



The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War

Thucydides , Robert B. Strassler (Editor) , Richard Crawley (Translator)

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Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is one of the great books in the Western tradition, as well as its first true historical narrative. Editor Robert Strassler has annotated this classic text to make it more accessible to modern readers and added dozens of maps for easy reference. A helpful introduction places Thucydides in proper historical context and a series of short appendices focus on particular aspects of life and war during the period. But the bulk of the book itself, where Thucydides chronicles the long struggle between Athens and Sparta, enjoys an unexpected freshness on these pages--partly due to Strassler's magnificent editorial labors, but mostly because it's a great story resonant with heroes, villains, bravery, desperation, and tragedy. Every library should have a copy of Thucydides in it, especially libraries on military history, and *The Landmark Thucydides* is without question the best version available.

The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War Details

Date : Published (first published -411)

ISBN :

Author : Thucydides , Robert B. Strassler (Editor) , Richard Crawley (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 752 pages

Genre : History, Classics, Nonfiction, War, Ancient History

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From Reader Review The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War for online ebook

Darwin8u says

If you are going to read Thucydides, the Landmark version is the best place to start. I read this after I became a fan of Strassler's The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories. For me, there is not much better than Thucydides' speeches. "The Funeral Oration of Pericles", "Diodotus to the Athenian Ecclesia", "Demosthenes to his troops at Pylos" & "Nicias before the last sea fight" are all some of the most interesting, moving and inspiring speeches and harangues EVER written.

Thucydides' HOPW (Landmark edition) is filled with enough maps, appendices, marginal notes and summaries that Strassler well-girds the modern student of the Peloponnesian war for the challenge that is Thucydides. Strassler (and his team) has updated and improved the Crawley translation (which is a gem). This book is a must for students of the classics, politics, history and war. Hell, even if you are just interested in a good story, Thucydides tells a good one. This is an amazing and beautiful piece of history.

umberto says

3.5 stars

Finally I could finish reading this book after many intervals of being content with what I knew, I didn't claim I enjoyed all of eight-book Thucydides's account. Compared to the other history classic of similar stature, Herodotus's "The Histories" translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, I think, is more enjoyable and impressive regarding the world as viewed by the Greek historian in the fifth century B.C. Contrastively in a smaller scale, Thucydides has ambitiously depicted the twenty-seven year conflicts between Athens and Sparta with innumerable sieges, commanders, strategies and so on till we simply can't help getting confused, praying when each book would ever end.

The reason why I decided to read it is that many years ago I read some excerpts of Pericles' funeral oration somewhere and longed to read it in full. Definitely one of the greatest orators in history, he has since impressed posterity to the extent that few can surpass him as we read from his 7.5-page oration (nos. 35-46). It's a bit lengthy, I think, for those who would read him for the first time; therefore, the following three extracts should suffice in the meantime.

First, his opening statement:

Many of those who have spoken here in the past have praised the institution of this speech at the close of our ceremony. It seemed to them a mark of honour to our soldiers who have fallen in war that a speech should be made over them. I do not agree. These men have shown themselves valiant in action, and it would be enough, I think, for their glories to be proclaimed in action, as you have just seen it done at this funeral organized by the state. Our belief in the courage and manliness of so many should not be hazarded on the goodness or badness of one man's speech. ... (p. 144)

Then, in praise of those fallen soldiers:

This, then, is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died. It is only natural that every one of us who survive them should be willing to undergo

hardships in her service. And it was for this reason that I have spoken at such length about our city, because I wanted to make it clear that for us there is more at stake than there is for others who lack our advantages; also I wanted my words of praise for the dead to be set in the bright light of evidence. And now the most important of these words has been spoken. I have sung the praise of our city; but it was the courage and gallantry of these men, and of people like them, which made her splendid. ... (p. 148)

Finally, in conclusion:

... I have now, as the law demanded, said what I had to say. For the time being our offerings to the dead have been made, and for the future their children will be supported at the public expense by the city, until they come of age. This is the crown and prize which she offers, both to the dead and to their children, for the ordeals which they have faced. Where the rewards of valour are the greatest, there you will find also the best and bravest spirits among the people. And now, when you have mourned for your dear ones, you must depart. (p. 151)

In brief, I think reading this book should inform and inspire its readers on the futility in terms of atrocities of war, being those ancient, medieval, premodern or modern ones till we wonder if there is really peace to all humankind and when.

