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*Sergei G. Karpyuk*

## THUCYDIDES ON ISLANDS AND ISLANDERS\*

When the Aristophanic hero Strepsiades saw the island of Euboea on the map, the picture of the island did not surprise him: an island like many others, only stretched out in length:

DISCIPLE: ... And this is Euboea, you see.  
Here it is, so stretched out in length.

STREPSIADES: Yes, we did stretch down the poor thing with Pericles.<sup>1</sup>

(*Nub.* 211–213)

The role of islands in ancient (and not only ancient) Greek civilization was obviously great.<sup>1</sup> In the unique closed basin of the Mediterranean, islands cover 4% of the surface. They constitute 16.7% of the territory of today's Italy and 19.1% of modern Greece. In ancient times this percentage was even higher for Greece, since Cyprus and Sicily were part of the Greek world as well. Islands as small as Aegina (83 km<sup>2</sup>) or even Delos (3.5 km<sup>2</sup>), as well as the large ones (Crete, 8300 km<sup>2</sup> or Rhodes, 1404 km<sup>2</sup>, etc.) played an important part in the history of ancient Greece.

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\* I am most grateful to Prof. P.J. Rhodes for inspiration and improvement of the English text of my article, and to the British Academy for the opportunity to work in the library of Durham University.

<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes makes play with different meanings of the verb παρατείνω: 'to stretch out' (212) and 'to stretch down' (213). The allusion is to Pericles' expedition to Euboea in the 440s, Strepsiades belonging to that generation.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, not only the encyclopaedias, but also some monographs on classical Greece prefer to ignore the problem of the islands. A recent example is: J. Buckler, *Aegean Greece in the Fourth Century B.C.*, Leiden, 2003. The same is true of some textbooks: P. Pédech, *La géographie des Grecs*, Paris, 1976.

Modern scholars pay surprisingly little attention to this phenomenon. One could even speak of a striking ‘reticence conspiracy’ of encyclopaedias as far as islands are concerned. An article *Insel* is not to be found in *RE* or in *Der kleine Pauly*, though the latter has articles *Insula* (in the sense of *domus*), *Inkrustationen*, and of course *Inschriften* and *Instituten*.<sup>3</sup> The fifth volume of *Der neue Pauly* includes an article about the ‘Islands of the Blessed’.<sup>4</sup> To do justice to all these encyclopaedias, one must point out that all of them have articles on the Islanders (*Nesiotai*) in various meanings of the Greek word, such as (1) the fifth tribute district of the First Athenian Sea Alliance and (2) a federal body in the Aegean that existed from the late-4<sup>th</sup> to the early-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 2003 that the article entitled *Insel* (no bigger than that about *Insekten*) was published in the second part of the twelfth volume of *Der neue Pauly* (‘Nachträge’), its opening words reading ‘For many inhabitants of the ancient world an island was a natural dwelling place’.<sup>6</sup>

There are several approaches to the study of islands in ancient Greece. First, we should mention the mythological one. Using this framework, Roger Dion, to cite just one example, traced the links between mythological or epic motifs (the stories of Jason, Odysseus and others having to do with islands) and the reality of Greek colonization or the rivalry of Greek cities in the archaic period.<sup>7</sup> One must not forget that descriptions of islands (*nesiotike*), Utopias of many kinds and accounts of the Isles of the Blessed became literary genres in vogue with the general public in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Another important approach to the study of islands is the complex archaeological study of particular islands, C. Renfrew’s book on Melos<sup>8</sup> and Roland Etienne’s book on Tenos<sup>9</sup> being well-known examples. This approach, if its scale is widened, may lead to a true breakthrough in classical scholarship. However, it is practised first and foremost by archaeologists, who are usually less interested in

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<sup>3</sup> *Der kleine Pauly*, Bd 2, Stuttgart, 1967, coll. 1411–1418.

<sup>4</sup> E. Olshausen, ‘Makaron Nesoi’ (αἱ τῶν μακάρων νήσοι, *insulae fortunatae*): *Der neue Pauly*, Bd 7, Stuttgart, 1999, col. 725.

