Chapter 4

Conveying the Message

The efforts of the sources and agents described in the preceding chapters would be for naught if they were unable to communicate the information they had collected. But the conveyance of information is a tricky thing, involving a number of filters that determine which information makes the transition from collector to recipient. In its most simple form, the filter is one of time, for example, condensing the experiences of a two-day reconnaissance patrol into a five-minute briefing. But even such apparently straightforward reports were and are highly complex, involving an interplay of semantics, motivations, personalities, and expectations with the various media of communication.

Thus, before describing how the Greeks transmitted information, it must first be noted that sources and agents convey the information that they feel is newsworthy. There is an editing process intrinsic to human interpretation of data provided by the environment, and this is extended to the information provided by one individual to another. Would a scout, for instance, think it worthy of notice or mention that many of the enemy had brown hair? That a contingent wore red cloaks? That some carried bows and slings? That they were men? The information provided is based on what the informant thinks is pertinent, and the informant may neglect details whose consequence he or she does not recognize. Red cloaks, for example, were typical of the Spartans, and if a commander did not know whether or not the Spartans were committing troops to the aid of his enemy, information about the color of garments would be of importance to him. If the scout was aware of neither the custom nor the political situation, he might not report this detail. If the commander did not think to ask this specific question, he might then underestimate his opponent or misjudge the political impact of an engagement.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that different people have interest and expertise in different fields. While some topics may be of general interest to all and thus readily passed on as newsworthy, all

information gatherers may not be equally capable in differentiating the pertinent from the peripheral.[1] A scout would be more likely to pick up relevant details about the aforementioned contingent than would, for instance, a merchant. But a merchant or envoy would be far more useful when economic or political information was sought. Thus it was necessary to employ as agents individuals best suited to gathering information of a given sort. Aeneas Tacticus recommended that *skopoi* be men experienced in war, both to ensure that information would be reported accurately and to prevent false alarms made in ignorance.[2] In the ideal military practice of Cyrus, a subordinate officer selected for his experience and wisdom determined what information was to be passed back by the scouts to the commander of the vanguard.[3] As was mentioned in the second chapter, there sometimes existed a degree of specialization among other types of intelligence agents as well.

An obvious solution to problems of information relevance was for the commander himself to gather the information, providing, of course, that the commander was better equipped to interpret data than his agents. This was, in fact, advised by Xenophon and Onasander, with the sensible proviso that the commander should not expose himself unnecessarily to danger.[4] Alexander often took the advice and ignored the proviso, and his actions found precedent on the Attic stage.[5] There is mention of participants in trials embarking on research themselves, as Lysias claimed to have done, traveling to Decelea to make inquiries regarding Pancleon's

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1. Lee (*Information and Frontiers,* 153–55) provided a good discussion on diffusion of information and considerations of what comprised newsworthy information, citing Stephens, *A History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite* (New York, 1988), 33, for items of general applicability: "reports of accidents, earthquakes, military expeditions, sports, weather, death and violations of the law."

2. Aen. Tact. 6.2.

3. Xen. *Cyr.* 6.3.6, 12.

4. Xen. *Cav. Com.* 4.16: "It has long been said that it is good to try, by the use of *kataskopoi,* to know the affairs of the enemy. But best of all is for the commander himself to watch from some safe vantage." Cf. [Nicephorus] 14.

5. See, e.g., Arrian *Anab.* 1.20.5; Q. Curtius 8.10.27–30; Demophon in Eur. *Children of Heracles* 390–97. Cf. Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 36ff., in which Eteocles relies entirely on the eyes of the *kataskopos.* Contrast Rommel (38: "Aus Meldungen von Dritten kann man meist nicht das entnehmen, was für den eigenen Entschluß wesentlich ist. Man muß selbst hinfahren und selbst beobachten") with Handel (*Intelligence and Military Operations,* 26, ad loc.), who criticized focus on the tactical level as dysfunctional at higher levels, since commanders such as Rommel were liable to be trapped in details. In an Aristotelian manner, Handel (68) thought that for commanders virtue lay in a mean between the extremes of remote control and personal involvement.

claims to the status of a Plataean.[6] Political leaders could and at times did investigate matters for themselves, as Demosthenes ascertained the Theban sentiment while acting as an ambassador in Thebes prior to Chaeronea, but generally the decision makers—whether ephors, kings, tyrants, or a collective body—received information rather than sought it. Reasons are easily called to mind, a monarch simply did not have the time to see everything everywhere, even if he were reckless enough to face the risk involved.[7] A similar problem applied to small governing bodies, and large groups could neither feasibly travel together nor reasonably depend on their members to witness matters outside their normal sphere of activity. Thus information was normally filtered through the minds of agents and sources.

Related to the problem of editing is the selection of intelligence goals. If agents are asked to gather every detail about a people, irrespective of relevance to an issue, they will spend much time and effort, with consequent risks and delays, on a task without end. If they are told to pay attention only to matters within strict parameters (a possible example might be to ascertain the quantity of baggage attached to a company, so as to obtain an idea of its range and rate of movement), they might overlook matters not apparently relevant but nevertheless important to the problem they are investigating (e.g., if the company commander was ill, his force might move more slowly or not at all).[8] A commander cannot hope to learn or assimilate every minute detail about his foes—instead, he must have a degree of detail adequate to his task. To avoid irrelevant "static" he concentrates on those details that he thinks are important. In effect, he sets intelligence goals corresponding to his needs and allocates resources to meet his goals. When Agesilaus fought to defend his city and Laconia from Epaminondas, he had no need to send scouts to discover features of terrain since this was his native land. When he campaigned in Asia Minor, such information was vital. Many intelligence needs, however, were more or less constant, and a sensible commander would be able to direct his attention to these needs through reason and experience.

Having determined what information was to be sought and passed on, the agent or source then had to determine how to effect its transmission. The following methods were available.

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6. Lysias XXIII *(Against Pancleon)* 2ff. Cf. Demosth. XXI *(Against Meidias)* 36.
7. Cf. Xen. *Hiero* 1.11–12.
8. Such was the case when Darius misinterpreted Alexander's delay in Cilicia, the cause of which was actually Alexander's illness (Plut. *Alex.* 29.1).

Overt Methods of Communication

Messengers

Angeloi, or messengers, were ubiquitous in the Greek world yet were a rather nebulous lot.[9] In not a few cases envoys *(presbeis)* and even heralds *(kerukes)* are called *angeloi* when delivering information. More often the identities of *angeloi* were obscure because the act of communication was thought more important than the actor, so that passive forms of verbs (e.g., "when it was announced") were sufficient to explain the movement of information. In a number of cases arrangements might be made for specific types of individuals (such as horsemen or sailors of light craft) to act as messengers in an ad hoc manner; exceptionally they might be appointed to long-term duty as couriers within the structure of a surveillance or reconnaissance detachment or be attached to the staffs of military commanders.[10]

The speed with which *angeloi* could transmit messages was, of course, far slower than fire signals over long distances. Over very short distances, however, *angeloi* might make up for lack of swiftness with convenience of use, especially since a commander would not need to prepare a fire or hoist a flag (assuming that high ground was available) and hope that the intended recipient noticed it in time. They were also useful over very long distances, when lines of sight were obstructed by geographical features and when relay stations for visual signals were neither available nor practical. *Angeloi* were more flexible than visual signals, in that prior arrangements to establish recognizable signals were not necessary. They could provide superior detail and range of information. They could clarify a message that was not completely understood, or they could furnish supplementary details.[11] They also offered more confidentiality than visual or audible signals, which could be noticed by enemies as well as

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9. A proper discussion of *angeloi* is a subject fit for a detailed study in its own right—only a few brief notes are given here.

10. For horsemen, see Bugh 11–12, 99. Cf. also Thuc. 8.11; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.20, 4.5.7; Diod. Sic. 15.82.6 (Plut. *Ages.* 34.4); Diod. Sic. 17.60.7; Arrian *Anab.* 3.15.1, 5.18.6. For light vessels, see Plut. *Lys.* 10.2; Isoc. *Epist.* VII *(To Tim.)* 10ff.; Plut. *Ages.* 15.2. For long-term duty, see Aen. Tact. 6.6.

11. Aeneas Tacticus (6.4–5) was quite cognizant of the relative merits of visual signaling and couriers and thought swift or horsed messengers were a necessary supplement to *semeia,* so that *hemeroskopoi* could communicate matters which did not lend themselves well to visual signaling; cf. Isoc. *Epist.* I *(To Dionys.)* 3 for comments on clarification.

recipients. Their operation might be impeded by adverse weather conditions, but it would not be precluded altogether, as might happen with signals in heavy fog or precipitation or with shouts in the din of battle.[12]

But *angeloi* needed physical access to their recipients and might be unable to slip through a blockade or siege; seas controlled by enemies were also hazardous. They were susceptible to interception and capture, in which case information not only failed to reach its intended recipient but fell into the hands of people who might use it to the disadvantage of the sender.[13] Being only human, *angeloi* were liable to misunderstanding, dishonesty, and all the other foibles to which agents and sources were susceptible; they might even be impersonated.

In light of such fallibility, some states and commanders had recourse to the written word. Thucydides treated Nicias' decision to entrust a messenger with a letter rather than an oral report as somehow exceptional, at least as far as Athenian practice went in the late fifth century, but dispatches are well attested in the fourth century.[14] The Spartans relied on written messages for official correspondence at least as early as the beginning of the fifth century. During the Peloponnesian War, they appointed secretaries *(epistoleis)* to their naval commanders to handle correspondence with authorities at home and with other commanders.[15] Secretaries

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12. For problems arising from vocal commands, see Q. Curtius 4.9.20; Aelian *Tactica* 25.1–5; Anon. Byz. *Peri Strat.* 30. Shouting was a resort of necessity when other methods failed, as when the Syracusans communicated by shouting to each other during the Athenian night attack on Epipolae, there being no other way to signal in the night (Thuc. 7.44.4; cf. the Tyrians at Arrian *Anab.* 2.22.4). In what must have been quieter moments, the passing of commands and watchwords along a chain of command, or through the ranks, was practiced and advocated—the contexts are before battle or by surveillance agents separated from their enemies by a river: e.g., Onasander 25.1–3; Arrian *Anab.* 5.11.2.

13. A picturesque tale in Plutarch's life of Dion (26.5–10) well illustrates the hazards chance can throw into the paths of couriers. When Timocrates, Dionysius' second in command, learned that Dion had landed in Sicily, he sent an *angelos* to bear letters to Dionysius at Caulonia. This man took meat (for a meal en route) in the same wallet in which he carried the letters. The smell of the meat attracted a wolf, who carried off the wallet as the man slept. When he awoke and realized he had lost the wallet, the *angelos* feared to go to the tyrant and fled. Thus Dionysius did not learn until later, through other sources, of the threat that Dion posed. Cf. also Demosth. XXXIV *(Against Phormio)* 8, on the hazards arising from entrusting a message to a dishonest courier.

14. Thuc. 7.8–10, 7.11.1.

15. Pritchett 2:46; Szanto "Ἐπιστολέυς," *RE* 6 (1909): 202–3; Michell 279–80; Anderson 67–68 and 68 n. 7. Anderson noted that Hippocrates, called an *epistoleus* at Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.23, reappeared as a harmost at 1.3.5; he is also found at Thuc. 8.99, sending information on the prospects of (not) receiving aid from the Phoenician ships.

(grammateis) are attested serving military commanders in the fourth and following centuries and had cameo appearances earlier—in the case of Polycrates' secretary Maeandrius, as an investigator in his own right.[16]

Signaling

In his *Tactica,* Aelian noted the relative advantages and disadvantages of visual and auditory transmission of commands.[17] Further comments on their strengths and weaknesses in transmitting information in other contexts follow.

Fire and Smoke (Pursoi, Phruktoi)

Legend has it that Palamedes invented signal fires and that his father was the first to manipulate them to deceive an enemy.[18] Fire signals first appear in a simile in the *Iliad,* which describes smoke and fire *(pursoi)* signals sent up by a beleaguered island town to its neighbors, the former by day and the latter by night.[19] Walbank thought that the earliest evidence of the use of fire signals among the Greeks could be dated to 489, when the Parians, besieged by Miltiades, pretended that the gleam from a fire on Mykonos (not actually intentionally sparked) was a signal from Datis.[20] Technically, the signal was supposed to be from a Persian, but he is surely correct that signals were in use at the time. The first tangible historical example of fire signaling between Greeks is actually that sent from Sciathus to Artemisium in 480, regarding a skirmish between Greek and Persian forces.[21]

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16. Hdt. 3.123ff. *Grammateis* might also serve as envoys—see, e.g., Arrian *Anab.* 3.16.6, 5.24.6.

17. Aelian *Tactica* 25.1–5. Cf. Anon. Byz. *Peri Strat.* 30.

18. Hyg. *Fab.* 105

19. *Iliad* 18.207–13. Aristarchus is said by Dionysius Thrax to have altered line 207, ὡς δ' ὅτε καπνὸς ἰὼν ἐξ ἄστεος to ὡς δ' ὅτε πῦρ ἐπὶ πόντον ἀριπρεπὲς. Semmett (41–42) noted a passage in the *Odyssey* (10.30) that appeared in a translation as "beacon fires." The Greek πυρπολέοντες lends itself better to translation as "tending campfires" than "tending signal fires" when used in this context of shepherds in the hills.

Festivals celebrated with beacon fires might indicate traditions preserved from still earlier times, but myth provides shaky foundations for argument. Those interested may, however, refer to Pausanias (2.25.4–5), who mentioned an Argive festival of bonfires commemorating mythical signals sent to and from two lovers; Frazer (in Pausanias, 3:216–17 ad loc.) observed that the festival might well have other origins.

20. F.W. Walbank 2:258 on Polyb. 10.42.7, citing Ephorus (*FGrHist* 70F63).

21. Hdt. 7.183.

Fire signals were used extensively by watchers and scouts.[22] Unlike other signal types, they did not normally serve to transmit orders but were instead used to convey simple messages, and they were considered to be quite valuable in this role.[23] Polybius observed that they enabled a swift response to events and were of great utility in internal security and warfare. Although he added that signals were less developed in earlier times (i.e., before the second century), extant examples show that even then signals served often and well.[24]

In most cases the presence or lack of a fire at an appointed point sufficed to convey a prearranged message (e.g., Memnon's troops were to light fires when they had scaled the acropolis of Methymne).[25] There are examples of varied signals, each with a specific significance, but often the arrangement is ambiguous. According to a scholiast, movements of hostile forces were indicated by moving a flame—presumably a torch—back and forth, those of friendly forces by holding a torch steady.[26] All such signals were limited (in the range of information that they could convey) to predetermined messages, since there is no indication before the second century B.C. that signalers could represent letter characters (in the fashion, for instance, of Morse code), which would permit the flexibility required for conveying complex or unforeseen events.[27] In the first half of

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22. Hershbell (82ff.) maintained that they were used almost exclusively in war, and I see no reason to disagree with his assessment.

