This is a much discussed topic, of course, and another article on the subject needs a word of defence. Despite the efforts of Grote and Woodhead, the Thucydidean picture of Cleon still dominates modern accounts. It is a picture I am not disposed to accept. Rather than repeat the standard accounts of the role of Cleon in the Pylos episode, I propose to examine in depth Thucydides' military narrative concerning Cleon at Amphipolis. The historian's interest in Amphipolis is well known. I shall contend that his treatment of Cleon's activities, culminating in the latter's defeat and death, is deliberately inadequate, confused, and distorted to the point of dishonesty. My concern is not with Cleon the politician, but with Cleon the general and Thucydides as military historian.

Prior to the actual engagement, Cleon conducted a series of raids against cities of the Thracian area. Since the researches of West and Meritt, modern commentators are coming to suspect Thucydides of suppressing Cleon's real achievements in this area. Apart from his sins of omission, Thucydides minimises the Athenian achievement in capturing Torone. Cleon's men forced the defensive wall against the opposition of Pastelidas' soldiers and the inhabitants of the city (5.3.1.). Gomme is not unfair in pointing out that the fortifications in question were in a state of dilapidation; Thucydides' narrative indicates that the old wall had been partly dismantled and the new defence works were incomplete. Yet the capture of a city by storm was a remarkable achievement at this stage of Greek warfare. According to Adcock, there is no certain record of Greeks successfully storming a Greek city until the first phase of the Peloponnesian War. Cleon's capture compares very favourably with the earlier capture by Brasidas, since the latter had the advantage

1. Much of my treatment follows the Commentary of A. W. Gomme (Oxford, 1956), pp. 631—654; see also his article in Hellenika XIII (1954), pp. 1—10. My debt to Gomme is obvious, but I find some of his efforts to justify Thucydides' account of Cleon unconvincing and, at times, verging on desperation.
7. op cit., p. 631.
of allies within the city who opened the gates to him. Cleon’s next achievement, the capture of Galepsos, was no mean feat (5.6.1); this Thasian colony had gone over to Brasidas, and its situation on a hill serves to heighten Cleon’s achievement in storming it. Thucydides allows the success no more space than the failure to take Stagiros.

After Galepsos, Cleon settled down in Eion, to await the reinforcements he had requested from Perdiccas, and from the Odomantian king Polles (5.6.2). Aware of this, Brasidas took up a defensive position on Cerdylium, from where he could observe the Athenian movements.

It is at this point that the Thucydidean account begins to strain credulity. Brasidas is represented as assuming that Cleon would attack Amphipolis with the troops that he had with him, because he would be contemptuous of Brasidas’ numbers. This is absurd. Brasidas’ forces are immediately detailed by the historian: 1,500 Thracian mercenaries; all the Edonian peltasts and cavalry; 1,000 Myrcinian and Chalcidian peltasts along with those in Amphipolis; 2,000 hoplites; 300 Hellenic cavalry. Of the aforementioned, Brasidas retained 1,500 on Cerdylium; the rest were held, under Clearidas, in Amphipolis.

Hardly a force to be scorned. Cleon, by contrast, had begun his operations with 1,200 hoplites, 300 Athenian cavalry, and an unspecified ‘larger number’ of allied soldiers (5.2.1). Thucydides gives no casualty figures for the engagements at Torone, Stagiros and Galepsos, but we must surely assume some Athenian losses, especially in view of the nature of the fighting. The Athenian forces are later described as first class troops, supported by the best of the Lemnians and Imbrians. However, from Thucydides’ own statistics, it is manifest how much Cleon needed his reinforcements (5.6.2). If Cleon had any proper idea of Brasidas’ numbers, it is inconceivable that he would scorn the opposition. A huge numerical superiority on Pylos had not encouraged the Athenians to decisive action! Moreover, Thucydides is soon to reveal that the forces

9. Thucydides IV, 110--112. All subsequent footnote references to Thucydides are given without the author’s name.
10. IV. 107. 3.
11. For the site of Galepsos, see Gomme, p. 580.
13. See Gomme, p. 636, for the topography.
14. V. 6. 3.
15. V. 6. 5.
16. V. 8. 2. See Gomme, ad loc., for the difficulties of the Greek.
17. Cleon is supposed to have been heartened by the fact that no defenders were visible in Amphipolis when he advanced, and is represented as lamenting his failure to bring siege engines against a ‘deserted city’ (V. 7. 3.). This is mere rhetoric on the historian’s part. Later, when Brasidas had come down from Cerdylium, Cleon was close enough to see the feet of horses and men (V. 10. 2.). But this comes after his initial ‘scorn’.
of Cleon and Brasidas were about equal in number. And if Cleon did not know the strength of the enemy, how could he have scorned an unknown quantity? Whatever character defects Cleon may have had, risking his own life was never one of them; Thucydides is quite clear on this, in his account of the Cleon-Nicias debate over the Pylos command!

The narrative worsens. In wishing to wait for his reinforcements, Cleon was doing precisely what Brasidas was not expecting him to do. In other words, Cleon was demonstrating that he was not a fool in military matters. The malice of the Thucydidean portrait of the generals’ psychologies is exposed by his own recital of the facts. At length Cleon moves. But not from his own choice; he is said to be forced to this by the unrest amongst his own men. If we concede the truth of this, it does not square with the historian’s description of Cleon, used to introduce him into the History in the context of the debate with Diodotos, as the ‘most persuasive’ of men.

Brasidas now came down from Cerdylium to Amphipolis. He is said, remarkably, to distrust the quality of his own troops (5.8.2). No reason for this disquiet is offered by the historian. It does not prevent him from treating his men to a speech on their own merits and valour! He selected a chosen band of 150 hoplites; the rest were entrusted to Clearidas.

When Cleon realized that Brasidas was going to attack, he ordered an immediate retreat. His reason is the expected one; he wanted to wait for his reinforcements to arrive (5.10.3). In view of Thucydides’ own statistics regarding the numbers on both sides, Cleon’s decision is hard to fault. He ordered the left line southwards towards Eion, a manoeuvre said by Thucydides to be ‘the only possible one’. He himself headed the right wing, wheeling it round so that it exposed its unarmed side to the enemy. Then came the attack, first by Brasidas and his contingent, in which clash the Athenian centre was broken; Clearidas now charges out, to take the Athenians on the other side. The left wing fled; the right wing offered more resistance. Here, of course, we have the notorious claim that Cleon fled at once, having no intention of standing his ground. Even Gomme is reluctant to accept this masterstroke of Thucydidean bias. Adcock’s defence of the historian’s claim is quite remarkable.
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