Notes on a Stratagem of Iphicrates in Polyaenus and Leo Tactica

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Abstract: Proper understanding of Iphicrates’ stratagem at Polyaenus 3.9.38, marred by a lacuna, can be derived from Leo Tact. 20.196, where anchoring a fleet off a harborless coastline is described. Emending Polyaenus’ text from the reading of a later MS also clarifies the anecdote’s meaning. Leo knew the full text of Polyaenus, since Polyaenus 3.9.38 does not occur in the abbreviated Excepta Polyaeni, which some recently suggest replaced the Strategica in Byzantine use of Polyaenus.

Keywords: Iphicrates, Polyaenus, Leo, Strategica.

Artaxerxes II’s attempt to recover Egypt in 374–373 B.C. with a combined force of Greek mercenaries and Persians fell victim to the bickering of its commanders, Iphicrates and Pharnabazus. A major joint military and naval expedition it was. From 377 or 376 B.C. there assembled at Ace (Acco, Acre, Ptolemais) in Phoenicia (allegedly) 200,000 Persians, 20,000 Greek mercenaries, 300 triremes and 200 triaconters. Diodorus (15.41–45) provides the fullest narrative (from Ephorus?), to be supplemented by tidbits of Trogus (Prof. 10), Nepos (Iphic. 2.4), Plutarch (Aratax. 24.1), and Polyaenus’ Strategica. Iphicrates, the most rusé of all generals in Polyaenus with 63 stratagems to his credit, distinguished himself in four exempla from this campaign in the stratagem collector’s compendium (3.9.38, 56, 59, 63). Polyaenus 3.9.38, marred by a lacuna and misinterpreted in two recent translations, demands re-examination. Although a complete history of the campaign cannot be recovered on present evidence, filling the lacuna at Polyaenus 3.9.38 can offer a proper understanding of the anecdote and contribute to an aspect of the Nachleben of Polyaenus’ text.

1 Diod. 15.41.3; Nepos (Iphic. 2.4) reduces the Greeks to 12,000.
2 On Diodorus’ use of Ephorus for fourth-century events, see most recently Bianco 2010 with references to earlier bibliography; Parke (1933: 105–106) and Bianco (1997a: 189–191) provide modern overviews of the campaign.
Polyaenus 3.9.38 reads:

Iphikrates βασιλεύαν τιμής Φαρναβάζου, πλέων επ’ Αίγυπτου, τής χώρας ούσης ἀλόμην, παρήγγειλε τοίς τριηράρχοις ὑπότασσον νέως καὶ οὔτως ἀνείλλουσαν αὐτάς τεταρσωμένας.

Krentz translates the passage as:

When Iphicrates was serving the King as a general with Pharnabazus, he sailed to Egypt. Since the land had no harbors, he ordered the captains, “Let each have forty sacks.” After they came to anchor, he filled the sacks with sand *** fastened them to the bow of each ship, and in this way he dragged the ships up complete with oars.

For Bianco the passage reads:

Ificrate, mentre svolgeva funzioni di stratego per conto del re di Persia insieme a Farnabazo, salpò alla volta dell’Egitto; poiché la regione era priva di porti, ordinò ai trierarchi che ciascuno avesse con sé quaranto sacchi. Ormeggiatisi, fece riempire i sacchi di sabbia +++ e li fece attaccare alle sartie di prua di ciascuna nave: così riuscì a tirare a terra le navi, fornite di remi.5

Both interpretations of the text are essentially identical: forty sacks of sand attached to the prow of each ship (or “shrouds of the prow” pace Bianco) are somehow used as a means of dragging the ships (onto the shore?) at a harborless coastline. How forty sacks of sand on a ship’s prow can aid in dragging (ἀνείλλουσαν) the vessel is unclear, although such is the usual nautical meaning of ἀνέλλω (LSJ s.v.). Paradoxically, the additional weight of forty bags of sand would seem to add weight and thus to increase the difficulty of hauling the ships ashore.