23. The line between information and command becomes somewhat blurred in some circumstances (as when a city under attack signals for help—see, e.g., Aen. Tact. 15.1); what I mean here is that leaders and commanders did not normally issue orders via fire signals to their subordinates. Thuc. 4.111–12 provides a possible (but rather confused) exception: the signal for the attack of Brasidas' light-armed troops is alternately called σημεῖον, σημεῖον τοῦ πυρός, and ξύνθημα. I think the last word, *xunthema,* provides a solution—it was a prearranged indication that a previously given command (attack) was now to be carried out.

24. Polyb. 10.43.1–2.

25. Polyaenus 5.44.3 (ca. 340).

26. Schol. on Thuc. 2.94. Cf. Riepl 59–60; Hershbell 85–86.

27. Polybius' mechanism (10.45–46) for sending messages (which may never have made the transition from theory to practice) indicated the positions of each desired letter on tablets by means of different combinations of torches. Polybius referred to systems invented after Aeneas by Cleoxenus and Democlitus, which lack other independent attestation. Democlitus has been dated to the third century or early second century B.C. by Hultsch ("Demokleitos," *RE* 5.1 [1905]: 132); no date is available for Cleoxenus (other than a *terminus ante quem* implicit in Polybius' work). For full descriptions of the signaling systems of Polybius and Aeneas, see Riepl 66–69; Hershbell 86ff.

the fourth century, Aeneas Tacticus devised a scheme for combining a water clock with fire signals to signal predetermined messages.[28] The sender and recipient had identical water clocks, marked at various levels with a variety of commonly sent messages. After obtaining the recipients' attention, the sender would unplug the bottom of the water clock and hold up a torch until the water level had sunk to the desired inscription. It is probable that the Greeks had the ability to send a variety of messages by different types of signals (perhaps combinations of fires) by the late fifth century: how could the besieged Plataeans otherwise have expected to be able to confuse Peloponnesian signals by lighting fires of their own?[29] There is, furthermore, an appearance of a fair degree of specificity in recorded examples of prearranged fire signals. From torches held up by his blockaded troops, for instance, Alexander of Pherae was able to learn numbers of Athenian ships setting sail.[30]

It is not always so easy, however, to separate the historian's explanation from the imparted message. Did the Peloponnesians learn from fire signals that Athenian ships were approaching from Leucas, or was their origin a detail assumed by the Peloponnesians or included by Thucydides by way of explanation?[31] In general, Polybius' criticism of the inflexibility of the fire systems of his precursors seems reasonable enough, although perhaps exaggerated to establish a contrast to and a need for his own scheme.[32] While systems like those just described could encompass a wider variety of subjects than the Boolean variable of a simple pyre, they could not serve to convey news of events for which a prior arrangement had not been made.[33] It is likely that they were also unable to convey precise details or large numbers—such information was probably filled in by historians.

The advantage of fire signals is their relatively swift operation over long distances. While Aeschylus' image of flames flaring in a swift dance from Troy to Mycenae is poetic, there is no doubt that the more prosaic

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28. For a more complete description, see Polyb. 10.44.

29. Thuc. 3.22.7–8.

30. Polyaenus 6.2.1 (Alexander of Pherae, son of Jason, was tyrant from 369 to 358). Cf. Anon. Byz. *Peri Strat.* 8.

31. Thuc. 3.80.2.

32. Polyb. 10.43.6–10.

33. Polyb. 10.45.1. In 43.7–9 he provided an example: if an arrangement had been made that a fire would be lit to indicate the approach of an enemy fleet, how could one send a message telling of a rebellion that was unanticipated?

fires on Salamis, glowing red with warning of a Peloponnesian surprise attack, were seen in Athens long before it would have been possible for a weary runner to stumble up to the *prytaneis*.[34] Basic information could therefore be had very quickly, and although the Athenian reaction to Brasidas' advent resembled panic more than preparation, the Peloponnesians withdrew because they hesitated to attack an alerted enemy. The range of fire signals could be considerable: Polybius said they could convey information at distances beyond a four days' march.[35] The fires lit by the Peloponnesians laying siege to Plataea could be seen in Thebes even on a stormy night, while the flashes of *pursoi* in Boeotia and Phocis were visible from Mount Tisaion in Thessaly.[36] Greek use of relays after the Aeschylean and Persian fashion is a matter of conjecture in the fifth century and earlier, but by the fourth century the Athenians possessed an extensive system of signal and relay towers for effective frontier defense.[37] Alexander of Pherae was likewise said to have had a fire-signaling system, in which the aforementioned Mount Tisaion was an important link.[38]

Another benefit of fire signals (and signals in general) was that they provided a means of communication when siege or other such circumstance precluded the use of channels necessitating physical delivery of a message. Thus fifth columns found them suitable for conveying messages

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34. Thuc. 2.94.1. Cf. Aeschylus *Ag.* 288–313; Riepl 51; Fraenkel 2:156–66. Note also a tale told by R. Coleman of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (preserved in C. Stray, "Ideology and Institution: English Classical Scholarship in Transition," *Annals of Scholarship* 10 (1993): 119 and 130 n. 15; this article was brought to my attention by P.G. Naiditch): "A colonial officer stationed on the farther reaches of the empire, suspecting an imminent attack by hostile natives in part of his territory, remembered the opening of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* where the watchman sits on the palace roof at Mycenae waiting for the line of signal beacons to tell of the sack of Troy and his master Agamemnon's return home. Accordingly he ordered his native subordinates to prepare a line of beacons. Unfortunately, this was at the beginning of the rainy season, and when the enemy attacked, the beacon fires could not be lit."

35. Polyb. 10.43.3.

36. Thuc. 3.22.7–8; Polyaenus 6.19.2; Polyb. 10.42.7–8, of Philip V (ca. 209 B.C.). F.W. Walbank (2:258 on Polyb. 10.42.7) noted that Mount Tisaion has been identified with the modern Mount Bardhzogia, a hill only 130 meters high; Eliot (30–31) preferred Mount Chromon, a somewhat higher hill nearby.

37. Ober (196–97) envisioned messages relayed between forts and city by fire or smoke signals; the Limiko Tower apparently included a signaling platform (Ober 147, citing Vanderpool 242).

38. Polyaenus 6.2.1. Cf. Aen. Tact. 22.2–3; Aristoph. *Birds* 1158–62.

from within city walls to their allies without.[39] But such signals could also be seen by people other than their intended recipients, who would therefore be made alert to the traffic, even if they did not yet know the content of the messages.

Most examples of the Greeks using fire signals are of communication by night, and hence fires were valued for the visibility of their glow from afar rather than for their ability to send smoke signals in the manner of, for instance, some Native American peoples. There are comparatively few references to smoke signals used by Greeks; they were, naturally enough, employed only during daylight.[40] It seems, however, that long-distance communication during the day was normally done through other devices.

Other Signaling Devices (Semeia)

Although other signaling devices, such as flags, lack the range and efficacy of fire by night, they served well in daylight and in places where signal fires were impractical (e.g., contexts where mobility was demanded) or dangerous (especially on ships). Flags were the most common device and were used on both sea and land.[41] There are also a couple of famous instances in which shields were used: once allegedly by an Alcmaeonid to the Persians after the battle of Marathon, once by a scout ship to Lysander at the opening of the battle of Aegospotami. Both times the flash of a brazen shield indicated an opportunity to attack.[42]

Semeia of unspecified types were employed by *hemeroskopoi* to pass information swiftly to their commanders, either directly or in relays.[43]

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39. Thuc. 4.111.1–2; Plut. *Alc.* 30.2. Note that Aeneas Tacticus (10.26) warned against allowing people to carry lights at night while their city was besieged, lest somebody signal to the enemy. Cf. also Hdt. 9.118: when Sestus was besieged by the Athenians, its people communicated with their besiegers via *purgoi* upon Artayctes' flight.

40. *Iliad* 18.207–13. Herodotus (4.196) relates a story he ascribes to the Carchedonians, of traders landing on the shores of Libya using smoke to alert the inhabitants living near the sea that they had wares available. Quintus Curtius (5.2.7) related that sometime after the battle of Arbela, Alexander no longer signaled his soldiers to move camp by trumpet (since it was not always heard) but instead had a pole set up, on which he had a fire lit to convey his orders— by light during the night, by smoke during the day.

41. Hence, the verb most often used for signaling with *semeia* is αἴρω, which means "to raise" (LSJ s.vv. αἴρω I.1, σημεῖον I.3).

42. Marathon: Hdt. 6.115, 121, 123 (cf. How and Wells 116 ad loc.); Aegospotami: Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.27; Plut. *Lys.* 10.3, 11.1–2; Polyaenus 1.45.2.

43. Aen. Tact. 6.4: "If there are no places available to scouts where signals can be seen from the city, there must be relays to receive the signals as raised and pass them on."

The information conveyed was quite restricted—commonly a warning of enemy approach—since *semeia* normally conveyed their message by their presence or absence rather than by variations in manner of presentation.[44] There is no indication of a semaphore system or record of flexibility more complex than three alternate messages: Iphicrates arranged signals with his scouts to differentiate the approach of an enemy fleet from its anchoring.[45] More frequently, commanders used *semeia* to convey simple, prearranged orders—usually to attack—to their ships and occasionally to land forces when distance did not permit the use of trumpets *(salpinges)*.[46] *Semeia* also served to convey by their presence a predetermined message to detached military units.[47]

Trumpets (Salpinges) *and Horns* (Kerata)

Trumpets are found in military contexts, where they were nearly always used for conveying commands.[48] In one instance Xenophon arranged for specific meanings for successive signals (and it was not unheard of for commanders to reassign meanings to signals to deceive a nearby enemy), but most examples give the impression that commands (e.g., to attack or to break camp) were represented by generally recognizable patterns.[49] Given such a function, it is no surprise that Aeneas Tacticus recommended that the trumpeters camp near the *strategoi*. It is decidedly odd to find a trumpeter up in a tree serving as a lookout.[50]

Covert Methods of Communication

Allusions to the conveyance of concealed and secret messages date back to myths of Bellerophon and Palamedes found in epic. There are a few references, made by historians, to events set in the sixth and fifth cen-

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44. Thuc. 4.42.4; Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.2, 7.2.5.

45. Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.34. The third message is implicit ("all clear") and can generally be assumed to be denoted by the absence of the *semeion*. In this example, Iphicrates arranged for heralds to watch for the signals and announce them in the city.

46. By land: Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.3. By sea: Thuc. 1.49.1, 2.84.1, 2.84.3, 2.90.4, 7.34.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.28; Arrian *Indica* 28.3–4 (Nearchus, shore to sea); Polyaenus 1.48.2. In Persian use: Hdt. 9.59. Polyaenus (1.48.2) specifies the *kubernetai* as the recipients of naval signals.

47. By land: Thuc. 1.63.2; Q. Curtius 7.11.11; Arrian *Anab.* 4.19.3; cf. Thuc. 8.95.4. By sea: Hdt. 8.11; Thuc. 3.91.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.28, 6.2.30. In Persian use: Hdt. 7.128, 8.7.

48. Save for Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.8–9, all examples are found in land, rather than sea, warfare.

49. Successive signals: Xen. *Anab.* 2.2.4. Altered meanings: Polyaenus 5.16.4; cf. Hdt. 6.77, 78; Polyaenus 1.14.1.

50. Aen. Tact. 22.3; Polyaenus 5.39.1.

turies, as well as the third through second, but the bulk of extant examples is derived from Aeneas Tacticus' work on the defense of a city under siege. This distribution does not indicate that the fourth century was the zenith of the art of secret communication in antiquity; it is rather the result of the happy chance that some small part of Aeneas' writing has been preserved. The reader should keep in mind that Aeneas, however much he was caught up by a fascination for his subject, was writing for the benefit of those who must detect and thwart such communication.[51] His advice, therefore, might not represent secret state-of-the-art techniques.

Before I embark on a consideration of selections from Aeneas' treatise, it is worth mentioning one method of keeping messages from being discovered that he neglected, perhaps because it was self-evident: this is, quite simply, not to write them down. The Greeks were by no means ignorant of the security advantages of a message quietly passed verbally over one committed to writing: Xenophon himself explicitly makes the comparison in the *Cavalry Commander*.[52] Short messages that could be scratched onto surfaces as small as some of those mentioned could hardly have been difficult to memorize. A courier was needed in either case. Why add to the risk of compromise by sending objects that could be detected?[53]

Despite the risk involved, there is frequent mention of the conveyance of secret information in written form. There were some advantages to this: it reduced the duration of contact between courier and recipient to the amount of time necessary to pass over the physical form of a message (in comparison, a verbal briefing would take longer and might be overheard). This reduced the likelihood of either or both parties being compromised. Better yet, contact might be rendered unnecessary by the drops described later in this chapter. Written dispatches ensured that the recipient read the actual words of the informant, rather than a courier's paraphrase, which would be subject to omission or variation due to forgetfulness or motive. It also enabled a message to be sent without the bearer knowing its contents, hence reducing the chance of a breach of security.

A major disadvantage to written text was the possibility of discovery.

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51. Aeneas Tacticus (31.1–35) recorded many more than the few examples here offered to the reader.

52. Xen. *Cav. Com.* 4.9. Cf. Macchiavelli *Discorsi* 3.6.

53. Mention of messages committed to memory can be found at Arrian *Anab.* 1.25.9–10 and Q. Curtius 7.2.17–19. Cf. [Plato] *2 Epist.* 314b–c.

