

## THUC. 5.65.3 AND THE TACTICAL OBSESSION OF AGIS II ON THE DAY BEFORE THE BATTLE OF MANTINEA

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Agis II, Eurypontid King of Sparta, had much to do with the course and outcome of the Peloponnesian War. From 426 on he led repeated Peloponnesian invasions of Attica. He signed the treaty of alliance with Athens in 422/1. The truce he hastily concluded in the Argolid in the summer of 418 was unpopular and led, after threats of worse punishment, to temporary restrictions on his powers (Thuc. 5.60; 63.2–4). Yet both in the preceding year 419, and again in 415, after the victorious Battle of Mantinea later in 418, his Peloponnesian campaigns were generally successful. And, after occupying Decelea in Attica in 413 he there enjoyed extraordinary powers (8.5.2), so that, operating from this outpost as a base until 404, he was able to conduct a campaign in North Greece, constantly and effectively to harass Attica (7.27.4), to intrigue with the Four Hundred, to support the Spartan naval policy in the Aegean, and to cooperate in ending the Peloponnesian War. Thereafter from 400 until his health failed in 399 or early 398 he conducted successful campaigns against Elis. And, upon his death, which followed shortly, he was buried with something like divine honors (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1).

As the *indices nominum* illustrate more fully than I can here, this long prominence, extending over decades of bitter warfare and well into the period of postwar Spartan dominance, of course brings Agis over and over again into the narrative of our main sources. Yet it is amazing how obscure his personality remains for us. Neither Thucydides nor Xenophon gives us anything like an extensive characterization. Perhaps, in the Laconic manner, he was not very forthcoming, and so did not gain much hold on the attention of his contemporaries. If that is indeed true, then doubtless our investigations into Agis' thought processes can never advance very far. For it is hard to believe that we, at this remove, can deeply penetrate a personality which was largely closed to the men of its own time. Nevertheless, any place where our authors dwell on Agis' thinking, even if

only in passing, is bound to have special interest for us.<sup>1</sup> That is the case with the passage which is the particular concern of this paper.

The passage occurs where Thucydides has just narrated a move made to the north from Tegea by a large force of Lacedaemonians and Helots under Agis, their purpose being to forestall a move south which threatened on the part of the Argives and their allies in the neighborhood of Mantinea. These met Agis' advance by drawing up for battle on steep ground, probably the slopes of Mt. Alesion, and Agis came on despite the fact that the position was unfavorable to him and his forces. He continued advancing until one of the older men called to him that this was no way to make amends for his earlier precipitate withdrawal from Argos (5.60.2,5; 63.2-3), which many had criticized as cowardly, or at least ill-advised. At this point our text continues:

ὁ δὲ (sc. Ἄγις) εἶτε καὶ διὰ τὸ ἐπιβόημα εἶτε καὶ αὐτῷ ἄλλο τι ἢ “κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ” δόξαν ἐξαίφνης, πάλιν τὸ στράτευμα κατὰ τάχος πρὶν ξυμμεῖλαι ἀπήγεν. (5.65.3)  
 (“κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ” pro sententia Agidis habeo et sic distinxi ἢ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ABCEFGM, Krüger, Classen-Steup, Jones-Powell, Smith, del. Dobree probante Steup ἢ καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ recc., Campe, Rauchenstein, de Romilly ἢ del. Poppo-Stahl, Hude)

Now, as the critical apparatus makes clear, this passage has caused later scribes and modern editors and exegetes much trouble, and it is indeed generally considered to be an irremediable *crux*, which allows no intelligible translation. Nevertheless I venture to suggest an entirely new interpretation—“Agis, whether on account of this call, or because he himself had suddenly taken some other firm decision rather than ‘straight on as before!’, led his army back again in all haste without coming into conflict.” In support of this interpretation I would like to bring up four points:

(1) *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό* in its conventionalized sense as equivalent to *κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ πρότερον* applies properly to any motion which continues in the present in a fashion consistent with itself in the past. This use is found, e.g.,