<sup>5</sup> *RE* published the fundamental article by W. Schwan, ‘Nesiotai’, *RE*, Bd 17 (1), Stuttgart, 1936, coll. 70–77. The article on *nesiotai* in *Der kleine Pauly* deals only with the Island region in Athens’ Delian League: E. Meyer, ‘Nesiotai (2)’, *Der kleine Pauly*, Bd. 4, München, 1972, col. 78. The Hellenistic League of Islanders is dealt with in *Der neue Pauly*: P.J. Rhodes, ‘Nesiotai (2)’, *Der neue Pauly*, Bd 8, Stuttgart, 2000, coll. 859–860.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Latsh, ‘Insel’, *Der neue Pauly*. Bd. 12/2, Stuttgart, 2003, coll. 1023–1925. The bibliography at the end of the article is not satisfactory, for it lists books on particular islands, but not on islands in general.

<sup>7</sup> R. Dion, *Aspects politiques de la géographie antique*, Paris, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> C. Renfrew, M. Wagstaff (edd.), *An Island Polity. The Archaeology of Exploitation of Melos*, Cambridge, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> R. Etienne, *Ténos, II. Ténos et les Cyclades du milieu du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. au milieu du III<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C.* (BEFAR 263bis), Athènes–Paris, 1990.

historical research than in demographic, economic, soil studies etc. Moreover, this approach implies so broad a scale that it takes the whole of antiquity (or at least the archaic and classical periods) for a single unit, thus making historical research impossible or unnecessary.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, there is the politico-geographical approach. I am deeply convinced that it was only natural that students of Thucydides were the first to become interested in the islands. For it was Thucydides and his contemporaries (Aristophanes, Pseudo-Xenophon) who began to think of the inhabitants of the Archipelago mainly as subjects of the Athenian *Arche*.<sup>11</sup> After that the word 'island' acquired a geopolitical (or politico-geographical) connotation. It was no mere chance that the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996) for the first time published an article on islands written by a well-known British historian, Simon Hornblower, who was also a member of the editorial board of this dictionary: the beginning of the article is: 'Islands were and are one of the most obvious realities of Greek life'.<sup>12</sup> But even as early as 1980 the Italian scholar Emilio Gabba in his public lecture in Cambridge (later published in *The Journal of Roman Studies*) underlined that Thucydides' *History* was 'a product of the civilization of the polis of the late fifth century B.C.', and therefore his attitude towards the islands was determined by the concrete historical situation.<sup>13</sup>

In 1990s – 2000s the phenomenon of insularity has become more and more attractive for scholars. Patrice Brun underlines the specifics of the history of Aegean islands in the 5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C., considering the 4<sup>th</sup> century as the floruit for the world of the Aegean islands.<sup>14</sup> And Christine Constantakopoulou's book presents the complex approach to the Greek islands, and the discourse 'Athens as an island', very important for the student of Thucydides, has been examined there.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Demographic study of the eastern Mediterranean, chiefly for the present day (the sources for the ancient period are scarce), has been undertaken in the fundamental book: E.E. Kolodny, *Population des îles de la Grèce. Essai de géographie insulaire en Méditerranée orientale*. vols. 1–2, *Atlas*, Aix-en-Provence, 1974. Of some interest is a recent study of *synoikismos* on the islands: G. Reger, 'Islands with One Polis versus Islands with Several Poleis', in M.H. Hansen (ed.), *The Polis as an Urban Centre and as a Political Community* (Acts of the Copenhagen Polis Centre 4), Copenhagen, 1997, 450–492.

<sup>11</sup> See for details S.G. Karpyuk, 'Political Geography of Classical Athens: Thucydides and His Contemporaries on Island and Islanders', *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, 2005, no. 2, 27–41 (in Russian).

<sup>12</sup> S. Hornblower, 'Islands', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1996, 769.

<sup>13</sup> E. Gabba, 'True History and False History in Classical Antiquity', *JRS* 71 (1981), 50.

<sup>14</sup> P. Brun, *Les archipels égéens dans l'antiquité grecque (V<sup>e</sup>–II<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère)*, Paris 1996. Less successful is the effort of another French scholar: S. Vilatte, *L'insularité dans la pensée grecque* (Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 446), Paris, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> C. Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands. Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World*, Oxford, 2007, esp. ch. 5 'The Island of Athens', 137–175.

