precarious situation. Accounts of secret deliberations in which Alcibiades was involved are many in this part of the *History*. They show that he was constantly intriguing in his own personal interest: indeed Thucydides expressly endorses the opinion of Phrynichus that the sole object of Alcibiades in advocating the overthrow of the democracy was to secure his own recall to Athens.<sup>1</sup> The account of the negotiations with the Athenian oligarchs thus helps the reader to appreciate factors which Thucydides evidently considered to be of great importance in this period: the impact of Alcibiades and his restless ambitions upon the situation on both sides of the Aegean; the utter selfishness of his intrigues; the limitations of his influence on Tissaphernes, who took advantage of his advice but was far too astute to be deceived or dominated by him.

It will be observed that all the passages chosen for discussion because they suggest that Thucydides modified his practice in reporting diplomatic activities belong to the fifth and eighth books. The sixth and seventh books, being concerned almost exclusively with the Athenian expedition to Sicily, are mainly a record of military preparation and military action, but the efforts of both sides to obtain as much support as possible by diplomatic means are shown to have been of considerable importance. Here the treatment of inter-state diplomacy does not differ substantially from the pattern observed in the first half of the *History*. Discussions apparently conducted by small groups of negotiators tend to be reported briefly and only their results noted: for example, two missions by Gylippus from Syracuse to other parts of Sicily to enlist military aid (7.7.2 and 21.1; 7.46 and 50.1). The only detailed account of inter-state diplomacy in Sicily is that of the debate at Camarina which has already been mentioned,<sup>2</sup> when Syracusan and Athenian delegations competed for Camarinean support (6.75.3—88.2). This debate took place in a public assembly; two speeches in *oratio recta* are included, those of the spokesman for each side,

<sup>1</sup> 8.48.4, ὄπερ καὶ ἦν, cf. 47.1.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 234.

Hermocrates and Euphemus ; both speeches touch on issues relevant outside the context of the debate. Another account of open diplomacy follows : Corinthian and Syracusan envoys, together with Alcibiades, are received in the Spartan assembly and appeal for action by Sparta to prevent Syracuse and all Sicily from falling under Athenian control (6.88.7—93.1). Here there is a basic difference of approach. The entire account, except for a few sentences, is devoted to a speech by Alcibiades, which presents a most vivid picture of his personality. It is in fact the most personal speech in the whole *History*. There might, however, appear to be grounds for concluding that the distinction which has been drawn between the first half of the *History* and the second in regard to the treatment of diplomacy is false ; that the real distinction is between the parts which seem to be in a more or less finished condition and include speeches in *oratio recta* and the parts betraying some lack of finish and apparently left unrevised, namely the fifth book<sup>1</sup> and the eighth book.<sup>2</sup>

This conclusion, if accepted, would presuppose that Thucydides, when subjecting each portion of his work to a final revision, tended to cut down, or cut out, information about conferences between small numbers of leading personalities, a process inevitably reducing the prominence of the personal element. His account of the Sicilian expedition, which is among the most highly finished parts of the *History*, shows conclusively that he did nothing of the kind. While the sixth and seventh books do not contain much information about diplomatic exchanges between small groups of delegates from two or more states, they

<sup>1</sup> Apart from the opening chapters (1-24), which conclude the first half of the *History*, and the Melian Dialogue (85-113), which is exceptional in so many respects.

<sup>2</sup> The proportion of inconsistencies, obscurities and infelicities is so much higher in these two books than in the rest of the *History* that this phenomenon cannot be wholly attributable to their subject-matter, though the number of reports on complex intrigues and confusing situations is abnormally large. Lack of revision must surely be the basic cause of their defects, as has been widely acknowledged. J. de Romilly, *Thucydide et l'impérialisme athénien* (1947) 191 (cf. 224 in the English translation, 1963) acutely observes that the two books "ont du moins dans leur ensemble une caractèrè rapide, sommaire, et en quelque sorte provisoire, qui appelle l'hypothèse d'une première rédaction assez peu révisée."



do include accounts of consultations of a sort closely akin to diplomacy. Many secret conferences are recorded, some of them in detail, between the Athenian generals, the first at Rhegium at the beginning of the campaign (6.46.5—50.1) and others at Syracuse after the arrival of Demosthenes with the second expeditionary force (7.47—49; 50.3; 60.2; 72.3—4). There are also shorter reports of conferences on the other side in which Gylippus (7.1.1—2) and Hermocrates (7.73.1—2) were involved. These reports perform precisely the same function as those on meetings of negotiators in the fifth and eighth books. Thucydides uses them to show how a course of action which was put into operation came to be adopted and how it was influenced by the opinions held by leading personalities. Causation is thus traced back to its source in the ability or inability of these leaders to formulate enlightened plans and to their ability or inability to persuade others to accept their recommendations.

