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STASIS IN CORCYRA: WHO WAS FIGHTING THERE?

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I am attempting to present a different perspective on a famous passage from Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* (Thuc. 3.69–3.85), on the so called *stasis* in Corcyra island. Many scholars have scrutinized that passage in order to define what the *stasis* was or to fit it into the historian's work. My aim is to elucidate the concrete case in Corcyra, not the model of the *stasis* in general. In this article, I analyse the source to find the answers to the main question, that is, who really was fighting in Corcyra (looking beyond simple dichotomy, which is stressed by Thucydides). I elaborate on the origins of the conflict, the role of individuals, the chief and background groups engaged in the strife and the process of gradation of the *stasis*, where the neutral status is practically impossible. I am trying to interpret this case of *stasis* not only as a struggle between democrats with oligarchs, but (what is equally important) as a commixture of different people or bodies of people, who often, in fact, were merely random dwellers (not only citizens) of the island.

KEY WORDS: *stasis*, civil war, Corcyra, Thucydides, democrats, oligarchs, neutrality

1. INTRODUCTION¹

An internal war is a notion which seems to be a universal phenomenon, regardless of its time or place – it is coeval with political life.² The Athenian historian Thucydides, whose work is a subject of research for modern non-historians inasmuch as for scholars of antiquity,³ in his oeuvre describes the origins, the course, and the nature of that conflict, which occurred in Corcyra (present-day Corfu island) and began in 427,⁴ and which is called *stasis* in Greek terminology. His account⁵ was studied in detail by many historians, but also by political scientists and sociologists to highlight different issues, depending on the perspective.⁶ I would like to take cognisance of contextualists' standpoint and thus analyse the source through the prism of my main research questions.

Those passages were closely scrutinized to emphasise the nature of the conflict and try to answer the question about what the *stasis* was. Thucydides writes⁷ that it was the first time when *stasis*, in the described form, occurred and, moreover, adds that such things will always occur, as the human nature remains the unchanged (γεννόμενα μὲν καὶ αἰεὶ ἐσόμενα, ἕως ἄν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ).⁸ In most cases,

¹ For critical comments on draft of this essay, I am much indebted to Prof. Marek Węcowski. I would like to also extend my gratitude to Dr. Floris van den Eijnde for discussing the topic of this paper and preliminary hints. Of course any errors are mine.

² Palmer 2017: 424.

³ Thucydides is numbered among the representatives of the classical political realism (next to Polybios, Machiavelli or Thomas Hobbes – the latter translated Thucydides' work in 1629 A.D.). See e.g. Kimel 2009: 12–14.

⁴ If it is not marked otherwise, all dates in the main text refer to B.C.

⁵ Thuc. 3.69–3.85.

⁶ See Clark 1993: 491. Clark compares ancient and modern realism (he checks whether actually there are grounds for realistic ideas in Thucydides' account from the perspective of IR theories) and rejects perspective of presentism, standing that Thucydides apparently is not IR theorist, because of the language and time, which distance us from his thoughts. Clark alerts us to be very careful using Thucydides' reflections to elucidate international relations theories, but still indicates what we can learn from Thucydides; see also Crane 1998. The book written by Kimel is somehow a view balanced between presentism and contextualism (Kimel 2009).

⁷ Thuc. 3.82.2.

⁸ I am using the Loeb edition of the Thucydides' work: Thucydides, 1920, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Volume II: Books 3–4, with an English transl. C.F. Smith,

scholars' endeavours focused on reconstructing the model of *stasis* (as stressed in chapters 82 and 83) and answering the question about how it fits into Thucydides' entire work.⁹

The basic book which examines the problem of *stasis* in ancient world is the monograph written by Hans-Joachim Gehrke entitled *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* The historian in his research omits the archaic period and internal affairs in Athens and Sparta (Cyrene and West Greeks as well), yet provides comprehensive pictures of *staseis* in many other, lesser *poleis* in the ancient world.¹⁰ He concludes with important remarks, especially on general understanding of *stasis*. Gehrke indicates that opponents in a *stasis* tried to completely eliminate (not only destroy politically) their enemy.¹¹ Moreover, he highlights the role of small groups (*hetaireiai*) and individuals in an inchoation of the wrangling¹² and also elucidates the role of external *poleis*, which influence the *staseis*.¹³ The latter issue is the main thesis in the Ruschenbusch's book, who states that *stasis* was mainly caused by foreign interventions.¹⁴ Gehrke's book is a great contribution to a problem of *stasis*, but in his catalogue of *staseis* from the 5th and the 4th century, he merely describes the train of events – in the case of Corcyra, he practically limits himself to rephrasing the description from Thucydides' account.¹⁵ Further in his book, he naturally provides some remarks, but still taking into account thousands of other cases in ancient Greece, of different chronology and political context (it is still helpful but may lead to a temptation to interpret under the thesis, so I do not agree with all of Gehrke's inferences). In my opinion, there is still a need to precisely examine the case of Corcyra without

London–Cambridge, Mass. I made use of the critical edition of Thucydides' work for Greek text and apparatus as well: *Thucydidis Historiae*, 1948, vol. I: Books I–IV, ed. by H. S. Jones, with apparatus criticus revised by J. E. Powell (in *Oxford Classical Texts*).