One of the postulates of the Athenian imperial democracy was control over the islands, and Thucydides, who recognised the right of the stronger, would at the same time condemn it in his famous ‘Melian dialogue’. But what did ‘island’ mean for him? The answer may seem easy. ‘Island’ means a piece of land surrounded by water. Islands could be either in the sea or in a river or lake. One could use a special term for small islets (*nesidion*). ‘Islanders’ therefore (naturally) are inhabitants of the islands. These obvious meanings are of course present in Thucydides’ *History*.

Thucydides, as well as Herodotus before him, uses the words ‘island’ and ‘islanders’ in his work quite often. On the face of it, this usage may seem quite trivial; as well as in other authors, ‘island’ in Thucydides is a piece of land surrounded by water and islanders are its inhabitants. To be sure, ‘islands’ in his *History* are normally mentioned in this trivial geographical meaning of the word (I 4,1; 5,1; 44,3; 47,1; II 66,1; 102,3; III 33,3; 104,1–2; IV 44,6; VIII 17,3, etc.). To cite just one example: ‘King Cyrus ... brought the Ionian cities on the mainland into the Persian Empire. Later Darius, with the aid of the Phoenician navy, conquered the islands as well’ (I 16).<sup>16</sup>

Thucydides, as well as his predecessor Herodotus, uses the same word νῆσος to denote both sea and river islands (I 109,4; cf. II 102,3). Small and often uninhabited islands are called νησίδιον (VI 2,6; VII 23,4; VIII 11,1). An island could easily acquire a very special meaning, its name becoming almost a common one. Thus the island of Sphacteria became for the Spartans a symbol of their misfortune: ‘Then, too, they were very greatly disheartened by the many unpredictable blows of fortune which had fallen upon them in such a short time, and they were constantly afraid that some other disaster might overtake them like the one at Sphacteria’ (IV 55,3; cf. IV 8,9; 13–14; 16,1; 17,1; 19,1 etc.).<sup>17</sup>

A precondition of the Peace of Nicias was that, on the island, the Lacedaemonians had sustained a defeat they had never suffered before (V 14,3; cf. V 24,2; 34,2; 35,4; 43,2; 75,3). For the Spartans Sphacteria became *the* island, so that the name required no further comment.<sup>18</sup> In this case one can already speak of a political and military nuance of the insular situation. In Thucydides’ *Archaeology* one even comes across a half-forgotten view of islanders as robbers and pirates: ‘Piracy was just as prevalent in the islands among the Carians and Phoenicians, who in fact colonized most of them’ (I 8,1).

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<sup>16</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, transl. by Rex Warner with introduction and notes by M.I. Finley, Harmondsworth, 1972 (Penguin Classics).

<sup>17</sup> Sphacteria is separated from the peninsula only by a narrow strait (A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. III, Oxford, 1956, 484–486). But it *is* an island, for it proved uncontrollable for the Spartans.

<sup>18</sup> The Spartan phobia of islands proved long-lasting: see Xen. *Hell.* VI 2,26.

Such attitude, though, was in Thucydides' opinion a matter of the mythological past (cf. Eur. *Her.* 84) and exercised no influence upon contemporary life. And even in that remote past mainland rulers like Agamemnon could wield power over 'many islands and all Argos' (I 9,4).

Lastly, there is one more sense of the word 'island', which is most topical and characteristic of the political situation of the late-5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is common knowledge that islands constituted a significant part of the Athenian *Arche*. In one of his speeches, Pericles said: 'We have plenty of land both in the islands and on the mainland' (Thuc. I 143,4). The Spartan king Archidamos was even more graphic: 'Most of them [the Athenian allies] are on the islands' (I 81,3).

Islands are regarded as a territory under Athenian control, and islanders, therefore, as subjects of the Athenian *Arche*. Examples are numerous *passim*, and especially in the well-known 'Melian dialogue' where the Athenians openly say to the Melians: 'We rule the sea and you are islanders, and weaker islanders too than the others; it is therefore particularly important that you should not escape' (V 97).<sup>19</sup> The Athenian representative Euphemus utters a phrase that reflects very well the Athenians' confidence that islands could be easily subjugated: '...While some allies, although they are islanders and easy for us to take over, enjoy complete freedom, because they are in convenient positions round the Peloponnese' (VI 85,2).

