

Russell's Anthology of Greek Prose

Text 17: The final defeat and death of Nicias (Thucydides)

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a) Source:

Historiae 7. 84-86.

b) Background (synopsis quoted from Russell's book):

"The Athenian expedition to Sicily (415-413 BC) ended in disaster, with the destruction of the army following a naval defeat in the Great Harbour of Syracuse. Thucydides' account has always been recognized as one of the most graphic and moving narratives in any ancient historian."

c) Language comment:

From line 10 on there are some difficult sentences that describe the battle in the river and how the Athenian soldiers disturbed each other and the problems they had with their own baggage. Lines 57-61 may also present some difficulty. The rest of the text is as expected in Thucydides.

d) Content:

The Athenian army is withdrawing, but the Syracusans and the Spartans don't stop attacking them. The lack of water adds another problem to their desperate situation, and the Athenians' arrival into the river is chaotic, making it really easy for their enemies to kill them. Nicias surrenders his troops in the hope that this will stop the slaughter. The prisoners are taken into the quarries of Syracuse, and the two Athenian generals are put to death.

e) Distribution of content:

(numbers refer to the lines in the printed edition)

1-20:	Battle in the river.
20-28:	Nicias surrenders.
28-41:	The survivors in numbers.
42-47:	Their destiny.
48-56:	Gilippo's plan.
56-65:	The Syracusans oppose to this plan.

f) Notes for help:

2) *ξύμμαχοι*: note older Attic *ξύν* for *σύν*. cf. 29,31,34,42,45,50,61.

2) *προσκεῖμαι*: here = "to attack".

2) *προσέκειντο*: 'pursued closely' (mil. sense more often = be placed by /near, be attached to).

2) *τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον*: "in the same way", Russell cites Goodwin 1060 ('an accusative in certain expressions has the force of an adverb').

3-4) *ἐπέιγω* = "to push".

4) ff. *ἅμα μὲν βιαζόμενοι...ἅμα δ' ὑπό...*: Russell notes Thuc. variety of construction: participle + abstract nouns, the latter themselves varied (prepositional phrase + dative, *ὑπὸ τῆς ταλαιπωρίας...ἐπιθυμία* + genit.). These give the external and then internal pressures on the Athenians.

6) *ἔσεσθαι*: the subject is missing, something as "the situation".

6) *οἰόμενοι* + acc. and inf. : "thinking things would be easier for them (reflexive *σφίσιν*, cf. 58, 60, and singular *οἱ* 48-9)". This centrally positioned participial clause is dominant, and *βιαζόμενοι* is subordinate to *οἰόμενοι* (see Marchant): it is because they are under pressure that they think things will be easier if they cross the river.

6) *ἦν* = *έάν*. Ex. of older Attic (also Xenophon). Note vivid sequence of the direct speech/thought after past verb of statement/thought.

6) *διαβῶσι*: aor. subj. *διαβαίνω*.

7) a strange lack of symmetry: *ὑπὸ τῆς ταλαιπωρίας*, as depending on *βιαζόμενοι*, is one of the reasons, and (*τῆ*) *ἐπιθυμία* is the other one; of course, the genitive *τοῦ*

πίνειν has nothing to do with the former genitive agent.

8) vivid historic presents (Russell cites Goodwin 1060: this is a mistake for 1252) breaking into all the imperfect tenses before and after. cf. 24.

8) *ἔτι*: emphatic in final position, 'in what was no longer in any good order'.

9-10) *πᾶς τις...βουλόμενος*: "the fact that everyone ...". Russell cites WS 2053 for participle and noun (cf. Lat. post urbem conditam = after the foundation of the city), used like articular infinitive.

9) *διαβῆναι*: aor. infin. *διαβαίνω* (cf. 6).

10) *ἐπικείμενοι*: here = "to attack".

10) *χαλεπήν*: predicative position, "made the crossing difficult".

10) *τὴν διάβασιν ἐποίουν*: cf. Antiphon for fondness for abstract nouns, cf. 40 *ἀναχώρησις*, 46 *τήρησις*, 65 *ἐπιτήδευσις*.

12) *περί* + dat.: = around (of place), Russell cites Goodwin 1214 ("chiefly poetical").