⁹ For a detailed elaboration, see Price 2001: 6–73.

¹⁰ The first main chapter is the catalogue (with exact descriptions) of the previous *staseis* according to established chronology; Gehrke 1985: 11–201.

¹¹ Gehrke 1985: 222f, 234.

¹² Gehrke 1985: 333.

¹³ Gehrke 1985: 277–287.

¹⁴ Ruschenbusch 1978.

¹⁵ Gehrke 1985: 88–93. On the pages 88–89 he refers and comments on who actually was *oligoi* and *demoi*.

any generalisation through the prism of any other *staseis*, especially later ones. The only paper known to me which focuses only on the origins of the conflict in Corcyra, is Bruce's one,¹⁶ albeit, still, he does not imply all the issues relevant in the case of the *stasis* in Thucydides' account.

I would like to pay more attention to the problem of the origins of the conflict in Corcyra through the prism of the main actors and sides ('factions') of the strife. My aim is to elucidate the complexity of *stasis* in the case of Corcyra. Specifically in Thucydides' account, we see mixture of different factors: external and internal as well. *Stasis* in Corcyra influenced everyone and it was not only a political and constitutional issue. This is the reason why I primarily decided to use the term 'dwellers' – not 'citizens.' It was the strife which revealed the pessimistic aspect of human nature (*physis anthropon*) and showed that a simple division into groups does not really matter in the final stage of *stasis*. In my opinion, the case of Corcyra teaches us to be really careful about seemingly unsophisticated conceptualisation of the civil war.

In Thucydides' account, we see a straightforward dichotomy: in Corcyra, democrats (literally *demos* in the sources) fought with oligarchs (Greek *oligoi*).¹⁷ The latter were supported by the Spartans and the former were by the Athenians (διαφορῶν οὐσῶν ἑκασταχοῦ τοῖς τε τῶν δήμων προστάταις τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐπάγεσθαι καὶ τοῖς ὀλίγοις τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους).¹⁸ This is also the model for similar *staseis* happening later in the ancient world. It is really intriguing, because a precise analysis of the source and the relevant words could reveal interesting results (not so obvious), which would contribute to answering the question: Who was really fighting in Corcyra? I will also try to elucidate the problem of the definition of *stasis*¹⁹ referring to information about the sides of the conflict and its context. Moreover, it is important for me to pose the following questions: How can we define the wrestling 'factions,' and, Was it possible to be neutral during the *stasis*? Obviously, it is difficult to separate the mentioned passages from the entire

¹⁶ Bruce: 1971.

¹⁷ I will come back to the issue of these notions on pages 67–68.

¹⁸ Thuc. 3.82.1.

¹⁹ I will atypically return to the problem of the definitions of the *stasis* in the conclusions, taking into consideration the comparison with my inferences.

work²⁰ and generally from the intellectual environment which influenced Thucydides' text.²¹ I refer to these aspects whenever I consider that they are necessary for understanding the elaborated problems.

2. THE CONFLICT AND ITS CONTEXT

Thucydides' work is the main source for the reconstruction of the affairs in Corcyra, but we can complete this image with short mentions in *Bibliotheca Historica* written by Diodorus of Sicily (Diod. Sic. 12.57), who definitely utilised *The Peloponnesian War*. We have short lines on Corcyreans in Hermippos fr. 63.10–11 (Kassel–Austin), who treats the dwellers of the island²² as duplicitous allies of the Athenians.²³ There are also votive tablets from Dodona sanctuary in Epirus – which are not so much relevant for this paper, but still matter due to the religious aspect of the *stasis*.²⁴ To some degree, archaeological data could provide information about the layout of the city and assist in sorting out the evidence about the main places where the factions were located.²⁵ The interpretations of topography may help us understand the social role of fighting groups and their urban and rustic henchmen.

In *The Peloponnesian War*, Corcyra is an important *polis* not only because of the *stasis*, but also due to its clashes with Corinth, which

²⁰ It is also worth mentioning the problem of interpolations. In the analysed passages, the most doubtful place in this regard is chapter 84. See e.g., Fuks 1971: 48–55. About the hypothesis of Pseudo-Thucydides and interpolations in the passages of *stasis* in Corcyra see Bravo 2000: 43–46.

²¹ There is no place for a precise examination of this topic, but we have to remember that the works of the first sophists (to Thucydides, Antiphon from Rhamnus seems to be the most influential sophist; Thuc. 8.68) are crucial to the understanding of many aspects of the historian's account. Moreover, scholars discern the influence of Hippocrates' school (also in the description of the Athenians' plague, which many times is merged with the *stasis*' account in interpretations): see Parker 2001: 14–18.

²² In this case, it is necessary to avoid the term 'citizens,' because slaves were engaged in the *stasis* in Corcyra as well.

²³ Brock 2009: 158.

²⁴ They are dated to the late fifth century, so might (but do not have to) refer to the *stasis* in Corcyra. I checked the text in: Parker 1967: 260 (Appendix).