Bettie? says

BABT

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05s2pbm>

Description: *'My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever,' Thucydides*

Ancient Greek historian Thucydides' spellbinding first-hand account chronicles the devastating 27-year-long war between Athens and Sparta during the 5th century BC. It was a life-and-death struggle that reshaped the face of ancient Greece and pitted Athenian democracy against brutal Spartan militarism.

Thucydides himself was an Athenian aristocrat and general who went on to record what he saw as the greatest war of all time, applying a passion for accuracy and a contempt for myth admired by historians today. Looking at why nations go to war, what makes a great leader, and whether might can be better than right, he became the father of modern Realpolitik. His influence fed into the works of Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbs and the politics of the Cold War and beyond.

Thucydides' masterful account of the end of Greece's Golden Age, depicts an age of revolution, sea battles, military alliances, plague and massacre, but also great bravery and some of the greatest political orations of all time.

Today: With Spartan distrust of the rising power of Athens, is war inevitable?

Abridger: Tom Holland is an award-winning novelist and historian, specialising in the classical and medieval periods. He is the author of 'Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic', which was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, as well as 'Persian Fire', 'Millennium: The End of the World

and the Forging of Christendom', 'In the Shadow of the Sword', as well as several novels. His latest non-fiction book, 'Dynasty', chronicling the Roman Emperors, will be published in 2015.

He has adapted Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides and Virgil for the BBC. His translation of Herodotus was published in 2013. In 2007, he was the winner of the Classical Association prize, awarded to 'the individual who has done most to promote the study of the language, literature and civilisation of Ancient Greece and Rome'."

Reader: David Horovitch

Producer: Justine Willett.

Machiavellian long before that book, and even earlier, by ~200 years, than ????: The Art of War.

1. War Begins
 2. From Funerals to Plague
 3. Spartan Surrender at Pylos
 4. An Athenian Atrocity
 5. The Beginning of the End
-

Michael says

If you ever wanted to tackle Thucydides, this is the way to do it. It's beautifully laid out, with helpful maps and other material. The reading experience is profoundly moving, not really for the style but for the sheer weight of human folly on display. This should be required reading for politicians of all stripes.

Alcyone says

Favorite quote:

"The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest, but if it is judged worthy by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the understanding of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content.

In fine I have written my work not as an essay with which to win the applause of the moment but as a possession for all time." -Thucydides

Joaco says

This book is impossible to review but I still wanted to give my opinion on this as I try to do with every outstanding book I come across. I mean impossible because this book is the cornerstone for different disciplines, mainly History and International Relations. This is no surprise as Thucydides was intending to provide a historic account of the greatest war of his time, the war between Sparta and Athens while not focusing on any superstitious beliefs. Being the first historian, he set about trying to understand this great powers struggle over control of the Greek world paying no attention to prophecies (unless it impacted the actions of the actors, as it usually did with Sparta).

Having framed the book on its actual importance, I am left with my impressions. I had assumed the book was going to be a boring account of ship and hoplite numbers per battle as well as one or two mentions to Greek commanders. Obviously, I had completely underestimated Thucydides' skills as well as the great job the translators have done since its time of publication (I guess we owe Hobbes the bulk of it back on the 17th century). The book does have that, but it is so much more.

Thucydides was an important Athenian figure during this conflict. He was a general while one of the greatest Spartan commanders -Brasidas- was fighting in Thrace and he lived some time on Sparta as well after being exiled by the Athenians. This allowed him to provide insight on the conflict while not being completely one sided. Additionally, his involvement in the everyday struggle the leaders had, allowed him to provide a unique account on human nature of his time. The book immerses you in this conflict in a way that I thought impossible to do. You will hear the speeches of the Athenian politicians; you will feel the disgust Thucydides had when writing about the demagogue Cleon, as well as Cleon exploits of his fame and good fortune against the Spartans on Sphacteria; you will smell the sea, sweat, and tears of the Athenians fighting for their survival on Syracuse; all this embedded on a page turning narrative where diplomacy, treason, political maneuvers, and personal traits of different leaders shaped the world.