To circumvent this danger, the Greeks contrived ingenious ways of disguising and concealing documents. Demaratus is said to have informed the Lacedaemonians of the imminent Persian invasion early in the fifth century by writing his message in ink on wooden tablets and then covering them with wax, in which messages were normally written.[54] Other incidents predating the mid–fourth century include messages disguised in the form of wound dressings, earrings, and votive tablets.[55] A tattoo hidden under a slave's hair and a bladder bearing ink characters (while serving to carry oil within a flask) were imaginative (and possibly imaginary) innovations.[56] More conventional letters could be concealed in apparel and sandals.[57] Other hiding places are suggested in tales of smuggling and subterfuge, such as the story that poison to be used on Alexander was conveyed in a mule's hoof.[58]

The above stratagems served to make discovery of communication difficult but they did not conceal the content of a message should it be found. Aeneas Tacticus recommended a number of ways of making writing intelligible only to its desired recipient. Two of them are ciphers of a sort; the others are codes. A simple cipher substitutes one symbol for another (e.g., one letter for another), in effect producing an alternate alphabet. In very simple ciphers, such as those described by Aeneas, the relationship between the symbols is constant: a fixed, unchanging pattern of dots represents each of the vowels in his cipher described at 31.30–31 ("." for alpha, ":" for epsilon, etc.). Such a cipher is not difficult to break, given enough text, even for those who know nothing of cryptography—it may be meant as a simple, easily understood example, rather than as a recommendation for actual

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54. Hdt. 7.239; Polyaenus 2.20.1; Justin 2.10.13f. (who attributed the invention to Hannibal Barcas, 21.6.6); Gellius 17.9.16f. Cf. Aen. Tact. 31.14.

55. Respectively, Aen. Tact. 31.6 (written on leaves, conveyed to Ephesus; cf. Whitehead, *Aineias the Tactician,* 184 ad loc.), 31.7 (on beaten lead), 31.15 (written in ink on a votive tablet, which was then whitewashed, painted with an appropriate figure, and placed at a hero's shrine; the recipient would remove the paint and the wash by dipping the tablet in oil).

56. Histiaeus shaved his slave's head and tattooed his message thereon (Hdt. 5.35; Aen. Tact. 31.28–29; Polyaenus 1.24.1); the bladder contrivance was described by Aeneas Tacticus at 31.10. Cf. Hdt. 1.123; Polyaenus 7.7.1; Leo Byz. 1.4.

57. Aen. Tact. 31.23, 24; see also Leo Byz. 1.7, 10. T.E. Lawrence (25) mentioned the use of messages sewn into the sandals of couriers in the correspondence between Feisal and his father during the Arab revolt.

58. Arrian *Anab*. 7.27.2. Cf. Q. Curtius 10.10.14; Plut. *Alex*. 77.2; Paus. 8.18.4.

employment.[59] Should symbols be devised for every letter, as suggested in 31.31, finding the key might be much more difficult for a people unfamiliar with letter frequency or other such deciphering tools.[60] Hellenistic papyri have been found in Egypt bearing ciphers of this sort—some of which were accompanied by their keys. Some were sophisticated enough to have evolved from sequential substitution (which was the basis for Julius Caesar's famous cipher).[61] A problem, however, is immediately apparent: if you were a guard and noticed a papyrus written with strange symbols or illegible letter combinations among the baggage of a traveler, would you not suspect some subterfuge? A letter written in such ciphers would therefore have to be concealed.

Aeneas also describes positional ciphers; these had problems as well. It has been observed that messages based on the Lacedaemonian *skutale* can be made legible by anyone with sufficient imagination to try wrapping the lettered strip around rods of various diameters.[62] Aeneas' astra-

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59. I have tested Aeneas' sample passages (in English) on friends and relatives who know nothing of cryptography. Five required help; four were successful without assistance. I must note, however, that this passage is not without problems for editors, and readings of the message vary—cf. Whitehead, *Aineias the Tactician,* 190–91 ad loc.

60. Or, I must admit, for myself (although I have done some reading and practice). When applying for a position in the Special Collections of the UCLA University Research Library, I was interviewed by Mr. P.G. Naiditch. Some knowledge of Greek was required, and I was given a copy of an "Antike Inschrift gefunden bei Olympia am 7 Mai 1880" (cf. Joan Evans, *Time and Chance: The Story of Arthur Evans and His Forebears* [London, 1943] 231). To my frustration and embarrassment, I found it unintelligible. As Mr. Naiditch was looking on, I confessed my bewilderment to him, and he advised me to read the passage aloud. It quickly became clear that the passage was written in English using the Greek alphabet. The document was a letter of warning sent by Felix von Luschan to the "spy" Arthur Evans.

61. Gardthausen *Griechische Palaeographie* II.305–6; A.S. Hunt, "A Greek Cryptogram," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 15 (1929): 127–34. I owe these citations to Leighton 153.

62. Plutarch's description of a *skutale* (*Lys.* 19.5–7; see also Aulus Gellius 17.9) is as good as any.

When the ephors send out an admiral or a general, they make two round pieces of wood exactly alike in length and thickness, so that each corresponds to the other in its dimensions, and keep one themselves, while they give the other to their envoy. These pieces of wood they call "scytalae." Whenever, then, they wish to send some secret and important message, they make a scroll of parchment long and narrow, like a leathern strap, and wind it round their "scytale," leaving no vacant space thereon, but covering its surface all round with the parchment. After doing this, they write what they wish on the parchment, just as it lies wrapped about the "scytale"; and when they have written their message, they take the parchment off, and send it,

gals and disk are difficult to recognize as encryption devices and afford somewhat better security due to the abstract nature of the cipher, which does not rely on written characters.[63] A simpler method outlined in his study calls for marking letters of an ordinary text with tiny dots to indicate which were part of the secret message.[64] Thus the message is hidden from casual observation, while its form is not such as to arouse suspicion and so requires no further disguise or concealment. The employment of acrostics *(akrostikhidia),* in which the first letter of each line of poetry spells out a message, is attributed by Diogenes Laertius to a certain Dionysius Metathemenus ("the Renegade"), a contemporary of Heraclides Ponticus (fl. 360).[65]

While ciphers substitute alternate symbols for those symbols that normally compose words, codes replace words or thoughts with symbols or other words of different or no meaning (e.g., the code word "Torch" was used to indicate the 1942 invasion of North Africa). Evidence for the use of codes by the Greeks rests on a single example, which is a small collection of signals of limited flexibility: a treacherous gatekeeper communicated with his city's foes by means of the arrangement and number of stones by a watering hole that he was accustomed to visit. In this way he could convey the watch, detachment, and position to which he had been assigned.[66]

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without the piece of wood, to the commander. He, when he has received it, cannot otherwise get any meaning out of it,—since the letters have no connection, but are disarranged,—unless he takes his own "scytale" and winds the strip of parchment about it, so that, when its spiral course is restored perfectly, and that which follows is joined to that which precedes, he reads around the staff, and so discovers the continuity of the message. And the parchment, like the staff, is called "scytale," as the thing measured bears the name of the measure. (Perrin, trans.)

It is a matter of some contention whether the *skutale* served to render messages decipherable or merely as a token of authenticity for the message and its bearer. The present consensus favors the latter purpose. See, e.g., Michell 273–74; Leopold passim; J. Oehler, "σκυτάλη," *RE* 3, no. A.1 (1927): 691–92. For the contrary opinion, see Reinke 115–16; Leighton 150–52. There is no adequate explanation, however, why this particular method would be considered appropriate if confidentiality was not a consideration.

63. I.e., a piece of wood with holes denoting letters, through which string was threaded successively according to the sequence of letters in the message (Aen. Tact. 31.16–22).

64. Aen. Tact. 31.2; his idea has endured into the twentieth century.

65. Diog. Laert. 5.93; he also mentions *parastikhidia* in reference to the dramatist Epicharmus (ca. 550–460), at 8.78. I owe my knowledge of these incidents to Margoliouth (an intriguing and bizarre article) 2.

66. Aen. Tact. 18.20–21; cf. 18.19, where the presence or absence of a flock of wool indicated whether Temenus ought to attack.

Allusions that require a common background or acquaintance can—and did—serve to conceal meanings.[67] When the Lacedaemonian Hippodamus was blockaded by Arcadians in Prasiae, a herald came from Sparta to speak with him. The Arcadians refused to allow the herald into Prasiae, but Hippodamus hailed him from the walls. Knowing that the Arcadians were listening, Hippodamus told the herald to bid the Spartans to deliver his garrison from the woman bound in the temple. The Arcadians present were puzzled, but the Lacedaemonian herald understood the reference. There hung in a temple in Sparta a picture of famine personified and enchained; Hippodamus was telling him that the garrison was starving and immediate relief was imperative.[68] The letter written by Plato to Dionysius (concerning the exiled Dion and his wife) probably relied on this form of private circumlocution in those passages "clear to Dionysius alone."[69]

Modes of Delivery

There are a few examples of covert communication by signaling, whether by fire or some other device. These suffered from the same defects, and benefited from the same advantages, as their overt counterparts. However, signaling by fire or other signs catches the eye, and although the content of a message might not be apparent, the fact that a message was sent would be. Attendant on this was a danger that the signaler could be discovered and captured, as was the case with the Athenian Agoratus' unnamed elder brother.[70] More often, therefore, the agents themselves or couriers enlisted by them brought covert messages; occasionally arrangements were made for places at which secret messages could be dropped off or picked up.

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67. Cf. Q. Curtius 6.9.15; Paus. 1.37.3, in which he addressed those who were initiated into mystery rites as knowing his meaning.

68. Polyaenus 2.15.1 (ca. 364); cf. Athen. 452a.

69. Plato was sent by Dionysius to Dion (then exiled in Athens) to learn whether Dion would object if he gave Dion's wife to another man. Not surprisingly, Dion took this ill. Plato sent a letter that was open in other respects but that was clear to Dionysius alone in this particular. Plut. *Dion* 21.1, 21.4; cf. [Plato] *2 Epist*. 312d. Cf. Plut. *Alex*. 7.4–9. Cf. also the tale about Periander's response to Thrasybulus' herald (the roles of the two tyrants are given variously in Hdt. 5.92 and Aristotle *Politics* 1284a [3.8.3]).

70. Lysias XIII *(Against Agoratus)* 65/67.

Agent

Unless one proposes that Demaratus was a spy (which is rather unlikely), there are no examples before the Peloponnesian War of spies sending back information while still operating. Instead, they reported once they had returned home and their mission was over. This practice enabled them to give comprehensive information and enabled the recipient of the news to pose questions and get immediate clarification. There was no need to have physical evidence of secret communication in the form of letters and the like, unless by chance the agent needed to supplement his memory. Since other forms of communication that possessed a similar capacity for detail were not likely to be more rapid than the agent travelling in person, the information would be relatively timely if the spy returned immediately after he collected it. The disadvantage to this practice was that the spy either was not in place for an extended period of time or, if so, delayed communication until the end of his sojourn.

Traitors at times communicated directly with their new allies. There is a fragmentary but exciting account of a clandestine meeting in the Florence fragment of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*.

> . . . in the temple of Demeter and Kore, which is near the walls . . . through the wood, he was keeping watch inside. And during this time he kept silent hidden in the wood. But the Athenian, when he stood guard, would let down a rope over the wall and make a sign that he had assumed the watch, either by calling or throwing a stone. The Myndian, having come out of the wood, would first take and keep any note that might have been let down by him; then he himself would attach another to the rope.[71]

Courier

Although some of those betraying information to the enemy communicated in person, many (from at least the sixth century) had recourse to

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71. *Hell. Oxy.* 5.2 (Chambers' reconstruction of the text): [line 5] [τῷ νε]ῷ τῷ τῆς Δήμητρ[ος καὶ Κό]ρης, ὅ[cἱ ἐγγ]ὺς τοῖς τείχεσί⟨ν⟩ ἐστι [. . . .]ου διὰ τὴν | [ὕλη]ν ἐγεγόνει τη [ρέων εἴ]cω. ὁ [δ]ὲ κατα | [τοῦ]τον μὲν χρόνο[ν ἡcυ]χίαν εἶχεν | [ἐγκρ]ύψας αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ὕλην· ὅτε δὲ |l10 [κατας]ταίη φύλαξ ὁ ᾿Αθη[ναῖ]ος, ἐκεῖνος μὲν καθεὶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ τείχ[ους] cπάρτον | ἐποίηcεν ἄν τι cημεῖον ὅτ[ι] παρείλη|φεν τὴ[ν φ]υλακήν, ἢ φθεγξάμενο[c ἢ λί]lθῳ βαλών. ὁ δὲ Μύνδ⟨ι⟩ος ἐξελ[θὼν ἐ]κ τῆς |l15 ὕλης πρῶτον μὲν εἴ τι γραμματεῖον | εἴη παρ᾿ ἐκείνου καθείμενον [[τε]] ἐλάμ|βανε͎ν καὶ διεφύλαττ[ε]ν, ἔ[πειτ]α δὲ προ[c]λῆψεν αὐτὸς ἂν ἕτερον [τῷ cπάρτῳ γ]ραμμ[α. There is some debate over whether Μύνδ⟨ι⟩ος is a name or an ethnic and over the location of the city to be betrayed: see Bruce 45–49 on 5.2; McKechnie and Kern; in *Hell. Oxy.* 131.

couriers or drops while they remained in their city or in their ranks, as did the spies of Nicias in the late fifth century. The category of couriers can be further divided into those who knew they were conveying secret information and those who did not.

Couriers aware of their role were chosen from among those wishing to send the information or from trusted subordinates. In the former case, the context was usually treachery; in the latter, it could be treachery or sensitive official business (either military or political). The degree of knowledge possessed by such couriers varied. Accomplices of traitors would often know a great deal, and the information could be imparted verbally, as in the case of a man sent by the Theban exiles to Charon regarding the overthrow of Archias.[72] A cavalryman of a besieged city, who was a member of a fifth column intending to betray his people, sewed a letter into his breastplate and allowed himself to be captured in a raid outside the walls. In this example, the letter would serve more to indicate to his captors that he came to them deliberately (rather than making up a story on the spot that he was on their side all along) than to fill in gaps in his own knowledge, as he was privy to the intended treachery.[73] The men purportedly coming from Nicias' spies in Syracuse called out their message indiscriminately to Athenian soldiers, who then relayed it to their generals. This cannot be accepted as indicative of normal procedure, since at other points it is apparent that Nicias had information not available to his fellow generals, implying a more limited and secure channel of communication. Instead, this practice no doubt resulted from Hermocrates' fear lest someone realize that his men were not who they pretended to be.[74]

Some subordinates would be cognizant of the news they bore. When Alexander sent Amphoterus to Parmenio in response to information about Amyntas' plot, he did not entrust the message to a letter; instead, Amphoterus memorized it (moreover, he traveled disguised as a native).[75] Sicinnus delivered Themistocles' message verbally as well. Other couriers might not know the content of the message they were carrying but would be aware that it was of a secret nature. In this camp

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72. Plut. *Mor.* 516cd; *Pelopidas* 7.2. This man was personally known to Charon, which would further aid in both communication and recognition.

73. Aen. Tact. 31.8.

74. Thuc. 7.73.3–4; Plut. *Nicias* 26.1–2; Diod. Sic. 13.18.4–5. In fairness, it must be noted that the mode of delivery of Hermocrates' agents was not considered so outlandish as to provoke Nicias' suspicions enough to verify their information by other means.

