CLAH4005: Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Writing historical gobbets

What is a gobbet?

- A gobbet is a piece of ancient evidence.
- It can be a bit of text, an inscription, a painting, a sculpture or an object.

Very important!

- While you will be asked to work with gobbets in different modules, ancient history modules will ask of you slightly different things than classical studies modules.

Today we will be working with an example

The example gobbet

- After this Tissaphernes came to the Hellespont; and when Alcibiades with a single trireme went to visit him, bearing friendly offerings and gifts, Tissaphernes seized him and imprisoned him in Sardis, saying that the King ordered him to make war upon the Athenians. [10] Thirty days later, however, Alcibiades, together with Mantitheus, who had been taken prisoner in Caria, provided themselves with horses and made their escape from Sardis by night to Clazomenae. [11] Meanwhile the Athenians at Sestus, learning that Mindarus was planning to sail against them with sixty ships, withdrew by night to Cardia. There Alcibiades joined them, coming from Clazomenae with five triremes and a dispatch boat. But upon learning that the Peloponnesian ships had set out from Abydus to Cyzicus, he proceeded overland to Sestus and gave orders that the ships should sail around to that place.
- Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.1.-11

First steps

Who is the author?
What is the work?

- Author: Xenophon
- Work: Hellenika

What do you know about Xenophon and about the Hellenika?

- Before trying to tackle the text itself and what it is about, you need to be comfortable that you can deal with both the author and the work.
- In other words you need to learn about both the author and the work.

Dealing with the author: Step 1

- Check out the main information that we have about the author. Use one of the scholarly encyclopaedias you have access to:
  - Oxford Encyclopaedia of ancient history (Oxford reference online)
  - The New Pauly (Brill online)
- Who was Xenophon?
- What did he do in his life?
- What are his main biases / strengths / weaknesses?

Dealing with the author: Step 2

- Read some modern scholarship on the author, his biases, strengths, weaknesses and problems.
- Are there any major debates?
- How are scholars approaching this author?

- Use the library catalogue to find books and articles on this author.

Dealing with the work

- Exactly as you need to collect information about the author, so you need to get information about the work.
- Use the same resources as you used for researching the author.

BIG DANGER

- Remember this is just background.
- Don't spend all of your time researching the author and the work.
- Put a clear limit on yourself as to how much you will read on the author and the work in general.

Working with the gobbet itself

The basic information

- Read the gobbet carefully.
- Do you know what it is referring to?
- Do you know all the people/places/events/situations that are in the gobbet?
- You need to be absolutely certain that you can understand the gobbet completely.

Obvious things to check

- After this **Tissaphernes** came to the **Hellespont**; and when **Alcibiades** with a single **trireme** went to visit him, bearing friendly offerings and gifts, Tissaphernes seized him and imprisoned him in **Sardis**, saying that the **King** ordered him to make war upon the Athenians. [10] Thirty days later, however, Alcibiades, together with **Mantitheus**, who had been taken prisoner in **Caria**, provided themselves with horses and made their escape from Sardis by night to **Clazomenae**. [11] Meanwhile the Athenians at **Sestus**, learning that[1] **Mindarus** was planning to sail against them with sixty ships, withdrew by night to **Cardia**. There[2] Alcibiades joined them, coming from Clazomenae with five triremes and a dispatch boat. But upon learning that the Peloponnesian ships had set out from **Abydus** to **Cyzicus**, he proceeded overland to Sestus and gave orders that the ships should sail around to that place.

The obvious questions:

Who?

- Tissaphernes
- Alcibiades
- Mantitheus
- The King
- Mindarus

Where?

- Hellespont
- Sardis
- Karia
- Sestos
- Clazomenae
- Cardia
- Abydus
- Kyzikos

Use the encyclopaedias and the inventory

The gobbet in its immediate context

- Never try to work on a gobbet in isolation.
- Make sure that you read the text around it as well.
- This means not just the next paragraph but at least the book that it belongs in.

When & What?

- You need to put the gobbet in its chronological and historical context.
- Use the text itself and the essential purchase to put it in its general context.

The wonderful commentary

- Use the relevant commentaries for extra light upon the passage in question.
- Commentaries can provide extra information, make connections between different authors or between different parts of an author's work.
- REMEMBER: Not all ancient sources have commentaries and some of them can be rather old.

