Introduction

> About this I was quite at a loss what to do. For to write in detail and with precision about matters which the kings managed between themselves and secretly, seemed to me to be open to criticism and exceedingly hazardous; but to pass over in complete silence matters which seem to have had more practical effect than any others in the war, matters which enable us to detect the causes of much that was afterwards difficult to explain, appeared to me to be decidedly indicative of indolence and entire lack of enterprise. (Polybius 29.5.1)[1]

Polybius is by no means alone in his dilemma. His near contemporaries might have occasionally slipped into sensationalism and the allures of the secret world, but for the most part they avoided that treacherous path and trod by the familiar markers of virtue, vice, and chance en route to explaining the causes of history. His modern heirs have added new markers along the way and looked out on wider vistas, but their analyses must inevitably become conjecture when they attempt to explain the decisions that led to the actions of the ancients. For while competent contemporary historians do look to explain *why* something happened in a particular case, few have looked beyond the particular to the general: to a context into which one can set and thereby interpret individual decisions, a context that must include a consideration of how the ancients obtained the information on the basis of which they acted.

It would be the height of folly to allege that a study of information gathering would in itself illuminate the motives behind decisions obscured by two and a half millennia, but it can at least establish parameters for the knowledge people would have or would not have possessed when they made the decisions. That is the ambition of this book: to

1. Loeb translation.

define terms, to describe mechanisms, and, in effect, to produce an intelligence resource of use for specific studies.

The contributions of this book are more or less limited to the Hellenic world in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Information before that time is sparse and shrouded in myth but is nevertheless included to illustrate development and continuity, not so much by actual events as by perceptions of how events might have occurred. In other words, while Odysseus never really donned rags and snuck into the citadel of Troy, the story of his adventure was told and retold from the time the *Odyssey* was first sung, so that we know such espionage was conceivable in the eighth century; thus we can contrast the portrayal of Odysseus' adventures with those of his heirs in the fourth. With the advent of Herodotus and Thucydides in the fifth century, we begin to enjoy real historical examples of collection, especially at the tactical level (e.g., battlefields), but also at the strategic (e.g., foreign relations). Covert collection remains somewhat difficult, however, since spy stories tend to be just that, and since democratic Athens—from which most of our information about the ancient world is derived—had the same ambivalence between fascination and fear of the secret world that democratic states do today. While inscriptions, which begin to be more numerous in this period, grant us information concerning strategic, and occasionally tactical, intelligence, they are mute on covert aspects. The real gold mines for collection of every sort are the theoretical treatises of Xenophon (especially the *Education of Cyrus* and the *Cavalry Commander*) and Aeneas Tacticus *(How to Survive under Siege)* in the early and middle part of the fourth century. Valuable, if highly biased, information on political intelligence can be culled from orators (Andocides, Lysias, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Dinarchus, Isocrates, and the like) and some from philosophers (especially Aristotle) and playwrights (especially the author of the *Rhesus*). Much evidence comes from later writers—chiefly Diodorus, Quintus Curtius, Plutarch, and Arrian—who lived centuries after the events they described yet had sources (such as Ephorus, Theopompus, and Ptolemy) since lost. Isolated gems hide in odd places—from Linear B records to Athenaeus, Eustathius, Harpocration, Lucian, and Strabo. Later collections of stratagems, especially those of Polyaenus, provide tenuous but exciting evidence. Herein the task of the historian of intelligence bears some resemblance to the tasks of the intelligence analyst—to extract from a mass of data, most of it irrelevant, pertinent and useful items.

After Alexander's flame had burned out, the political stage in the

Mediterranean had changed substantially. While continuity in collection methods was strong, especially on the tactical level, there emerged a sense of professionalism lacking in the classical age. While there were prototypical intelligence organizations as early as the fourth century, the classical poleis lacked either the centralization or the continuity of government (in many cases both) that would have allowed evolution into professional services. The Hellenistic kingdoms had both these qualities, and the uses to which they put the opportunities so afforded are another story.

Culturally, the focus of this work is on public life, rather than private. The methods of the two spheres scarcely intersect, and the realms really belong to separate works.[2] The goals also are different in form, if not in essence, and hence we come to the consideration of the very nature of information gathering in ancient Greece: what were its goals? This question can be answered in at least two ways: one can look at what information was sought and hence determine the goals, or one can try to discover the fundamental reasons for seeking information in the few passages on intelligence left to us by the ancients.