This is an excellent book that anyone interested in the ancient Hellenic world must read.

Cait • A Page with a View says

Somehow utterly captivating, yet mind-numbingly boring at the same time... maybe having a stronger interest in the time period would've helped me.

Chris says

I first read Thucydides in college, using Rex Warner's translation in the Penguin edition. As a frosh with little background in ancient history and political science, I didn't have the proper perspective to realize Th.'s critical place in western historiography and political thought. As a junior, I re-read Th., this time in a course on ancient historians. At that point, having had modest exposure to Hobbes, Machiavelli, Burke, Clausewitz and the like, I was better equipped to appreciate Th.'s method--particularly his analyses in the vein of what we'd call "realism" today. Last year I tackled Th. again, this time in Strassler's amazing Landmark edition, and I am grateful that it was available for my third go at probably the most difficult classical author I've run into.

I won't go into details on Th. himself--I'm not a historian and anything I say expounding on how great he was, etc. will of course come off as amateurish and pointless. I will go into how much I admire the product of Strassler's labor of love (he's an unaffiliated scholar) in producing the Landmark edition. First of all, the translation is refreshingly readable and doesn't have the relative stuffiness of an early 20th-century Oxbridge rendering (which, er, I actually rather enjoy every now and then :-)). Second, the marginal timelines, the extensive but not suffocating footnotes, and maps (all carefully placed next to the relevant narrative) make it unnecessary for the reader to flip pages and lose the flow of the story. Furthermore, its appendices are a treasure trove of ancillary information: there is background information on the Athenian polis and imperial administration and the corresponding systems on the Peloponnesian side; discussions of the more technical aspects of ancient warfare; and pages on other topics such as the currency, religion and ethnic groups of the

Greeks, each written by a specialist.

In summary, I have nothing but good things to say about this edition--I only wish I'd been able to use it as an undergraduate. I also note that Strassler has just come out with a similar edition of Herodotus. Can't wait to check that one out...

Roy Lotz says

It has been said that Earthling civilization, so far, has created ten thousand wars, but only three intelligent commentaries on war—the commentaries of Thucydides, of Julius Caesar and of Winston Niles Rutherfoord.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *The Sirens of Titan*

Some years ago, I waded through the Barnes & Noble edition of Herodotus' *Histories*. It was one of the most painful reading experiences of my life. I blame 95% of this on the translator (G.C. Macaulay), who broke new ground in dry, prolix, knotty prose. The final result was to make Herodotus' narrative—already full to the brim with digressions and asides—into a tangled mess that gave me a never-ending headache.

However, Donald Lateiner's introduction to that edition was so good that I was left wanting to read more of *him*. So when I found out that the B & N edition of Thucydides' famous history also featured an introduction by that scholar, I picked up a copy. But the memory of the pain wrought by Herodotus still burned. It took a few years before I could bring myself to give Greek history another go. But I'm glad I did.

In many ways, Thucydides is the polar opposite of Herodotus. Whereas the latter is relaxed and easygoing, Thucydides is forceful and dogmatic. Herodotus is more than willing to report an entertaining anecdote, to indulge in an aside, or to report multiple occurrences of the same event. Thucydides, by contrast, is always on topic, never indulgent. From the first few sentences, one is aware that he is cutting down and refining his material with ruthless precision. Every fact that makes it to the page has been culled from an ocean of information; every sentence has been written and re-written dozens of times.

The merits of Thucydides are twofold. The most obvious is that he virtually invented modern history—concentrating on political and military developments, and keeping scrupulously to verifiable facts. The other is his rhetorical prowess. From what I've been told, his Greek prose was cutting-edge. There is only the faintest echo of this quality in Crawley's translation (which I still liked, by the way). Nevertheless, the *History* is at times as gripping as any good novel. The speeches

(however closely they adhered to actual fact) are without exception masterpieces—both of drama and of political analysis. The battles, the intrigues, the plots, the strategies, the movements of men and ships—all come alive in Thucydides' terse, muscular writing.