75. Arrian *Anab.* 1.25.1ff.

belong the slave of Histiaeus and the couriers who handled Pausanias' correspondence with the Persians.[76]

There is no hard evidence that covert couriers were a professional or even specialized breed, but it is not impossible, since the art of smuggling was not unfamiliar to the Greeks. Besides the usual clandestine importation of merchandise and arms, there is reference to "a few men" who yearly deceived the people of Ilium by smuggling in Locrian maidens despite Ilium's every precaution.[77]

It was also possible to dupe an unsuspecting individual to carry messages without his or her knowledge or consent. Pharnabazus deceived Lysander in this way, by agreeing to write a letter absolving him from charges of misconduct, permitting him to read the letter, and then substituting another document (identical in form, but damning, rather than absolving, the Spartan) before Lysander returned to Lacedaemon.[78] Aeneas suggested sewing a letter written on thin tin into the sandals of a messenger and then openly sending him with an innocent letter to the intended recipient. After delivering his missive, the courier would be asked to spend the night. While he slept his sandals would be unstitched, the message retrieved, and a reply enclosed. Later he would return bearing another innocent letter.[79]

Not all Greek couriers were male; indeed, not all were human. Aeneas suggested employing women for transporting messages written on metal strips and disguised as earrings.[80] He further noted that dogs carried mes-

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76. One presumes that the message was tattooed on Histiaeus' slave's head to keep him from knowing the message he carried—if not, why not give it verbally (unless he was thought too stupid to memorize the amount of text that could be written on his skull)? This story, which embodies the sum of all Greek intelligence activity before Alexander in many histories of espionage (more on account of its bizarre nature than its pertinence), seems to me rather suspect, since it entails a considerable delay while the slave's hair grew back, during which somebody might catch sight of the message; more important, Histiaeus' precarious position might have collapsed in the interval. Cf. Hdt. 5.35; Aen. Tact. 31.28–29; Polyaenus 1.24.1

Pausanias' couriers must have had an inkling that treachery was in the cards if the regent thought it necessary to have them killed on delivery of their message (i.e., he feared loose tongues). See Thuc. 1.132.5.

77. Aen. Tact. 31.24. Since this custom went on yearly for centuries and the women faced death if caught, there is every likelihood that the Locrians depended on those smugglers who were successful and spurned those who were not.

78. Plut. *Lys.* 20.1–4; Polyaenus 7.19.1; Cornelius Nepos *Lys.* 4.

79. Aen. Tact. 31.4; cf. Leo Byz. 1.5.

80. One wonders, however, whether most women would have been afforded ample opportunity for travel between city-states.

sages in Epirus and Thessaly.[81] Aelian mentions a pigeon used to carry a note from Elis to Aegina, albeit in a private context.[82]

Drops

Among the Greeks, drops were originally conceived to meet the demands of physical access. The earliest example is an ongoing correspondence between Timoxenus of Scione, the commander of a contingent sent by Scione to help defend Potidaea, and Artabazus, who was commanding the Persian forces besieging that city in the early fifth century.[83] Timoxenus was working to betray Potideia, and the two communicated via letters wrapped around arrows, which were fired into predetermined spots. The matter was exposed, however, when Artabazus' arrow missed its mark and wounded a man; the letter was discovered and brought to the *strategoi*. Given this context, the idea may have been of Persian origin, but it must be noted that a bit earlier Themistocles had left messages on rocks for the Ionians and their Persian masters to find.[84] Certainly the Greeks used arrows to carry notes between besieger and besieged from the time of Cimon, but without the notion of a prearranged drop.[85]

Aeneas Tacticus developed the idea of drops in the fourth century, but with a different focus: his primary concern was security. There are problems inherent in a communication system that calls for personal contact between agent, courier (if employed), and recipient. The transaction might be seen, for instance, and suspicion might fall on the parties involved. Couriers could, and did, betray those who relied on them. Aeneas showed how the drop method could avoid such dangers.

> The letter should be sent to a certain place [. . . by a man known to the recipient] and it should be indicated to him that a message has come for him and is in the appointed spot, by the fact that the man comes into the city and buys or sells something. And by this

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81. Aen. Tact. 31.32.

82. The pigeon bore a message from a victorious competitor at the Olympic Games to the athlete's father in Aegina (Aelian *VH* 9.2; the citation is owed to S. Lewis 42 and 168 n. 104). See also Athenaeus 9.395 and, for Roman uses, Pliny *NH* 10.53 and Front. *Strat.* 3.13.7–8.

83. Hdt. 8.128. Cf. Aen. Tact. 31.25–27; Polyaenus 7.33.1.

84. Hdt. 8.19; Plut. *Them.* 9.2.

85. Plut. *Cimon* 12.3. In terms of fourth-century perceptions, Aeneas Tacticus did not link the Timoxenus-Artabazus correspondence (at 31.25–27) directly to his discussion of drops at 31.14 and 31.31. Cf. Caesar *Bell. Gall.* 5.48.

> method neither does the bearer know to whom the message has
> been brought nor will the recipient be known as having the letter.[86]

The omnipresent shrines to heroes also provided ready receptacles for
messages disguised as votive tablets. This method is quite clever: the
intentions of a foreigner asking directions to a local shrine would not be
suspect. Likewise, frequent trips of a citizen to a shrine would appear
quite innocent. If remarked on, those sending messages in this manner
would be noteworthy only for their apparent piety. Their cover might be
still stronger if the chosen shrine was dedicated to a hero connected with
(or reputedly connected with) their families.[87] The danger of this practice
would lie in the possibility that dedications concealing messages might be
stolen and hence never received or, still worse, perceived for what they
were.

Unfortunately, once again the specter of theory versus practice con-
fronts us—we cannot be certain that drops in fact existed or were
employed in the manner described by Aeneas. However, it is certain that
an awareness of the potential of the practice existed in the fourth century,
and such knowledge begs to be put into use.[88]

Unspecified

As is typical in the history of intelligence, there are examples of covert
communication that lack indication of method and manner. Among
them is the secret correspondence between Phrynichus and Astyochus.
How did Phrynichus know where to get in touch with Astyochus? What
conveyance did he use for his letters? How did he expect Astyochus to
reply? From the preceding discussion, one would expect that a trusted

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86. Aen. Tact. 31.31, Loeb reconstruction and translation; the text may have a lacuna:
τὰ πεμπόμενα γράμματα εἴς τινα τόπον . . . [ὑπ᾽ ἀνθρώπου γνωτοῦ] τῷ πεμπομένῳ δῆλον
γίγνεσθαι ἐλθόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ πωλοῦντός τι ἢ ὠνουμένου, ὅτι ἥκει
αὐτῷ γράμματα καὶ κεῖται ἐν τῷ προρρηθέντι τόπῳ.

87. It is possible that some degree of impiety might be attached to using shrines for these
purposes (cf. Whitehead, *Aineias the Tactician,* 187 ad loc.). The degree to which this
would bother the pragmatic (but superstitious) Greeks probably varied according to indi-
vidual nature.

88. Bankers *(trapeziteis),* with whom documents might be deposited to be recovered by
another person, might have provided convenient opportunities for drops. A perusal of pri-
vate law cases, however, affords the realization that third parties who accepted documents
were not always above taking advantage of their position for their own ends. Thus they
may have been considered unreliable for covert communication. Yet an individual who
became a banker, either as a profession or as a temporary cover, would be in an excellent
position to aid covert communication by providing a drop.

courier was employed, but the details of such questions drift, unanswered and lost, on the shoals of the eighth book of Thucydides.[89]

The Effect of Communication on Intelligence

It is readily apparent that the highest quality intelligence is of no use unless it can be communicated to those who have need of it. Yet while theorists such as Xenophon realized that even the most trustworthy intelligence agents could be thwarted in their attempts to pass on information, there is little indication that backup or alternate channels were prepared for agents to ensure that their reports were received. When these are attested, it is in the context of complementary types of communication—most often signals and couriers, with the former serving to get a basic message across swiftly, while the latter provided details when they arrived later. Instead, the Greeks seem to have trusted receipt of messages to Hermes, or to have relied on more than one agent, presumably reckoning that at least one would manage to get word back in time. While this might seem indicative of incompetence or negligence and might lead one to think that the Greeks placed little value on intelligence, one must remember that the lack of effective fallback communication channels plagued military operations as late as World War II, when intelligence was not neglected by most commanders.[90]

In an age before the "real-time" communication of television, radar, radio, and the like, there was necessarily a lag between event and report.[91] This lag was potentially dangerous.[92] This is particularly true of military intelligence at tactical and operational levels, when a given piece

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89. Thuc. 8.50–51; see also Plut. *Alc.* 25.5–10.

90. Handel (*Intelligence and Military Operations,* 62) noted that the British suffered from this malady in the earlier campaigns in the North African theater.

91. While there are allusions to cledomancy (news traveling more quickly than technological means allow), these cannot be taken seriously in discussing the effect of communication on intelligence. See Pritchett 3:132 for some interesting observations and examples.

92. It has been observed (Lee, *Information and Frontiers,* 163 and n. 67, citing M. Van Creveld, *Command in War* [Cambridge, Mass., 1985], 22), with some justification, that the timeliness of information is dependent on the speed of information relative to its subject matter, as opposed to its absolute speed. Yet it is apparent that the speed of electronic transmissions is proportionally far greater to that of the fastest jet than that of a courier to a marching army. The speed of an army's advance over long distances has not increased astronomically over that shown in the ancient world—Alexander's pace in Asia Minor was not all that much slower than the Allied breakout through France in 1944. Likewise, the time necessary to effect political decisions has not necessarily been reduced. While fire signals did convey a message at the speed of light (once they were set up), it has been shown that these messages were limited in range and utility.

of information might be obsolete by the time of arrival or might have arrived too late to allow an effective response. When Brasidas was pressuring the people of Amphipolis to surrender their city to him, for example, Thucydides was a half day's sail away. By the time a messenger had informed Thucydides and he could hasten to the rescue, Brasidas had persuaded the people to admit him, and so Thucydides missed the opportunity to thwart the Spartan's ambitions by a narrow margin.[93] For this reason, the Lacedaemonians declined an alliance with Plataea, since they realized that they were too far away to be able to respond in time to requests for aid.[94] A cynic might retort that this was a pretense covering an unwillingness due to other reasons, but in any case the point was acceptable enough to be proffered as an excuse.

The deleterious effect of slow communication channels might be alleviated in military contexts by a commander's presence among his troops, where his own senses might afford him information, and where his own voice could convey his wish. Not a few commanders made their decisions in this context, but the reduction of reaction time was paid for with the loss of a coherent picture and by a distraction with immediate detail.

Strategic intelligence was less affected by communication time than were other types of information, since it tended to retain its value over a longer period of time. The Athenian dependency on imported grain, for instance, was well known to the Peloponnesians and remained a constant factor in their conduct of the war in the Aegean.

While a lack of technology has been shown to be an impediment to swift and accurate communication, it does have a curious compensation. Studies in the business world have shown that the use of the telephone and of other faceless electronic devices has led to a degree of dislocation and uncertainty in conversants, since they are cut off from nonverbal cues and kinesics. In a world in which most political and many military messages were conveyed face-to-face, these signals would have been available for recipients to interpret (however unconsciously) when receiving news. Isocrates would have us believe that more trust was put in the spoken word than in the written, since there was more scope for empha-

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93. Thuc. 4.104.4–106.4. Gomme 3:579 on Thuc. 4.106.4 maintained that Thucydides must have arranged a signaling system, since a messenger would not have been able to get the news to Thucydides so quickly over a distance of fifty miles. He added: "If this is correct, the fact that signaling is not expressly mentioned is of some importance; for it implies that the use of signals was commoner, and more elaborate, than is generally supposed."

94. Hdt. 6.108.

sis in delivery, yet his characterization may have been influenced more by rhetoric and excuses for his medium (i.e., letters) than by a desire to reflect reality.[95]

Contextualizing the Message

Receiving the Message

Yet another factor influencing the reception of information is the nature of the political process within a state. There is some variation in detail, but recipients can be generally classified according to whether a single person can make policy decisions or whether such a capability is accorded to a collective body.[96]

There is a tendency for agents and sources to be brought directly to military commanders, tyrants, and kings, after an initial reception by guards or pickets. This tendency may in part be a result of a simplification on the part of our sources, especially in cases where the name of the commander was used with a verb of learning and where no further details were provided. Xenophon's casual commendation of Agesilaus' personal interview of deserters both provides evidence for the practice and implies the existence of contrary custom.[97] The guidelines provided to sentries regarding when the commander may or may not be disturbed for news probably varied according to individual, but it appears that a competent leader was expected to be generally available.[98] Xenophon with some pride brought attention to his own practice of receiving any who had news for him, no matter what his personal cir-

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95. Isoc. *Epist.* I *(To Dionys.)* 2: "everyone puts more faith in the spoken word than the written"; cf. V *(To Phil.)* 25ff.

96. Cf. Starr 32ff.; Riepl 430–31.

97. Xen. *Ages.* 1.19. Cf. Cyrus personally questioning captives (Xen. *Cyr.* 6.3.9).

98. This might not be true of the Greeks' less egalitarian neighbors. Herodotus told how Deioces was not easy of access, and it is possible that his story has foundations in fifth-century Persian practice, at least in times of peace (Hdt. 1.99; cf. Plut. *Them.* 27.2). The ruler probably did not normally personally interview most sources (e.g., the tale of Xerxes' interrogation of the captured Greek spies appears to have been contrary to customary procedure), although he might have been more approachable on campaign. Herodotus' account (4.96) of Coes son of Erxander is suggestive: Coes was in command of the contingent from Mytilene accompanying Darius on his expedition into Scythia and had information he wished to impart to the king. He did not do so, however, until he had satisfied himself that Darius was receptive to others' suggestions. Charidemus was bolder and less fortunate (Q. Curtius 3.2.10–19; Diod. Sic. 17.30.4).

cumstances.[99] Aeneas Tacticus also warned leaders against postponing attention to news, and his examples—including the fall of the Cadmeia, Lampsacus and of Mytilene—are of interest not only in that they censure the leaders' failure to respond promptly but also in that they provide evidence that guards and attendants felt free to admit messengers to their leaders at all times.[100]

Alexander appears to have been somewhat distanced from informants by his officers and guards. These men decided whether or not to disturb the king so that he might hear tidings. When Eurylochus and Epimenes came with information pertaining to a threat to the king's life, Ptolemy and Leonnatus ushered them in and awoke Alexander.[101] But Philotas did not communicate Cebalinus' report of an assassination plot to the king, perhaps (as he claimed) because neither it nor the source seemed credible, or perhaps (as his prosecutors claimed) because he was a participant in the plot. He paid for his decision with his life.[102] Cebalinus still hesitated to go directly to Alexander after Philotas put him off, and he eventually sought Metron as an intermediary. It is evident from the latter instance that there was a real danger that a king or tyrant might lack critical information because of precautions taken for his person and because of the consequent reliance on subordinate agents.