²⁵ For the topography of Corcyra, see Gomme 1956: 370–372.

has ties with Epidamnus – Corinth’s another colony (the course of the events is described mainly in Thuc. 1.24–1.55).²⁶ Those events (dated on 435–433) are recognised as one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.²⁷ Corcyra was the colony of Corinth, but since time immemorial it tried to be an independent city and displayed hostility towards its mother-city. Corinth was in alliance with Sparta’s league and Corcyra sought help in Athens. The conflict escalated in the Battle of Sybota in 433, which resulted in the Athenian victory. Nevertheless, Corinthians took Corcyrean hostages (πεντήκοντα δὲ καὶ διακοσίους δῆσαντες ἐφύλασσον καὶ ἐν θεραπείᾳ εἶχον πολλῆ, ὅπως αὐτοῖς τὴν Κέρκυραν ἀναχωρήσαντες προσποιήσεται: ἐτύγχανον δὲ καὶ δυνάμει αὐτῶν οἱ πλείους πρῶτοι ὄντες τῆς πόλεως),²⁸ who will have a crucial role in the origins of the strife in Corcyra in 427 (it is the beginning of the *stasis*’ description).²⁹

Thucydides’ account of the situation in Corcyra in 427 is generally divided into two parts³⁰ and thus has two aims: to elucidate the course of the events in that *polis* and to present the model of the *stasis*: how the strife influences the life in *polis* and the relationships between the citizens and dwellers of the city as well. The latter of those aspects is usually referred to by the scholars as the ‘pathology of war.’³¹ There are two messages which we can learn from Thucydides: first, that the *stasis* in Corcyra is recognised as the kind of event that occurred and will always happen, and second, that it was somehow ‘the first,’ a historical

²⁶ See Crane 1992.

²⁷ However, the main reason Thucydides saw in the growth of Athenian power and Spartan fear of it: τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ, τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν (Thuc. 1.23.6).

²⁸ Thuc. 1.55.1.

²⁹ Thuc. 3.70.1.

³⁰ However, the ultimate demise of oligarchs is finally mentioned in Thuc. 4.48.5.

³¹ Prices 2001: 39–66. Pouncey parallels the description of *stasis* in Corcyra with the situation in Athens during the plague; Pouncey 1980: 33. Interpreting passages from Thucydides, he comes to the conclusion that pathology during a war always requires some kind of an external factor, which ‘disturbs regular flow of life’ – like plague or *stasis*, which are impulses for negative activity of human nature; Pouncey 1980: 35. Compare with Immerwahr 1973: 16–31.

breakthrough.³² The former conclusion could seemingly astonish readers, because we know about earlier *staseis* in the ancient world.³³ I will not go into detail, but we have to remember about a general belief of the historian himself that his work presents the greatest movement (*kinesis*)³⁴ in the Greek world. Why Corcyra is the first example of such an escalation of hatred is also a question about the range of the participants of that civil strife: those who were aware and eager, and those who maybe did not want to be involved but they had to take a side.

3. THE ACTORS OF THE STASIS AND THEIR AIMS

The reason of the conflict seems to be clear, as I mentioned in the introduction. We see fighting dwellers of the city divided into two main factions (the popular and the oligarchic side). We read that one of the parties wants to enter into alliance with Athens, the other one does not want that and the democrats claim that the opponents want to overthrow democracy. I think that the situation is more complex, thus I will scrutinize that problem now.

³² Williams 1985: 1.

³³ Even Thucydides in the passage called *Archaeology* (Thuc.1.2–1.20) writes that the cities that became the most powerful on the account of their ‘excellent land’ destroyed themselves with *staseis* (the first appearance of this word in his work); see Price 2001: 409–410. Also, Williams 1995 – she presents a selected description of the previous *staseis*, which seems to engage a small number of people. In Corcyra, everybody was touched by the strife – I will try to elucidate this aspect. For economic interpretation of the internal strife in ancient world and fitting the notion of *stasis* into the elaborated issue, see de Ste Croix 1981: 291–293. In my opinion, economic reasons in the case of Corcyra was not a key issue; similarly Gehrke 1985: 89. See page 72 with footnote 91.

³⁴ Thuc. 1.1.1. However, the term *kinesis* itself may refer to the period of Pentekontaetia not the Peloponnesian War. I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Marek Węcowski for this remark.

3.1. THE ORIGINS: WAS IT REALLY AN INTERNAL STRIFE?

Studying the origins of the *stasis* in Corcyra, we should remember that even if the main skirmishes were between the dwellers of the *polis*, in the whole account we see a lot of interferences (political or military) made by the Athenians or Spartans and their troops or alliances. It is important to determine the status of Corcyra and the aim of its policy before the savage struggles. Did oligarchs really want to overthrow democracy?

I. A. F. Bruce³⁵ highlights that Corcyra belonged neither to the Athenian League nor to Spartan's symmarchy (they only had a defensive alliance³⁶ with Athens). We could assume that in 427 most citizens wanted to maintain the *status quo*: neutrality.³⁷ Thucydides began the descriptions of the affair³⁸ on the island with presenting the external factor (only ostensibly internal) – prisoners who were liberated by pro-Spartan Corinth for a political reason: to persuade Corcyreans to take the side of Corinth.³⁹ After hearing the envoys from Corinth and Athens, they decided to maintain the defensive alliance with the Athenians but also renew the friendship with the Lacedaemonians⁴⁰ (καὶ ἐξ λόγου

³⁵ Bruce 1971: 108.