Military conferences of this kind are mentioned in the first half of the *History*, but the accounts of them are few and brief.<sup>1</sup> It is also noteworthy, and indeed to be regretted, that, although Thucydides must have had access to information about discussions at meetings of the strategoi at Athens before his exile, he nowhere even refers to these discussions. He probably served on the board only once himself, namely in 424/3, and he may well have been sent on active service to the northern Aegean soon after his election to office. Nevertheless, his colleagues included well-established leaders, such as Nicias and Demosthenes, who had already served on the board several times. He very probably obtained from Demosthenes information about military operations in Acarnania and at Pylos<sup>2</sup> and could, it seems, have questioned him, or other strategoi, about discussions at meetings of the board held in the years preceding his own election. After his banishment such opportunities were no longer open to him. For all these reasons there does seem to be a strong case for drawing a distinction between the two halves of the *History* in regard to their treatment of consultations which were not held in public, in fact of secret diplomacy in its widest sense.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 3.29.2-31.2, which includes a short speech in *oratio recta*; 4.3.1-4.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Individuals in Thucydides*, 97.

The difference between the two halves in this respect might be thought to be due to factors other than a change of attitude on the part of Thucydides. It might be attributed to differences in the character of the events which he has occasion to record. Private discussions between small groups might be deemed to have taken place less frequently, or to have had less influence upon the course of events, during the Archidamian war and its antecedents than during the succeeding period. It is true that during the years after the Peace of Nicias hostilities in Greece were nominally suspended. Therefore it was normally by diplomacy alone that states could pursue their own interests and seek to improve their position in competition with other states. The period, was however, not so much one of peace but rather of cold war, and less cold than the cold wars of our own times, since the Greeks had an even greater capacity than modern nations for being neither wholly at peace nor wholly at war. Armies took the field on a number of occasions during the Peace of Nicias, and the campaign culminating in the battle of Mantinea, which Thucydides describes in detail, was on a larger scale than any in the Archidamian war. It is also true that after the Sicilian expedition the uneasy coalition between Peloponnesians, Persians and former allies of Athens now in revolt called for an abnormal amount of diplomatic activity and that later the Athenians too, both oligarchs and democrats, entered into negotiations with the Persians through Alcibiades. During the same period, however, military and naval operations were in progress almost continuously on or near the Asiatic coast. Few of them produced impressive results because neither side was eager to risk a major sea battle, but their cumulative effect in what was largely a war of attrition is shown by Thucydides to have been considerable. Their scale as well as their intensity increased, as is seen from the last chapters of the eighth book (99—109), when the scene shifted from Ionia to the Hellespont in the late summer of 411. Accordingly there is no reason to conclude that from the end of the Archidamian war a marked change took place in the relative importance of military and diplomatic activities. As has been made clear by the references to diplomacy in the first half of the *History*, negotiations in that period were neither infrequent nor

unimportant, but only those conducted in public assemblies are given much prominence.

It might be argued that Thucydides records diplomatic activities in greater detail in the second half of the *History* because fuller information about negotiations between small groups in the period covered by this part of his work happened to be available to him. Admittedly he must always have been in some degree at the mercy of his sources. Modern scholars tend to assume too readily that, because he was a contemporary and because he so obviously took pains in collecting material, he must have possessed full and trustworthy information about every single event. This assumption is hardly reconcilable with the famous statement in the first book in which he complains that eyewitnesses tended to give contradictory and unreliable information (1.22.3). It is also true that after his banishment he was able to use Peloponnesian sources, as he himself claims with some satisfaction (5.26.5), and that material gleaned from Peloponnesian informants on very recent events must have been more abundant and more reliable than on those of some years earlier before he became an exile. On the Athenian side, however, there is no doubt whatever that he was in a far better position before his banishment than after it to obtain evidence on discussions of all kinds which were not conducted in public. Indeed reports even on debates in the Athenian assembly became fewer from the time when he was no longer able to attend them in person. As has already been pointed out,<sup>1</sup> his own public career before its abrupt termination, and the contacts which it provided with leaders far more influential than himself, gave him excellent opportunities for becoming acquainted with what was going on behind the scenes at Athens during the greater part of the Archidamian war. There is no means of determining whether or not he included such information among the records which he began to compile from the outbreak of war.<sup>2</sup> If he did

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> His statement that he began to write as soon as the war started (1.1.1) presumably refers to notes which were to serve as raw material for his *History*, though this interpretation has been disputed, cf. F. E. Adcock, *Thucydides and his History* (1963), 119-20.

include it, he chose to make very little use of it ; if he did not, he may later have regretted this omission as his *History* developed. When he returned to Athens after twenty years in exile, most of the Athenians who had held positions of authority during the Archidamian war were already dead, and the few survivors cannot have supplied him with much evidence which he could accept as altogether trustworthy, since their recollections of what had happened long ago must have been affected in some degree by the passage of time.

If the change of attitude towards diplomatic exchanges suggested in this paper is not due to extraneous factors, it must be attributed to Thucydides himself. Whether he modified his treatment of diplomacy consciously or unconsciously is a question on which it would be hazardous to speculate. The fact remains that, if the case presented here has any validity, he did modify it. This modification is consistent with, and indeed forms part of, the greater emphasis in the second half of the *History* on the personal influence of leading individuals which may be thought to be a feature of his development as a historian.<sup>1</sup>

The revision of this paper was completed before the publication of A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. iv.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Individuals in Thucydides*, passim.