There were three main routes by which information came into a governing body: through state channels, through the private information resources possessed by leaders, and through the personal experience and common knowledge of those possessing a vote. These three routes intersected in one or more governing bodies, and the process resulting in their synthesis was, in effect, a process of interpretation and evaluation.

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99. Xen. *Anab.* 4.3.10: "Two youths ran up to Xenophon while he was having breakfast; for all knew that it was possible to approach him breaking fast or dining, or wake him up if he was sleeping, to speak with him if anyone had something to say regarding the war." If Diodorus' account is to be believed, Alexander received news of Philotas' plot while in the bath; he reacted at once (Diod. 17.79.5). Cf. Onas. 11.6: "Let [the general] admit everyone who wants to report anything, whether slave or free, night or day, on the march or in camp, when resting, bathing, or eating; for those who put things off and are difficult of access, and bid their subordinates refuse those who come to see them, consequently fail in many and important matters or are ruined by their neglect; for often informants come at critical moments, when it is possible to avert something in the nick of time." See also the practice and comments of T.E. Lawrence (553).

100. Aen. Tact. 31.33–34, citing Astyanax, tyrant of Lampsacus, and Archias at Thebes, and alluding to the capture of Mytilene. Cf. Plut. *Pelopidas* 10.3–4 (not mentioned in Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.6–7); Plut. *Mor.* 596e–f.

101. Q. Curtius 8.6.22ff.

102. Q. Curtius 6.7.16ff.; Diod. Sic. 17.79.1; Arrian *Anab.* 3.26.2; Plut. *Alex.* 49.3.

Information appears to have been received by collective bodies according to standing parameters of more or less complexity. It is not my task to attempt reconstructions of the governmental processes of the many states of the Greek world. Such studies would be most important for assessments of given states' mechanisms for evaluation and hence of their use of intelligence, but they would properly be the scope of whole books. Here, I will confine myself to a few generalities.

In states governed by collective bodies, procedures existed for receiving news from representatives of other states, from their own envoys and agents, and from other informants, domestic or foreign. These were not confined to ad hoc usages of customary channels but were sometimes based on established agendas for discussion of continuing concerns.[103] In many states there existed more than one deliberating body, so that initial reception of information, deliberation, proposals, and decisions might take place in various bodies depending on the nature of the issue, might be repeated in more than one body, or might be divided between bodies. In states such as Sparta, this system might have existed to ensure that initial evaluation was undertaken by men experienced in politics before the matter was referred to the Apella for a yes-or-no vote, but in states such as Athens, in which the membership of the *boulé* was little more expert than their counterparts in the *ekklesia,* the division might have offered little advantage from the standpoint of evaluation.

Before I go further, the input of the voting citizens, particularly in those states governed by democracy, ought to be described. It has been argued, not without reason, that the average citizen of a democratic polis (like his contemporary counterpart) did not possess an adequate depth or breadth of knowledge for making decisions on foreign policy.[104] Consequently, his vote was elicited through persuasive oratory rather than factual presentation. This scenario is generally accurate but needs some qualification. First, the plays of Aristophanes demand from their audi-

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103. In fourth-century Athens, the defense of the *khora* was customarily included on the agenda of the *kuria,* as was border defense on that of the *ekklesia* ([Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 43.4; Aristotle *Rhet.* 360a).

104. Cf. Starr 37 and n. 2, citing Demosth. X *(4 Phil.)* 1 and Thuc. 3.38—good examples, but I am somewhat wary of the speakers (Demosthenes and Cleon), who had every motive both to assert the superiority of their own views and to maintain (perhaps falsely, certainly with bias) that the current policy of the citizens was due to ignorance rather than prudence. Similar charges might be made of the voting public in the United States and Canada today; "packaging" and "image" are still quite important in deciding issues. Cf. Handel, *Intelligence and Military Operations,* 28–29, on the difficulties faced by Montgomery's intelligence officers when presenting information to him.

ence a far deeper political awareness than modern popular humor and at least as much as that found on the editorial pages of newspapers. General knowledge of the political world would have been absorbed from one's own and others' experiences (including past sessions of the assembly) and crystallized in a pattern of factual detail, beliefs, and prejudices. Current information was probably derived from casual conversations, especially in the agora or at symposia. Second, *presbeis,* heralds, and messengers were often introduced to the *ekklesia* (at least in Athens, and most probably in other democratic states), which indicates not only that citizens could listen to information directly from its source but that such an opportunity was perceived to be valuable.[105] Finally, the ability of an orator to persuade the average citizen must be set against the citizen's frequent exposure to oratory in assembly and in the courts. The analogy of a television commercial might be helpful: commercials are effective, and the more credible or clever or entertaining a commercial is, the more well-disposed one may feel toward the product it advertises. But the consumer viewing a commercial, while no doubt influenced, does not necessarily divorce reason altogether when making a final decision to spend hard-earned money. The Greek citizen sitting in assembly had a further advantage over the modern consumer: he heard arguments both for and against proposals. One should not expect his actions to be dictated solely by susceptibility to persuasion. Let the model stand, then, with the above provisions.

The intersection of the three routes, and the beginning of the process of interpretation, occurred when an official response to a piece of information was called for. At this point individuals of differing points of view—unless, by strange chance, all were unanimous in their opinion—argued for different responses. With respect to the information at issue, they could argue in two ways: first, that the information was true, false, or incomplete; second, that the information ought to be interpreted in a certain way. Both means could, of course, be used in conjunction; the second was more common than the first.

Arguments for the veracity of information generally consisted of affirmations of the credibility of the source. For example, when discussing the quality of Philip's troops, Demosthenes said, "As I myself have heard from one of those who lived in that very land [Macedonia]—

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105. Such seems to have been the case in Chios, at Thuc. 8.14.2 (cf. Meiggs and Lewis no. 8).

a man who would never be the sort to lie—they are no better than any-one else."[106] Those who argued that information was false attempted to demonstrate the opposite—that the source was not trustworthy or that the content was improbable (the treatment of the latter often degenerated into the former). Thucydides portrayed Athenagoras doing both, when arguing that the Athenian expedition was a myth: "So now that is what these reports mean—reports that did not arise uncontrived but were fab-ricated by men who always stir things up. But you, if you consider well, will reckon the probabilities not looking to what these men report but from what clever and widely experienced men—as I deem the Athenians to be—would do."[107] Contradictory reports could also be found, as when Cleon proclaimed that the situation in Pylos was other than a mes-senger reported, and as when Nicias and Alcibiades used different, and sometimes incompatible, items of information to portray contradictory views of the feasibility of an expedition in Sicily.[108] The states of health of Philip and Alexander were not infrequently subject to contrary rumors.[109]

Information depicted as incomplete was handled in a number of ways. The most popular was to supplement it with facts gleaned from a private source, as Demosthenes did with his anonymous informant from Mace-don.[110] This tactic both allowed the speaker to reinforce his case with further facts (real or imagined) and also gave him a claim to special authority. It is in this role that those who had private networks func-tioned best, especially when their claim was recognized. Demosthenes, for instance, when evaluating Philip's strength before the assembly, dif-ferentiated the understanding of a casual observer from his own expert knowledge: he claimed privileged information that the Thessalians had resolved on actions indicating a break with Philip.[111]

The same device was also of utility when presenting an interpretation of an item of information. An excellent example is provided by Brasidas, who saw his foes' manner of comportment and called out to his own

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106. Demosth. II *(2 Olynth.)* 17.
107. Thuc. 6.36.3.
108. Thuc. 4.27.3, 6.9–19.
109. See, e.g., Arrian *Anab.* 1.7.3–6.
110. Demosth. II *(2 Olynth.)* 17. Cf. Lysias VIII (*Accusation of calumny*) 8–9.
111. Demosth. I *(1 Olynth.)* 21–22; cf. XVIII *(On the crown)* 172. Isocrates, when writ-ing an oration to Philip (V *[To Philip]* 75), denied that Demosthenes and Philip's other detractors had a right to claim exact knowledge; it is evident, however, that Isocrates here had a motive for so depicting them.

men: "These men will not withstand us—they show it in the movement of their spears and heads; when that occurs among men, they rarely withstand attackers."[112] Brasidas took a detail observed by all and attached a meaning to it. He did this to hearten his troops, one suspects, rather than based on specialized knowledge (in effect, the Athenians did stand up to the attack, if only for a short while). He was, however, perceived as credible, being both experienced and valorous. In the event, the perception was justified, since he led his men to his death and their victory.

It often happened that the same information was presented with different interpretations by two parties: in the debates of rival embassies—such as those of the Corinthians and Corcyrans at Athens or those of the Corinthians and Athenians at Sparta—there was little or no quibbling over whether or not events occurred; instead, the significance and pertinence of the events was hotly contested.[113] In such cases, the democratic assembly acted more as a jury in a court case than as a body deliberating information. In such contexts emotional appeals are most powerful, and consideration of information was perhaps less a concern than was sympathy with those interpreting it.

Interrogation

Not all informants were willing, and even those who were could be moved to suppress, alter, or otherwise influence the information they imparted. The interrogator had to develop both a skill enabling him to sense when another person was withholding information and an ability to motivate the person to provide it. The first attribute is difficult to quantify and seems to be a function of reason and intuition developed through personal experience. It should be noted, however, that the intelligence evaluator of ancient Greece would often be able to check his source's words against his nonverbal communication (e.g., posture, eye contact), since information was frequently conveyed orally rather than through writing. The ability to effectively motivate an informant was and remains the product of keen study of psychology, but often interrogators resorted to less subtle but effective stimuli, including torture, threats of torture or violence, rewards or promised rewards, blackmail, and psychological manipulation to loosen the tongues of recalcitrant individuals.

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112. Thuc. 5.10.5. The context is in a military, rather than democratic, setting but the intent and effect is relevant.
113. Thuc. 1.32–43, 1.68–78.

Torture or threats of death were employed to compel information, to ensure its accuracy, or to accomplish both these ends. Obviously torture would only be feasible for sources over which the interrogator had power of life and death (such as slaves, captives, deserters, and suspected traitors) and would not be applicable to those who could not be harmed due to law, consequence, or relative power (heralds, allied leaders, etc.). Agents employed by the interrogator (such as scouts or watchers) could be punished or even killed for suppressing information or failing to perform their duties.[114]

In Athenian legal practice slaves were forced to undergo torture before their testimony was admissible in some types of court cases.[115] Consequently the efficacy of torture was upheld or questioned by prosecutors and defendants depending on whether testimony was advantageous or deleterious to their position. In different contexts Antiphon provided arguments for both sides: "torture forces people to tell the truth, even if the result will be death, since the compulsion of the moment overrides all else";[116] "I need not remind you, I think, that witnesses under torture are biased in favor of those doing the torturing."[117] In his work on rhetoric, Aristotle illustrated ways in which evidence obtained from torture could be upheld or attacked.[118]

Psychological manipulation was more broadly applicable and often equally effective. Methods were as varied and enduring as human nature. For example, the technique of eliciting information while pretending to

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114. Alexander is reported to have had the *phulakes* guarding the tomb of Cyrus tortured when he learned that the grave had been plundered. He released them when he had established that they had not been privy to the theft (Arrian *Anab*. 6.2.11). In this instance, the torture was applied in the context of a criminal investigation rather than in that of receiving guards' reports; hence the example must be taken as exceptional.

115. Slaves were tortured for evidence in those types of trial in which "they deny a theft or conspire with their masters" (Antiphon *1 Tetr*. 3.4). In theory, free citizens could not be tortured and were protected by a decree passed in the archonship of Scamandrius (Andoc. *On the mysteries* 43; cf. Antiphon *1 Tetr*. 3.4; Demosth. XXIX *[Against Aphobus III]* 14, 39). Andocides mentioned (loc. cit.) that this decree was suspended on the motion of a certain Pisander in the panics concerning the herms and profanations, and examples of its neglect in other crises are not lacking (see, e.g., Antiphon *Murd. Her*. 30, 49–50; Plut. *Mor*. 509a). Cf. Bushala and DuBois on this subject.

116. Antiphon VI *(On the choreutes)* 25. See also Antiphon I *(Against the stepmother)* 10; Antiphon *1 Tetr*. 2.7; Demosth. XXIX *(Against Aphobus III)* 5, 11, 37; Lysias *On a wound by premeditation* 10, 14; Lycurgus *Against Leocrates* 28–30.

117. Antiphon V *(On the murder of Herodas)* 31—the prosecution alone could release a slave from torture. For the ambiguity see also Q. Curtius 7.2.34 on the confessions of Philotas.

118. Aristot. *Rhet*. 1376b–1377a.

be fully informed (called "show of knowledge") is attested in both the ancient and modern worlds. An example from a legal case might be instructive. In the course of investigating his wife's infidelity, a certain Euphiletus took aside his wife's servant and threatened her with torture if she did not confess that his wife was having an affair. She refused to admit that his wife was guilty. But Euphiletus had earlier been told that Eratosthenes might have been involved, so he pretended he knew the whole story, mentioning Eratosthenes by name, and gave out that he was merely establishing corroborating evidence. At this the servant thought the game was up and provided full details in her confession.[119]

Examples of interrogation of voluntary informants can be found in law cases and in literature as well, but Xenophon provided the most detailed outline of a debriefing in a scene depicting the return of the spy Araspas in the *Education of Cyrus*.[120] As previously described in chapter 3, this debriefing was rather straightforward: there was an admonition not to conceal or neglect anything, a statement professing the agent's integrity and the means by which he accomplished his mission and gained access to the information, and a question-and-answer session in which information was both volunteered and demanded. Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* provides a similar, if more stylized, reconstruction of a debriefing, in this case of an anonymous *kataskopos* by Eteocles.[121] Examples of interrogation of unwilling (or at least involuntary) subjects are not uncommon but are not generally detailed. The most elaborate is the poetic account of the questioning of the captive Dolon by Odysseus in the *Iliad*. It is roughly similar to the accounts already mentioned. One might compare briefer anecdotes in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, such as captives questioned about routes and geography.[122]

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119. Lysias I (*On the murder of Eratosthenes*) 19. The same device was also used when interrogating German prisoners of war in World War II. American intelligence officers would have at their disposal both background information from other sources and identity documents taken from prisoners (the abbreviations and codes of which they understood better than the captives). They used these to impress the Germans with remarks on their past histories and so give them the impression that in all cases they were merely confirming that which was already known. A variation was to make leading statements, saying, e.g., "We have learned that your unit was responsible for the execution of ten civilians," when there was a suspicion that something of this sort had occurred, to which a prisoner of war might reply: "Oh no, sir—only five" (P. Levine, conversation with the author, 13 June 1993).

