

## IMPLICATING THE *DEMOS*: A READING OF THUCYDIDES ON THE RISE OF THE FOUR HUNDRED\*

**Abstract:** In the midst of his account of the events, Thucydides says that it was difficult to switch Athens from democracy to the oligarchic rule of the Four Hundred (8.68.4). Most modern scholars have agreed, viewing the rise of the Four Hundred primarily as a *coup* effected by violence, terror and deceit. This interpretation does not conform to Thucydides' narrative (8.47-70), however, which shows that it was not very hard to end the Athenian democracy. Although terror, violence and propaganda have their place in Thucydides' account, modern treatments overemphasize them and so ignore or gloss over Thucydides' charge that the Athenian people did not resist oligarchy very strenuously and so bear a large share of responsibility for it. In Thucydides' narrative Peisander *et al.* are open about plans for oligarchy (if not for the extremely limited oligarchy that they eventually put in place at Kolonos) both on Samos and in Athens, and meet little resistance from democratic supporters. In addition, Thucydides' rhetoric repeatedly mutes what resistance there is, as if to underscore its weakness. Thucydides' Athenians for the most part quickly and easily abandon their democracy. There was a 'terror' campaign, but its scope, effect and need has been exaggerated. In particular, there is no reason to think that the location of the Kolonos meeting – where the Athenians voted the limited oligarchy of the Four Hundred into power – terrified them into doing so. Thucydides' comment on the difficulty of the task of the Four Hundred is ironic. There is a jarring contrast between Thucydides' judgement and his narrative which, when recognized, compels readers to re-examine their own assumptions and expectations. The attention modern commentators have given to Thucydides' words about intimidation and propaganda have left them deaf to the other interesting story Thucydides has to tell about the role the Athenian *demos* played in the move to oligarchy.

### I

FOR it was no easy matter about 100 years after the expulsion of the tyrants to put an end to the liberty of the Athenian people – a people not only unused to subjection itself, but, for more than half of this time, accustomed to exercise power over others (Thuc. 8.68.4).<sup>1</sup>

So Thucydides comments during his account of the end of democracy in Athens and the introduction of the oligarchic rule of the Four Hundred in the spring of 411.<sup>2</sup> His use of the words 'put an end to their liberty' – ἐλευθερίας παύσαι – suggests an oppressive takeover much against the will of the majority of the Athenian people, and this is how his narrative is usually understood. Donald Kagan, for example, reads Thucydides' account of the constitutional change as a description of a 'coup by means of terror, force and deceit'.<sup>3</sup>

Thucydides is not, of course, a straightforward writer; he rarely gives his own judgement, in his own words, on the people or events he describes. An assessment as apparently clear as his comment about the difficulty of turning Athens to oligarchy is relatively rare. This is because, as Hobbes noted long ago, 'the narration itself doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effec-

\*My reading of Thucydides' presentation of the rise of the Four Hundred owes its genesis to insightful classes with Richard Hamilton and Carolyn Dewald long ago. I am grateful to them both for their teaching and their encouragement. I wish also to thank the anonymous referees of *JHS* for their helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Translations are based on the work of R. Warner, trans., *Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War* (rev. edn, New York 1972) with only minor changes.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides here (and only here) makes an equation between 'liberty' – ἐλευθερία – and democracy. 8.68 begins with Peisander who was 'most openly in favour of doing away with the democracy' – ξυγκαταλύσας τὸν

δῆμον – and, after a survey of the abilities of Peisander's co-conspirators in oligarchy, ends with the comment about putting an end to the liberty of the Athenian people. Although a strain of political thought clearly identified liberty with democracy (see, e.g., Arist. *Pol.* 1291b 35-6; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.8), ἐλευθερία for Thucydides usually means the freedom of a state from an outsider's domination. Athenagoras (6.40.2) makes a similar equation (although less explicitly), but 8.68 is the only such usage not in a 'character's' voice. See below, p. 108 for a discussion of Thucydides' rhetoric here.

<sup>3</sup> D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca 1987) 145.

tually than can possibly be done by precept'.<sup>4</sup> At times, in fact, it would even seem that Thucydides' narration critiques some of its own judgements. Consider, for example, how Thucydides treats Pericles' financial predictions. In his *Epitaph* of Pericles, Thucydides explicitly praises Pericles for his foresight with regard to Athens' resources for fighting the war (2.65). In a speech to the Athenians on this topic, Pericles strongly suggests that Athens (unlike the Peloponnesians) will not need 'violent increases in taxation' to fund the war (1.141.5). In the narrative of the Athenian siege of Mytilene, however, only a few years after Pericles' confident speech, Thucydides notes that to fund the siege the Athenians 'for the first time raised a property tax from the citizens of 200 talents' (3.19). Thucydides here uses the same word for taxation that Pericles used in his speech, encouraging the reader to remember Pericles' confident (but inaccurate) prediction.<sup>5</sup> As Hornblower remarks, the combination of these two passages 'to some extent undermines the praise... bestowed on Pericles' financial foresight [in the *Epitaph*], and we should allow for the possibility that this is deliberate on Thucydides' part, an oblique expression of a reservation'.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he notes that 'the combination of the two passages is subversive: Pericles' financial foresight, praised at 2.65, was not, even on the evidence of Thucydides' own text, perfect'.<sup>7</sup>

It is no simple matter to read a text that subverts itself; and it is no simple matter to flesh out Thucydides' bare-bones narrative into a full interpretation of the events of 412/11. Most commentators, nevertheless, read Thucydides' text to demonstrate quite clearly that the Four Hundred came to power by 'a classic mixture of terror and propaganda'.<sup>8</sup> Thucydides is the more easily read in this way because of his contrast with Aristotle's *Constitution of the Athenians*. Aristotle differs from Thucydides particularly in adding to the story unlikely layers of 'leisurely constitution-making',<sup>9</sup> which contribute to a picture of what Kagan called 'a leisurely and legal transition'.<sup>10</sup> Kagan, Andrewes and most other commentators have rightly preferred Thucydides' version – a version which Andrewes terms an 'account of a genuinely revolutionary coup'.<sup>11</sup>

Thucydides' and Aristotle's accounts are certainly different: Thucydides gives a detailed background and context to the constitutional change and includes in it elements of terror and propaganda (8.65). Aristotle, on the other hand, provides little context beyond noting that the people 'were compelled to abolish the democracy' and did so 'because of the belief that the King of Persia would be more likely to fight with them if they had an oligarchical constitution' (29.1). The two authors agree, however, that the constitutional change began when the Athenians appointed *syngrapheis* to draft measures regarding a new constitution (Thuc. 8.67.1; Arist. 29.2). The *syngrapheis* reported at a subsequent assembly (located at Kolonos, according to Thucydides), and both authors agree that their first move was to abolish indictments against illegal proposals (Thuc. 8.67.2; Arist. 29.4).

From this point the two writers diverge dramatically, however. According to Thucydides this was the only proposal of the *syngrapheis*, and it was Peisander himself who made the proposal that the state should abolish pay for all offices, and should choose 400 men (apparently on the spot) to rule in whatever way they thought best. These 400 men should convene the Five Thousand when they wished (8.67.3). In Aristotle, by contrast, it seems to be the *syngrapheis*

<sup>4</sup> T. Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. Sir W. Molesworth (London 1843) 8.xxii.

<sup>5</sup> αἱ δὲ περιουσίαι τοὺς πολέμους μᾶλλον ἢ αἱ βίαιαι ἐσφοραὶ ἀνέχουσιν (1.141.5); καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐσνευγόντες τότε πρῶτον ἐσφορὰν διακόσια τάλαντα (3.19).

<sup>6</sup> S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (2 vols, Oxford 1991-6) on 2.65.6.

<sup>7</sup> Hornblower (n.6) on 1.141.5.

<sup>8</sup> M.I. Finley, *The Ancestral Constitution* (Cambridge 1971) 4.

<sup>9</sup> A. Andrewes in A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes and K.J. Dover (eds), *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford 1981) 169.

<sup>10</sup> Kagan (n.3) 145.