<sup>1</sup>Diodorus 12-14 garbles various details of Agis' career, and, lacking the freshness of a contemporary account, brings little information about Agis' mind and manners. Even our best authors only really make us privy to Agis' thoughts at Thuc. 5.65.3 and two other places. At Thuc. 8.81.1 we learn how his preconceptions colored his understanding of the importance of the oligarchy of the 400, and how the expectations which led him to attempt to seize the opportunity of the political difficulties by attacking the walls of Athens were disappointed. Then at *Hell.* 1.1.35 Xenophon tells us of Agis' reflections on the importance of a Spartan naval effort against Athens. These were sound military thinking. But as *Hell.* 1.1.36 goes on to relate, Agis' own early efforts to develop a naval strategy were awkward and led to but disappointing results. Spartan successes in this direction had to wait for Lysander.

in Plato, *Timaeus* 34a διὸ δὴ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιγαγὼν (sc. ὁ τὸν κόσμον ξυνιστᾶς) αὐτὸ (sc. τὸ τὰ πάντ' ἐν αὐτῷ ζῶα περιέχοντα ζῶον) ἐποίησε κύκλῳ κινεῖσθαι στρεφόμενον "wherefore he spun it around *uniformly* in the same spot and within itself and made it move revolving in a circle" (Bury), 36c τῇ κατὰ ταῦτὰ . . . περιαγομένη κινήσει, 38a, d, 40a, b *ei saepe*, where it describes the changeless steadiness of the rotary movement of the universe. The great difference between these passages in Plato and our passage in Thucydides is that Thucydides applies the phrase in a military sense, as the equivalent of a command, to the relentlessly steady advance of troops.<sup>2</sup>

(2) The use of the accusative absolute δόξαν represents, with the addition of a causal connotation, a compressed form of the statement ἔδοξε αὐτῷ (sc. τῷ "Αγιδι) ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ "κατὰ τὸ αὐτό." What we have therefore is a version of the standard construction of impersonal forms of δοκέω taken

<sup>2</sup>κατὰ τὸ αὐτό most likely was in actual use as a military command (cf. the modern equivalent direction to a helmsman at sea "Steady as you go"). But, if it was not, it certainly is used here after the analogy of prepositional phrases which were so used. I have discussed the syntactical peculiarities of the more common kinds of prepositional phrases used as military commands, as, e.g., ἐπὶ δόρυ, ἐπ' ἀσπίδα, εἰς τὰ σπλα, ἐπὶ τὸν δεινα, κ.τ.λ. in *Zur syntaktischen Theorie und Textkritik der attischen Autoren* (Zürich 1971) 84-90, "Präpositionale Ausdrücke aus dem Bereich der militärischen Sprache und der Kanzleisprache," where I make the necessary connection with the instructions for drill-sergeants found in Arrian, *Tactica* 31-32. In order to avoid repeating the same material, I will show here an example which comes from a later text but represents the kind of problem typical in Classical passages involving such phrases, Pausanias 4.23.3 'Αριστομένης δὲ . . . τοῖς Μεσσηνίοις ἐπέταξεν "ἐς Κυλλήνην." ("ἐς Κυλλήνην" pro verbo ducis habeo et sic distinxi ἐπέταξεν ἐς Κυλλήνην codd., Rocha-Pereira ἐπέταξεν ἰέναι ἐς Κυλλήνην Clavier, Spiro, Jones-Ormerod) The needless addition of a verb of motion, which in this example has now fortunately been removed by Rocha-Pereira, is not the only trouble which such phrases have caused. Perhaps the most interesting example in Thucydides, apart from our principal passage, is at 5.72.1 ξυνέβη οὖν . . . κελεύσαντος αὐτοῦ (sc. τοῦ "Αγιδος) "ἐπὶ τοὺς Σκιρίτας," ὡς οὐ παρήλθον οἱ λόχοι (sc. ἐπὶ τὸ μέρος τῶν Σκιριτῶν sic Schol.), πάλιν αὖ σφίσι (sc. τοῖς ἀμφὶ τὸν "Αγίδα τοὺς Σκιρίτας) προσμείξαι μὴ δυνηθῆναι ἔτι μηδὲ τούτους συγκληῖσαι. "Thus it happened that after Agis gave the order 'over alongside the Skiritae!,' when the companies did not move along the line to the sector of the Skiritae, the Skiritae for their part were no longer able to make conjunction with the troops in Agis' sector, and the Skiritae did not close up the line either." Here Krüger correctly saw that ἐπὶ τοὺς Σκιρίτας must go with the preceding genitive absolute, not with the following ὡς clause. Others have failed to follow his lead, but that leaves the text in an awkward plight. See Gomme's despairing note, which is not much improved by Andrewes' additions. To me this second use by Thucydides of drill-sergeants' idiom in connection with Agis gives strong support to my interpretation of 5.65.3. The peculiarities of both passages must arise from Thucydides' effort to give stylistic characterization to Agis.