120. Cf. *Od.* 4.630ff., 13.232ff., 16.235ff., 16.460ff.

121. Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes* 369–676. This passage has recently been discussed by H. Roisman (17–36), but in a literary context.

122. *Iliad* 10.370–459; Xen. *Anab*. 3.5.14–15, 4.1.22–23. Cf. Hdt. 7.146; Thuc. 8.33.4; Plut. *Nic*. 30.1.

With some skill, intelligence could be derived from people who did not realize that they were providing substance of material value—even from those imparting misinformation. At one point in the odyssey of the Ten Thousand, the Greeks were encamped by a city on a fertile and lush tract between the Tigris and a canal. Here a messenger came to Clearchus from Ariaeus and Artaozus, who were Persians who had formerly fought for Cyrus (and hence claimed goodwill to the Greeks) but were now in the army of the Persian king Artaxerxes. The messenger warned Clearchus to guard the bridge over the Tigris, since Artaxerxes intended to burn it and thereby cut the Greeks off. At the same time he warned of a night attack. Clearchus was alarmed, but a young man present pointed out to him that the stories were inconsistent, since it was in the Persians' interest to preserve the bridge for their own use if they were to attack. Clearchus then inquired of the messenger how large the "island" was. On being told it was extensive, he evaluated what he had been told and perceived the true intent of the Persians: they wished to prevent him from firing the bridge himself and establishing himself in a defensible area in which he could easily provide for his men.[123]

Interpreting Messages

Interpretation has more than one denotation, paralleling, if you will, the problems the Greeks faced when trying to understand information. In one sense, interpretation refers to the verbal translation of an informant's report into language comprehensible to its recipient (e.g., Persian to Greek). In another, it refers to conveying the significance of observed or reported information (e.g., the significance of an envoy's demand for earth and water).

Verbal Translation
Verbal translation is not easy. Abstract concepts can be particularly difficult to convey, as the Greeks found out to their cost when they equated *libertas* and ἐλευθερία. Both words can be roughly translated as "liberty," but liberty had different parameters to a Roman and a Greek. Concepts and terms such as hegemony (ἡγεμονία) and democracy (δημοκρατία) might well have lacked easy equivalents in other tongues, and Greek might equally have lacked words for foreign concepts. In the

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123. Xen. *Anab*. 2.4.14–24. To be on the safe side, Clearchus still stationed a guard at the bridge.

world of diplomacy, this represented a potential problem. It may also
have led to misapprehension in the military sphere (what *is* a Lacedae-
monian λόχος?). One can only imagine how exacerbated the problem
was when Alexander was campaigning far to the east and probably had
to make inquiries through two interpreters—one to translate Greek and
Persian, another to translate the local language and Persian—since it was
unlikely that a local could speak Greek.[124] Imperfect knowledge of a lan-
guage can only make understanding more difficult. Trivial differences in
syntax can lead to major differences in meaning. There is a story that
when a priest at the oracle of Zeus Ammon intended to address Alexan-
der as "my son" (ὦ παιδίον), he mistook a neuter for a masculine and so
hailed him as "son of Zeus" (ὦ παιδίος = ὦ παῖ Δίος).[125]

The problem of understanding might not have only applied to foreign
tongues: Greek was not uniformly spoken through space or time.[126]
Besides potential misunderstanding due to dialect, words themselves
could and did change their connotation, as Thucydides described in the
context of stasis.[127] Finally, one can no doubt draw from one's own per-
sonal experience examples of miscommunication between two fluent
speakers of the same language raised in the same culture.

Those who attempted to bridge language barriers were called
hermeneis. Curiously, their use is not often mentioned in the sources,
even when they would logically have been needed. When present, they
are usually found attached to rulers of considerable status, such as Dar-
ius, Cyrus, Seuthes, and Alexander, or in the service of military com-
manders abroad, as in the case of the Ten Thousand. They are not found
employed by states with collective governments, although there is
implicit evidence that they were available. The letters sent by the Persian

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124. Cf. Engels 339; Arrian *Anab.* 7.1.5; Arrian *Indica* 28.5.

125. Plut. *Alex.* 27.9, an anecdote too good to be true.

126. S. Lattimore has brought to my attention the possibility of cognitive dissonance in
speeches of (1) foreign-born statesmen, such as Dinarchus, who would have been born to a
Doric dialect, speaking Attic Greek (at least, Attic Greek is what we find in their preserved
speeches) and (2) speakers in court who either delivered speeches composed by a more
gifted orator, or spoke in an Attic dialect when they themselves were of foreign extraction
(e.g., Euxitheus, who probably spoke in the Aeolic dialect yet delivered Antiphon's *On the
Murder of Herodes* in fine Attic). I have not been able to find any indication that suppres-
sion of dialect marred credibility, but certainly orators tried to adapt speeches to their
speakers. In his *Rhetoric* (1405a8, 1406a15), Aristotle said that one of the benefits of
metaphors and epithets was that they gave a pleasing "exotic air" (τὸ ξενικόν and ξενικὴν
ποιεῖ τὴν λέξιν) to a speaker's words.

127. Thuc. 3.82.4.

king to the Lacedaemonians in 425 were not written in Greek, as Thucydides recorded that they were translated by the Athenians when they were intercepted.[128] Gomme has suggested that metics might have served the Athenians as interpreters, but one must also realize that the Persian king expected the Lacedaemonians to be able to translate the documents. When Plutarch described the advent of Persian envoys demanding earth and water, he included among them a man bilingual in Persian and Greek.[129] It may be, therefore, that embassies were accompanied when necessary by their own interpreter—motives for this practice, such as independence, security, and reliability, come to mind easily enough, if this was in fact the case. Some interpreters attached to rulers are named in the sources and were individuals of consequence, with a more or less permanent and professional office. Those serving generals or private individuals are not named and were employed on a less official and more temporary basis.[130] Interpreters must also have been available to merchants and travelers, as they were for Herodotus when he was in Egypt.[131] In a pinch, Greeks could try to convey meanings with gestures or mien.[132]

Most interpreters were not ethnic Greeks. Indeed, the Greeks seemed to have a reluctance to learn a tongue other than their own—Peuces might have been the only Macedonian in Alexander's force to learn Persian, and he did so only after his appointment as satrap.[133] Such sentiment was not

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128. Thuc. 4.50.1–3.

129. Plut. *Them.* 6.2.

130. Interpreters in Herodotus' stories of the Persian kings, however, tend to be anonymous, perhaps because of the ahistorical nature of many of the tales. See, e. g., 1.86, 3.38, 3.140.

131. Hdt. 2.125.

132. At *Anab.* 4.5.33 Xenophon records that Greek soldiers communicated with Armenian boys by signs as if the boys were deaf and dumb; cf. Hdt. 4.113 (Scythians and Amazons). Quintus Curtius (8.12.9) painted an amusing picture of Alexander encountering the Indian ruler Omphis. The two were unable to communicate in speech and attempted to convey goodwill through their countenance (an interpreter was soon found).

133. Arrian *Anab.* 6.30.3. It is not certain that Arrian meant that Peuces was unique. He might have been the only Macedonian considered worthy of mention, and the passage reads μόνος τῶν ἄλλων Μακεδόνων μεταβαλὼν τὴν Μηδικὴν καὶ φωνὴν τὴν Περσικὴν ἐκμαθὼν καὶ τἆλλα ξύμπαντα ἐς τρόπον τὸν Περσικὸν κατασκευασάμενος, so that it is possible (although not probable) that the combination is what was singular. In any case, "going native" drew disapproval (cf. Arrian *Anab.* 7.6.3). Quintus Curtius (3.12.12) described Leonnatus speaking with Darius' mother, apparently with no translator present, but the account seems fictitious, and in any case mechanics might have been omitted for the sake of drama.

evident among their neighbors.[134] Consequently Greeks coming into contact with people of other languages were often forced to rely on an interpreter who differed from them in ethnic origin.[135] This might have been a disadvantage with respect to availability or fidelity and security (though perhaps not, as Greeks seem to have betrayed Greeks as often as anyone else did). It did have a positive aspect: foreign interpreters could provide their patrons with additional information about unfamiliar lands and people. When an embassy of Persians, formerly allies in Cyrus' cause, came up to the Greek leaders, the man interpreting for the Greeks recognized the brother of their enemy Tissaphernes among them and communicated his realization that the embassy was not to be trusted.[136]

There are some instances in which the credibility or loyalty of an interpreter was dubious,[137] but how could those speaking through him discern this? Seuthes knew some Greek already and so had some measure of control over Abrozelmes, but he was probably exceptional in this regard.[138]

Explanation of Significance

On Herodotus' canvas, the Spartans at Thermopylae—sitting in clusters or alone, combing their long hair, and lounging at ease on the edge of ruin—are juxtaposed by a look of perplexity on the face of a Persian scout. The tidings were no less strange to Xerxes. Numbers and defenses both scout and king could reckon and despise, but Herodotus' vignette demands that Demaratus, an exiled king of Sparta, be present in the king's train, so that Xerxes might know (if never really understand) what these actions meant: his delay was futile, since his opponents would never surrender but were preparing themselves for death in battle.[139]

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134. Cf. Hdt. 9.16; Diod. Sic. 17.67.1. Herodotus (2.154) related a story of Psammetichus, ruler of Egypt, wherein he gave Egyptian boys to those Greeks who helped him gain his throne, so that the boys would learn Greek—Herodotus supposed these were the ancestors of the Egyptian interpreters, who formed a class in Egypt (Hdt. 2.164).

135. The Greek colonists in Asia Minor, Italy, and Sicily must surely have faced difficulties communicating with the indigenous peoples, but no record is left of their solutions to this problem, which, if not overcome, would have rendered most types of information sources useless. Instead, most examples come from Xenophon's account of the Ten Thousand, while the remainder are derived from the campaigns of Alexander and the travels of Herodotus.

136. Xen. *Anab.* 2.5.35.

137. Xen. *Anab.* 7.6.43; Arrian *Indica* 28.5.

138. Xen. *Anab.* 7.6.8–9.

139. Hdt. 7.209–10. The incident is referred to in the *Suda* s.v. (oddly enough) Ἀλογία.

Interpretation serves to make information accessible to its recipient. It is a major step in the progression of information to intelligence. Needless to say, not all examples are so dramatic, and many acts of interpretation are unconscious—a yellow sign with a bent arrow, for example, is immediately interpreted by a driver to signify a curve in the road ahead. There is a danger, however, in misinterpreting things that resemble things familiar to us—Americans driving in Canada have been known to mistake speed limits posted in kilometers per hour for limits in miles per hour. In the meeting between Alexander and Omphis, Alexander had at first thought Omphis came to offer battle, since the Indian led his troops, as a formal reception, arrayed as if for war. The Macedonian at once set about preparing for an onslaught, whereupon Omphis rightly diagnosed Alexander's misinterpretation and rode forward alone.[140]

More generally, the meaning of a piece of information is not always clear when treated in isolation. If a scout returned to tell his commander that a company carried few provisions in its baggage train, this piece of news could be open to several interpretations. The troops might have planned a short march that they would complete quickly, since they would be relatively unencumbered. Another possibility is that they would march far but slowly, due to the need to forage. A third is that they expected to find supplies furnished by friends and sympathizers along their route and would therefore travel quickly and far. If the commander knew that the people of a nearby city were friendly to the company's men, he might favor the third interpretation. He might also see an opportunity: a delay would cause the company to become vulnerable to shortages, so he might send peltasts to slow their progress, or he might contrive obstacles across their expected route. He might arouse false suspicions and fears among the people of the city supplying provisions, or he might undertake some other action to exploit the information.

The above collation and interpretation of information is a crude and simple example of intelligence. Not surprisingly, most matters were far more complex in both number of variables and possible interpretations. Perhaps in consequence the Greeks invested considerable time and energy in interpretation and evaluation.

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140. Q. Curtius 8.12.8.

Verisimilitude and Validation

Credibility in classical Greece was governed by perceptions of individuals, rather than by a fixed hierarchy of agents or sources. Demosthenes once said that captives were more trustworthy than other sources, since they had no interests of their own to further.[141] While it is true that captives were taken or questioned to verify information provided by other sources and that they were especially vulnerable to retribution if they were proved deceitful, one might well imagine Demosthenes saying otherwise if it was in his interest to speak contrary to the testimony of a captive. More indicative of ancient practice is the sentiment attributed to Agesilaus, who claimed that when he heard praise or blame spoken of a man, he sought information on the speaker before believing the words.[142] The criteria for credibility were essentially threefold: character, access, and motive.

Perceptions of the character of the informant were crucial, as is illustrated in efforts to uphold or demolish on this basis the testimony of witnesses in law cases.[143] Sian Lewis has already done an admirable job of delineating the various factors influencing assessment of character, such as social class, ethnicity, gender, and reputation, leaving me only the task of adding that white hair also led an air of authority to words. For example, Lysias noted that he sought the eldest Plataean when making inquiries about the status of a certain Pancleon, who claimed to be from that polis.[144]

Access to information was also important and could mitigate antipathy aroused by less than desirable character traits, at least for a while. Alcibiades, for instance, was valued by the Spartans because of his intimacy with Athenian capabilities and machinations; hence his previous excesses were for a time overlooked. Eyewitnesses were, sensibly enough, thought more trustworthy than those who had heard of events by hearsay. Iphicrates, for example, was suspicious of reports of the death of Mnasippus that came to him en route to Corcyra in 373, since they were not from eyewitnesses. He thought the reports were meant to deceive

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141. Demosth. X *(4 Phil.)* 32.
142. Plut. *Mor.* 208d; cf. Xen. *Ages.* 11.4.
143. See, e.g., Lysias XXVI *(On the scrutiny of Evander)* 21ff.
144. Lysias XXIII *(Against Pancleon)* 5. Cf. *Iliad* 1.250–74; Isoc. VI *(Archidamus)* 4.

him.[145] Similar assessments can be found in the programmatic statements of Thucydides, who further points out that even those present at the same event remember things differently.[146] Alexander and Xenophon also perceived the need to establish *how* the source or agent obtained information. Alexander questioned a prisoner as to whether he knew of a path around the Susian Rocks by hearsay or personal observation; the latter was esteemed as the more certain type of knowledge.[147] Xenophon's methods are probably reflected in his descriptions of Cyrus, who asked of his ally how he knew that a large force of the enemy was afield against him, and who was pleased to learn that his ally's information was confirmed by many people coming with different versions of the same story.[148] Knowledge about the source was especially of use when dealing with people of limited experience. On his trek back from India, Alexander sent men ahead to find out how far distant the ocean lay. His men questioned some locals downriver, who told them they had never heard of such a body of water, but who mentioned that on the third day of their voyage downstream the Macedonians would reach bitter water. The scouts correctly deduced that the bitter water was saltwater and that the ocean was close. They recognized that the knowledge of the people they had encountered was incomplete due to isolation.[149]

While agents entrusted with information gathering rarely had need to justify their communication of information, the motivations of sources were usually carefully considered. People with interests at stake demanded cautious treatment. If you were seeking to purchase a home, you would be more likely to believe what your sister tells you of a house she visited than what you hear from its owner, even though the latter's knowledge would be far more comprehensive. So, too, the Greeks normally exercised caution in the cases of exiles appealing for aid or traitors

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145. Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.31. Cf. Thuc. 3.29.1–2: Prof. Lattimore (conversation with the author, 27 May 1994) observed that in this passage Thucydides seems to mock Alcidas for his tardy efforts to verify reports of the fall of Mytilene. Cf. also Hutchinson (48 on Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 41), who noted that in drama personal observation on the part of messengers heightened their claim to veracity, citing also Aesch. *Persians* 266 (cf. 513) and Soph. *Antigone* 1192f.; he further distinguished autopsy from report, citing Eur. *Heracles* 847f.