The Athenians took it for granted that the islanders had to be their subjects, and they were more afraid of unsubdued islanders than of mainlanders, who would be slow in taking measures for defending their independence: 'We are more concerned about the islanders like yourselves, who are still unsubdued...' (V 9). The reason why islands were to be subdued was τὸ νησιωτικόν, their position as islanders: 'As for the islanders round the Peloponnese, the Cephallenians and Zacynthians joined the expedition as independent powers, though in fact, with Athens in command of the sea, their position as islanders left them little freedom of choice' (VII 57,7).

Ideologically the subjection of islanders was grounded in their pretended weakness, submissiveness and inability to protect common Greek interests. The Athenian representative Euphemus declares that it was only just for the Athenians to have subjected Ionians and islanders, since the latter had had no courage to oppose the Persians and supported them in their war against the Greeks (VI 82,3).

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Thuc. III 91,2: 'They [the Athenians] wished to subdue Melos, which, although it was an island, had refused to submit to Athens or even to join the Athenian alliance.' The reason why the islanders should be Athenian subjects is simple, and the Athenians give it to the Melians: 'It is hardly likely therefore that, while we are in control of the sea, they [the Spartans] will cross over to an island' (V. 109). The Athenian claims are fully exposed in the 'Melian dialogue' (Thuc. V 97; 99). See Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. II, Oxford 1956, 393.

Enemies of Athens, therefore, considered the islands as a weak point of the Athenian *Arche*. The Spartan general Gylippus in his speech to the Sicilians listed islanders together with the Ionians and ‘rabble of all sorts’ (Ἰόνων καὶ νησιωτῶν καὶ ξυγκλύδων ἀνθρώπων, VII 5,4)<sup>20</sup>. When the situation on Sicily became critical for the Athenian forces, Gylippus first tried to make the islanders surrender: ‘Gylippus and Syracusans and their allies made a proclamation first to the islanders (οἱ ξύμμαχοι πρῶτον μὲν τῶν νησιωτῶν) offering their liberty to any who would come over to them’ (VII 68,2). The Athenian general Nicias, on the contrary, tried to maintain the islanders’ self-respect: ‘For where we have Argives, Mantineans, Athenians, and the best of the islanders (νησιωτῶν οἱ πρῶτοι) all together in a great combined force of excellent troops, how can we help feeling confident of victory?’ (VI 68,2). It is probable that islanders constituted a great, if not the main, part of the Athenian troops both in Sicily (VII 20,2) and on Melos (V 84,1).<sup>21</sup> The Athenians’ view of the matter being expressed by Thucydides, which islanders were islanders *par excellence* for the Athenians? Among their allies he mentions ‘the islands between the Peloponnese and Crete towards the east, and all the Cyclades except Melos and Thera’ (II 9,4). Those were ‘the islanders’ in the Athenians’ view by the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. In book VII, where Thucydides describes the Athenian *Arche* according to tribute districts, he says: ‘In the class of tribute-paying subjects were the Euboean peoples from Eretria, Chalcis, Styria, and Carystus, the peoples from the islands of Ceos, Andros, and Tenos, and from Ionia the peoples of Miletus, Samos, and Chios’ (VII 57,4).<sup>22</sup>

When Alcibiades together with Tissaphernes demanded that Ionia and all the neighbouring islands should be given to the King (VIII 56,4), what they meant was not all the islands, but only those lying close to Ionia. If the Spartans had acted more resolutely after the revolt on Euboea, the historian wrote, ‘the Hellespont and Ionia would have fallen into their hands, together with the islands and everything as far as Euboea – the whole Athenian empire, in fact’ (VIII 96,4). Here Thucydides obviously describes the island area under Athenian power.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘The islanders’ are condemned here not because of their insular position, but because Aegean *poleis* were despised by the Dorians from the Peloponnese and by Dorian colonists (A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, K.J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, Vol. IV, 384). Gylippus just redirected the accusation put forward by Alcibiades against the Sicilians themselves. In his speech Alcibiades had declared that the Sicilian cities had ‘swollen populations made out of all sorts of mixtures’, which produced their weakness (Thuc. VI 17,2).

<sup>21</sup> It is probable that the Aegean islands, having no land frontiers and a bigger population than they could feed, became a constant and available source of supplying crews and troops. See A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, K.J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. IV, Oxford, 1970, 396.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Thuc. VIII 43,3 – the Spartan idea of the ‘islands’.