The Greeks were truly remarkable. In mathematics, Euclid was the standard textbook for over two millennia; in philosophy, Plato and Aristotle still cast their long shadows over the present-day; in literature, there are few authors whose influence can compare with Homer, Sophocles, or Aristophanes. And now we must add Thucydides to their ranks of geniuses. The man managed to set the stage for an entire field of enquiry, and do so with a book that remains both readable and relevant after over two thousand years. If America suffers the same fate as Athens, I at least hope we leave behind half as many great books

Phoenix2 says

The Peloponnesian War is something that historically interests me the most from the ancient greek history, so this book was something that I've read with ease. In addition the writing is quite understandable and easy to follow.

Jim says

What I love about the best ancient Greek literature is how startlingly modern it could be. This is particularly true of Euripides (whom I regard as a 21st century dramatist) and **The History of the Peloponnesian War** by Thucydides. The accounts of the Corcyran revolution, the so-called Melian Dialogue (in which Athens shows itself to be somewhat less enlightened than reputed), and the utter disaster of the Sicilian Expedition can just as easily be taking place now in remote parts of the world.

The Peloponnesian War even had its own Neocon in Alcibiades. He was largely responsible for Athens undertaking the Sicilian Expedition, only to be called back by the Athenian leadership for sacrilege. Thereupon, he made his escape at Thurii, went over to the Spartans, where he gave them excellent advice in combating the Athenians. Then, when the Spartans began to suspect him, he went over to Tissaphernes, the Persian Governor of Asia Minor. (Later still, he returned to Athens.)

I recommend the Rex Warner translation but urge readers to have a copy of **The Landmark Thucydides** at hand for its numerous and excellent maps, if not for its somewhat archaic translation by Richard Crawley.

Kenny says

I need more stars! Thucydides is the man. In 1947, George Marshall "doubt[ed] seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic issues today" without having

read this book. The parallels between the Cold War and the Peloponnesian War as T. describes it are certainly striking. My two favorite sections of this book are the civil war in Corcyra, which T. describes as representative of many civil wars going on in the Aegean at the time--and which he would not be at all surprised to learn was a pretty good description also of many 20th century internecine conflicts; and the siege of Plataea.

The sociological insight of the Corcyra section is breathtaking, as T. describes the values of a society crumbling as its citizens adapt to the demands of a war with no fronts, in which every friend might secretly be an enemy and anything is justified in the name of the faction's cause.

The siege of Plataea is, in T.'s telling, by turns exciting, inspirational, terrifying, and heart-rending. Both sides show great ingenuity in their attempts to outwit each other; there is a great escape story; and it ends with the battle of political, religious, patriotic and ethical motives as the Spartans must decide how to deal with their prisoners.

I could go on and on. The point is, read it! The "Landmark" edition with the maps and stuff is the best one.

Cleo says

Probably 4.5 stars due to Thucydides dry narrative but an awesome read. Political stupidity has not changed.

Jan-Maat says

Towards the end of this book I had a flashback of watching an episode of Mastermind in the 80s, the contestant had chosen the Spartan military as their specialist subject was asked being asked by Magnus Magnusson, the Icelandic Viking who swooped down from the north to Britain as a child to become a TV quiz host, why the Spartans had stopped their campaign on one particular occasion and gone home. The correct answer was that this was in response to an earthquake. Judging by Thucydides' history that could have been a lucky guess. The best way to maintain a reputation as fierce-some warriors is not to fight, but to be frightening, and the Spartans seem to have displayed a rare skill in finding reasons in the shape of a sacrificed animal's liver or a passing earthquake or a religious festival for either staying home or returning there.

I found Thucydides difficult to start (view spoiler) but increasingly intriguing. His history is a book that can be reread, studied, attention paid to each word as much because of what he doesn't say and how he says what he does.