Reading parallel

- Check out what other sources cover (or can cover) the event / issue / subject that the gobbet covers.
- Read them carefully (these are alternative accounts that you will need).

Parallel reading to our text

Diodoros 13.49

- Mindarus, when winter had come to an end, collected his triremes from all quarters, for many had come to him from the Peloponnesus as well as from the other allies. But the Athenian generals in Sestus, when they learned of the great size of the fleet that was being assembled by the enemy, were greatly alarmed lest they, attacking with all their triremes, should capture their ships. 3 Consequently the generals on their side hauled down the ships they had at Sestus, sailed around the Chersonesus, and moored them at Cardia; and they sent triremes to Thrasybulus and Theramenes in Thrace, urging them to come with their fleet as soon as possible, and they summoned Alcibiades also from Lesbos with what ships he had. And the whole fleet was gathered into p259one place, the generals being eager for a decisive battle. 4 Mindarus, the Lacedaemonian general, sailing to Cyzicus, disembarked his whole force and invested the city. Pharnabazus was also there with a large army and with his aid Mindarus laid siege to Cyzicus and took it by storm.

What to do?

- Compare the two texts.
- Where are they different?
- Why are they different?
- Does Diodoros get his information from another source than Xenophon?
- Is it merely that Diodoros is compressing the narrative?
- How does one text throw light upon the other and on the events?
- REMEMBER to read about the parallel author(s) as well. you need to know about them as well as the gobbet author.
- REMEMBER to read around the parallel text as well.

The Scholarly Context

- You need to read on the period / event / issue from modern scholarship as well.
- For our example you need to check books and articles on:
  - The Peloponnesian War
  - The Ionian/Dekeleian War
  - The role of Alkibiades in the war
  - What are the main issues/debates on this issue?

Themes and issues in the gobbet

Identifying the main issues that you need to cover

- What are the areas that the gobbet provides information about?
- What insights does it provide for the historian?
- Read carefully and combine the information you have gained from your research

Issues in the gobbet

- After this Tissaphernes came to the Hellespont; and when Alcibiades with a single trireme went to visit him, bearing friendly offerings and gifts, Tissaphernes seized him and imprisoned him in Sardis, saying that the King ordered him to make war upon the Athenians. [10] Thirty days later, however, Alcibiades, together with Mantitheus, who had been taken prisoner in Caria, provided themselves with horses and made their escape from Sardis by night to Clazomenae. [11] Meanwhile the Athenians at Sestus, learning that[1] Mindarus was planning to sail against them with sixty ships, withdrew by night to Cardia. There[2] Alcibiades joined them, coming from Clazomenae with five triremes and a dispatch boat. But upon learning that the Peloponnesian ships had set out from Abydus to Cyzicus, he proceeded overland to Sestus and gave orders that the ships should sail around to that place.
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The two main issues in the gobbet

- Alkibiades, Tissaphernes and the orders from the King
- What's going on with the two fleets and why is it significant?

- AND
- Why is Xenophon providing all this detail about Alkibiades and Diodoros is not?

Writing the gobbet assessment

Introduction

- What is the gobbet talking about?
- What are the main issues about the author/work?
- What are you going to talk about?

- REMEMBER just a sentence or two for each.

Main text

- Issue 1: Alkibiades, Tissaphernes and the orders from the King
- Issue 2: What's going on with the two fleets and why is it significant?

Criticism of sources

- Should not be just in your introduction
- Do not forget to connect the issues of the sources with your discussion of the specific issues covered in the gobbet.
- Make sure that you use the parallel reading you have done to exemplify your argument.
- Example: Is Xenophon's pro-Spartan attitude what prompts him to place such significance on Alkibiades' Persian connections? Is that why Diodoros does not mention the whole Alkibiades business there?

Criticism of scholarship

- Make sure to include scholarly opinions and arguments in your discussion.
- If you disagree with a scholar's argument/opinions, mention it and provide the evidence that makes you disagree.
- If you agree with a scholar's argument / opinions / interpretations, mention that as well.

References

- You need to reference:
  - The gobbet itself
  - The parallel reading that you bring in
  - The modern scholarship that you are using
- Every time you use it

Conclusion

- End your discussion with a conclusion.
- Be careful: THIS IS NOT A **SUMMARY**.
- Conclude what you have argued and why it is important.

Questions?