12) about the meaning of *σκεῦος* here, it may mean "weapon" or also "equipment" in the sense that their own equipment prevented them from moving and running, or even making them go down the water.

13) *ἐμπαλασσόμενοι*: here it means "entangled", and it would go with the former *σκεύεσιν*, having it finally the meaning of "equipment".

13) *κατέρρεον*: impf. *καταρρέω*. Russell trans. 'collapsed': a sense that is found (LSJ 4 'fall in ruins'): better here 'were pulled under', 'were swept away'.

13-14) *ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ θάτερά τε τοῦ ποταμοῦ*: note position of *τε* (connective); ex. of prepositional phrase after neuter plural of article.

16) Note word-order of *ἐν κοίλῳ ὄντι τῷ ποταμῷ*: how does the sense differ from *ἐν τῷ κοίλῳ ποταμῷ*?

16-7) *σφίσιν*: reflexive referring to Athenians

17) *ἐπικαταβάντες* (aor. pple. *ἐπικαταβαίνω*): double compound (both banks were steep). Thuc. like Antiphon likes compound verbs generally.

18-19) *εὐθύς διέφθαρτο* (plupft. pass. *διαφθείρω*, 'corrupted'): "the plup. is occasionally thus used with *εὐθύς* to express a result hastily arrived at, esp. in combination with the imperf., e.g. Dem. 19.154 *τότ' εὐθύς ἐγνώκειν καὶ προεωρώμην*" (Marchant).

19) *ἐπίνετο*: passive, the subject being the water.

19) *οὐδὲν ἥσσον*: "none the less", "just as much". Note as in Antiphon older Attic *ἥσσον*, later *ἥττον*. cf. 36 *ἐλάσσων*.

20) ἡματωμένον: perf. pass. pple. αἱματόω, 'to make bloody'.

20) περιμάχητον ἦν τοῖς πολλοῖς: strange construction of verbal adjective, "the water had to be fought for"; the normal thing here is that the verbal passive adjective has its agent in dative, as the rule says.

21-2) two genitive absolutes.

21) ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι: 'on top of each other'.

21-23) very long genitive absolute, that at the end includes a conditional.

22-3) τοῦ μέν...τοῦ δὲ καί: in apposition to διεφθαρμένου. (καί = also)

23) εἴ τι διαφύγοι: Russell cites WS 2568, Goodwin 1393 for past general/indefinite conditional clause, "if ever any (of the army) escaped".

24) παραδίδωσι: cf. 8 for vivid historic present at moment of climax.

25-6) ἐαντῷ χρήσασθαι [verb used + dat.] ὅτι βούλονται: "to deal with him(self) however [but not strictly an indefinite clause] they liked" (formula for unconditional surrender). Russell cites Goodwin 1487(2) for vivid retention of tense of direct speech.

26) ὅτι βούλονται: it would have been more normal to find a subjunctive + ἄν, but the live style is maintained; of course, ὅτι = ὅ τι.

27) φονεύοντας (pple. after παύσασθαι, 'to stop slaughtering'): Ionic word, found in Hdt. and tragedy, 4 exx. in Thuc. (Slaughter word, as often, at end of sentence.)

28) ὅσους μὴ ἀπεκρύψαντο: generic μή, "all those the Syracusans had not hidden away for their own purposes" (viz. to make money from ransom).

30-1) τῆς νυκτός: gen. of time within which (Russell cites Goodwin 1136).

31) τοὺς διωξομένους: fut. pple with hint of purpose; note middle form of future of διώκω.

31-2) τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀθροισθέν (aor. pass. pple. ἀθροίζω) ... τὸ δὲ διακλαπέν (aor. pass. pple. διακλέπτω) ... : "the part of the army gathered together publicly was not large, but the part undetected was large": note (a) pointed repetition of οὐ πολὺ...πολύ and (b) Thuc. liking for articular nouns made from neuter expressions with adjectives and participles (the latter are rarer).

32) ἐς τὸ κοινόν = "for the state".

33) αὐτῶν: gen. after διεπλήσθη (aor. pass. διαπίμπλημι): "was filled with them".