<sup>11</sup> Andrewes (n.9) 255.

themselves who make the proposals,<sup>12</sup> and their proposals are different. In particular, Aristotle's *syngrapheis* urge that the Athenians hand the state over to a group numbering not less than Five Thousand, not to a mere Four Hundred as in Thucydides. Furthermore, the *syngrapheis* propose that the Athenians elect 100 men to draw up a list of the Five Thousand (29.5).<sup>13</sup>

In addition, according to Aristotle, the Five Thousand elected from themselves 100 *anagrapheis* to draw up a constitution (30.1). In due course these *anagrapheis* produced two constitutions (one for the future and one for the present), and the *plethos* ratified them (30.2-32.1). It is only the constitution for the present that laid down procedures for choosing the Four Hundred. They were to be 'elected from candidates over thirty years old previously chosen by their tribesmen' (31.1). The constitution for the future, on the other hand, provides for a government in which one quarter of the Five Thousand serves as the Council each year (30.3). Only after the *plethos* ratified these constitutions was the Council dissolved, and the Four Hundred (who had, presumably, been chosen by the procedures Aristotle details) waited eight days before entering office (32.1).

In Thucydides, by contrast, Peisander provides procedures that allow the Athenians to choose the Four Hundred virtually as they hand the state over to them; there is certainly no election of candidates by the tribes (8.67.3). Nor is there any 'constitution for the future'. Furthermore, the Four Hundred replace the Council either on the very day of the Kolonos assembly or very soon afterward (8.69.1-3).<sup>14</sup>

Thus the Five Thousand have a corporate existence in Aristotle which Thucydides' text explicitly denies (8.92.11, 8.93.2). Furthermore, the very existence of a constitution for the future would seem to indicate that, at least as far as Aristotle's *anagrapheis* are concerned, the rule of the Four Hundred was to be temporary, and the management of the state was ultimately to be in the hands of the Five Thousand. Aristotle's version of events thus helps to make the rise of the Four Hundred look like a 'leisurely reform'. Things move relatively slowly. There is time for constitution-making, and time for a subsequent assembly at which the people ratify the constitutions. Ultimate responsibility is shared widely – among *syngrapheis*, *katalogeis*, *anagrapheis*, tribal electors and the *plethos* that ratifies the constitutions – and the constitution for the future implies that the reformers' ultimate goal was a very broad oligarchy.

If Thucydides is right and Aristotle wrong on the main points, Aristotle's text probably reflects some kind of deliberate fraud. But we do not know whose fraud it was or to what end, exactly, it was perpetrated. Aristotle's account tends to legitimize the regime and exculpate the reformers, but his version does not whitewash only the oligarchs. The *demos*, too, finds excuses here. They were 'compelled' to abolish the democracy (29.1). As Rhodes points out, 'the motif of the *demos*' being compelled to do things which turned out badly is not likely to come from a source of oligarchic bias...'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The subject of the important verb διέταξαν in 29.5 is either the Athenians assembled or the committee of *syngrapheis*. P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford 1993) 381, ultimately prefers the *syngrapheis*, reconciling this with Thucydides' account by supposing that 'Pisander was one of the *syngrapheis*... and in introducing these proposals stated or implied that he had their support'.

<sup>13</sup> Thucydides omits any mention of these *katalogeis* but there is evidence that such men were, in fact, elected. A resolution giving the state over to a body of Five Thousand was also probably adopted at this time, although Thucydides fails to mention it – presumably because he knew it was an ineffectual resolution. See Lysias 20 and Andrewes (n.9) 203-4 on these points.

<sup>14</sup> See below (n.53 and pp. 104-7) for more on this point and on the choice of Kolonos as a meeting place.

<sup>15</sup> Rhodes (n.12) 369 goes on: 'what we have in these passages may be an apologia commonly resorted to in the fourth century'. This is akin to the excuse offered by a certain Sophocles when asked by Peisander (apparently during Peisander's own trial) if he had voted along with the other *Probouloi* to establish the 400: 'Yes', he said, 'for there was nothing better to do' (Arist. *Rh.* 1419a 25-30). This does not deny responsibility for establishing the oligarchy, but attributes the move to political *aporia*. See M. Jameson, 'Sophocles and the Four Hundred', *Historia* 20 (1971) 541-68, where this Sophocles is identified as the famous tragedian.

It is dangerous to assume that Aristotle's account is a correction of a version that viewed events as pure *coup*, and especially dangerous to assume that the version Aristotle 'corrects' is that of Thucydides. Such assumptions tend to treat Aristotle as a negative reflection of Thucydides and use Aristotle to interpret Thucydides. We must resist the temptation to view Aristotle and Thucydides as opposites, however, and must forswear turning quickly to Aristotle to explicate Thucydides. If Thucydides' account seems less a description of a legalistic reform, if it moves more swiftly and lacks a layer of constitution-writing, that does not mean that it must present a strictly anti-Aristotelian view – a 'genuinely revolutionary *coup*'<sup>16</sup> effected by 'terror, force and deceit'.<sup>17</sup> We must, with great care, read Thucydides first.

Thucydides' narrative deserves to be read on its own because the contrast with Aristotle has encouraged misreading. Revolution, terror and propaganda have their place in Thucydides, but modern accounts of the rise of the Four Hundred accord them a starring role that they do not deserve. Thucydides' narrative does not ascribe the rise of the Four Hundred exclusively to oligarchic terror and propaganda. He gives other reasons as well, which the scholarly literature elides. In fact, Thucydides takes great care to charge the Athenian people themselves with a large share of responsibility for the oligarchy. Some embrace it outright for the sake of money. Others accept it with only a token reluctance. Thucydides shows few, if any, resisting oligarchy and defending the traditional regime. The Athenian democrats in Thucydides' account do not do well by their democracy.

This is not to say that Thucydides excuses the oligarchs or denies that they used terror and force. But we should not allow Thucydides' dramatic picture of the oligarchs' machinations to obscure his equally dramatic picture of the people's weak opposition to, and sometimes eager acceptance of, oligarchy. Despite Thucydides' explicit statement, his text demonstrates that it was quite easy to end the democracy and put an end to the Athenians' liberty.

## II

The story begins on Samos, where the oligarchic movement arose. Alcibiades sent messages to the Athenians with the fleet there and told them that 'if there were an oligarchy instead of that corrupt democracy' (8.47.2), he would return to Athens and bring to Athens' cause the money and help of the Persian King. Alcibiades made his proposal to the 'most powerful men' in the fleet, with instructions to make it known to 'the best men', and it was the trierarchs and the 'most powerful men' that Thucydides says then set themselves to destroying the democracy (8.47.2). But the movement was not for long confined to the élite. After various individuals went to discuss matters with Alcibiades and formed a party from 'the right people', they 'openly said to the multitude that the King would be their friend and would provide funds for the war if Alcibiades were brought back from exile and they were no longer governed by a democracy' (8.48.2). There is no propaganda or deceit here. Those supporting the proposal explained it openly to the masses (*ἐς τοὺς πολλοὺς φανερώς ἔλεγον*). Thucydides soon reiterates the point, noting that 'those working for the oligarchy held meetings among themselves... and reconsidered what Alcibiades had to offer, after they had made their views clear to the troops in general' (*ἐπειδὴ τῷ πλήθει ἐκοίνωσαν*) (8.48.3). The movement to oligarchy begins as no hidden plot; the leaders of Thucydides' text present the proposal to the troops without duplicity.

Kagan, however, points out that although Alcibiades had spoken of oligarchy in his initial message to 'the most powerful men' (8.47.2), 'there was no use of the word *oligarchy*' in the

<sup>16</sup> Andrewes (n.9) 255.

<sup>17</sup> Kagan (n.3) 145.

presentation to the troops.<sup>18</sup> He thus suggests that deceit did have a role to play in the plan, and that the leaders of the movement could not have expected Athenian sailors, the backbone of democracy, to accept an openly oligarchic proposal. But Thucydides' narrative does not support Kagan's reading. It is true that the word oligarchy itself is not used in front of the troops, but Kagan's contention that there was some delicacy of presentation makes little sense. It is hardly more delicate, after all, to say 'Alcibiades will bring us money from the King if we are not ruled by a democracy', than to say 'Alcibiades will bring us money from the King if we are ruled by an oligarchy'. The first proposal – the one used – does leave open the possibility that Alcibiades would return as tyrant, but Kagan can hardly think that this would be especially attractive to the men. With that possibility eliminated, however, the phrases used mean 'if we are governed by an oligarchy' whether they employ the word or not. The leaders of the movement do not mention oligarchy, but they show no hesitation in informing the men that the end of the democracy is a precondition of their scheme. Thucydides depicts no tip-toeing around the real issue. Rather than indicating that fraud was involved, Thucydides emphasizes the openness of the oligarchic leaders' initial appeal to the troops. Thucydides' narrative suggests, quite simply, that the leaders of the movement expected no difficulty from the men. His text soon confirms that they were right.