Clarification of the lacuna and the stratagem’s meaning comes from Leo VI’s Tactica (c. 900 A.D.), where a version of Polyaenus’ exemplum appears. Leo Tact. 20.196 reads:

I will tell you of a stratagem for the naval fleet. When, in the course of a naval expedition, it happens that you wish to disembark in a sandy place without a harbor, fill a large number of sacks with sand, tie them with ropes, and hang a sufficient number of them from each dromon like iron anchors. Thus, having made what is called a harbor at sea, you will easily disembark at that place at night and make the raid you had planned.6

At first glance the two passages seem to resemble each other only in the reference to a harborless coast and the practice of hanging bags of sand from a ship’s prow, as the function of the sandbags differs: in Polyaenus for somehow dragging the ships (onto

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6  Tr. Dennis 2010: 607; the text with English translation is also to be found at Pryor/Jeffreys 2006: 516–517.
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shore?); in Leo for anchoring the ships off shore. Polyaenus’ κεφαλίδας έξηπτεν would correspond to Leo’s τοῖς σχοινίοις προσδήσας ... ἐκκρεμάσις, κεφαλίδας, a hapa in Polyaenus (LSJ s.v. IV), are ropes suspended from a ship’s prow and, contrary to Krentz’ interpretation, not the prow itself; hence the equation of Polyaenus’ κεφαλίδας with Leo’s τοῖς σχοινίοις. The difference in the sandbags’ function can be removed, if the reading έλκυσεν, found in Monacensis gr. 401 (dated to 1581–1596), be accepted. The sense of έλκω here is not “to drag” but “to weigh down,” as in weighing items on a scale (LSJ s.v. A.9). Although Woefflin’s favorable view of the great authority of Monacensis gr. 401 as a witness is now disputed by Schindler, who finds this tradition contaminated, in this case the reading of Monacensis gr. 401 seems preferable.8 Schindler failed to note the significance of M’s reading (his M1) at 3.9.38, as argued here, for the real meaning of the exemplum and even the alternative reading. Iphicrates substituted sandbags for anchors or supplemented anchors with sandbags to stabilize a fleet’s position offshore from a harborless coastline, to create what Leo calls a “harbor at sea” (πελαγολιμένα).

Identification of the relevance of Leo Tact. 20.196 to Polyaenus 3.9.38 derives from Karl Ludwig Roth (1790–1868), who apparently communicated the suggestion to Woefflin privately, as Melber did not cite Roth’s own publication of the idea. Melber retained it in the apparatus criticus of his 1887 edition and wisely did not attempt to reconstruct the lost portions of Polyaenus’ text.9 Leo clarifies the meaning of Polyaenus’ anecdote without permitting such a reconstruction. The vocabulary of Leo’s text differs significantly from that of Polyaenus and more than just a few words may be missing. Indeed Leo may have known a longer version of the text, unless Leo has considerably reworked Polyaenus’ exemplum for his own purposes – an unlikely view for the section of a book like his Constitutio XX, which offers an exempla collection even repeating material from earlier parts of the Tactica, just as Frontinus reproduced exempla from his first three books in his Strat. 4.10 In any case, the significance of Polyaenus’ concluding words, αὐτῶς τεταρσωμένας, referring to ships having their complete row(s) of oars, is not clear and seems irrelevant to Leo’s version. The obscurity may derive from Polyaenus’ own abbreviation of his source or offer further proof that a longer version of the exemplum has not survived.11

Placement of the stratagem of 3.9.38 within its specific context during the 374–373 B.C. campaign could also enlighten, but such must remain problematic. Tempting is a connection with Iphicrates’ amphibious assault described at Polyaenus 3.9.63, where Iphicrates commanded 100 triaconters, a type of vessel used in the 374–373 B.C. expedition (Diod. 15.41.3). But these ships are explicitly stated to have anchors at their sterns (ἀγκυραν ἀφιέναι κατὰ πρόμαν), whereas in 3.9.38 Iphicrates is concerned with