³⁶ See Gomme 1956: 360; in Greek: κατὰ τὰ ξυγκείμενα – Corcyra helped the Athenians during the war only in 431: see Thuc. 2.25.1, 3.95.2.

³⁷ For the concept of the neutrality issue and its interpretation see Bauslaugh's book. The historian introduces a claim that there is a lack of terminology for neutrality in Greek sources (somehow this term is also an anachronism); there is no single term for this concept. He elaborates on some notions and phrases like 'keep quiet' (*hesychian agein*), 'remained at peace' (*eirenen egagon*) and 'allies of neither side'; Bauslaugh 1991: 3–8, 5–16. According to *status quo*, Bauslaugh quotes the passage about the embassy of Corcyra to Athens and their speech (Thuc. 1.32–1.34), when they say (1.32.4) that previously they were allies of nobody (ξύμμαχοι τε γὰρ οὐδενός ποῦ ἐν τῷ πρὸ τοῦ χρόνῳ ἐκούσιοι γενόμενοι), because they considered it wise (*sophrosyne*) to pursue a policy of avoiding active involvement with other *poleis*; Bauslaugh 1991: 7.

³⁸ To be precise, he asserted that with that event the *stasis* had begun: Οἱ γὰρ Κερκυραῖοι ἐστασίαζον, ἐπειδὴ [...]. See Hornblower 1991: 467–468; he disputes with Wilson 1987 ('Athens and Corcyra: Strategy and Tactics in the Peloponnesian War' – *non vidi*), whether we may assume that the real *stasis* began with the return of the prisoners or only from Thuc. 3.70.6 or even 72.2, what Wilson wants (because of the harsh and violent acts).

³⁹ Thuc. 3.70.1.

⁴⁰ Thuc. 3.70.2.

καταστάντων ἐψηφίσαντο Κερκυραῖοι Ἀθηναίους μὲν ξύμμαχοι εἶναι κατὰ τὰ ξυγκείμενα, Πελοποννησίους δὲ φίλοι ὥσπερ καὶ πρότερον). The verb ψηφίζω indicates that under the democratic and constitutional decision (at that moment in peaceful circumstances) Corcyreans enacted the decree about neutrality. Bruce claims that these prisoners did not opt for oligarchy. He agrees with Gomme that they were maybe patriotic men, who conducted negotiations with Corinth but they did not want to engage in a war on either side.⁴¹ After a bloody assassination of Peithias (I will come back to him in the next paragraph), the conspirators (*drasantes*) called out to the citizens of Corcyra and told them that everything was alright, and they had to reject both sides of the conflict (τό τε λοιπὸν μηδετέρους δέχεσθαι ἄλλ' ἢ μιᾷ νηϊ).⁴² Thucydides recounts that the *demos* were compelled to ratify this decision (καὶ ἐπικυρῶσαι ἠγάγκασαν τὴν γνώμην),⁴³ but it still confirms that the opponents of the 'popular group' tried to forge alliance with neither Sparta nor Corinth – and then to overthrow democracy. They were afraid of the loss of the neutral status and being 'enslaved by the Athenians' – because a pro-Athenian faction definitely existed in Corcyra, with Peithias as the leader.

Roger Brock provided the example of Corcyra, while posing the question whether the Athenians really promoted democracy due to constant and ideological reasons.⁴⁴ It seems more plausible that they wanted to maintain the alliance with Corcyra and thus support a more 'popular group' because of pragmatism and forestalling any enemy's reinforcement.⁴⁵ However, he assumes that this *polis* had an oligarchic government in 433–427.⁴⁶ I think that he wants to reassert the statement that the Athenians have not always supported the democrats. It is controversial and many scholars claim that Corcyra was actually more democratic

⁴¹ Bruce 1971: 109–110.

⁴² Thuc. 3.71.1.

⁴³ Thuc. 3.71.2. For more on those events, see Simonton 2017: 127.

⁴⁴ Brock 2009: 157–158.

⁴⁵ This is a general conclusion about promoting democracy in the *poleis* by Athens. See Brock 2009: 161–162. It is also plausible as an overall perspective of an inevitability of war with Peloponnese, which was obvious for Athens – they did not want their enemy to capture the large Corcyrean fleet; moreover, Corcyra offers a convenient stop on the way to Italy; Pouncey 1980: XI–XII.

⁴⁶ Brock 2009: 157–158.

than oligarchic, even if the members of *boule* seem to be appointed by election and not by lot, which is recognised as more democratic – when we look at the example of Athens.⁴⁷ Actually, this problem fits into a larger question about the nature of the Athenian imperialist policy and reasons for it.⁴⁸ It is not so obvious that the aim of the Athenians' interventionism was the establishment of democracy and their form of government. There were also many reasons why different *poleis* decided to submit to the Athenians (like, for example, avoiding establishment of the tyranny of their own oligarchs).⁴⁹