Consider how the masses react to the plan: 'The crowd may have been upset for the moment at what was being done, but it calmed down owing to the agreeable prospect of getting pay from the King' (8.48.3). Of this passage Connor comments that it encourages 'something close to disdain of democracy'.<sup>19</sup> Whether Thucydides meant to encourage disdain of a constitutional system in his readers or not, he surely meant them to be struck by the feelings of the men of the fleet. As Thucydides presents them, these Athenians have little love for the rights and privileges of democracy, since their heads have been turned by the sound of money. Kagan charges that Thucydides' explanation here is 'tendentious'. These men, he writes, 'had stronger motives than greed for being willing to consider even unwelcome proposals late in 412 and to think such unthinkable thoughts as were being proposed to them. The salvation of their city was at issue.'<sup>20</sup> This is perfectly true. After the failure of the Sicilian expedition and the revolt of much of the empire, the Athenians were in desperate need of money to fund the war they deemed crucial to Athens' existence. But Kagan's defence of the men only points up how differently Thucydides draws the picture. In Thucydides' text Kagan's 'unthinkable thoughts' are quite easily thought; the men are upset 'for the moment' – *παραντίκα* – only. As Kagan himself points out, Thucydides' men seem motivated by simple greed.

Thucydides crafts the episode to highlight the men's love for money and to suggest that they have little love for anything else. No one opposes the oligarchic proposals for longer than a moment. The crowd of *thetes* themselves – *ὁ μὲν ὄχλος* – those men almost certainly to be disenfranchised by any oligarchic movement,<sup>21</sup> are upset only for the moment, so long as they can be reassured of money from the King. The implication is that this mass of men cares little about ideology, office-holding or voting rights in the assembly, but only about pay. If that money is to come for serving democratic offices, or for military duty in the service of a prosperous democracy, well and good, but if the coffers of the democracy have gone empty, these men are perfectly happy to receive their pay from the Persian King through the middle man of an oligarchic

<sup>18</sup> Kagan (n.3) 121. At 120 n.55, he cites W.J. McCoy, *Theramenes, Thrasybulus and the Athenian Moderates* (Diss., Yale 1970) 24, for the idea that Alcibiades and others deliberately avoided the word oligarchy because, as Kagan puts it, "not to retain the democracy" could be understood differently by moderates and oligarchs but "replace the base democracy with an oligarchy" would not'.

<sup>19</sup> W.R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984) 227.

<sup>20</sup> Kagan (n.3) 121.

<sup>21</sup> The *thetes* were probably denied the franchise even in the moderate oligarchy of the Five Thousand instituted after the fall of the Four Hundred. See Kagan (n.3) 203-5, Andrewes (n.9) on 8.97.1 and, especially, P.J. Rhodes, 'The Five Thousand in the Athenian revolutions of 411 B.C.', *JHS* 92 (1972) 115-27 for this interpretation.

Athens. They have been away from home for a long time and can expect to be away from home for even longer. What do they care, practically, about democracy, the franchise, payment for office-holding, etc. so long as they can get their pay for serving in the fleet? Thucydides implies that the war has made democracy superfluous for these men.

The ease and speed with which, according to Thucydides, the men of the fleet accept the oligarchic proposals is impressive – impressive enough to cause some commentators to write it out of their narratives. As we have seen, Kagan tries to explain the men’s acceptance away by insinuating that they were misled, and by ascribing to them reactions utterly different than those Thucydides relates. Andrewes, for his part, simply misrepresents the situation, writing that ‘Alcibiades’ proposals were put to the men of the fleet, who disliked the prospect of oligarchy but did not mutiny’.<sup>22</sup> Andrewes does not describe Thucydides’ men, however; the men Thucydides pictures might well mutiny over back pay, but not over changes to the democracy.

Commentators write out the fleet’s easy acceptance of oligarchy because of its implication for all of Athens. Kagan, for example, argues that the oligarchic movement’s beginning on Samos rather than in Athens is ‘evidence of the powerful general support for the traditional full democracy...’.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the soon to be disenfranchised *thetes* of the fleet should vigorously defend the democracy if they perceive it to hold many benefits for them. That the *thetes* accept oligarchy so easily suggests that they see no such benefits, and hints that Athenians of higher status, who might expect to retain their rights in an oligarchy, would accept that system even more easily. Thucydides emphasizes how easily the *thetes* abandon democracy, and so raises doubts in the reader’s mind about all Athens’ commitment to it.

Having branded Thucydides’ explanation for the troops’ acceptance of oligarchy ‘tendentious’, Kagan fails to ask why Thucydides chose to give it. In fact, the explanation is a crucial element in Thucydides’ depiction of all Athenians throughout his account of the rise of the Four Hundred. Thucydides paints them as flippant and ignorant, little attached to their democracy and fully complicit in their own loss of liberty. The characterization continues as the narrative moves to Athens.

### III

After the fleet at Samos accepted the switch to oligarchy, the leaders of the movement sent Peisander to Athens to present the plan to the general citizen-body in an assembly. Here is Thucydides’ account:

And now Peisander and the other representatives of the Athenians sent out from Samos reached Athens and spoke in front of the people, giving them a general idea of their programme and pointing out in particular that they could have the King as an ally and win the war against the Peloponnesians if they recalled Alcibiades from exile and did not live under the same kind of democracy. Much opposition was expressed with regard to altering the democracy; there was a great outcry from the enemies of

<sup>22</sup> A. Andrewes, ‘The beginnings of the Athenian revolution’, in D.M. Lewis, J. Boardman, J.K. Davies and M. Ostwald (eds), *CAH 5<sup>2</sup>: The Fifth Century B.C.* (Cambridge 1992) 471.

<sup>23</sup> Kagan (n.3) 112. Kagan believes that the critical core supporters of the movement were hoplites, insisting (140 n.30) that when Thucydides says (8.63.3) that the leaders worked to secure τὸ στράτευμα, this means that they ‘worked to gain firmer control of the hoplites in the army, a more natural constituency than the propertyless sailors in the fleet’. But τὸ στράτευμα does not necessarily mean ‘the army’ as opposed to the fleet. At 8.89.1

and 8.89.2 in particular it seems to mean the whole force on Samos. Since the word can mean this, one needs something compelling in the context to help one decide whether one should understand it to refer to the hoplites instead of the whole force. 8.63.3 does not include any compelling detail that allows one to choose, unless one has already decided that the hoplites must be the target of the oligarchs’ effort. Kagan believes that the hoplites are for the oligarchs a ‘more natural constituency than the propertyless sailors in the fleet’. Thucydides’ narrative, however, shows this opinion to be false.

Alcibiades at the idea of his being brought back from exile in a manner which involved breaking the law and the priestly families of the Eumolpidae and the Kerykes lodged their protests on behalf of the mysteries... In the face of a great deal of violent opposition Peisander then came forward and took each of his opponents in turn and asked, 'Now that the Peloponnesians have no fewer ships than we do ready for action at sea, and more cities as their allies, and now that the King and Tissaphernes are supplying them with money, while ours is all gone, have you any hope of salvation for the city unless someone can persuade the King to change sides and come over to us?' When they replied that they had not, he then spoke straight out and said to them: 'Well, then, that is impossible unless we are governed more sensibly and put the offices more into the hands of the few so that the King may trust us. At the moment what we have to think about is our salvation, not the form of our constitution. (We can always change that later, if we do not like it.) And we must bring Alcibiades back, because he is the only person now living who can arrange this for us.' The people at first received the proposal concerning oligarchy badly, but when they were carefully instructed by Peisander that there was no other way out, their fears (and also the fact that they expected to be able to change the constitution again later) made them give in (8.53-54.1).