33) ἄτε: explanatory force.

33) κλέπτω has two passive aorists: the first one ἐκλέφθη and the second one ἐκλάπη, and the participle διακλαπέν comes from this second one.

- 34) *ληφθέντων*: aor. pass. pple. *λαμβάνω*; agrees with *αὐτῶν* (33).
- 34) *σύμβασις* = "treaty".
- 34-35) *ληφθέντων*: it goes with the former *αὐτῶν*.
- 35) *καὶ ἀπέθανεν*: emph. *καί*, 'actually'. cf. e.g. the first 2 exx. in 39.
- 35-6) *οὗτος*: no article, "this was the greatest killing".
- 36) *οὐδενὸς ἐλάσσων* (+ gen. of comparison): "inferior to none of". On *-σ-*, cf. note on 19; the genitive of comparison is *οὐδενός*, not the following *τῶν*, which rather depends on *οὐδενός*.
- 38) *γενομέναις*: instantaneous aor. pple. (not prior to action of main verb *ἐτεθνήκεσαν*, pluperf. with aor. sense, cf. 63)
- 39-40) see Russell for present ptcp. *διαδράσκοντες* (explaining how they escaped), aor. ptcp. *δουλεύσαντες* (stating as fact what had happened to them - they were enslaved - which delayed their escape).
- 40) curious use of the possessive dative.
- 42) *ξυναθροισθέντες*: aor. pass. pple. *ξυναθροίζω*.
- 43) *ὅσους ἐδύναντο*: understand *ἀναλαβεῖν* from *ἀναλαμβάνοντες* (aor. pple. *ἀναλαμβάνω*) - 'as many as they could [pick up]'
- 47) *ἄκοντος*: gen. absolute.
- 48-49) *ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις* = "moreover of the other things".
- 48-9) "Gylippus thought that in addition to everything else (*ἐπί* + dat.) to take also the enemy generals back to Sparta would be a glorious success for him (reflexive dative *οἱ*)." [But 'a glorious success' - Russell's trans. - doesn't quite bring out the force of the predicative adj. *καλόν*: perhaps better 'thought that the success was glorious for him, to take also . . .]
- 50) *ξυνέβαινε*: impersonal, 'it happened that', with acc. and infin.
- 50-1) *τὸν μὲν...τὸν δέ*: the one . . . the other. N.B. *μὲν* mistakenly omitted in 1st ed. of Russell.
- 53) *προθυμέομαι* has a passive deponent aorist.
- 54) *ὥστε ἀφεθῆναι* (aor. pass. infin. *ἀφίημι*): depending on 53 *προϋθυμήθη* (Russell), and the subject of *ἀφεθῆναι* is *τοὺς ἄνδρας* in line 52. *τοὺς...τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων* is subject of *ἀφεθῆναι*, not object of *προϋθυμήθη*.
- 57) *ὅτι*: causal meaning.

57,59) μή after verb of fearing, + subjunctives ποιήσῃ and ἀποδρᾷ...γένηται. In 57 ὅτι is causal, 'because'.

59) δῆ: indicating it was alleged or imagined. Russell cites Denniston 233.

60) ἀποδρᾷ: aor. subj. ἀποδιδράσκω.

61) νεώτερον: as often pejorative = new, strange, unwelcome . (νεώτερόν τι subject of vb. γένηται).

62) ὅτι ἐγγύτατα: ὅτι = ὅ τι, and ἐγγύτατα is a superlative adverb, moreover, supply εἶη.

62) τοιαύτη ἢ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τούτων αἰτίας: "by a reason like this or one as near as possible to this".

63) again a pluperfect.

63) ἐπ' ἐμοῦ = "in my time".

63) τῶν γε ἐπ' ἐμοῦ Ἑλλήνων: "the Greeks in my lifetime at least".

64) ἐς τοῦτο δυστυχίας: "to this point of misfortune", Russell cites Goodwin 1088 for partitive gen.

64-5) see Russell, accepting Dover that πᾶσαν and νενομισμένην go with ἐπιτήδευσιν, and translating "because his whole way of life was conducted in the direction of the highest standards". Note νομίζω = use customarily, practice.
