

XENOPHON AND DIODORUS ON AEGOSPOTAMI

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MY THESIS IS SIMPLE: that Xenophon's description of the battle of Aegospotami, at which Athens' last fleet was destroyed, is not only inherently improbable, but is contradicted by contemporary as well as later evidence, and that Diodorus' description accords well with that evidence, and is therefore to be preferred. As a corollary, I shall suggest that Diodorus' account descends, via Ephorus, from "P," the Oxyrhynchus historian. I have nothing new to say about "P"'s identity: I believe the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* were written by Thucydides' daughter, but I cannot expand on that now.

Before beginning my arguments, I would like to acknowledge two debts of gratitude: first, to Dr. Donald R. Laing, Jr., for advice on the naval catalogue, *IG* 2² 1951, and, second, to D. M. Lewis, who first gave me the idea quite a long time ago, and who has helped me with advice, references, and severe but friendly criticism ever since. Without their aid, this paper would be even more imperfect; but its faults, at least, I can claim as my own.

Xenophon's account of Aegospotami, *Hell.* 2.1.17–32, is well known, so I can outline it very briefly: Lysander's fleet attacks and captures Lampsacus; the Athenians arrive too late to save the city, but encamp opposite it at Aegospotami, and for five successive days try to provoke Lysander to battle. During this time Alcibiades, who had taken refuge in his castles nearby in Thrace, comes and advises the Athenians to withdraw to Sestos, where there are a harbour and supplies, and is brusquely dismissed. Each evening Lysander sends reconnaissance ships to watch the Athenians' actions; on the fifth day they signal that the Athenians have, as usual, dispersed to prepare their suppers; Lysander's fleet falls upon the unprepared Athenians, and only the *Paralus* and eight other ships, under Conon, escape. All the rest are captured, and Lysander puts to death all his Athenian captives except Adeimantus, one of the generals. Conon with his eight ships flees to Cyprus; the *Paralus* alone brings the news to Athens.

Presumably Xenophon got this information from eye-witnesses, yet contemporary evidence contradicts it. *Lysias* 21 was delivered in 403 or very soon after; in section 11 the speaker states, as well known, that twelve ships were saved, of which he himself brought back two—plainly to the Piraeus; so that these twelve are distinct from the eight which fled to Cyprus. In section 10, moreover, after describing the care he had taken to equip and maintain his vessel, he says, "all of you who were

there (i.e. at Aegospotami) know this is true," which implies that Lysias expected that any Athenian jury would contain a substantial number of survivors from Aegospotami, yet on Xenophon's account, there would be only the crew of the *Paralus*, numbering 200 at most, and probably, after the siege and the domination of the Thirty, far less.

Isocrates 18 was also delivered soon after 403. In sections 59–60 the speaker says (I paraphrase and abridge) "when the city lost its ships in the Hellespont . . . I and a few other trierarchs saved our ships, but when we returned to the Peiraeus, the others gave up their duties in despair; . . . I alone retained my command, persuaded my brother to join me, . . . and continued fighting."

A papyrus fragment of Lysias,¹ part of a speech defending Eryximachus, who seems to have been one of the generals at Aegospotami, is a close parallel to Lysias 21, and in lines 100–104 the defendant says "After doing much damage to the enemy, I saved my ship from the battle (obviously Aegospotami) and brought it back (presumably to the Peiraeus)," which strongly suggests that some serious fighting occurred.

I should also mention briefly *IG* 2² 1951, fragments of a large catalogue of ships' crews. It has been thoroughly discussed by Prof. Laing,² who shows that it originally listed the officers and crews of eight triremes, that these were very probably the ships which went with Conon to Cyprus, and that it is likely that the inscription was put up soon after Conon's return to Athens in 393 B.C. If these conclusions are accepted, there is the obvious dilemma that Lysias 21.10 expects there will be survivors from Aegospotami in *any* body of 500 Athenians drawn for jury service, while according to Xenophon only the survivors from one ship returned, as well as the obvious discrepancies that Isocrates and Lysias' clients can state that several ships, including ones they themselves commanded, escaped, while their audience should know that *Paralus* was the only survivor.

A further, subsidiary, argument may be drawn from the allegations of treachery: besides Adeimantus, who is accused in Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.1.32) and Alcibiades, whom Lysias calls a traitor (14.38), Pausanias relates a rumour that the Spartans bribed several of the generals, of whom he mentions one, Tydeus, by name (4.17.3, 10.9.11). On the other hand, though some modern authors accuse Conon, who they assume was commander-in-chief, of, at the least, gross negligence,³ we know of no such charges against him in ancient times; indeed, his conduct at Aegospotami is invariably praised.

¹*Rylands Papyri* 3 (Manchester 1938) no. 489.

²Donald Laing, Jr., *A New Interpretation of the Athenian Naval Catalogue IG* II² 1951 (Diss. Cincinnati 1964).