Clazomenae was a special case, because it was situated both on the mainland and on an island (VIII 14,3). For the Athenians its insular position was especially attractive: 'The Athenians, after restoring the situation in Lesbos, sailed from there to Polichna on the mainland, which was being fortified by the Clazomenaeans. They captured the place and took the people back to their city on the island. ... So Clazomenae became Athenian again' (VIII 23,6).

The examples cited above show that for Thucydides the terms 'island' and "islanders" could have a geo-political meaning, which could even be predominant, but which did not come into conflict with the normal geographical sense of the words, that is, with islands actually being islands.

Let us now turn to the examples where geographical and 'geo-political' senses do not go together quite as well. Thus the city of Scione lay, geographically, on the mainland, on Pallene, the most westerly peninsula of Chalcidice. Potidaea, situated on the isthmus of Pallene, was tributary to Athens. But as far as one can see in Thucydides, both sides at war, the Athenians and the Spartans, regarded Scione as an island city. The Spartans, though, would in this case refer to the Athenians; Brasidas, whose speech Thucydides reports, says that 'they [the people of Scione] deserved the very greatest praise because, although Pallene inside the isthmus was cut off by the Athenian occupation of Potidaea and although they were thus practically in the position of islanders (καὶ ὄντες οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ νησιῶται), they nevertheless came forward on their own accord to claim their freedom...' (IV 120,3). Brasidas also 'thought that, Scione being in the position of an island, the Athenians would certainly send out a force against it...' (ἡγούμενος καὶ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους βοηθῆσαι ἂν ὡς ἐς νῆσον, IV 121,2)<sup>23</sup>.

The Athenian view of it (as shown by Thucydides) was even more definite: after the armistice the Athenians 'were not at all inclined to risk the result of arbitration; instead they were eager to send out an expeditionary force at once, since they were furious at the idea that now even islanders dared to revolt against them (οἱ ἐν ταῖς νήσοις ἤδη ὄντες ἀξιοῦσι σφῶν ἀφίστασθαι), and to trust in Spartan land power, which, in fact, would do them no good' (IV 122,5). Then, according to the scenario which had already worked with Mytilene, 'on the motion of Cleon a decree was passed immediately to recapture Scione and to put its inhabitants to death' (IV 122,6).

One can see, then, that Scione was considered by the Athenians as if situated on an island and therefore part and parcel of the Athenian empire, though the city was in fact situated on the peninsula of Pallene. In this particular case in Thucydides, political geography, or geo-politics, gained the upper hand over the

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<sup>23</sup> See S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. II, Oxford, 1996, 379 and 387.

normal physical geography (physical geography was superseded by geo-politics): Scione's geographical position was 'eliminated' because of the fact that the Athenians had control of Potidaea (i.e., the isthmus of the peninsula) and thus could keep land forces of another state (Sparta) from interfering in the affairs of this westernmost peninsula of Chalcidice.

The savage reprisal the Athenians carried out on Scione and Melos became a common argument of those who opposed the restoration of the Athenian rule. As early as the fourth century Isocrates, trying to excuse his native city in his *Panegyric*, regretted that the accusation had stuck to Athens (100). And stick it did, for even many centuries after that, in the second century A.D., Aelius Aristides kept justifying the Athenians in a very eloquent though not very convincing passage of his *Panathenaic* speech (302–312). But what is more important for us is the fact that, influenced by Thucydides, Arrian in his *Anabasis of Alexander* treated Scione as an island: the capture of Melos and Scione, small insular towns (νησιωτικά τε πόλίσματα), was shameful for the victors and not a great surprise for the whole of Hellas (I 9,5).<sup>24</sup>

Thus, from the point of view of political geography, or 'imperial geo-politics', the peninsula of Pallene turned out to be an island. But was the inverse change possible? Yes, it was. Such was the case with Sicily. Sicily is an island. M.I. Finley begins his book on Sicily with what one can think of as an indisputable assertion: 'Sicily is an island'.<sup>25</sup> How can one object? Thucydides himself would of course call Sicily an island (as in VI 1,1 where he stressed its uniqueness because of its great number of Greek settlements) and estimated its size (VI 1,1–2).<sup>26</sup> But things are a little more complicated. Sicily is the biggest island of the Mediterranean, its territory surpassing all the islands of today's Greece and being 20% larger than the Peloponnese.<sup>27</sup> For the Greek world Sicily could not be just an island in the usual sense of the word: it was too large and too densely populated; moreover, it was separated from the mainland only by a very narrow strait (mentioned by Thucydides in VI 1,1). The very name of *Magna Graecia* applied to the lands on