For some commentators the particular words Peisander used in this assembly serve as extenuating points freeing the Athenians from responsibility for the switch to oligarchy. The Athenian majority, they contend, did not understand that Peisander was proposing an oligarchy. For example, Thucydides says that Peisander told the assembly that 'they could have the King as an ally and win the war against the Peloponnesians if they recalled Alcibiades from exile and did not live under the same kind of democracy' – *μη τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον δημοκρατούμενοις* (8.53.1). Later Peisander told the people that aid from the King was impossible 'unless we are governed more sensibly and put the offices more into the hands of a few' – *εἰ μὴ πολιτεύσομεν τε σωφρονέστερον καὶ ἐς ὀλίγους μᾶλλον τὰς ἀρχὰς ποιήσομεν* (8.53.3). The argument is that here Thucydides represents Peisander as guilty of deliberate fraud because he attempted to hide that what he hoped to institute was an oligarchy. Lintott, for example, says that Peisander 'described the proposed constitutional changes in vague and soothing phrases'.<sup>24</sup> Kagan, building on his contention that the initial appeal to the troops on Samos had suppressed the use of the word oligarchy, claims that here 'the terms used to describe the change in mode of government were even less alarming than before'.<sup>25</sup>

These readings privilege Peisander's first statement, where he says the democracy must not be 'of the same kind', and so implies that the state will still be in some way a democracy, over his second, where he says the Athenians must govern themselves 'more sensibly' and 'put the offices more into the hands of the few'. But despite Peisander's implication about the continued existence of the democracy, and even despite his careful qualifier that the Athenians would put offices only 'more' and not wholly into the hands of the few, even the dimmest of Athenians must have heard the roots of *ὀλιγαρχία* – oligarchy – in the phrase *ἐς ὀλίγους μᾶλλον τὰς ἀρχὰς ποιήσομεν*: 'put the offices more into the hands of the few'. To give only the few the power to rule is, after all, the definition of oligarchy. Kagan, however, mutes this clause when he says of Peisander's second statement about sensible government and putting the offices more into the hands of the few that 'the second clause appeared to explain the first in a way that made the project seem even less threatening. The implication was that the democracy would remain the same in all respects, except that there would be a limitation on office holding'.<sup>26</sup> Kagan puts his faith in, and argues that the Athenians believed without question, Peisander's implication that the democracy would still remain in some form. Furthermore, Kagan specifies for Peisander, who, of course, is deliberately vague, that apart from the limitation on office-holding 'the democracy would remain the same in all respects'. Andrewes agrees, finding Peisander's words about put-

<sup>24</sup> A. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City* (Baltimore 1982) 136.

<sup>25</sup> Kagan (n.3) 131-2.

<sup>26</sup> Kagan (n.3) 133.

ting the offices more into the hands of the few to mean that ‘the assembly would retain its powers and existing membership’.<sup>27</sup> Westlake goes even further, claiming that Peisander ‘conveyed the impression that the proposed constitution would not involve any fundamental change’.<sup>28</sup>

Peisander, of course, does not say any of this, nor is it likely that the majority of Athenians had faith that it really lay behind his words.<sup>29</sup> Given the paucity of information about his plan that Thucydides’ Peisander provides, only the most credulous of listeners, and one none too careful with his constitution, would vote for the proposal based on such faith. At the very least someone might have asked how much ‘more’ into the hands of the few the offices would be placed. Thus even if the popular reading were credible, Thucydides’ text would brand the Athenians as none too bright and far from vigilant in defence of their democracy.

Thucydides’ narrative, however, specifically denies that the Athenians were confused about the substance of Peisander’s proposal. First, Thucydides says that Peisander ‘spoke straight out’ – σαφῶς ἔλεγεν – when he told the Athenians that they had to ‘put the offices more into the hands of the few’ (8.53.3). Σαφῶς ἔλεγεν means ‘spoke clearly, plainly, distinctly, accurately’. Thus rather than emphasizing any deceit in Peisander’s presentation, Thucydides leads the reader to believe Peisander was straightforward in describing his plan. Furthermore, Thucydides himself labels this proposal oligarchic. After his description of the assembly, Thucydides says ‘the people at first did not receive the proposal concerning oligarchy well’ – ὁ δὲ δῆμος τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀκούων χαλεπῶς ἔφερε τὸ περὶ τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας (8.53.3). Especially because of Thucydides’ explicit statement that Peisander spoke clearly to the people, I read these words to mean that the people responded poorly at first to a proposal that they perceived to be about oligarchy.<sup>30</sup> Kagan, however, believes that Thucydides here represents a perception held by only a small fraction of the Athenians; the rest remained befuddled about the oligarchic nature of Peisander’s expressed intentions. But Kagan’s reasoning is both unpersuasive and revealing about the biases of his reading. Thucydides, Kagan argues, ‘must be referring to those listeners who understood what lay behind the ambiguity of [being governed] “more sensibly” but surely not to the majority, for the assembly as a whole accepted Peisander’s arguments’.<sup>31</sup> That is, the fact that the majority accepted Peisander’s proposal proves that the majority did not understand his meaning. In Kagan’s Athens, then, the majority could not accept oligarchy for any reason. But this seems rather to prejudge the situation. It is also surprising because we have in Athens the very weighing of constitution versus survival that Kagan wanted to find on Samos: one of Peisander’s arguments is that it is no longer a question of the constitution, but of salvation (8.53.3). If anywhere, Kagan could say that in Athens we find men compelled ‘to think unthinkable thoughts’.<sup>32</sup>

The Athenians in Athens, then, although more reluctantly than those on Samos, ultimately voted to accept Peisander’s proposal knowing full well that they were voting for oligarchy – not the oligarchy they eventually got, of course, but oligarchy all the same. They were not deceived. How, then, does Thucydides say Peisander persuaded the Athenians to abandon their one hundred year old democracy? How difficult a job did Peisander have?

<sup>27</sup> Andrewes (n.9) on 8.53.3.

<sup>28</sup> H.D. Westlake, ‘The subjectivity of Thucydides: his treatment of the Four Hundred at Athens’, in *Studies in Thucydides and Greek History* (Bristol 1989) 181-200, at 185.

<sup>29</sup> Nor need he be guilty of deliberate fraud if he used the word democracy and yet did not intend to retain a sovereign assembly open to all. An assembly open to five thousand could strike some as quite democratic.

<sup>30</sup> Andrewes (n.9) agrees, writing on 8.54.1 that ‘περὶ τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας [about oligarchy] above shows that

Thucydides thought that they understood what was at issue’.

<sup>31</sup> Kagan (n.3) 133.

<sup>32</sup> There is an escalation to Kagan’s denial of Athenian oligarchic sentiment. In Samos, where the men accept oligarchy quite readily, so long as money shall flow, Kagan claims the decision was an anguished one of accepting a necessary evil. In Athens, where the decision might perhaps be so characterized, Kagan denies the Athenians chose oligarchy at all.



It was certainly not as easy a sell as on Samos. The Athenians were reluctant. Thucydides mentions their opposition three times and says it was great.<sup>33</sup> They did not embrace Peisander's proposal but only 'gave in' to what he argued was the inevitable. But as we shall see, Thucydides nevertheless insists that it was not really all that hard to get the Athenians to abandon their democracy.

Consider the reasons why the Athenians gave in, according to Thucydides. First, Peisander said that the Athenians could return their constitution to its present form later, if they wanted. Thucydides has already shown that Peisander had no expectation that the Athenians would be able to do this, and so Peisander is here clearly guilty of deceit. Nevertheless, Thucydides tells us explicitly that the Athenians believed him. Andrewes correctly characterizes this as 'surprising innocence when we remember their usual suspicion about tyranny and oligarchy...'.<sup>34</sup> So Thucydides includes a detail that shows the Athenians to have been remarkably naïve.

In addition, Thucydides says that the Athenians gave in because of their fears, and because they were carefully taught by Peisander that there was no other way out. Subsequent events, however, when the Athenians retrieved their position without Persian aid, demonstrate that there was another way out, that Peisander was wrong, and that the people were too quick to believe that they had been 'well taught'. There is more than a little irony in Thucydides' comment that the Athenians gave in only after they were 'carefully instructed by Peisander'.