with a dative virtual subject as a verb of thinking and deciding.<sup>3</sup> Only here, by use of the comparative *ἤ*, the pronominal expression *ἄλλο τι* is substituted for *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό*, which represents the earlier somewhat obsessive thought in Agis' mind. The aorist in this construction is used especially of decisions which have been reached by formal consideration in consultation or assembly.<sup>4</sup> And it is for this passage a particular expressive advantage of the accusative absolute form of the construction—as opposed, that is, to the finite form *ἔδοξε*—that the accusative absolute is *regularly* so used of formally reached decisions.<sup>5</sup> Thus the application of *δόξαν* to a single person who consulted with no one is deliberately abusive, and can only be interpreted as a sarcastic thrust at Agis' autocratic ways.

(3) The reason why attempts to explain *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό* have hitherto failed is that they have been made with reference to Thucydides' usage elsewhere. But there is no other example in Thucydides of neuter forms of *ὁ αὐτός* standing alone without a substantive and construed with *κατά* which can serve as a parallel to our passage. The most obvious reason for this is that nowhere else in Thucydides is such a prepositional phrase a virtual quotation which must be interpreted in syntactical isolation from its surroundings. Rather, in the other examples of such phrases—there are only two—the form of *ὁ αὐτός* standing alone implies a specific elided comparison which must be drawn from Thucydides' context. At 8.5.5 *οἱ μὲν οὖν Χίοι καὶ Τισσαφέρνῃς κοινῇ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ* (sc. *ἀλλήλοις*) *ἔπρασσον* the comparison is internal to a specified plurality, and the elided comparison is correctly supplied in the form of a dative reflexive pronoun.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand at 5.66.4 *κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ* (sc. *τοῖς πρότερον ὑπὸ βασιλείῳ τοῖς πολεμάρχοις φραζομένοις*) we must supply a dative substantive participle,<sup>7</sup> and there is also a perceptible move toward the

<sup>3</sup>See LSJ s.v. *δοκέω* II.4.

<sup>4</sup>See the examples in LSJ s.v. *δοκέω* II.4.b, where the comment is "freq. of a public resolution, esp. in decrees and the like."

<sup>5</sup>So LSJ s.v. *δοκέω* II.4.c translate *δόξαν* "when it was decreed or resolved." See the Thucydidean examples at 8.79.1 *δόξαν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ ξυνόδου*, 8.93.1 *ἐξεκλησιάσαν τε καὶ δόξαν αὐτοῖς*, and cf. Xen. *Anab.* 4.1.13 *δόξαν δὲ ταῦτα ἐκήρυξαν οὕτω ποιεῖν*. Even in a humorously catachrestic example like that at Plato, *Proi.* 314c *Δόξαν ἡμῖν ταῦτα ἐπορευόμεθα*, where there is only a small group of philosophers involved, there is still a definite intent to convey the sense that a group decision has been reached by common consent.

<sup>6</sup>Similar examples may be found at 1.79.2 *ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ* (sc. *ἀλλήλοις*), 4.96.2 *τὸ αὐτὸ* (sc. *ἀλλήλοις*), 5.38.1, 5.48.2, 5.96 *τὸ αὐτὸ* (sc. *ἀλλήλοις*), 6.38.5(bis), 8.78.1 *ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ* (sc. *ἀλλήλοις*).