³E.g., H. Bengtson, *Griechische Geschichte von den Anfängen bis in die römische Kaiserzeit*² (Munich 1960) 244.

Diodorus' account, 13.104.8–106.8, has never been taken seriously, as far as I can discover, and generally, if mentioned at all, is dismissed out of hand,⁴ but it greatly reduces the difficulties. In the preliminaries he agrees quite closely with Xenophon, but makes the additional important point that the Athenians were unable to maintain their fleet for long and thus had to fight. While they were at Aegospotami, Alcibiades intervened and offered the help of Thracian kings and land forces, provided he got a share of the command. The generals, realising they would get the blame for defeat, but Alcibiades the glory for victory, ordered him to leave. When food had run short, Philocles, the general who held the command that day, set off with his squadron to provoke Lysander to fight, ordering the other captains to get their ships ready and follow him. Lysander, forewarned by deserters, routed Philocles' ships, and fell on the Athenian main body before it was ready; simultaneously the Peloponnesian land forces crossed the strait and attacked the camp. After a short battle, the Athenians on land fled, mostly to Sestos; at sea only 10 triremes escaped; Conon fled in one to Cyprus (Diodorus says nothing of the destination of the others). Lysander soon captured Sestos, but let the Athenians there go—presumably to Athens. Only Philocles was executed.

The merits of this version are obvious: it explains why the Athenians encamped at Aegospotami, for they were desperate to fight; it eliminates Lysander's spy ships, which daily followed the Athenian fleet unnoticed, though they presumably came within a few score yards of the camp; Alcibiades appears, not as a high-minded patriot with banal advice, but in a rôle familiar from Thucydides, Book 8, bent on "working his passage" back to the top in Athens; the battle itself is no longer a massacre brought about by negligence and indiscipline, but the result of the failure of an intelligible though desperate plan—Philocles was trying to repeat on a larger scale Antiochus' tactics at Notium, as described in *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, Florence fr. 4 (compare Diod. 13.71.2–4, and contrast Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.12–14), and failed for the same reasons: his colleagues were too slow, and Lysander was forewarned. Tydeus (Paus. 10.9.11) is not mentioned in the course of the battle, but one may suppose his squadron conspicuously failed to play its part, and thus provoked rumours of treachery.

We can also understand why Conon is never blamed for the disaster—he was not in command on the fatal day. We also have a substantial body of survivors available to serve on juries after the war; not only crews of triremes, but a considerable part of the land forces, sent home from Sestos.

The only substantial difficulty is the number of ships saved; I would

⁴E.g., J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte*² 2.1 (Strassburg 1914) 425, n. 1: "Der Schlachtbericht Diodors . . . ist grösstenteils wertlos."

suggest that Diodorus' ultimate source knew Conon went to Cyprus, and gave him one ship, and knew nine ships reached the Peiraeus quite soon after the battle; the other three, to make up Lysias' twelve, were stragglers, or perhaps escaped from Sestos before its capture.

Thus we see Diodorus' account is independent of Xenophon's and superior to it. Its immediate source is no doubt Ephorus—of whom, incidentally, a trace may also be found in Cornelius Nepos⁵—and there can be little doubt he got most of his information from "P"; the case is very similar to Diodorus' description of Notium, which De Sanctis claimed for "P" before the discovery of the Florentine fragments.⁶ Besides general probabilities, one specific characteristic can be adduced: Xenophon, on the whole, describes from the Spartan side; apart from the Paralus and Conon's squadron he says nothing of those who escaped, but he mentions the accusations against the Athenian prisoners, and their execution; the number of dead, incidentally, probably grew with the telling, till it reached 3000 in Plutarch *Lysander* 13.1 and 4000 in Pausanias 9.32.9. Similarly he knows nothing of the Athenian generals' difficulties and intentions, but can describe Lysander's actions, probably "with advantages." Diodorus, on the other hand, says little about the Peloponnesians, and knows only that they executed one of the Athenian generals, Philocles, but he gives a convincing and fairly detailed account of the action and its aftermath from an Athenian viewpoint; and "P"'s use of Athenian sources is well known (see Bruce's commentary 7–8).

If these arguments are, in general, sound, they inflict one more blow on the corpse of Xenophon's reputation as an historian,⁷ but they can only enhance our admiration of his skill as an historical novelist.⁸

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⁵Cf. *Alc.* 8.1–4 (sections 5–6 are from Xenophon) with Diod. 13.105.3–4.

⁶*RFIC* 9(1931) 222–229.

⁷G. L. Cawkwell's phrase, *Didaskalos* 2.2 (1967) 51.

⁸This paper was read at the 101st annual meeting of the American Philological Association, San Francisco, December 1969. At that time I did not know that Robert J. Littman, "The Strategy of the Battle of Cyzicus," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 265–272, had reached almost identical conclusions about Xenophon's account of the battle of Cyzicus (*Hell.* 1.1.11–18).