Intelligence Goals Inferred from Practice

A survey of about one thousand examples of verbs of learning (see app. A for details) yielded a wide range of objects. About half pertain directly to military operations.[3] Of this group, about a third concern movements of forces; the other two-thirds include information on orders of battle (especially origin, type, numbers, and dispositions of contingents), capabilities, morale, circumstances, states of preparation and alertness, results of engagements, and plans. Another 5 percent are inquiries into geogra-

2. For private life and social interaction, the interested reader may profit from the recently published work of S. Lewis, *News and Society in the Greek Polis* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

3. The large proportion of examples found in the context of open hostilities could be taken to mean that the need for information gathering was more widely recognized, and hence that action was more often taken, during war than in peace. Such a characterization is plausible, especially in light of the practice of later eras, and is probably accurate. The distribution of the data, however, cannot be expected to show otherwise, since the historians tended to treat events occurring during war at greater length and detail than those occurring during occasional times of peace. Thus the sources have an intrinsic bias. Yet one should realize that the subject matter of the histories in turn reflected what their Greek authors thought to be worth researching and recording; hence the bias itself can serve to justify the data.

phy, especially routes, most of which have immediate military significance. Such goals belong to the realm of tactical or operational intelligence.[4] Intelligence of this type was typically derived from military agents (e.g., scouts, patrols) and sources (e.g., deserters, captives) who are frequently identified by type (but rarely by name) in our texts. Collection of information was usually supervised by military commanders. The value of tactical intelligence was (and is) ephemeral but highly visible, and immediate response was required (or else, e.g., an enemy force might have moved from its reported position). Consequently, it was most liable to manipulation or inaccuracy, since a commitment usually had to be made before reports could be investigated.[5]

Only 10 percent of the catalogued examples are overtly political (e.g., diplomatic activity or policy). The bulk of the remaining third are varied enough to defy meaningful categorization, and many are found in contexts of anecdotes concerning private lives. Still, it may perhaps be said that a substantial number contain information of a social nature that could today be included under the general rubric of strategic intelligence. Different types of agents and sources were involved in gathering strategic information: envoys and oracles, for example, were not uncommon. Individuals are occasionally named and at times are people of note and stature, but sometimes sources specify no further identity than the state of origin (e.g., the Corinthians informed the Spartans). Supervision

4. "Operational intelligence" can be variously defined according to context; here I follow Handel's description (*Intelligence,* 2–3, cf. 28), which encompasses such matters as an enemy's resources, ability, and plans for waging a given campaign (e.g., the potential of Peloponnesian naval forces in the Aegean campaign). Its value was less ephemeral than tactical intelligence: compare "operational" intelligence on the order of battle of the Athenian expedition to Sicily, which would be a consistent factor in Syracusan planning, with the "tactical" intelligence on Nicias' plans for the second battle in the Syracusan harbor, which was of great value but only for that one encounter.

The term "operational intelligence" has elsewhere been used for intelligence acquired to put together a plan of operation for further (especially clandestine) collection of information; it is *not* used in that sense here.

5. For example, Alexander extracted from Persian captives news that Darius' army was at the Tigris (an instance detailed in chapter 1). Alexander wished to force an immediate encounter and marched his army to the Tigris, only to discover there that the information was inaccurate. Yet good tactical intelligence could make a great difference in a battle: witness, for instance, the victory of Dionysius I over Heloris by the Eleporus River, which was in large part owed both to careful attention paid to tactical intelligence by the former and to its neglect by the latter (Diod. Sic. 14.104.1–105.1). Dionysius made good use of scouts *(kataskopoi)* and watchers; Heloris was unapprised of his presence, although only forty stadia (about five miles) separated Dionysius' camp from his own.

tended to be the province of civil authorities (insofar as civil authority could be separated from military in ancient Greece). Strategic intelligence was fairly accurate and accessible and had long-term value (there were strategic surprises, but they were far fewer than surprises on the tactical level).

Information pertaining to future, and sometimes secret, events is also represented in the examples. About 9 percent are of plans, intentions, or preparations; an additional 3 percent concern plots. Developments in weapons technology were a concern then even as now.[6] The agents who gathered such sorts of information were varied but included spies, provocateurs, and traitors in their number. Their fields of operation are generally situated amid military campaigns, revolts, and tyrannies.

Certainly this exercise offers only a partial picture of Greek intelligence goals. Projecting back modern needs can be a fruitful, if risky, supplement. There is little detailed information, for instance, of a logistical nature, yet one now and again finds accounts of sophisticated intelligence applications, such as projecting an army's planned route through information on supplies. Hence one can fairly conjecture additional items that would have been of interest to the people setting intelligence goals, as

6. A prevalent fallacy in the academic and professional worlds holds that the Greeks had little inclination to preserve or penetrate secrecy, since they were democratic, and had no interest in technological innovation, since their technology was relatively primitive. So argues, for example, Dulles (15): "Athens in the days of democracy and Rome in the days of the republic were not climates that bred espionage. . . Except for the size and placement of enemy forces at key moments before the engagement in battle there was little need felt for specific information." First, many Greek states during the classical period were not democracies but were climates entirely conducive to espionage. Second, even the democracies perceived the need for information beyond the immediate demands of battle.