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7 Monacensis gr. 401 is the M of the Teubner editions of Woefflin (1860) and Melber’s revision (1887) of Woefflin’s text, but M1 in Schindler’s study of the manuscript tradition: 1973: 129–137.
9 Melber 1887, reprinted in Krentz/Wheeler 1994, I: 260; the connection is also noted in the translation and commentary of Nefedkin 2002: 397 n.122.
10 E.g., Tact. 20.21 = 11.21; 20.45 cf. 19.40; 20.80 cf. 6.5, 11.41; 20.87 = 17.91; 20.110 cf. 12.57, 14.101; 20.139 cf. 18.132; on the authenticity of Frontin. Strat. 4, see Wheeler 2010: 33 with n.102, 39 n.122.
weighing down the ships from the prow. More troubling, however, in 3.9.63 Iphicrates is attacking Phoenicians in Phoenicia, but the hostilities of 3.9.38 concern joint Persian-Greek operations against Egypt and the expedition had its base at Ace (Ptolemais) in Phoenicia. Bianco attractively suggests that 3.9.38 describes a training exercise – a view that can be neither refuted nor confirmed.12 A third possibility is the expedition’s landing at the Mendesian mouth of the Nile – a surprise attack from the open sea after Egyptian fortifications and preparations blocked a landing at the Pelusiac mouth (Diod. 15.42.4). Diodorus mentions an extensive beach but not a harbor. The versions of both Polyaeus and Leo imply the need for a “harbor at sea,” a situation in which the beaching of the ships was impossible or unadvisable.13 Little more can be done with Polyaeus 3.9.38 on present evidence.

II

Surprisingly, Leo’s version of Polyaeus 3.9.38 at 20.196 substantiates a significance aspect of the Strategica’s Nachleben. Constantine VII Porphyrogentius (r. 912–959), son of Leo VI (r. 886–912), recommended to his own son Romanus II (r. 959–963) what books to take with him when campaigning: these should include the historical works of Polyaeus and Syrianus Magister.14 Constantine’s encyclopedic efforts had included the collection of ancient and earlier Byzantine military treatises – manifest in the famous manuscript of the Greek tacticians, Laurentianus LV-4 of c. 985.15 This collection included the Excerpta Polyaenii (Hypotheses), the earliest Byzantine abbreviation of the Strategica, in which Polyaeus’ c. 900 stratagems were reduced to 356 and reorganized from the original prosopographical-ethnographic order into a topical arrangement by military categories as in Frontinus’ Strategemata.16 Dates of composition for the Excerpta range from 500 to 850, but all are conjectural. Thus the earliest witness of the Excerpta, Laur. gr. LV-4, antedates the earliest manuscript of the complete text of the Strategica, Laurentianus gr. LVI-1 (c. 1295) by three centuries.17

The prominence accorded to the Excerpta by its inclusion in the Laur. gr: LV-4 and the relatively late date of the earliest manuscript of the Strategica have often led to an assumption that the Strategica’s text was not available or not used, but rather in the time