With no clear answers available, I can assume that no obvious division of the citizens into pro-Athenian democrats and pro-Sparta oligarchs existed in Corcyra. Most citizens wanted to stay neutral during⁵⁰ the war (in my opinion, the decree – *psephisma* – described by Thucydides in 3.70.2 and the previous position of Corcyra in international relations – which is proclaimed in Athens (Thuc. 1.32.4); see footnote 36 – clearly indicates that). This status could not be confirmed by the external fighting sides – thus they tried to influence and use the situation in Corcyra.⁵¹ The slogan 'overthrowing democracy' (τὸν δῆμον καταλύουσιν) appears later in Thucydides' narrative.⁵² The historian claims that it was only a simple plea to murder political opponents or even private enemies. Studying the *stasis* (often called an 'internal war'), we should remember that the external factor is crucial as well.⁵³

⁴⁷ See the analysis of the government in Corcyra in: Robinson 2011: 122–128. Contrarily to this view, Gehrke states that the system in Corcyra resembled moderate oligarchy ('gemäßigte Oligarchie'), which he even calls 'Hoplitenpoliteia'; Gehrke 1985: 88 with footnote 2. Also Bruce 1971: 116 (about the role of hoplites in Boeotia for moderate oligarchy).

⁴⁸ Starting with Croix 1954: 1–41. In the context of the Corcyrian case, see Meiggs 1972: 409.

⁴⁹ Croix 1954: 38.

⁵⁰ For a broader explanation of neutrality – see pages 71–73.

⁵¹ Thucydides will reveal the impossibility of being neutral in the famous Melian Dialogue (Thuc. 5.84–116).

⁵² Thuc. 3.81.4.

⁵³ Ruschenbusch indicates that, especially for Hellenistic times, the external factors are really crucial; Ruschenbusch 1978: 32. It is worth mentioning the case of the *polis* Phlius (north-eastern part of Peloponnese), whose struggles are depicted in the Xenophon's *Hellenica* (4.4.15; 5.2–5.3); see Legon 1967: 324–337.

3.2. DEMOS, OLIGOI, AND PROSTATES TOU DEMOU

However, still in the *stasis*, we see internal fighting factions. Bruce argues that political terminology in the passages on *stasis* is not clear.⁵⁴ Now, I want to study this aspect and try to describe those sides: *oligoi* and *demos*, and the role of individuals in those factions.

The Greek word *demos* (or latin *populus*) is one of the most ambiguous political terms.⁵⁵ Primarily, it may connote the majority of citizens in the *polis* who support a democratic regime or poorer citizens subjected to demagogues or motivated by emotions (it is often identical with the Greek word *plethos* – which means ‘crowd’). In the English translation, we can find the phrase ‘popular party’⁵⁶ – but we have to remember that in ancient Greek there were no parties in the modern sense of the word.⁵⁷ We can only speak about factions or clubs (gr. *hetaireiai*) – and I will return to this problem later. Thucydides is not consistent in his narrative. On one occasion he speaks of the *demos*, having in mind the fighting side, but elsewhere he uses the phrase ‘the Corcyraeans’ for the same people murdering their enemies, alleged opponents of democracy.⁵⁸ The group of people designated as *demos* must, therefore, include individuals who were just common citizens supporting democratic rules (Greek *idiotes*, which were not engaged in political issues or public offices) and people gathered around such men as Peithias (οἱ δὲ τινες τῆς αὐτῆς γνώμης).⁵⁹

In most cases, the word *oligoi* refers to a small group of people. As it happens, they are wealthy citizens, but it is not a necessary condition.⁶⁰ They can also be recognized as men of distinguished ancestors, which embraces and connotes the Greek term *aristokratia*.⁶¹ Moreover,

⁵⁴ Bruce 1971: 112.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Rhodes 1985: 88 (*ad Ath. Pol.* 2.1).

⁵⁶ I am leaving this translation in quotations form Loeb (in the main text I call it ‘popular or oligarchic group’).

⁵⁷ Bruce 1971: 110.

⁵⁸ Bruce 1971: 112.

⁵⁹ Thuc. 3.70.6.

⁶⁰ Ostwald 2000: 21–30 (correlation with the Greek term *aristokratia*).

⁶¹ Fisher & Wees 2016: 1–58. The opening chapter of the important book entitled *Aristocracy in Antiquity: Redefining Greek and Roman Elites* deals with the concept of aristocracy in Roman and Greek world and presents the complexity of the problem and definitions, which scholars must confront analysing the sources.

aristocratic elites always express themselves by their status and social practices, such as *symposion* or funeral ceremonies.⁶² In the descriptions of *stasis*, *oligoi*⁶³ could refer to the part of them who were conspirators and revolutionists, but as Bruce highlights, some of them did not opt for continuing their dealings (among oligarchs, we see suppliants and others: καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις).⁶⁴ Referring to the oligarchic faction in the skirmishes, Thucydides describes them as τῶν Κερκυραίων οἱ ἔχοντες τὰ πράγματα.⁶⁵ It is also ambiguous, and we are uncertain about the precise political views it includes.