Thucydides has also shaped his description of the assembly to characterize the Athenians as easy converts to oligarchy. For example, Thucydides explains the Athenians' decision in one quick sentence (8.54.1). When he says the Athenians at first received Peisander's proposal about oligarchy badly – ὁ δὲ δῆμος τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀκούων χαλεπῶς ἔφερε τὸ περὶ τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας – the momentum of the sentence about their reluctance is already hurtling towards their acceptance. The effect is to diminish the weight of their opposition, to make it seem short-lived and weak. Furthermore, just as at Samos, Thucydides silences the voices of those opposed to oligarchy. He says the opposition was great, but he does not show this to the reader. He gives no impassioned defence of the existing order; no one argues that the democracy can still win the war without Alcibiades and without Persian aid. Indeed, Thucydides gives Peisander's opponents no names and virtually no words. Only Peisander gets to declaim. All the opposition can muster is a muttered 'No' to his question whether there is any other salvation for them. But, as Andrewes notes, 'Athenian demagogues were not usually so easy to silence'.<sup>35</sup> Thucydides has made Peisander's opponents seem lifeless and weak. Despite Thucydides' words about opposition, the passage makes it seem that in Athens, as on Samos, there are no committed democrats at all.

<sup>33</sup> 8.53.2 (bis): ἀντιλεγόντων δὲ πολλῶν καὶ ἄλλων περὶ τῆς δημοκρατίας. . . ὁ Πείσανδρος παρελθὼν πρὸς πολλὴν ἀντιλογίαν καὶ σχετλιασμὸν. . . 8.54.1: ὁ δὲ δῆμος. . . χαλεπῶς ἔφερε τὸ περὶ τῆς ὀλιγαρχίας.

<sup>34</sup> Andrewes (n.9) on 8.53.3. That the Athenians are lucky enough to have their belief turn out to be true does not diminish the naïveté of their belief.

<sup>35</sup> Andrewes (n.9) on 8.53.2 recognizes that 'the scene has been dramatized'. He denies that Thucydides was the playwright, however, because he believes that parts of Book 8 consist of Thucydides' transcriptions of his informants' reports in his own 'characteristically complex style' but from their point of view, not his own (373). In Andrewes' opinion (on 8.53.2), Peisander's *tour de force* in the assembly represents a provisional account written from the point of view of an oligarchic extremist exile who 'relished describing to Thucydides how Peisander had routed the demagogues'. Andrewes' theory is unlikely, however, particularly because he has failed to explain why Thucydides would write in full lit-

erary style a dramatic account that he must have been able to see was false. (For example, as Andrewes points out, the procedure where Peisander takes each objector in turn fits a law court but not the assembly – a point not likely to have been lost on Thucydides, who was, of course, familiar with procedure in the assembly.) Why not write a more sparse description of the outcome of the assembly (to await further information from other sources) and leave out the obviously biased embellishment? Andrewes' theory recognizes the anti-democratic tenor of the passage but does not explain its presence unless Thucydides wanted it there. I agree that Book 8 is unfinished, but I do not think that that fact explains away the presentation and characterization of the Athenians Thucydides gives in what we have of the book. The anti-democratic tenor of this passage is consistent with Thucydides' characterization of the Athenians on Samos and elsewhere in the book and we should, therefore, reclaim the passage as Thucydides' own work.

Thucydides' entire description of Peisander's first visit to Athens paints an unfavourable portrait of the Athenian democrats. They 'give in' to their fears and to arguments soon shown to be false, and so sacrifice their constitution to their salvation too easily and before it was necessary. They credulously believe soothing, but disingenuous, promises that they can easily undo what they are doing. Finally, they mount no direct defence of their democracy; no one at the crucial assembly has a quotable word to say in its favour. This characterization of the Athenians in Athens dovetails with that of the men on Samos, who cared not about democracy but only about their pay. Neither group, according to Thucydides, is very careful of their liberty.

This is not to say, of course, that Thucydides is not critical of the oligarchs as well. He shows Peisander's deliberate delicacy in the assembly, and his certainly duplicitous suggestion that the Athenians could change their constitution back to democracy if they wanted to. I do not mean to suggest that the Athenians enthusiastically embraced Peisander's secret plan for the extremely limited oligarchy of the Four Hundred. But influential commentators have consistently exaggerated the element of deceit required to get the Athenians to vote for oligarchy, and have underplayed the role in the switch to oligarchy of the Athenians themselves. Furthermore, commentators have not recognized sufficiently the negative elements of Thucydides' characterization of the Athenian *demos*. Westlake, for example, opined that in describing the *coup* of 411 Thucydides was 'so conspicuously more favourable to the democrats than to the oligarchies [*sic*]'.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, Thucydides criticizes all sides.

#### IV

The criticism of the *demos* continues as Thucydides moves into his account of the oligarchic conspirators' next steps. After the crucial assembly, the Athenians voted that Peisander and ten others should sail out to Tissaphernes and Alcibiades, and make with them whatever arrangements seemed best (8.54.2). Peisander also, according to Thucydides, 'made contact with the clubs that already existed in Athens for mutual support in lawsuits and in elections. He urged them to unite and to follow a common policy for getting rid of the democracy' (8.54.4). Peisander then sailed out on the embassy to Tissaphernes. When he returned to Athens later that spring Thucydides reports that

most of the work had already been done by members of their party. Some of the young men secretly murdered a certain Androkles, who was one of the chief leaders of the popular party and had also been largely responsible for the banishment of Alcibiades. They had, therefore, two reasons for assassinating him – because he was a demagogue and because they imagined they would be doing something to please Alcibiades... They also secretly murdered certain other undesirable people in the same manner (8.65.2).

Thucydides here describes the first known political murders in Athens since the assassination of Ephialtes.<sup>37</sup> He then goes on after a brief description of the oligarchs' propaganda (to which we shall return shortly) to describe the effect of these murders in Athens:

Nevertheless the assembly and the Council chosen by lot still continued to hold meetings. However, they took no decisions that were not approved by the party of the revolution; in fact all the speakers came from this party, and what they were going to say had been considered by the party beforehand. People were afraid when they saw their numbers, and no one now dared to speak in opposition to them. If anyone did venture to do so, some appropriate method was soon found for having him killed, and no

<sup>36</sup> Westlake (n.28) 191.

<sup>37</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous reader of an earlier version of this paper for stressing this point.

one tried to investigate such crimes or take action against those suspected of them. Instead the people kept quiet, and were in such a state of terror that they thought themselves lucky enough to be left unmolested even if they had said nothing at all. They imagined that the revolutionary party was much bigger than it really was, and they lost all confidence in themselves, being unable to find out the facts because of the size of the city and because they had insufficient knowledge of each other... Throughout the democratic party people approached each other suspiciously, everyone thinking that the next man had something to do with what was going on. And there were in fact among the revolutionaries some people whom no one could ever have imagined would have joined in an oligarchy. It was these who were mainly responsible for making the general mass of people so mistrustful of each other and who were of the greatest help in keeping the minority safe, since they made mutual suspicion an established thing in the popular assemblies (8.66.1-5).

The common view is that Thucydides here indicates that the Athenian people were so terrified that they were unable to oppose an oligarchic movement that, apart from the terror, the great mass of them would have fought vigorously. We find here, then, the first element of Finley's 'classic mixture of terror and propaganda'.<sup>38</sup> Kagan, for example, speaks of a 'calculated policy of terror that would weaken the opposition and open the way for the overthrow of democracy'.<sup>39</sup> Thucydides' account is more nuanced than this, however. Thucydides' text, for example, has already demonstrated that the opposition to oligarchy in Athens was weak enough before Peisander's departure that the barriers to the overthrow of the democracy were almost down. The Athenians, we should remember, raised no audible voice in support of democracy when Peisander first broached his oligarchic proposals. Modern analyses, as we have seen, fail to admit this, and consequently place too much emphasis on the terror campaign. Just as commentators have exaggerated the role of deception in the rise of the Four Hundred, so too they have exaggerated the role of terror both here and in the assembly at Kolonos. They also ignore elements that continue to suggest that many Athenians supported the oligarchy without compulsion. I do not mean to suggest that the oligarchs did not engage in a calculated campaign of political intimidation that terrified Athenians. However, we should be aware that Thucydides tells us that it is not political intimidation alone that accounts for the Athenians' move to oligarchy.