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12 Bianco 1997a: 189 n. 34.
13 Pryor/Jeffreys (2006: 516 n. 65) disparage Leo’s exemplum at 20.196, since a Byzantine dromon (like a trireme) could be beached and thus a “harbor at sea” was unnecessary. They do not consider the situation of an assault on an occupied coast in the face of an enemy and are unaware of the connection of Leo 20.196 with Polyaeus 3.9.38. On amphibious operations in Antiquity see Tucci 2004: a selection of case-studies and in no way a comprehensive discussion. Polyaeus 3.9.38, 63 and Leo 20.196 are not treated.
14 Haldon 1990: 106–107 (C198–99); on Syrianus see Rance 2007 with references to bibliography besides the recent edition (with translation) of his relatively inaccessible Rhetorica militaris: Eramo 2010.
15 On this MS see Dain/Foucault 1967: 382–385; Schindler 1973: 216–218. The impulse to compile this military encyclopedia certainly antedates Constantine’s death in 959, but the hand(s) of the Laur. LV-4 point(s) to a date over twenty years later.
of Leo VI and Constantine VII the Excerpta had replaced the Strategica. Exclusion of the Strategica from the Laur. gr. LV-4 – and thus the codicological tradition of the Greek military theorists – has also produced skepticism about Polyaenus’ prominence as an inspiration of Byzantine military thought, although the concept of stratagem as a Schwerpunkt of Byzantine doctrine is indisputable. Such pessimism about Polyaenus’ Byzantine fate, however, excessively, if not mechanically, emphasizes the chance survival of manuscripts – one but not the only source of intellectual history. Constantine VII, if he had in mind the collection of the Laur. gr. LV-4 in his advice to this son, could not have meant the Excerpta when he mentioned Polyaenus, because Polyaenus’ name is missing from the superscript of the Excerpta in that manuscript. Polyaenus name was only added to the Excerpta in the sixteenth century, when the Parisinus gr. 2522 was copied from the Laur. gr. LV-4.

Further, and more significantly, Leo knew the complete text of Polyaenus’ Strategica directly and Polyaenus’ collection seems to have been a major source for Leo Tact. 20. A scribe of the late tenth-century (?) Vindobonensis phil. gr. 225, one of the earliest witnesses to the Tactica, included Polyaenus in a marginal note to Prolog. 6.55–59 on earlier writers. But better evidence comes from Leo’s use of Polyaenus 3.9.38. Leo must have drawn this exemplum directly from the Strategica, as this anecdote is found neither in the Excerpta nor in the so-called Stratagems of the Emperor Leo, 118 exempla from the Excerpta further abbreviated, stylistically revised, and inserted in the mid-tenth century Sylloge Tacticorum. Indeed Leo apparently drew on Polyaenus frequently in composition of Tact. 20: of the 221 exempla included, Polyaenus is a potential source for twenty-seven and many, like 3.9.38, are not found in the Excerpta or possibly used through [Maurice]’s Strategicon. Leo’s reliance on [Maurice] noticeably decreases as Tact. 20 progresses (see Appendix). Clusters of Polyaenian material appear at Tact. 20.78–87, 144–68, 193–98, and 216–220. Leo’s failure to mention Polyaenus explicitly comes from his desire to rework material from “the ancients” as a collectivity rather than from ignorance of Polyaenus’ complete text. As in 3.9.38 he updated the vocabulary and eschewed verbal reminiscences. Polyaenus’ direct influence on Byzantine military thought was still flourishing in the tenth century.

20 Wheeler 2010: 335 n. 110; on the Paris. gr. 2522, see Dain 1941.
21 Dennis 2010: 7, n. 4. The list includes Arrian, Aelian, Pelops, Onasander, Menas, Polyaenus, Syrianus, and Plutarch. Pelops and Menas, otherwise unknown, may be inventions or pseudonyms.
23 Cf. the meager list at Rance 2011: n. 3.
24 John Haldon reaches (independently) the same conclusion as this paper on Leo’s use of the full text of Polyaenus. See his The Taktika of Leo IV ‘the Wise’: Critical Commentary, forthcoming.
Appendix

The following table lists exempla in Leo Tact. 20, which derive directly or indirectly from Polyaeus, or for which Polyaeus was one of the possible sources. Comprehensive citations of the anecdotes from all possible sources are not given.

L = Leo, P = Polyaeus Strategica, Exc.P. = Excerpta Polyaei, M = [Maurice] Strategikon

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<td>20.168</td>
<td>3.9.18 (Exc.P. 46.4)</td>
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<td>20.87 (cf. 17.91)</td>
<td>8.16.8</td>
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<td>20.196</td>
<td>3.9.38</td>
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25 See also Plb. 10.32.11–12 and Wheeler 1988: 164–65 with n. 37–38.
26 On the prominence of battles of desperation in Polyaeus, see Wheeler 2010: 39–42, where Puuap. fr. 44 Blockley should be added at n. 128.
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