In the first chapters, Thucydides describes the tensions, which are focused on a certain man, Peithias, who was sued by the returned captives for bringing Corcyra into servitude to Athens (οὗτοι οἱ ἄνδρες ἐς δίκην, λέγοντες Ἀθηναίοις τὴν Κέρκυραν καταδουλοῦν).⁶⁶ This man was a voluntary *proxenos* of Athens and the leader of the ‘popular group’ (ἦν γὰρ Πειθίας ἐθελοπρόξενός τε τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ τοῦ δήμου προειστήκει),⁶⁷ and a member of the council (*Boule*) as well. He was acquitted, but took revenge and charged five of the wealthiest citizens for sacrilege. The supporters of these men found Peithias dangerous and capable of ‘enslaving’ Corcyra to Athens. Then, we see the first savage step in the *stasis*: murdering Peithias, other members of *Boule* who were present in the office, and other citizens (*idiotai*) in the building; sixty people altogether.⁶⁸ We see the first random casualties in the originally political strife.

When the violent struggles arose, we can observe many actions carried out by the fighting sides. Firstly, we see which part of the city they occupied. Thucydides recounts⁶⁹ that *demos* ‘fled for refuge to the acrop-

⁶² See Duplouy 2006: 32.

⁶³ Bruce 1971: 116.

⁶⁴ Thuc. 3.80.1. For comment on ‘others’ in the conflict in Corcyra, who are outside of the general division, see de Ste Croix 1954: 26.

⁶⁵ Thuc. 3.72.2.

⁶⁶ Thuc. 3.70.4.

⁶⁷ Thuc. 3.70.3; ἐθελοπρόξενος – Pollux does not help – he refers to Thucydides here; hence this is the only example of using this word; maybe to distinguish it from the hereditary *proxenos*. See Hornblower 1991: 468 and also Gomme 1956: 360.

⁶⁸ This word denotes people who assume any office; citizen, who are not engaged in policy (the common citizens); really often in opposition to the term rhetor which implicates somebody who is a politician; see Węcowski 2009: 458.

⁶⁹ Thuc. 3.72.3.

olis and the high places of the city' and 'held also the Hyllaïc harbour,' whilst the opponents 'seized the quarter of the marketplace (*agora*), where most of them lived, and the harbour adjacent to its which faces the mainland'. Gomme comments that the latter rather refers to the absentee landlords who were working in agricultural domains, and some of the merchants (we hear that because of the defeat, oligarchs started to set fire to the 'dwelling-houses around the marketplace and to the tenements' (τὰς οἰκίας τὰς ἐν κύκλῳ τῆς ἀγορᾶς καὶ τὰς ξυνοικίας) and that 'much merchandise [*chremata*] was burnt up').⁷⁰ It is also a feature of the *oligoi* that rich and notable families lived close to the political centre.⁷¹ We find out as well that the majority of slaves joined *demos*, while the oligarchs 'gained the support of eight hundred mercenaries from the mainland'.⁷² It is obviously worth mentioning that the *oligoi* have sent the message to the slaves as well, but they rejected this appeal. It would be interesting to know why they chose *demos* (generally, turning to slaves for help was exceptional in the Greek world).⁷³ There is no clear explanation, we can only speculate that perhaps they predicted the people's victory. We also see Thucydides' commentary on women's participation in the civil strife: 'The women also boldly took part with them in the fight, hurling tiles from the houses and enduring the uproar with a courage beyond their sex' (literally παρὰ φύσιν, what means 'beyond their nature').⁷⁴

Throughout the account, the readers feel that there are two main factions, but an observant reader may remark that those groups are not coherent and consistent in their aims and policy. It is also worth highlighting Jacqueline de Romilly's remarks, who accentuated that in Thucydides' work some conflicts are exaggerated, including those between democrats with oligarchs.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Thuc. 3.74.2.

⁷¹ See Gomme 1956: 362.

⁷² Thuc. 3.73.1. Aeneas Tacticus – Greek writer from the 4th century – in his work 'How to Survive under Siege' (Περὶ τοῦ πῶς χρῆ πολιορκουμένους ἀντέχειν) writes about the role of mercenaries as the force for overthrowing the system; see Roy 2017: 206–213.

⁷³ Hornblower 1991: 471–472.

⁷⁴ Thuc. 3.74.2.

⁷⁵ Especially, the opposition democrats – oligarchs has not been crucial until the time of Brasidas; see Romilly 1947: 77–78.

3.3. TIES OF BLOOD AND TIES OF PARTY

In the detailed description of the nature of the *stasis* and the pathology of the strife, Thucydides writes a very important sentence: ‘the tie of blood (συγγενής) was weaker than the tie of party (ἐταιρικός), because the partisan was more ready to dare without demur; for such associations are not entered into for the public good (τῷ κοινῇ) in conformity with the prescribed laws (τῶν κειμένων νόμων), but for selfish aggrandisement contrary to the established laws (παρανομέω)’.⁷⁶

The tie of party and the prescribed laws could refer directly to the Greek type of associations, the so-called *hetaireiai*,⁷⁷ which are well known from Athens.⁷⁸ It is important to avoid anachronical comparison with modern parties, where the elections of candidates, ideology or doctrine, and a certain program exist.⁷⁹ Anastasiadis explains in his paper⁸⁰ the roots of that way of thinking, which arises from the thinking about parties in contemporary political systems, especially in the UK and the USA, characteristic of the 18th and the 19th centuries C.E. *Hetaireiai* were mostly informal gatherings, frequently very social, which implies that they were often very political. What I mean is that the reason for the establishment of *hetaireiai* was primarily in social integration, building networks⁸¹ and supporting each other. Thereby, it was a strong basis for a possible political activity, endorsement, backing or, in many cases, a starting point⁸² for a coup (initiating the so called *synomosiai* – a conspiracies). The groups very often met in private houses for banquets.⁸³

⁷⁶ Thuc. 3.82.5–3.82.6.