146. Thuc. 1.22.3. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.45.

147. Q. Curtius 5.4.10.

148. Xen. *Cyr*. 2.1.3–4.

149. Q. Curtius 9.9.6.

rationalizing their treachery. Those allies thought to be serving the inter-
est of their state at another's expense might also be suspect, as Nicias bit-
terly observed of the Egestaeans.[150] While the Greeks at Salamis thought
Aristides more trustworthy than Themistocles, they were still not con-
vinced of the Persian encirclement until told by non-Athenian sources,
when a Tenian ship deserted to them with the news.[151] In the legal arena,
motives, or lack thereof, of the participants in court cases were of con-
stant concern. In one instance, Lysias alleged that Agoratus adopted the
pretense of being an unwilling informer so that he might appear more
trustworthy.[152]

Besides unconscious editing or bias due to self-interest, outright fabri-
cation and misinformation had to be reckoned with. Misinformation and
fake deserters were largely successful, not because the Greeks were igno-
rant of the possibility that informants could deceive them (quite the con-
trary), but because most were less than systematic in verifying informa-
tion. Xenophon and Alexander were exceptions—albeit not infallible
ones—to this rule; the Lacedaemonians were better than most.[153] Other
states and individuals were not always negligent, but they were not con-
sistently prudent.

How did the Greeks distinguish fact from fiction? One method used
well by Xenophon and Alexander was to seek the same information from
more than one individual.[154] These commanders habitually questioned a
number of prisoners at once or in succession and furnished themselves
with two or more guides when possible.[155] More than one *type* of source
or agent was sometimes sought—Xenophon, for example, mentioned
that information on the king's army provided by deserters was confirmed

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150. Thuc. 6.12.1, cf. 6.8.2.

151. Hdt. 7.80–82; Plut. *Them.* 12.7.

152. Lysias XIII *(Against Agoratus)* 19.

153. Some examples: Hdt. 1.152; Thuc. 6.46. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.7ff.: Praxitas, the
Lacedaemonian polemarch at Sicyon, was approached by Pasimelus and Alcimenes, both
Corinthians whom he had previously known and trusted, regarding secretly admitting his
troops into Corinth. Upon his arrival, he had doubts and sent a man ahead to check out
affairs inside the gates; the man was shown that all was as promised. Cf. the Corinthians'
allegation that it was in the Lacedaemonian character to mistrust even that which seems
certain (Thuc. 1.70.3).

154. Cf. Kautiliya's acceptance of an item of information if the same report was derived
from three sources (Chakraborty 44).

155. See, e.g., Q. Curtius 9.2.5–6. Pompiscus was said to have sent spies out separately
from each other to get independent reports for the same reason (Polyaenus 5.33.6). Cf.
Polyb. 14.3.7: Scipio questioned his *kataskopoi* and compared their reports.

by prisoners after battle.[156] Likewise information provided by indigenous peoples was checked against those of prisoners (and found wanting) by Alexander. Other cases include the confirmation of reports from scouts by captives, from captives by scouts, from spies by captives, from envoys by state investigations, and from deserters by personal investigation. In court, the weight of evidence could be increased by appeals to independent corroboration through investigation.[157] It must be noted that two or more sources could at once be false or mistaken and that while comparison of reports was conducive to better intelligence, it was not a guarantee of it. Neglect of the practice, however, left a commander or ruler vulnerable, as Nicias became when he did not bother to confirm information ostensibly from his spies by the employment of scouts.

Another method was to undertake an independent investigation. Such investigations were carried out in response to information that either derived from a source that was in some way dubious or demanded action of especially serious consequence. When Nicias learned from his Sicilian foes of the fate of Demosthenes' contingent, he found the news incredible and asked for a truce to send back a horseman to verify it.[158] Alexander had a similar reaction when he heard (the source is unspecified) that Darius' army was behind him, but he nevertheless sent companions to Issus in a thirty-oar ship to investigate the report and found it to be true.[159] Investigations could also be commissioned by a state either before it committed itself to an enterprise or to settle disputed information. Curiously, there is no mention of any official investigation finding matters different from those reported, even when, as in the case of the Athenians sent to check on the stories of the Egestaeans, the first source had imparted false information.[160]

The price of investigation is time. Although the Lacedaemonians were not often deceived by false information, their habit of investigating information frequently caused delays and led to missed opportunities. Passage of time also increased the chance of Sparta's opponents discovering and countering matters held suspended until verification. Such was the case when the Athenians learned of secret negotiations between the

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156. Xen. *Anab.* 1.7.13; see also Xen. *Cyr.* 6.1.25.
157. See, e.g., [Lysias] *Accusation of calumny* 8.9.
158. Thuc. 7.83.1.
159. Arrian *Anab.* 2.7.2; cf. Arrian *Anab.* 4.24.9. See also Plut. *Phocion* 25; Plut. *Mor.* 188d.
160. Thuc. 6.8.2.

Lacedaemonians and Chians (regarding the latter's revolt from Athens) during the interval necessary for the Spartan agent Phrynis to ascertain whether the Chian negotiators had accurately represented the situation on their island.[161]

The Greeks evaluated reports in light of their own expectations, which were influenced not only by general knowledge arising from previous experience and observation but also by prejudice and sentiment. By way of example, David Lewis' analysis of influences on the Spartan assembly might be summarized. He noted a hostility to commanders (and possibly ambassadors) who stepped out of line, impatience with diplomatic maneuvering in cases that seemed straightforward, and a tendency to bear grudges and maintain prejudices. The Spartans could also be influenced by sentiment and appeals to uphold liberty and to fulfill their duties.[162] Such characteristics were not atypical of other poleis, though there is some variation: in Athens, for instance, one could try to discredit an opponent by depicting him as rich, having oligarchic leanings, and thus hostile to the democracy.

We mortals are reluctant to believe that which we do not wish to believe, and the Greeks were no exception to this malady. The Athenians were more vulnerable than most: when news came to them—from a number of independent sources—that Mytilene was planning to revolt, they at first refused to acknowledge such a possibility, putting their faith, as Thucydides said, in the wish that it might not be true.[163] Likewise the fate of the Sicilian expedition met with incredulity at Athens, even though soldiers who had themselves escaped told the story in grim detail.[164] The *ekklesia*'s enduring capacity for this sort of self-deception was a theme harped on by Demosthenes and Aristophanes (although the orator's assessment might be based more on petulance than observation, since the Athenians were reluctant to believe what *he* wanted them to believe).[165] Individuals suffered from similar delusion: since Phocion trusted Nicanor, he did not believe reports against him until Nicanor was actually running trenches around the Piraeus.[166]

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161. Thuc. 8.6.4.
162. D. Lewis 111–12; his nn. 25–35 provide a number of examples drawn from Thucydides and Xenophon.
163. Thuc. 3.3.1.
164. Thuc. 8.1.1.
165. Demosth. XIX *(On the embassy)* 23–24; Aristoph. *Knights*, e.g., passim.
166. Plut. *Phoc.* 32.5. Alexander disbelieved messengers telling him of Harpalus' flight (Plut. *Alex.* 41.8) and, apparently, of Philotas' treason (Arrian *Anab.* 3.26.1).

The effect of such reluctance was to increase the time interval between information and action. In the case of the Mytilene revolt, the delay prevented any opportunity to forestall the revolt or nip it in the bud. By the time the Athenians opened their eyes to the situation, the Mytilenaeans had prepared themselves for a conflict. The eventual suppression of the revolt cost the Athenians lives and resources.

While wishful thinking and cautious investigation caused delays in processing information, fear and insecurity could lead to a state of irrationality in which people precipitously acted on unconfirmed reports. It has been generally noted that people tend to believe reports that confirm their fears and that these reports are often exaggerated.[167] The witch-hunt arising from popular reaction to the mutilation of the herms is a case in point—Thucydides remarked with some bitterness that the Athenians, in their state of suspicion, did not test informers, and that in their trust of rascals, they imprisoned good men.[168] Individuals could also be susceptible to paranoia, especially tyrants and kings. Arrian noted that even Alexander became quick to credit accusations toward the end of his life, and the deaths of Clitus and Parmenio arose from passion based on insecurity.[169] One would expect the Lacedaemonians, who lived in constant dread of a helot revolt, to be particularly subject to precipitous actions, but the evidence that exists contradicts this notion. When Pausanias was charged by a helot informer of plotting rebellion, the allegations were not considered sufficient in themselves to bring action against a regent of royal blood.[170] The conspiracies of Cinadon and the Neodamades were handled with efficiency rather than the panics and furors characteristic of Athens. Perhaps such emotional restraint reflects the Spartan character; perhaps they possessed a degree of practice and proficiency in dealing with threats to their security; perhaps the influence of fear was countered by their customary caution and attention to verification.

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167. Cf. Q. Curtius 9.2.12ff., in which passage Alexander was depicted as warning his men of a tendency to exaggerate in reports regarding enemy and terrain. A parallel can be found in the tales of Chaeras, who, having escaped the Four Hundred and come to Samos, exaggerated and falsified the situation in Athens (Thuc. 8.74.3), playing on the fears of the sailors.

168. Thuc. 6.53.2.

169. Arrian *Anab.* 7.4.3.

170. Thuc. 1.132.5.

Identity and Recognition

A major factor in evaluating information was the perceived character of the source, and Sian Lewis has made a convincing case for the importance of recognition as a criterion for credibility.[171] She discusses at some length how an individual's identity—personal, social, political, or ethnic—is intertwined with the news the individual bears. It remains here, then, to take up some points to complement her discussion, specifically how an unknown or unremarked individual, as many of the sources of information were, was recognized and so assumed an identity. A brief survey of some mechanical means to afford recognition, licitly or not, follows.

Military Devices

Recognition devices used in military contexts tended to be visual—for example, emblems on shields, whitened helmets, or flags on ships.[172] Like any other device, they were susceptible to imitation or misinterpretation. On one occasion, a Messenian force deceived the Elians (who were friendly with Sparta at the time) by bearing shields marked with Lacedaemonian lambdas and so gained admittance into their city.[173] In rare instances, the lack of a device could signify identity to those aware of its significance, while causing confusion to an opponent relying on recognizing accustomed markings.[174]

Military Watchwords or Passwords (Sunthemata)

Sunthemata,[175] broadly speaking, were agreed on signals. More specifically, they were short verbal or nonverbal signs contrived by commanders to enable their men to recognize friendly troops and be recognized in turn. Consequently they enabled men to prepare for action against an enemy and refrain from action against a friend, and in turn they prevented panics.[176] They were particularly valuable when men of

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171. S. Lewis 81ff.

172. According to Anderson (18, including a range of examples), national emblems replaced personal ones in the fifth and fourth centuries. When the Phocians painted themselves white with gypsum, they may have done so to make themselves recognizable to their friends by night as much as to inspire terror in their foes (Hdt. 8.27).

173. Paus. 4.28.5–6.

174. Polyaenus 3.11.11 (of Chabrias).

175. Variants of different dialects include cυνθήματα, cυccήματα, and ξυνθήματα.

176. Aen. Tact. 4.5–6, 25.1. Although all examples are found in the context of military operations, they do have potential application to clandestine activity.

varied dialects or backgrounds were operating together or when men of similar dialects and backgrounds were on opposing sides of a conflict. The lack of such a sign could hamper—or even prevent—coherent action, as in the mythical case of the Messenians who, since they lacked a *sunthema*, were unable to recognize each other and therefore failed to counter a Lacedaemonian infiltration by night. They were forced to await dawn, and by then the Lacedaemonians had consolidated their position.[177]

A name of a deity or hero was often chosen as a *sunthema*. Sometimes the name had a meaning applicable to the participants (e.g., "Athena" was chosen on account of Athena's common connection to Seuthes and Xenophon) or the context (e.g., Aeneas suggested "Hermes Dolios" for a mission involving craft).[178] In this way the *sunthema* would be easily remembered. Aeneas further warned against using a word or name that might be misremembered in another form (as in the case of "Dioskouroi" and "Tyndaridai") and against using one peculiar to a dialect when troops of varied backgrounds were present.[179] The *sunthema* was passed twice (going, then returning—almost certainly to ensure that it was correctly communicated) along a line of soldiers after they were drawn up, before battle was joined.[180] Guards in a city were informed of the night's watchword after the gates were locked.[181] No doubt the timing was determined in both cases by the realization that earlier publication would afford deserters an opportunity to impart the *sunthema* to the enemy.

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177. Paus. 4.21.4.