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<sup>24</sup> An interesting fact: Arrian describes the panic among the Greeks caused by the defeat of Thebes by Alexander in 335. He shows that the Greeks themselves could do nothing comparable in scale and effect. On Thucydides as Arrian's source see: A.B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander*, vol. I, Oxford, 1980, 88; S. Hornblower, "The Fourth-Century and Hellenistic Reception of Thucydides", *JHS* 115 (1995), 50–51.

<sup>25</sup> M.I. Finley, *A History of Sicily. Ancient Sicily to the Arab Conquest*, London, 1968, 3.

<sup>26</sup> He obviously underestimated it: sailing round Sicily must have taken more than eight days at his time. The tradition of considering Sardinia bigger than Sicily comes from Herodotus (Hdt. I 170; V 106).

<sup>27</sup> Symptomatically, in Thucydides it is the Syracusan democratic leader Athenagoras who compares Sicily with the Peloponnese: 'I think that Sicily is in a better position than the Peloponnese for going through with the war' (VI 37,1).

Sicily and in southern Italy populated by the Greeks is quite a telling one.<sup>28</sup> Symptomatically, Thucydides calls Sicily an 'island' chiefly in the beginning of book VI when he describes pre-Greek history of Sicily and early periods of its colonization by the Greeks (VI 1–2), then he uses 'island' and 'land' (γῆ) alternately without any difference in meaning (VI 2,5–6), but after that he prefers to call it 'land', not 'island'. When he does call it an 'island', he underlines its uniqueness and the great number of Greek settlements on it (VI 20,2). In a speech attributed to the Syracusan political leader Hemocrates one can find a definition of Sicily from the point of view of political geography, which is essentially correct: 'We are all of us neighbours, living together in the same country, in the midst of the sea (ξυνοίκους μιᾶς χῶρας καὶ περιρρύτου) all called by the same name of Sicilians' (IV 64,3). Sicily is thus a land surrounded by the sea and having many cities on it.<sup>29</sup> Thucydides was quite sure that his reader would not be misled and would not mistake Sicily for Sphacteria when he wrote: '...The main fleet which was supposed to join them in Sicily was engaged in the blockade of Sphacteria (πυνθανόμενοι τὴν νῆσον πολιορκεῖσθαι)' (IV 24,3).

Sicilian people would realize the difference between themselves and the 'islanders', that is, the inhabitants of the islands in the Aegean subjected by the Athenians: '...They must remember, he (*sc.* Gylippus) said, that so far as material resources went they would be at no disadvantage, and as for morale, it would be an intolerable thing if Peloponnesians and Dorians could not feel certain of defeating and driving out of the country these Ionians and islanders and rabble of all sorts (... Ἴωνων καὶ νησιωτῶν καὶ ξυγκλύδων ἀνθρώπων)' (VII 5,4).

One may see then, that when the political and military situation is concerned, political geography in Thucydides supersedes trivial physical geography. The peninsula of Pallene becomes an island, the island of Sicily a continent.<sup>30</sup> For Thucydides, as well as for other Athenian writers of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., 'islanders' are inhabitants of the Cyclades constituting the fifth tribute district of the Athenian *Arche*. In a broader sense 'islanders' are Athens' allies living on the islands (but not on the islands only), that is, subjects of the Athenian power. Here Aristophanes goes even further than Thucydides: for him 'islander' is almost a synonym for 'ally', Athens thus being one of the 'islands' (*Pax* 760; cf. 296–298). The anonymous (Pseudo-Xenophon's) *Athenian Constitution*, contemporary with

<sup>28</sup> Australia, e.g., could be considered an island (as it was by the French in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), but we prefer to call it continent because of its size.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the attitude towards Rhodes. The Peloponnesians decided to sail to Rhodes, 'hoping to bring over to their side an island which had considerable importance' (ἐλπίζοντες νῆσόν τε οὐκ ἀδύνατον..., Thuc. VIII 44,1).