⁷⁷ See Gomme 1956: 377; Hornblower 1991: 484–485. Węcowski 2009: 471–473.

⁷⁸ For more on that theme, see Connor 1971: 25–29; his view of the *hetaireiai* is explained through the prism of his main thesis about the role and the rise of a new elite in the Peloponnesian War, which strongly influenced political and democratic life in Athens, and became a rival for the old aristocracy, which started to think about a coup.

⁷⁹ Connor 1971: 5–6.

⁸⁰ He writes also about the renaissance of this topical view in the 1950s C.E.; Anastasiadis 1999: 313–329.

⁸¹ Anastasiadis references to the research of M. H. Hansen (1989: 107f) who highlights the role of informal groups and the role of networks, which these associations were building in the city and beyond it.

⁸² Węcowski 2009: 472 (Węcowski supports Hansen’s view on that problem).

⁸³ Węcowski 2009: 471.

The members supported each other in the courts, others deliberated about politics, and, perhaps, certain *hetaireiai* might have led to conspiracy or to overthrowing the government.⁸⁴ The word *ἑταιρικός*, used in the quoted passage, may refer to some kind of informal groups, which were active in Corcyra.⁸⁵ It shows that family ties were weaker than relations between members of such groups.

Once again, it is worth mentioning the role of Peithias, who might have been the leader of a certain *hetaireia* in Corcyra. As we remember, he was a voluntary proxenos (*etheloproxenos*) of Athens. This type of proxyeny is actually *hapax* in the sources⁸⁶ and thereby very intriguing, but shows us a very important influence of the individuals having connections with other cities on *polis*.⁸⁷ *Hetaireiai* were focused also on building international networks (like *philia* or *proxenia*) to harden their own position. Even if there was no official appointment for Peithias to be *proxenos*, he had to have strong connections and ties with some kind of *hetaireiai* in Athens. Once again, we see how internal factor mixes with external background at many levels.

3.4. NEUTRALITY DURING THE STASIS

I have already indicated the fact that the savage *stasis* began with the killing of not only the leader of a faction, but of common citizens (*idiotēs*) as well. We may pose the question, whether it was possible to evade the *stasis* and remain neutral; briefly: Do I have to choose? Thucydides leaves no doubts: ‘And citizens who belonged to neither party (τὰ δὲ μέσα τῶν πολιτῶν ὑπ’ ἀμφοτέρων) were continually destroyed by both, either because they would not make common cause with them, or through mere jealousy that they should survive’.⁸⁸ The commentators on Thucydides (A. Wycombe and A. W. Gomme) differ in interpretations.⁸⁹ Wycombe understands these ‘neutrals’ (thus, in the commentary, the phrase:

⁸⁴ Connor 1971: 25ff.

⁸⁵ About role of *hetaireiai* generally in *staseis*, see Gehrke 1985: 331–336.

⁸⁶ See footnote 66 of this paper.

⁸⁷ For the case of Peithias in the context of proxyeny see Mack 2015: 141–142.

⁸⁸ Thuc. 3.82.8.

⁸⁹ See Gomme 1956: 380.

mesa ton politon)⁹⁰ as the middle class (between the rich *oligoi* and poor *demos*)⁹¹ – but it seems to be the wrong point of view for Gomme, who is doubtful about this explanation in that passage. Hornblower supports Jowett’s version, which follows the scholiast’s explanation and thus he understands it as ‘the citizens who were of neither party’.⁹²

In my opinion, we should understand these people as citizens (*politai*) – this group of people had political rights, but they did not engage in the conflicts as they were rarely involved in politics. I suppose that this may refer to citizens like *idiotes*, who wanted to be neutral – meaning that politics was not a goal of their common life.

Thucydides shows a realistic point of view on *stasis*: there is no place for neutrality. Everyone must be engaged, otherwise, some of the fighting groups will exhort to take sides. It is not only Thucydides’ reflection, but it seems to refer to the mentality of ancient politicians.⁹³ At this point it is worth noticing one aspect of the quoted passage, indicated by M. F. Williams⁹⁴ following Jonathan A. Goldstein’s commentary⁹⁵ on *Athenaion Politeia*,⁹⁶ where we can find Solon’s law about the prohibition of neutrality (*apragmones*) during the *stasis* (it was the real cure for the *stasis* in Solon’s reforms). Author(s) of *Athenaion Politeia* write(s) that neutrality will be punished by *atimia*. Those passages led scholars to elucidate the problem of ‘activist citizenry’. We discern here the reversed way of thinking about the internal strife. To prevent a *stasis*, Solon required all citizens to espouse a side. There was no chance to be on

⁹⁰ Bauslaugh translates it as ‘the middle segment of the citizenry’ or ‘belonging to neither faction’; Bauslaugh 1991: 7.

