

Failures in Athenian Espionage: An Examination of Espionage in Thucydides

In Thucydides, when you look at his spy stories, a pattern emerges. You start to see that, in general, Athenian spies tend to be unsuccessful, and non-Athenian spies tend to be successful. We can especially see this when comparing how much Syracuse knows about Athens during the Sicilian Expedition to how much Athens knows about Sicily. While it is interesting in itself that Athenians tend to fail at gathering information, I also intend to explore why Thucydides writes about Athenian espionage like this. As I see it, there are three possible reasons for this.

Firstly, it is possible that this was just a historical reality. Essentially, Athenian spies are bad at their jobs in Thucydides because they were actually bad at their jobs. To examine this possibility, I will compare Thucydides' depiction of Athenian spies to Xenophon's depiction in *Hellenica* to see if they are also largely ineffective. The second possibility is that Thucydides is doing this as a rhetorical device to push the Athenians to adopt a more systematic approach to espionage; similarly to what Aristotle suggests the Syracusans have adopted in *Politics* 1313b. To look at this, I will and show what evidence there is that the Lacedaemonians and Syracusans had established these systems, and try while showing that Athenians did not have these systems in place. The final possibility is that Thucydides is projecting his problems at Amphipolis onto failures by other Athenians. In his account of Brasidas in 4.104, he writes that his appearance was a "complete surprise", or, "τῆς δὲ διαβάσεως αὐτοῦ ἄφνω τοῖς ἐν τῇ πόλει γεγεμένης" in Greek. It is possible that Thucydides is filling gaps in stories he is receiving by filling in with his own personal experience losing to Brasidas. Regardless of why this happens, I hope to shed some light on this trend to help better understand espionage in the Peloponnesian War and how it affected how authors wrote about the conflict.

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