<sup>30</sup> This is why it is not quite correct to compare the *island* of Melos with the *island* of Sicily, as W.R. Connor does in his *Thucydides*, Princeton, 1984, 155.

Thucydides, considers the pros and cons of an insular and a mainland situation of a state, inevitably treating Athens with Piraeus surrounded by the Long Walls as a sort of island (II 2; 13–16).<sup>31</sup>

Xenophon's usage of the words 'islands' and 'islanders' is much the same as we find in Thucydides. This is most clear in the *Anabasis*, where the word 'island' occurs (quite predictably) rarely, only twice, to be precise. Book II mentions an island (in a trivial geographical sense) between the Tigris and a canal, which might serve the Greeks as a provisional refuge (II 4,22). In the last book the writer gives his own speech addressed to his comrades in Byzantium and warning them against confrontation with Sparta. One of his arguments is that even Athens, having great financial resources and ruling over all the islands (αρχοντες δὲ τῶν νήσων ἅπασῶν), nevertheless lost the war with the Spartans (VII 1,27). This seems to be not a rhetorical exaggeration, but rather a politico-geographical usage: the 'islands' meant here are the islands that constituted the Athenian *Arche*. By the way, neither Xenophon nor his listeners would have thought of listing Sicily as one of 'all the islands'.

Islands are mentioned much more often in Xenophon's *Greek History (Hellenica)*. But they are mentioned in an explicitly geographical sense only twice: when the author speaks of one of the islands closest to Alyzia (V 4,66), and when he mentions Corcyra (the Spartans being scared at the very possibility of being surprised by the enemies on an island – VI 2,26). Xenophon is precise in making a distinction between islands and coastal cities of the mainland (III 4,28; IV 8,1, 12). But both islanders and inhabitants of the coastal cities of Asia Minor are cowardly and ready to drop their arms on any occasion, as the Spartan general Dercylidas could see with his own eyes during the military operations against the Persian satraps of Asia Minor (III 2,17).

Usually 'islands' in Xenophon mean the islands of the Archipelago, which earlier constituted the Athenian *Arche* (IV 8,1, 7, 12, 14, 15; V 1,2, 23; VI 2,12). Aegina, the island that lies closest to Athens, does not belong with them (V 1,23). That Xenophon's islands mean the islands of the Aegean is confirmed by a passage from book III of the *Hellenica*. The Theban representative in Athens, explaining the change of his city's foreign policy, says: 'We are now not for the islanders and Syracusans ... we are for ourselves' (III 5,14). For Xenophon, the Syracusans are not islanders, at least not in the political sense of the word. In the *Hellenica* the political view of the islands prevails over the geographical one.

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<sup>31</sup> As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Kalinka, followed by Gomme in the middle of it, supposed that Thucydides' and Pseudo-Xenophon's (*Ath. Pol.* II 14–16) common source could have been Pericles' actual speech. See E. Kalinka, *Die Pseudoxenophontische 'Αθηναίων Πολιτεία*, Leipzig–Berlin, 1913, 233; A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. I, Oxford, 1945, 461.

This becomes more evident when Xenophon cites the text of the Peace of Antalcidas, which he probably knew from an official document. In this text one can notice a different, un-Greek view of the islands, which presents a harsh contrast to the rest of Xenophon's text: 'King Artaxerxes thinks it just that all cities of Asia should belong to him, as well as the islands of Clazomenae and Cyprus. The rest of the Greek islands, both great and small, are to be autonomous, except Lemnos, Imbros and Scyros, which remain under Athenian rule' (V 1,31). The text combines the idea of island with that of city, thus revealing its un-Greek nature.

Lastly, Xenophon's *Hellenica* has an important passage indicative of the change of the political and military role of the islands. It is not surprising that the call for relying upon mainland, not insular dominions comes from Polydamas, an ambassador of the Thessalian ruler Jason who showed to the Spartans the possibility of forming a big continental alliance of Greek cities which could have its core in Thessaly: 'Our treasure will have more income: we shall not have to count upon some miserable islets (νησίδρια), people of the mainland will be our tributaries ... The Persian king is the richest man in the world because his revenue comes from the mainland, not from islands' (VI 1,12).