178. Xen. *Anab*. 7.3.39; Aen. Tact. 24.15. The deities mentioned are (1) Ares/Enualios (Aen. Tact. 24.2); (2) Apollo Huperdexios, Phoibos ([Eur.] *Rhesus* 521, 573); (3) Artemis Agroteras (Aen. Tact. 24.15); (4) Athene (Xen. *Anab*. 7.3.39), Athene/Pallas (Aen. Tact. 24.2); (5) Hebe [MSS, Roscher: Hera] (Hdt. 9.98); (6) Helios (Aen. Tact. 24.15); (7) Hermes Dolios (Aen. Tact. 24.15), Hermes Philios (Polyaenus 3.9.21); (8) Nike (Xen. *Anab*. 1.8.16—possibly not the deity); (9) Poseidon (Aen. Tact. 24.16); (10) Selene (Aen. Tact. 24.15); and (11) Zeus Soter (Xen. *Anab*. 1.8.16, 6.5.25, [7.3.34]; Aen. Tact. 24.16). The heroes are (1) Herakles (Aen. Tact. 24.15), Herakles Hegemon (Xen. *Anab*. 6.5.25; cf. 4.8.25); (2) Dioskouroi/Tyndaridai (Aen. Tact. 24.1, 14). Other words include *xiphos/enkheridion* and *lampas/phos* (Aen. Tact. 24.2).

Aeneas Tacticus referred to "common names, which all use" at 24.15, implying widespread, if not conventional, practice in the fourth century, an odd indication of lack of imagination on the part of the frequently inventive Greeks.

179. Aen. Tact. 24.1–2. Cf. the example of Athenodorus, who erred in this respect (Aen. Tact. 24.14).

180. For the double trip down the lines, see Xen. *Anab*. 1.8.16; Xen. *Cyr*. 3.3.58, 7.1.10.

181. Aen. Tact. 20.5; cf. Xen. *Anab*. 7.3.34. Aeneas tantalizes us with the promise of further information in his lost *Stratopedeutike* and *Paraskeuastike*.

Sunthemata are first attested at the battle of Mycale in 479.[182] By the fourth century their use had developed considerably, probably as a result of measures to repair their weaknesses. Passwords were liable to be overheard by the enemy, especially when bandied about in a confused situation. During their night attack on Epipolae, the Athenians fell into disorder and called out their password to each other with enough frequency and volume that the Syracusans caught on and used their knowledge to their advantage.[183] With fiascoes such as this in mind, later commanders used countersigns *(parasunthemata)*. Aeneas recommended that these be other words, a noise in conjunction with a question, or merely a gesture (visibility permitting), such as taking off a cap or shifting the position of a spear.[184]

Naturally enough, *sunthemata* were the object of information gathering. Patrols and scouts could be captured and interrogated by an enemy—for this reason Aeneas, apparently following the practice of Iphicrates, suggested that they be given different passwords.[185] The

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182. Hdt. 9.98. One wonders whether Leotychidas gave out the true password, since he could have no confidence that at least one Ionian would not communicate it to his Persian masters. The example in the *Rhesus* ("Phoibos" at 521, 573) is no doubt indicative of classical practice rather than Mycenaean, and no password is mentioned in the tenth book of the *Iliad*. The use of *sunthemata* may have been peculiarly Greek. It is noteworthy that Cyrus did not know what his Greek troops were doing when they passed along their *sunthema* (Xen. *Anab.* 1.8.16). Diodorus (11.10.2) links the Persian confusion at Thermopylae to their inability to recognize each other or use a password. The passage is ambiguous: it is not clear whether they were hampered by being unable to use a password they possessed or by not having a password to use. In any case, Herodotus makes no mention of this and it is hard to see how a password would have helped in the melee.

183. Thuc. 7.44.4. Athenian confusion was exacerbated by their Argive (i.e., Dorian) allies striking up a paean as they entered battle, since the Athenians imagined the singers were Syracusans (who were also of Dorian extraction).

184. Aen. Tact. 25.2–4; cf. 24.17 and Whitehead, *Aineias the Tactician*, 168–69 on 24.13. Note the doffing (or donning) of a cap as a signal to begin the revolt of the Parthenii. Onasander (26) went further and advocated the reliance on gestures to the exclusion of words; he found this especially useful in the case of allies speaking different languages. Onasander also observed that passwords should be given even when the possibility of combat was remote, to prevent confusion.

Since *sunthemata* could also be discovered by foes in the guise of friendly patrols, Aeneas Tacticus (24.19) recommended that each party should be able to demand a recognition signal from the other. It might still have been possible in an open area for a disguised patrol to learn the password and either flee or kill the guards, but in a besieged city (the context for Aeneas' work) guards atop the walls could not be easily killed and would be able to notify their commander and change the *sunthema* by the time a fleeing enemy could return in force.

185. Aen. Tact. 6.7, 24.16; cf. 26.1.

Messenians were said to have captured and tortured one Nicon of Pherae, a pirate, and extracted from him a promise to betray Pherae to them, which he did by gaining them admittance by the *sunthema*.[186] As I noted earlier, deserters were no doubt a concern, as were spies: Pammenes of Thebes sent a spy disguised as a fake deserter to learn his enemies' *sunthema*.[187]

Given the Greek capacity for inventiveness, it should come as no surprise to find that *sunthemata* were manipulated in other ways. There is a story of a certain Akoues having a *sunthema* that was no *sunthema*—his men were to kill anybody who asked for one, since by asking he unwittingly revealed that he was an enemy.[188] On another occasion, the Spartan Cleandridas, to sow suspicion in his enemy's ranks, had his herald announce that any enemy who knew his *sunthema* would be spared.[189] Iphicrates told his men to spare any opponent offering their *sunthema,* so that they would be enheartened by the expectation of aid from a (imaginary) fifth column.[190] Finally, Diocles constantly changed his *sunthema* so that his men would stay in their ranks, thinking the enemy nearby.[191]

Tokens (Sumbola) *and Seals* (Sphagides)

Sumbola, or tokens, are attested in mercantile transactions and in diplomacy.[192] They served as credentials, allowing any bearer of the token to be recognized as operating on behalf of one of the parties agreeing to the arrangement. There is no evidence for their use in covert operations, but it would not be surprising if the Greeks realized their applications to this field. Stolen or forged *sumbola* might also be useful in support of covers.

Sphagides, or seals, were employed as marks of authenticity and provenance on letters and documents, incidentally preserving their con-

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186. Polyaenus 2.35.1.

187. Polyaenus 5.16.5. Cf. Polyaenus 3.13.1 (of Chares), in which spies were caught since they were unable to give the correct *sunthema* on demand.

188. Polyaenus 1.11.1.

189. Polyaenus 2.10.1; cf. Hdt. 9.98.

190. Polyaenus 3.9.21.

191. Polyaenus 5.29.1.

192. For an example of a mercantile transaction, see Hdt. 6.86, and How and Wells 98–99 ad loc. For the use of *sumbola* in diplomacy, see Tod no. 139 (ca. 367), lines 18–25: "Let the *boulé* also make *sumbola* for use with the king of the Sidonians, so that the *demos* of the Athenians might recognize them if the king of the Sidonians should send somebody when he needed something of our city, and so that the king of the Sidonians might recognize them whenever the *demos* of the Athenians should send somebody to him." A similar provision was made for Orontes, in *IG* II^2 207b–c (ca. 348).

tents from prying eyes. Lucian of Samasota outlined a couple of methods (and hinted at many more) used in antiquity for defeating the efficacy of seals, which may have occurred to the Greeks of the era under study. The first was to heat a needle, remove the seal by melting the wax underneath it with the needle's point, then reseal the document after reading it.[193] The second was to make an impression of the seal, using a type of plaster *(kollurion)* made from Bruttian pitch, asphalt, ground gypsum, wax, and *mastich*. This concoction was warmed and then applied to a seal previously wetted with saliva, to take a mold. The mixture hardened rapidly and could be used to duplicate the seal. A similar result could apparently be obtained from a mixture of marble dust and paper glue. Although the methods may have varied, the Greeks of the fifth century could likewise defeat seals, since Pausanias' courier made a counterfeit seal so that he could investigate the documents he carried without fear of being caught.[194] An ability to defeat seals in this manner could be of considerable use not only to those seeking information but also in the realms of counterintelligence and misinformation.[195]

Disguise, Covers, and Pretense

While there are examples of people engaged in secret dealings resorting to recognition devices, these devices were hardly covert and could hardly have been reasonably expected not to arouse suspicions. In one example, a party preparing to betray Megara anointed themselves with oil so that their Athenian accomplices would recognize them. The plot did not run as smoothly as planned, and the anointed ones were rather conspicuous among their fellow citizens.[196] In another instance, reeds were carried as tokens of support for a conspiracy among mutinous Peloponnesian soldiers stationed on Chios. When their commander, Eteonicus, saw what

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193. Lucian *Alexander of Abonoteichus* 21; the following examples are taken from the same section. He alluded to Celsus' descriptions of other means, and Harmon (204–5 n. 1 ad loc.) observed that Hippolytus' *Refutation* 4.34 also contained material on this subject, evidently drawn from earlier sources. See also Demosth. XXXII *(Against Zenothemis)* 28.

194. Thuc. 1.132.5; Thucydides uses the form παραϲημηνάμενοϲ for his act. Σημεῖα παραϲημεῖα (counterfeit seals) are attested in Plato Comicus (s. V/IV) 77; see LSJ s.v. παραϲημεῖον.

195. Cf. Diod. Sic. 16.52.6–7; Polyaenus 6.48.1: when Mentor (probably Mentor of Rhodes, fl. med. s. IV) got Hermaeus under his control, he wrote letters in Hermaeus' name using his captive's signet ring.

196. Thuc. 4.68.4.

was going on, he slew a man carrying a reed and let it be known that the man perished because of his token.[197]

It is not unreasonable to propose that covert devices or signals were used at some time or other by covert agents, since in the *Education of Cyrus* Xenophon gave an example of how a returning spy might signal his true allegiance to his master's troops. In this case, he merely extended his right hand—perhaps in the manner of the *parasunthemata* previously mentioned.[198]

Since Athena did not deign to alter the appearances of Odysseus' distant heirs, they tended to rely more on wits than physical disguise. This is not to say that disguises were never used, but usually they were props designed to lend credence to a cover, rather than attempts to render an individual's identity unrecognizable.[199] There are stories of people donning the garb of beggars, hunters, peasants, or foreign peoples when engaged in some crafty enterprise or another.[200] Generally, however, the use of material disguises does not overlap with the gathering of information. There are no exceptions to this rule that can make claims to historicity, although Xenophon's allusions to scouts disguised as brigands and to spies disguised as runaway slaves are worth noting as indications of a potential link.[201] There is no reliable evidence of a long-term impersonation of another person by a Greek.[202]

Of more concern to Greek covert agents was the establishment and maintenance of credibility through a cover story. Sometimes a basic cover could be implicit in an assumed role—that of an envoy or merchant, for example. Those agents assuming such covers would be obliged to know about the trade they professed, but to some extent the pretext

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197. Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.1.

198. Xen. *Cyr.* 6.3.13.

199. Exceptions to this general rule occur in cases in which a wanted fugitive tried to conceal his identity lest he be recognized and arrested (see, e.g., Polyaenus 5.42.1, of Charimenes). Cf. Paus. 5.4.7–8.

200. Beggars: *Od.* 4.244ff., etc.; Parke and Wormell no. 527 (legend of Temo); Lycurgus *Against Leocrat.* 86 (legend of Codrus, who is also alluded to as being in peasant's dress). Hunters: Paus. 4.12.9; cf. Hdt. 1.123 (Polyaenus 7.7.1; Leo Byz. 1.4). Peasants/farmers: Plut. *Pelopidas* 9.1. Locals: Arrian *Anab.* 1.25.9 (of Amphoterus); cf. Q. Curtius 7.2.17–19 (of Polydamas). Prisoners: Aen. Tact. 24.4. Stratagems involving donning foreign apparel: Polyaenus 2.16.1 (cf. Front. *Strat.* 2.3.13), 3.9.59, 5.44.5; Front. *Strat.* 2.5.15, 3.2.3. Stratagems using foreign ships: Polyaenus 2.11.1 (cf. Front. *Strat.* 1.4.12).

201. Xen. *Cyr.* 2.4.23, 6.2.11.

202. Cf. Hdt. 3.61–69 (of the false Smerdis).

for their presence was supplied by the cover: the Bithynian *kataskopoi* on embassy to the Ten Thousand, for instance, were ostensibly present to arrange for a truce and thus were permitted into the Greek camp.[203] Those agents wishing to pose as deserters needed more individualized explanations for their motives. These explanations seem to have been derived, sensibly enough, from justifications made by real deserters and traitors for their defection and championship of their new allies (one might recall the manipulative and rather tedious list presented by Alcibiades to the Spartans).[204] These include persecution, penalties, and other assorted grievances. When done well, the covers were backed up by prior arrangements on the part of a state or commander. There are tales of the Spartan ephors arranging sham trials and exiles of individuals, who would thenceforth act secretly on their behalf.[205] The most effective covers were no doubt ones that could use as much of the agent's real-life story as possible. Odysseus was a skillful liar in part because he managed to intertwine a mix of reality with fantasy when weaving his fantastic tales.[206] Xenophon applied Homer's example to his own guidelines for espionage. He portrayed Cyrus taking advantage of real circumstances and real grievances against his subordinate Araspas, by making a secret reconciliation and sending Araspas out in the guise of a fugitive from Cyrus' wrath.[207] Ad hoc exploitations of mistaken identity are occasionally found (e.g., Macedonian guards stationed on Chios pretended to be Pharnabazus' guards when they realized that his ally, their enemy, Aristonicus had not heard of Pharnabazus' defeat),[208] but our only examples belong to the realm of stratagems rather than to intelligence.

In some such instances there was no need to pretend to be anyone else—the cover was effected by a judicious presentation of misinformation. When Artaxerxes' captain Mithradates rode up to Clearchus, he did not attempt to conceal his identity or the fact that he was a Persian—such would be a futile task. Instead he pretended to be sympathetic to their plight and to be concerned lest he be seen speaking with them.[209] Thus he tried to establish an identity which would accord him credibility. In this

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203. Xen. *Anab*. 7.4.13.
204. Thuc. 6.92.1–3. Cf. Thuc. 8.50.2–5; Xen. *Cyr*. 4.6.2–4.
205. Hdt. 1.68 (of Lichas), Polyaenus 2.26.1 (of Sthenippus).
206. *Od*. passim, esp. 13.256, 14.199, 19.165, 24.266, 24.303.
207. Xen. *Cyr*. 6.1.31ff.
208. Q. Curtius 4.5.19–21.
209. Xen. *Anab*. 3.3.2. Cf. Thuc. 4.67.3; Paus. 2.26.3; Plut. *Ages*. 24.4; Arrian *Anab*. 1.25.3.

he failed, but his method was essentially sound and widely practiced, in his day and ours.

The preceding comments cannot and do not pretend to adequately present a whole field of study. They are, if you will, an attempt to communicate some of the problems the Greeks faced when communicating, and the effect these must have had on intelligence.