<sup>7</sup>See 3.42.6 *τῷ αὐτῷ* (sc. *τῷ κατορθοῦντι*), 4.114.3 *τῶν αὐτῶν* (sc. *τοῖς πράξασιν πρὸς αὐτὸν* [i.e., *τὸν Βρασίδαν*] *τὴν λῆψιν τῆς πόλεως*, cf. Schol. ad loc. *τῶν αὐτῶν τοῖς προδόταις*), 6.80.4 *οἱ αὐτοὶ* (sc. *τῷ τὴν νίκην παρασχόντι*), 8.87.5 *τὰ . . . αὐτὰ* (sc. *τῷ πολλὰ τῶν βασιλείῳ ἀναλίσσαντι*).

commonplace, more specifically temporal, ellipses.<sup>8</sup> Nothing like this can be made to fit in our passage, except at the price of lame insipidity.<sup>9</sup>

The other and less obvious reason that there is no precedent for *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό* as used at 5.65.3 in Thucydides is that what we have here must be a *technical* use of the phrase. Even if we could restore a supposed original context in Agis' Laconic thought processes, it would still be a prepositional phrase in the sense of a military command, and unlike any other phrase with *κατά* in Thucydides. But we can readily discern from the passages cited in note 8 how *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό* could by idiomatic extension and technical specialization come to mean *κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ πρότερον* "straight on as before." And it should cause no surprise that Thucydides, who is accustomed to think in more complicated terms than those of the drill-sergeant, should have had no occasion to use the phrase in such a special way except when he wanted to characterize Agis, most of whose thoughts may well have been tantamount to barked commands.

(4) The new interpretation makes of this passage, despite its brevity, what amounts to our single most trenchant *portrait* of Agis II. It presents him as an unimaginative and arbitrary Lacedaemonian militarist. That is much the same conclusion one would tend hesitatingly to draw from what we learn elsewhere of the man. But what a comfort it is to have in this brilliantly turned phrase the clear confirmation of the impression gained from our other reading. It even changes one's appreciation of all the other peculiar treatment Agis gets. Due to our new understanding of Thucydides' estimate of the man, what seemed before baffling vagueness now seems most naturally taken to be a sometimes pointedly wry attitude on the part of our authors. Thus the closer study and consequent better comprehension of this one clause allows us quite to savor what were formerly rather joyless stretches interspersed from the third book of Thucydides through the fourth book of Xenophon's *Hellenica*. That is a far

<sup>8</sup>See 1.124.1–2 *τὸ αὐτὸ* (sc. *τοῖς ἤδη πρότερον βλαπτομένοις*), 2.36.1 *οἱ αὐτοὶ* (sc. *τοῖς πρότερον τὴν χώραν οἰκοῦσιν Ἀθηναίοις*), 2.51.6 *τὸν αὐτὸν* (sc. *τῷ πρότερον ποινουμένῳ καὶ ἤδη διαφευγόντι*), 2.61.2 *ὁ αὐτός* (sc. *τῷ πρότερον Περικλεῖ ὄντι*), 2.89.2, 3.38.1 *ὁ αὐτός* (sc. *τῷ πρότερον Κλέωνι ὄντι*, cf. Schol. ad loc. *ὁ αὐτός εἰμι τῇ γνώμῃ ἡγουν τοῖς δεδογμένοις ἐμμένω*), 3.59.3, 4.50.2, 5.75.3 *et saepe*.

<sup>9</sup>What such an effort must lead to is understood and uneasily explained by Gomme-Andrewes *ad loc.*: "εἴτε καὶ αὐτῷ ἄλλο τι ἢ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ δόξαν: 'or because he himself had suddenly changed his mind' must be the meaning (so Warner), but 'because he too decided otherwise than on the same lines' is not easy." But then after Gomme-Andrewes rehearse the familiar emendations they opt for none and can only conclude "*ἡ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ* is certainly a very odd phrase." My solution accepts the fact that *κατὰ τὸ αὐτό* as here used is unexampled and goes on from there.

greater gain than anyone had hitherto hoped to win from the longstanding difficulties of this passage.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>I wish to thank Alison Burford, James Poultney, and the *TAPA* referees for reading this article and advising me on it.