For example, Thucydides inserts in the very heart of his account of the terror an indication that the oligarchs felt little need of terror-tactics. Right after he mentions the murder of Androkles and the others, and before he goes on to describe the atmosphere in the Council and assembly, Thucydides notes that the oligarchs 'in public put forward a programme demanding that no one should draw pay except members of the armed forces, and that the number of those with a share in the government should be limited to five thousand...' (8.65.3). Scholars disagree over whether 'having a share in government' refers only to the right to stand for and hold office or even to the basic democratic right to vote in the assembly.<sup>40</sup> Here it more likely refers to the right to vote in the assembly because the other element of the proposal, the abolition of all but military pay, already effectively limits the right to hold office to those men who can afford to serve without pay. The limitation of either right to only five thousand men, however, would clearly move Athens away from democracy and toward oligarchy. Thucydides brands this proposal propaganda, and says that the revolutionaries really intended to take over the city themselves in a much more narrow oligarchy. He nevertheless makes it clear that the conspirators put this false programme out for public consumption. One designs propaganda, of course, to be appealing to the target audience; one pretends to give the people what they want. The oligarchic conspirators did not openly advocate their plan of putting power into the hands of only Four Hundred men. We may conclude, therefore, that they doubted that this would be widely popular. As a corollary we may conclude that they judged that the abolition of pay for offices and the

<sup>38</sup> Finley (n.8) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Kagan (n.3) 143.

<sup>40</sup> See above n.21.

limitation of rule to only five thousand men would not be too offensive to the mass of Athenians. The Athenians, again, seem unconcerned with democracy and none too careful of their liberty.

Even Thucydides' long account of the terror's effect on the Athenians has elements in it that undercut the view that most Athenians vigorously opposed oligarchy and would have fought against it had they not been so terrified. For example, Thucydides says that the Council and assembly were dominated by the party and no one dared to speak in opposition to the party. This indicates that the party was quite large. The passage seems to oppose 'the party' to 'the people' and so allows the interpretation that the majority of the people were locked in conflict with the party, but the party's easy dominance of the people urges one to ask how great a proportion of the people were in fact in 'the party' and supported the oligarchic machinations. Thucydides reports that 'the people were afraid when they saw their numbers', explicitly leading the reader to suspect that the oligarchic movement had wide support. This then begins to subvert the interpretation that the great mass of the people would have opposed 'the party' if it were not for 'the terror'. It hints that there was little opposition not only because of terror but also because of weak support for democracy.

Thucydides' choices of what to include in his account corroborate this hint. Just as in his description of Peisander's persuasive triumph in the assembly when the Athenians voiced no opposition to Peisander's initial proposal about oligarchy, Thucydides depicts no Athenian resistance here. Thucydides could have described someone who spoke out and was killed for it, so that the reader might focus on the Athenians' tragic but heroic resistance. Instead, Thucydides emphasizes that the Athenians were uncharacteristically passive in the face of intimidation. He chooses to remark that no one even tried to investigate the murders or take action against those suspected of the crimes; the people kept quiet instead. The parallel to the people's reaction to Peisander's first proposal is instructive. Thucydides' Athenians mustered no great opposition to oligarchy at that time and were upset only 'at first', when no terror yet existed to excuse them. The passage about the terror charges that passivity continued to infect the Athenians even as the revolution gained momentum.

Thucydides' text not only brands the Athenians passive and unconcerned with democracy; it also insinuates that they are cowards. That it contradicts itself in doing so only underscores its commitment to a negative portrayal of the Athenians. Although the narrative had earlier indicated that the conspiracy was widespread (because Thucydides says 'the people were terrified when they saw [the party's] numbers'), it later insinuates that the people were cowardly when it suggests that the conspiracy was actually rather small. The Athenians were ignorant, Thucydides tells us, of the true size of the conspiracy; their ignorance of each other left them unable to discover the truth and so, in the face of this ignorance, they terrified themselves into believing that the conspiracy was greater than it really was. In his account of the terror, then, Thucydides shows that if the Athenians were scared, it was at least partly because they terrified themselves into silence. With a little courage and a little investigation, the Athenians might have realized that they could defeat the conspiracy. The suggestion is that the Athenians' lack of opposition may have been due not only to the oligarchs' campaign of terror, but also to their own cowardice and hysteria.

The effect of the last part of Thucydides' account of the terror most powerfully undercuts the notion that the Athenians failed to oppose the oligarchy only because of terror and deceit. Thucydides ends his account of the terror by pointing out that the democrats were quick to believe that even members of their own party were in on the plot. Thucydides then confirms that the people were right. He reports that even formerly staunch democrats went over to the oligarchy. This, of course, buttresses the charge that support for the oligarchy was actually quite widespread, and directly challenges the preferred modern account, for Thucydides does not say that anyone believed these men had been terrified into supporting the oligarchy or were deceived

about its oligarchic intentions. On the contrary, they seem to have joined of their own free will. This image of formerly staunch democrats now willing and knowledgeable members of the oligarchic party is what Thucydides chose to serve as the climax of his account of the terror, and this image powerfully undercuts that very account.

In the end, Thucydides' account of the terror cannot bear the weight assigned to it by a reading that claims that 'Thucydides' narrative plainly indicates that the Athenian people accepted [the proposals leading to the Four Hundred] out of fear'.<sup>41</sup> In focusing so hard on the terror, this reading ignores many facets of Thucydides' picture of the Athenian people. A terror campaign clearly occurred: the oligarchic conspirators committed political murders to intimidate their opponents, and some Athenians were afraid. But this is not all that Thucydides has to say. Fear was a powerful motivator, but it was not the only one.

## V

The secret plan of the core oligarchic conspirators was, of course, to replace the democratic Council and assembly with the group known as the Four Hundred, and the oligarchs had never breathed a word of this to the general public. The Athenians had accepted in principle a move to an oligarchy as early as Peisander's first visit to Athens, but he had never indicated that he meant to place the government into the hands of so few men. In this the core conspirators were, of course, guilty of deception, and we can assume that they were silent about their ultimate plans because they judged most Athenians would not support such a narrow oligarchy. The reader might then expect the Athenians to put up some resistance to the installation of this very limited oligarchy if, as the common view has it, they accepted a moderate oligarchy only under the duress of the war, or were initially confused even about Peisander's moderate proposals. In Thucydides' account, however, the Athenians make no move in opposition even when the conspirators finally openly propose the government of the Four Hundred. They raise neither whisper nor finger in defence of their liberty, and this is not due to any oligarchic deception. Nor is this passivity and lack of interest due to terror or intimidation, despite modern commentators' attempts to find force in this part of Thucydides' narrative. In short, Thucydides' narrative of the actual installation of the Four Hundred continues his negative characterization of the Athenians as essentially passive, weak, and unconcerned with preserving their democratic freedoms.

The conspirators began their move to total control by calling an assembly at which they proposed the creation of a committee of ten men who would bring proposals on government to the people at a subsequent assembly. That second crucial assembly was held, Thucydides tells us, 'in a narrow space at Kolonos, about a mile out of the city, on ground sacred to Poseidon' (8.67.2). There the committee of ten moved only that any Athenian should be able to propose whatever he liked; that is, the laws against illegal bills were suspended. With this effected, the revolution was on: Peisander proposed that office-holding and salaries under the present constitution should end, that five presidents should choose one hundred men, each of whom would choose three others, and that 'this body of Four Hundred should enter the Council chamber with full powers to govern as they thought best, and should convene the Five Thousand whenever they chose' (8.67.3).

Thucydides makes no mention of terror tactics or overt intimidation at either the preliminary meeting or the meeting at Kolonos.<sup>42</sup> Thucydides' description of the meetings follows hard on his chapters describing the terror that at least partly cowed the people into silence, but Thucydides does not mention any intimidation in his description of the assemblies at which the Athenians actually voted the Four Hundred into power. He does not claim any member of the

<sup>41</sup> Kagan (n.3) 144.