Here the mainland is opposed to islands very clearly, and it is no accident that Jason, the ruler of Thessaly, uses the scornful word 'islets'. Polydamas' speech in general is important evidence of the political reorientation of the Greek world. Mainland possessions become more important than insular. With islands as allies and the main source of revenue you cannot think of conquering Persia. But when Alexander the Great got hold of the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, he became able to make the Phoenician fleet surrender and to subdue the islands.

Now how did this 'imperial geo-political' view of the islands spring up and develop?

One can suppose that the Athenians had long envied the islanders who had been naturally protected from enemies' attacks from the mainland: let us, for example, recall their fight with Megara for Salamis or their hatred for the Aeginetans, which made them adopt Themistocles' proposal and build a great fleet (Herodotus, Thucydides). The very sight of Aegina, protected by the sea and flourishing, and very clearly seen from the Athenian Acropolis, called for resolute measures from the Athenians. It was no Carthage, with 700 kilometres separating it from Rome! One did not need a reminder. And as soon as Athens became the leading power of the Aegean, subjugation of the islands had to become the next item on the agenda. It did, and Athens' allies on the islands had to submit, even if not always of their own free will.

Thucydides' work cites many examples of Athens' capturing islands and carrying out reprisals on the islanders. The Athenians led by Cimon captured Scyros, sold its inhabitants (Dolopians) as slaves and populated it with Athenian colonists (I 98,2).<sup>32</sup> The Athenians occupied the uninhabited island of Atalanta (II 32); suppressed the rebellious Mytilenaeans (see e.g. Cleon's speech in III 39,2); invaded the island of Minoa in front of Megara (III 51,1); devastated Delos (III 104,1–2) and so on. The 'Melian dialogue' is the best evidence of this point of view (V 97, see above).

In the end, the Athenians began to think of shutting themselves off from the land and to connect themselves with Piraeus and the seacoast by the Long Walls. This ambitious project was realized under Themistocles and Pericles, and Athens was turned into a sort of island. Athens' pseudo-insular position was the basis of Pericles' strategy during the Peloponnesian War. In Thucydides' *History*, Pericles exhorts his compatriots in the following way: 'Sea-power is of enormous importance. Look at it this way. Suppose we were an island, would we not be absolutely secure from attack? As it is we must try to think of ourselves as islanders; we must abandon our land and our houses, and safeguard the sea and the city. We must not, through anger at losing land and homes, join battle with the greatly superior forces of the Peloponnesians' (I 143,5). Evidently these questions were widely discussed in Athenian society (see, e.g., Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* II 2; 13–16).

Soon after the Peloponnesian War broke out, the Athenians could feel on their own backs the advantages and disadvantages of being islanders: 'The Athenians took the advice he gave them and brought in from the country their wives and children and all their household goods ... Their sheep and cattle they sent across to Euboea and the islands off the coast' (II 14,1).

The idea of Athens as an island power marked the Athenians' self-consciousness significantly. It influenced many of their military and political decisions during the war. Only after the defeat (and weakening) of Athens did the 'sea' component of the *polis* begin to fade away.

But the 'imperial' attitude towards the islands persisted (from force of inertia) for some time even after the fall of the *Arche*. This may be proved by the short existence of the Second Athenian League and by the struggle for subject islands. But some changes, reflected by the orators and Xenophon, took place.

Geo-political attitudes and stereotypes may seem permanent or even eternal. But when the world of the ever-fighting Greek poleis was gone, the Greeks learned to take pleasure in the islands. Islands became a favourite theme of paradoxograp-

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<sup>32</sup> The same happened to the inhabitants of Eion, a town on the Strymon (Thuc. I 98,1).

hers, of the writers describing catastrophes and of the utopians. The gap between the Lesbos under Cleon's repression and the Lesbos as the scene of 'Daphnis and Chloe' cannot easily be bridged. Islands as geopolitical objects sank in the deep like Plato's Atlantis, and instead of them there appeared other islands, the best place for a comfortable, even if the last, exile. But this is another story, a Roman one.

Thucydides' work, in spite of the criticism of the principles of Athenian policy in the 'Melian dialogue', reflected the predominant view of islands and islanders in Athenian society. 'Public' opinion prevailed in his *History* over the personal one.

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