⁹¹ Gehrke, too, rejects the leading role of wealthy issues in the *staseis*, also in the case of Corcyra. He states that the group of *demos* cannot be compared with Athenian *thetes*; Gehrke 1985: 89. I think that, especially for the beginning of the conflict, it was not a pivotal issue, but along with the escalation of the *stasis* this factor became crucial as well, what we see especially in chapters 81 and 82 (provided we have not rejected these passages as interpolations; see footnote 19 of this paper).

⁹² Hornblower 1991: 487.

⁹³ Bauslaugh 1991: 23–24.

⁹⁴ See Williams 1985: 2–3.

⁹⁵ Goldstein 1972: 538–545. Also Rhodes 1985 (*ad loc*). See Thuc. 2.40.2 (the negative attitude towards being neutral is seen in the Funeral Oration). Cf. Lys. 31.27–28. On forbidding neutrality, see also Bers 1975: 493–498.

⁹⁶ *Ath. Pol.* 8.5.

the sidelines. Williams claims that in Corcyra we see another level of political change, and at that time the new form of the *stasis* was more terrifying, because it became unlimited and uncontrollable.⁹⁷

3.5. WAR AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ABUSERS

As I have already mentioned, the catchphrase ‘overthrowing democracy’ became only an excuse to attack the enemies, either political or private. The *stasis* escalated not only into political fighting but also into struggles having repercussions in the form of collateral damage. The strife was an occasion to wreak the opponents. Thucydides describes those events: ‘the Corcyraeans continued slaughtering such of their fellow-citizens as they considered to be their personal enemies (ιδίας ἔχθρας). The charge they brought was of conspiring to overthrow the democracy (τὸν δῆμον καταλύουσιν), but some were in fact put to death merely to satisfy private enmity, and others, because money was owing to them, were slain by those who had borrowed it (καὶ ἄλλοι χρημάτων σφίσις ὀφειλομένων ὑπὸ τῶν λαβόντων)’.⁹⁸

It is interesting that technically we discern the rightful procedures: the accusers would bring lawsuits, but we can assume that the trials were only simulated.⁹⁹ The other thing that is confusing is the mention of debtors. As we can expect, those passages were often interpreted in the Marxist perspective as class struggle between the propertied class and the propertyless one. It seems an anachronistic and unreal point of view.¹⁰⁰ More plausible is that Thucydides presented here some kind of generalisation to highlight the wide range of conflicted sides. During the *stasis* in the city, lawlessness (*anomia*) governs (as during the plague)¹⁰¹: there are no rules, no principles of how to exact debts. It is a huge chance for revenge in every aspect of life.

⁹⁷ Williams 1985: 3

⁹⁸ Thuc. 3.81.4–3.81.5.

⁹⁹ Gomme 1957: 368. A type of ‘show trial’ was common during the Peloponnesian War. The most famous one was the Plateian Debate (Thuc. 3.53–67). See Macleod 1977: 227–246.

¹⁰⁰ See Hornblower 1991: 476–477.

¹⁰¹ Thuc. 2.53.1.

4. CONCLUSIONS

My endeavours focused on highlighting the *stasis* not as a model, but as a concrete case which occurred in Corcyra. After checking the political terminology and elucidating the picture of the fighting actors, I will now try to define the *stasis* in Corcyra. The modern translations of that word, such as a civil strife, an internal war, do not embrace the fullest substance of that notion.

In Thucydides' account, I discern the mixture and gradation of the *stasis*. Despite the established definition of it as an internal conflict, we see that an external factor is crucial for understanding the originally political aims of the fighting factions. Of course, in Corcyra, there were conflicts, like in every *polis*, but it seems that most of the citizens wanted to be neutral during the war. Simultaneously, the strife started to intensify and then we see that the same factions were divided, and then the sides were looking for support outside of the political world (they sought out support of slaves, mercenaries). The next step involved all common dwellers and women as well (I have to emphasize the important clue for me that generally *stasis* was between all dwellers in Corcyra – not only citizens). The political reasons became only a pretext to struggle with private enemies. Finally, there was no place for neutrality. A reader discerns it from the beginning of the conflict, when the cutting of vine-pros from sacred ground became the reason to attack the opponent in the previous context of political skirmishes (Thuc. 3.70). In the final stages of the *stasis*, private matters are tied with political ones – for all of the dwellers and citizens (active or those who were *idiotes*) of the *polis*.

I agree with Bruce that in Corcyra during the *stasis* 'the fighting was not between democrats and oligarchs as supporters of different political reasons'.¹⁰² The picture is more complex. On the island, definitely many political and social *hetaireiai* lived, with many more leaders like Peithias. These men had an important role in public life, what we can see on the political scene in Athens (also in Thucydides' account).

In my opinion, Thucydides demonstrates how the *stasis* gradually arises, embracing more and more – very often incidentally – dwellers into the conflict whose roots seem to be strongly influenced by external

¹⁰² Bruce 1971: 116.

factor. The political and military struggle concerns everybody, not only political or social groups or clubs, *ta mesa* as well. In the historian's dichotomy, which I have already quoted in this paper, we should see a general model (in most cases, it happened – in fact, the main factions were democratic and oligarchic), but it does not mean that it presents the whole truth: 'the devil is in the detail'.

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