<sup>42</sup> I will show below that the location alone is cer-

tainly no evidence of coercion on the part of the oligarchic conspirators.

assembly felt any fear or acted in fear; nor does he allude in any way to the terror. His point, then, does not seem to be to charge that the Athenians' actions at the Kolonos assembly should be understood primarily as the actions of a terrified people. Indeed, as Thucydides tells us, all the Kolonos meeting did at first was to allow any Athenian to propose whatever he wanted, and this makes the assembly seem rather benign. This proposal has puzzled Kagan, who remarks that 'the provision inviting any Athenian to make any proposal he liked suggests an atmosphere of freedom of speech totally at odds with the menacing and tightly controlled mood at Kolonos'.<sup>43</sup> Thucydides does not, however, describe any such mood. Thus he avoids a ready opportunity to ascribe the Athenians' actions to intimidation, and allows the reader the conclusion that some Athenians voted for oligarchy because they wanted oligarchy. Thucydides' failure to describe coercion at the Kolonos meeting does not erase his account of the terror, or mean that some Athenians were not terrified, but it does indicate that intimidation is not the only reason that the Athenians voted for the Four Hundred.

Recoiling from this conclusion, however, many modern commentators manage to find threat, menace and manipulation in these events, particularly in the location of the second meeting at Kolonos. Some argue, for example, that Kolonos was picked for the assembly because it was outside the walls and so vulnerable to enemy attack. Therefore, only hoplites, men with arms and men more inclined to oligarchy, would be present.<sup>44</sup> Others suggest that a meeting outside the city would allow an armed guard to be present ostensibly to protect from enemy attack but in reality in order to intimidate the people. As Andrewes notes, however, these theories 'must not be pressed too hard, since Kolonos is very close to the city where the enemy would not normally venture'.<sup>45</sup> Kagan, conceding this, nevertheless claims that 'just moving... to an unusual and unfamiliar place would have been unsettling... and would make it easier for Peisander and his collaborators to dominate the scene'. He fails to explain why.<sup>46</sup> Lang agrees that the choice of Kolonos was 'a subtly terroristic move which would increase the ordinary citizens' fear of the strange and unknown forces about them'.<sup>47</sup>

These are the voices of apologists for the Athenians, commentators desperately searching for some way to explain away the Athenians' vote in favour of the Four Hundred. They are forced to find intimidation in the choice of Kolonos as a meeting spot because Thucydides' account of the assemblies at which the Athenians voted the Four Hundred into power is otherwise completely free of any mention of coercion. Only the unexplained unusual location of the second meeting offers any real opportunity of injecting terror-tactics into the body of the narrative and mitigating the implication of the Athenians' vote. Kagan, for example, in defence of the Athenians, claims that 'in the threatening circumstances, the assembly would choose the *pro-edroi* designated by the conspirators',<sup>48</sup> and Lang excuses the Athenians for voting for the Four Hundred without a dissenting vote because 'who knew whether in this strange place of assembly oligarchic spies might not be watching'.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the ingenuity of these commentators, the decision not to assemble on the Pnyx probably had nothing to do with terror or intimidation; rather it was probably symbolic of the action

<sup>43</sup> Kagan (n.3) 148.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution* (Oxford 1952) 275.

<sup>45</sup> Andrewes (n.9) on 8.67.2.

<sup>46</sup> Kagan (n.3) 147. Kolonos, only one mile from the city, is unlikely to have been particularly unsettling to many.

<sup>47</sup> M. Lang, 'The revolution of the 400', *AJP* 69 (1948) 272-89 at 280-1.

<sup>48</sup> Kagan (n.3) 148-9.

<sup>49</sup> Lang (n.47) 282. It is hard to understand why Kolonos would make the work of 'spies' easier, and

Lang's appeal to 'spies' is in any case illogical. It suggests that oligarchic sympathizers were few and hidden – that they felt compelled to pretend they opposed the movement. But Thucydides' text shows that even formerly staunch democrats were openly supporting the movement. These men could report opposing votes and so intimidate democrats, if that was what happened at Kolonos. There is no need to imagine spies. Talk of spies fits Lang's preferred picture of Athens, however, and allows her to imply that most people opposed the oligarchy.

to be taken at the meeting. The Pnyx was the usual meeting place of the democracy, and as such it became almost a symbol of the democracy. In Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 42, for example, the *Demos* is '*Demos Pyknetes*' – '*Demos* from the Pnyx'.<sup>50</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that the leaders of the movement deemed it best not to try to end the democracy in a place so associated with its rule. On this argument the decision to move from the Pnyx would be based not on the attractions of an alternate location in potential for limitation of membership, intimidation, coercion or the introduction of spies, but because the oligarchs required a place less connected with democracy than the Pnyx.

This does not, of course, explain why the oligarchs ultimately chose Kolonos as the alternate location. Other obvious possibilities are lacking, however, because all the alternatives to the Pnyx which were sometimes used by the democratic assembly – e.g. the Theatre of Dionysos and the Theatres in Peiraeus – might also have been judged too closely associated with democracy. The Thirty held the one assembly we know they called in the Odeion of Pericles (*Xen. HG* 2.3.5, 2.4.9-10), perhaps because the Odeion did not smack too much of democracy.

As it turns out, the oligarchic conspirators chose Kolonos, and we do not know why. Our ignorance is instructive, however. We do not know why the oligarchs chose Kolonos precisely because Thucydides did not deem it important to discuss the point. He describes Kolonos to a reader unfamiliar with Athens and notes its short distance from the city, but he gives no hint that the location was meant to frighten the people. If he thought that the location was chosen for reasons of intimidation, and if he believed intimidation explained the Athenians' actions at Kolonos, he had every opportunity to indicate this. He did not, however, and we should attend to Thucydides' silence. Compulsion and terror do not fully explain the Athenians' vote. According to Thucydides they considered Peisander's proposal about the Four Hundred in an open assembly free from threats or intimidation. If he had wanted to describe things differently, he could have.

In fact, Thucydides' presentation of the Athenians' response to Peisander's proposal to hand over the government to the Four Hundred underscores his interest in stressing how little resistance the Athenians mounted to the oligarchy. Thucydides simply proclaims that the assembly ratified Peisander's proposal and 'with no word spoken in opposition, was dissolved' (8.69.1). Kagan supplies the description that Thucydides omits: 'the constitutional change had been imposed on a terrified, confused and leaderless assembly'.<sup>51</sup> Thucydides, however, has none of this. His assembly barely appears in the passage as subject or object, much less as the beneficiary of three adjectives excusing it from what it had done. Of the assembly Thucydides notes only that it ratified the proposal and that it said nothing in opposition. If the Athenians' vote is to be explained by reference only to terror and confusion, as Kagan would have it, Thucydides has done much to conceal it.

## VI

Thucydides' account of the expulsion of the democratic Council by the Four Hundred and that group's take-over of the Council House is even more revealing. Thucydides begins by setting the scene: because of the state of emergency due to the presence of the enemy at Dekeleia, 'all Athenians were constantly either on the walls or standing by near their arms at the various posts' (8.69.1). On the appointed day, therefore, the conspirators 'let those who were not in on the secret go home as usual', but told their own party to wait about quietly a little distance from the arms 'and if there was any opposition shown to what was being done, to seize the arms and sup-

<sup>50</sup> See M.H. Hansen, 'How many Athenians attended the *ecclesia*?', *GRBS* 17 (1976), 115-25 at 117-21, and *id.*, *The Athenian Assembly* (Oxford 1987) 12-14. R.A.

Moysey, 'The Thirty and the Pnyx', *AJA* 85 (1981) 31-7.  
<sup>51</sup> Kagan (n.3) 156.

press it' (8.69.2). Thucydides also notes that certain Andrians, Teneans, Aeginetans and 300 Karystians who had come for this purpose were given the same instructions. When all were in their places, the Four Hundred, with daggers concealed under their cloaks, together with their 120 young toughs went into the Council House (8.69.3).

Thucydides' description of the plans of the Four Hundred is elaborate. The large build-up leads the reader to expect some response from the Council commensurate with the preparations of the Four Hundred and Thucydides' expense of words. What Thucydides provides, however, is a quick denouement showing that the Four Hundred's fear of armed resistance was greatly exaggerated:

Coming in upon the members of the Council chosen by lot who were sitting in the Council chamber, they told them to take their pay and go. They had brought with them themselves all the pay due to them for the rest of their term of office and gave it to them as they went out. When the Council had made way for them like this, with no objections raised, and the rest of the citizens kept quiet and took no kind of action, the Four Hundred took their places in the Council chamber (8.69.4-70.1).