Starr (2) and Gerolymatos (*Espionage,* 15) maintained that technology was not of concern to Greeks and was thus neglected in information gathering. But examples indicating the contrary may be found at Thuc. 7.62.3, 7.65.1 (reinforced rams, grappling hooks); Arrian *Anab.* 3.8.6 (Diod. Sic. 17.53.1: scythed chariots; but in Q. Curtius 4.9.3–4 and 4.15.4 Alexander's men were unprepared), 3.9.4 (Q. Curtius 4.13.36; Polyaenus 4.3.17: traps and caltrops). One would expect the warring parties in the Lelantine War, in which an agreement had been reached banning the use of missile weapons, to have had an interest in discovering whether their foes intended to abide by the treaty.

See also Aristotle *Politics* 1330b–1331a, regarding the effects of new inventions in types of missiles and siege artillery, and Arrian *Anab.* 5.18.5, regarding Porus' armor (although the knowledge was obtained only after he was taken captive). Plutarch would have us believe that Epaminondas despised news that his opponents had new weapons at their disposal, since he considered skill and virtue more important than technical innovations (Plut. *Mor.* 193f.). Yet this sentiment seems more in keeping with Plutarch, the philosopher, than Epaminondas, the *strategos.*

Engels did with regard to Alexander, (e.g., harvest dates, arms manufactories, the availability of transport facilities and pack animals).[7] Similar details are needed to flesh out other categories. They are not forthcoming from the ancients, who do, however, afford us some indication of why the Greeks sought the types of information they did.

Intelligence Goals Expressed in Ancient Sources

While early writers at times contained accounts of information gathering and intelligence, no extant work written before the fourth century contains a theoretical treatment of the subject. Honorable mention must be given to Herodotus and especially Thucydides for beginning to formulate criteria and methods for historiography, which bear close kinship with the intelligence process.[8] But the distinction of being the first—and only—Greek practical theorist on the subject of intelligence must be awarded to Xenophon, who alone went so far as to study the gathering and evaluating of information as a field in its own right. His instruction is contained in discourses on reconnaissance, surveillance, and espionage in the *Cavalry Commander,* in detailed models of various elements of intelligence in the *Education of Cyrus,* and in dialogues in the *Memorabilia.* These texts are theoretical, not historical. They are particularly valuable, even though—or, perhaps, because—his descriptions and analyses of intelligence are based on examples contrived for the purpose of illustrating his points, rather than historical events. It might be added in passing that his fictitious accounts are in no way incompatible with historical accounts in the *Hellenica* and *Anabasis* (or, for that matter, with those of other historians); rather they tend to be more detailed, no doubt so as to better serve as models of instruction.

These texts reveal Xenophon's understanding that the basis of the need for information lies in conflict and competition—especially military (and thence political) and economic. Xenophon's primary strategic con-

7. Engels 328–31. However, the Spartan invasion of Attica in 425 was deleteriously affected by a failure to ascertain harvest dates (Thuc. 4.6.1).

8. Thucydides' doctrinal statements of method are, of course, quite familiar to any classical historian. More subtle are his apparent distinctions between information and intelligence (for which the Greeks lacked specific terms), whereby he tended to use αἰσθάνομαι in instances of the former and πυνθανόμαι combined with an adverb (e.g., ἀκριβῶς, σαφῶς) in instances of the latter.

cern was the absolute and relative capabilities of states to wage war.[9] His terminology is rather broad and vague. In two instances he used as the object of inquiry the word *dunamis,* a word that is quite general and abstract and that implies concerns beyond a reckoning of the strengths of armies.[10] On another occasion the object was simply "the enemy's affairs."[11] On tactical levels, Xenophon perceived intelligence as a means to security and advantage. Efforts were to be directed toward the prevention of surprise and toward gaining a sound knowledge of terrain.[12]

Xenophon saw a connection between good intelligence and success in attaining and fulfilling political and military offices, and he maintained that intelligence enhanced one's capabilities.[13] Those who lacked it were unlikely to advance in rank; if, by chance, they did, they would be at best

9. Xen. *Mem.* 3.6.7–8: "It is necessary, is it not, to know the power *[dunamis]* of both our polis and the enemy's, should one advise us with whom we should wage war, so that if the power of our city be greater, one would counsel taking up a war, but if the enemy's is greater, one may persuade us to refrain." Cf. *Mem.* 4.2.29. For the importance of knowledge of one's own situation, see Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.9 and Sun Tzu (the famed Chinese strategist) 3.31–33.