Commentators, again, tend to stress violence in their analysis of this event. Lintott, for example, says that the conspirators removed the democratic Council 'by force straight-away after the Kolonos meeting'.<sup>52</sup> He admits it was a 'bloodless *coup*', but nevertheless argues that 'violence had prepared the ground and was a barely concealed threat on the day'.<sup>53</sup> The conspirators were clearly prepared to use violence. As Thucydides tells us in detail, they carried hidden daggers and had a force of hundreds of men to back them up, but this is not the whole story. It is important that Thucydides makes no reference to threats or fear in the actual confrontation between the Four Hundred and the Council. Thucydides' councillors do not suffer any violence nor do they react to threats or show any fear. They do not cower in dread, prevented from standing their ground in defence of democracy only because of fear for their lives. Thucydides could have drawn the picture thus, but he did not. In his text the councillors, told to take their pay and go, quietly take their pay and go. The Four Hundred were obviously ready and willing to use force, but, as Thucydides makes quite clear, there was no need. What quieted this group, he suggests, was not daggers but money. The abundance of Thucydides' description of the preparations of the Four Hundred to counter resistance makes the absence of resistance that much more obvious.

<sup>52</sup> Lintott (n.24) 139.

<sup>53</sup> Lintott (n.24) 144. Many commentators believe that the Four Hundred feared active violent resistance. They have some difficulty working with Thucydides' text, however, because it is not clear that the replacement of the democratic Council took place right after the Kolonos meeting. Thucydides describes it as occurring on 'the appointed day' but fails to say exactly when that day was. That the expulsion took place right after Kolonos is almost essential if one believes the Four Hundred feared active opposition, for the Boule could serve as a locus of resistance. See Hignett (n.44) 276 and Lintott (n.24) 139. Thucydides' text, however, makes the Four Hundred on 'the appointed day' tell their followers to stand around by the arms and also tells them 'to allow those who were not in the secret to go home as usual'. As Andrewes (n.9) on 8.69.2 rightly notes, the 'going home' mentioned here does not seem to refer to citizens leaving the assembly but rather to their leaving the place where the arms are. Thus it seems to refer to men leaving from a regular daily parade under arms. See Andrewes (n.9)

on 8.69.1. Thucydides thus seems to place a parade under arms right before the Four Hundred move to the Bouleuterion. As Andrewes remarks (n.9) on 8.69.2: 'if the Four Hundred were expecting resistance... it was curiously rash of them to allow the citizens to go and take up their arms immediately after the meeting at which they had for the first time revealed their full plans'. The alternative, of course, is to suppose that the Council House was taken over on a later day, but this hardly removes the difficulty that Andrewes sees. Of the possibility that the take-over occurred on the day after Kolonos, for example, Andrewes (n.9) on 8.69.2, remarks that 'one may still think that the Four Hundred were taking something of a chance, but by the day after Kolonos they would have a clearer idea whether trouble was likely, and it was not impossible that they took precautions on this day which were not strictly necessary'. Thucydides' text, of course, makes abundantly clear what Andrewes will only hint at most delicately. The Four Hundred took precautions on that day which were well beyond what was required.



The shocking contrast highlights that the Council and people did nothing to resist the final and crucial step in the overthrow of the democratic structure.

The text proclaims that all this Council really cared about was the money due them for the rest of their term.<sup>54</sup> This, of course, rounds out a characterization of Athenians that began with the crowd on Samos, who, in Thucydides' description, were upset only for the moment at the loss of their democracy but were cheered at the happy prospect of money from the Persian King. At the beginning of Thucydides' story about the rise of the Four Hundred, and at its end, what moves the Athenians is money. In addition, Thucydides records no audible resistance from the *demoi*. The Council 'made way', we are told, 'with no objection raised'. In fact, Thucydides' democratic Athenians barely speak in his whole account of the rise of the Four Hundred. They say virtually nothing when Peisander first proposes oligarchy in his initial visit to Athens; they have no objection to make at the meeting preliminary to Kolonos, and they ratify Peisander's proposal at Kolonos 'with no word spoken in opposition'. Here Peisander and company seem to have anticipated the one objection these men might have made by paying them off. And so the councillors depart without a word. What a far cry from the Athenians who so wore Sthenelaidas out with words that he objected 'I do not understand these long speeches which the Athenians make' (1.86.1). Furthermore, the rest of the citizens are again wholly passive. They 'kept quiet and took no kind of action'. As it turns out it was not all that difficult to deprive the Athenians of their liberty.

## VII

And so we return to the passage with which we began: 'For it was no easy matter about 100 years after the expulsion of the tyrants to put an end to the liberty of the Athenian people...' (8.68.4). As we have seen, Thucydides' narrative contradicts this statement. He depicts Athenians, both on Samos and in Athens, who care more for money than democratic institutions. He records no voice speaking in favour of democracy. He shows no active resistance to the oligarchic conspiracy but instead depicts a passive Athens. He indicates that support for the oligarchy was widespread and had even infiltrated democratic strongholds. Finally, although he details the oligarchs' campaign of terror, his text does not attribute the Athenians' acceptance of oligarchy to terror alone. Why, then, does Thucydides say the oligarchs' task was so difficult?

Connor claims Thucydides' comment 'recalls the *pathos* statements that sometimes accompany moments of loss and suffering in the Histories'.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps. More likely, Thucydides writes with piquant irony. The context certainly suggests as much. Thucydides makes his statement during his account of the Kolonos meeting. Chapter 67 ends with Peisander's proposal to create the Four Hundred. Then, instead of recounting the Athenians' response to the proposal, Thucydides segues in chapter 68 into a long digression on the remarkable abilities of the other three main conspirators – Antiphon, Phrynichos and Theramenes. The enumeration of the powers of these men is necessary, according to Thucydides, to quiet the surprise of the reader that the enterprise succeeded 'in spite of its difficulties'. The comment in question follows, and Thucydides returns immediately to his main narrative to describe the Athenians' response to Peisander's proposals. The entire passage runs thus:

<sup>54</sup> If the dating of Aristotle's *Ath. Pol.* 32.1 is correct, we are talking about pay for a month. See Andrewes (n.9) on 8.69.4. The Four Hundred's emphasis on the pay due the Councillors contains powerful symbolism, of

course. It proclaims the men unfit to rule; only men who require no pay from the government will have a share in the government of the new Athens.

<sup>55</sup> Connor (n.20) 225.

For it was no easy matter about 100 years after the expulsion of the tyrants to deprive the Athenian people of its liberty – a people not only unused to subjection itself, but, for more than half of this time, accustomed to exercise power over others. The assembly ratified Peisander's proposal and with no word spoken in opposition was dissolved... (8.68.4).

Thucydides' placement of these two sentences is significant. His description of the dissolution of the assembly 'with no word spoken in opposition' is calculated immediately to contradict and undercut his statement that the enterprise was especially difficult. Just as Thucydides' comment on forced taxation during the siege of Mytilene subverts his explicit praise of Pericles' financial foresight, this contrast highlights the question of the Athenians' responsibility for their own 'enslavement'.

Thucydides' unusual equation here between the end of democracy and loss of liberty heightens the drama of the passage. It also further suggests that he writes with irony about both the Athenians and democracy itself. If democracy does equal liberty, then ending a city's democracy (and liberty) should be difficult. Peisander's task was not difficult, however. Thucydides' rhetoric mocks that of contemporary political discourse, in which democracy and liberty were indeed equated ([Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.8); in view of the powerful resonance of the word 'liberty' elsewhere in his text, especially in relation to Athenian tyranny over others, the irony here rises even to the pitch of sarcasm.

The comment about the difficulty of depriving the Athenians of their liberty might be what Thucydides' democratic readers would expect. It is certainly what modern commentators want to believe, but Thucydides' narrative charges that this expectation was not realized. The jarring contrast Thucydides makes between judgement and narrative when he follows his verdict with a portrait of the meek and silent Council seems designed to compel his readers to re-examine their own assumptions and expectations.

Terror and deceit figure in Thucydides' account of the Four Hundred's rise to power, but not so exclusively or pervasively as some would like to argue. Furthermore, the attention modern commentators have given to Thucydides' words about intimidation and propaganda have left them deaf to the other interesting story Thucydides has to tell about the role of the Athenian *demos* in the move to oligarchy. In that story the Athenian *demos* itself bears a large measure of responsibility for its own loss of 'liberty'.

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