10. LSJ s.v. I.1–3.

11. Xenophon (*Cyr.* 1.6.43) included in topics for consideration by a military commander "how one might best learn the affairs of one's enemies [τὰ τῶν πολεμίων], and how they might have least knowledge of your own."

12. E.g., Xen. *Cav. Com.* 4.6.

13. Isocrates also noted the value of intelligence to generals and leaders of states: a general must know against whom and with whom he ought to make war (XV *[Antidosis]* 117); a ruler should spend most of his time making inquiries into, reflecting on, and taking counsel about events (IX *[Evag.]* 41, 42). Isocrates also praised Evagoras for his knowledge of public affairs and citizens, whereby no plots escaped his notice. Cf. his *Letters* 1.4 (to Dionysius) and 6.9–10 (to the Sons of Jason). Cf. also Plutarch (*Mor.* 187d), who attributed to Chabrias the saying that the best *strategoi* were those who best knew their enemies' affairs (τὰ τῶν πολεμίων).

Not surprisingly, this idea is implicit in Herodotus and Thucydides. Curiously, in other instances, Thucydides concentrated more on the psychological effects of "intelligence failures" than on the positive effects of its successes. His most striking discourse is set in a portrayal of the effects of stasis in Corcyra, wherein he described the fall of those of greater intellect to their inferiors, since "they, assuming in their arrogance that they would be alerted in advance and that there was no need for them to accomplish by deed that which they might gain by intellect, were caught off guard and perished all the more" (3.83.4). Similarly, he described the Athenians as confident that the Peloponnesians would not be able to attack the Piraeus without the Athenians learning of their enemies' plans in advance. Yet they were surprised by a Peloponnesian force, and disaster was narrowly averted (2.93.3). This emphasis on the failure of intelligence may be a result of his interest in dramatic reversal caused by hubris, rather than a reflection of contemporary perception, since many examples of effective use of intelligence are present in his work.

of little use to their compatriots, at worst a danger to their own state. A passage in the *Memorabilia* illustrates this quite clearly: Socrates is depicted questioning Glaucon, who had aspirations to political power, about his knowledge of matters on which he proposed to guide Athens. Socrates' questions focused on the military disposition of the state and of its enemies, of which Glaucon knew nothing. Yet Glaucon still wanted to do away with the Athenian garrisons as superfluous. Socrates questioned him as to the consequences of this and asked him whether he had himself gone out and investigated the matter or learned in some other way that they were badly maintained. Glaucon admitted that he had come to his conclusion through conjecture. At this he was gently rebuked and told to get information on the matter before he acted rashly.[14]

For all its apparent worth, intelligence for Xenophon—and for the Greeks in general—was valuable only insofar as it enabled a person to accomplish a goal, primarily one defined by military or political conflict. It was not desired for its own sake. Therefore a curious and lasting pattern developed: when conflicts occurred and the security of an individual or state was threatened, intelligence goals were set and met. But when a person or populace was confident in its power, wealth, or virtue and saw no probable outcome of circumstances save success, intelligence might be neglected. Consequently one may find in oratory, such as the speeches of Isocrates and Demosthenes, a certain condescension toward information gathering. Demosthenes on occasion alluded to it as the concern of the threatened party: "[if you use your strength] perhaps, just as now you make inquiries about what Philip is doing and where he is going, so he may wonder whither the might of your city is bound and where it might appear."[15]

Indeed, it is demonstrable that success has often been achieved with little or no intelligence, given the right mixture of luck and strength.[16] And so the Greek states have often been characterized—unfairly, one

14. Xen. *Mem.* 3.6.9–11.

15. Demosth. X *(4 Phil.)* 23; cf. 19 *(On the embassy)* 288. Cf. also Isoc. *Epist.* V *(To Philip)* 70. One must, however, note the rhetorical motive present in all these cases. This philosophy is by no means peculiar to the ancients. Handel (*Intelligence and Military Operations,* 39; cf. 69) noted: "There is no stronger incentive to encourage the appreciation of intelligence than fear and weakness (whether real or perceived); conversely, victory and power reduce one's motivations to learn about the enemy, thus bringing about the conditions that eventually cause defeat." This characterization would explain the attention given by the tyrants and Spartans to internal espionage.

16. Cf. Handel, *Intelligence and Military Operations,* 32ff., 65ff.

must add—in part because of modern perceptions of democratic virtue and vice. The remainder of this book is dedicated to illustrating how the Greeks achieved their intelligence goals, in hope that the account will serve as a piece of intelligence applicable to the animated, if bloodless, conflicts of historians.