It is an ambitious book in several ways. Thucydides was writing after Herodotus and his epic on the Persian war but opens by telling us that this war was "more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it...the greatest movement yet known in history" (p1). Secondly Thucydides makes great claims for his precision and accuracy implicitly a dig here at Herodotus and his giant gold gathering ants or the baby Cyrus lowered in a basket into a river to be brought up by step parents (but you've heard that story before). Both claims are dubious, the first has become a common place, people invariably want to claim that the story they want to tell is about the biggest, most impressive, amazing, far-reaching, and influential story ever in the history of history and they can't all be right, the other requires the reader's trust in Thucydides. He has decided what to trust as reliable information and what to include in his history. While he mentions a couple of times comparing accounts he never gives any clue as to whose accounts he is comparing or indeed when. The composition of the book is unclear, some parts seem more complete than others. Parts of the book were

presumably being written or revised decades after the events and since he doesn't reveal his sources there are untold layers of interpretation between the pages. While with Herodotus I had more of a feeling that I knew where I was in terms of what source materials were going into the finished work (view spoiler).

Thucydides does have some clear biases. He is fan of Pericles, he can live with Athenian democracy but doesn't seem to be enthusiastic about it, he doesn't like Cleon and while he lived among the Peloponnesians after his exile seems to find the Athenians a superior bunch in terms of their élan.

Remarkably given his stress on accuracy and reliability he tells us that he makes up the speeches that he has people say (view spoiler). About mid way through I wondered if the speeches were a key, it was unhelpful to think of this a history, better to frame it in my imagination as a drama. In which case this is a tale about hubris. The pride of Athens that came before its fall.

Thucydides tells a very familiar story of *Machtpolitik*. Athens through fighting off the Persians obtains an Empire. Sparta comes to fear Athenian power and is motivated by that to fight Athens. Pericles has a wise policy of avoiding battle but this is undone, first by his death but then by the ambition of reckless, feckless and self serving politicians (view spoiler)(view spoiler). At the same time in speeches a reoccurring criticism of Athens is its arrogance. Given the opportunity, the subject parts of its empire will break away. Athens can compel the rebels to obedience, but only for as long as its politicians are able to respect the foundations of Athenian power. Some have read this as Thucydides believing that might is right and that a state should use power directly in pursuit of its own ends, simply taking what it wants. I'm not so sure, in the context of the history that isn't an approach that works out well for Athens (view spoiler). Nor is Thucydides direct, the political attitudes are expressed in speeches (made up to reflect what he felt was demanded of the speaker at the time) and are typically paired - one person arguing for a position, the other arguing against it. This is a cleaned up, parred down, staged account of a decision making process played out in the theatre of public assemblies that runs counter to what he describes happening in book eight where we have political clubs (view spoiler), rumour and discussion between small groups of people going on in the aftermath of Athenian defeat in Sicily and the seizure of power by a Junta in Athens itself.

This is intriguing, there is a sense of purpose beyond a historical inquiry into the twenty-sevenish year war between Sparta, Athens, and their allies that is never quite spelled out but hangs elusive over the whole work. The influence is clear in Livy's The War with Hannibal there is the same assertion of the epic and unique scope of the conflict (view spoiler), the same use of paired speeches to stage a policy debate, the same use of a cart to block a gate to allow one side to gain entry to an enemy town - which made me wonder if Livy (or his sources) were reusing Thucydides or if Hannibal & co were themselves keen readers and took their tactical ideas from history or if some plans are just so basic that they are unwittingly repeated. Perhaps this is why the long siege of Syracuse gets so much attention in Livy - here victorious Rome clearly surpassed Athens.

This was a very intimate conflict, when Athens lost in the region of five thousand of its citizens killed or captured in Sicily, this was about one in eight of its entire citizen population (view spoiler). It was fought at close quarters, the bitter rivalry between Thebes and Potidaea is between a town and a village a couple of miles apart but will eventually end in the execution of every man left to defend Potidaea after a lengthy siege (view spoiler).

I was then a little taken aback by Thucydides treatment of the Corcyrean Revolution. For him this outbreak of inter-communal violence seemed particularly horrific yet from an outsiders perspective it just seemed to be the application of a similar degree of violence within a community as they were prepared to visit upon a neighbouring community: kill the men and sell the women and children into slavery - this was the time when

Euripides' Trojan Women was first performed, the resonance must have been inescapable (view spoiler)(view spoiler)

Fear plays its part in the revolution in Corcyra too. Those who have power fear those who are excluded from it (view spoiler), masters fear their slaves, Sparta fears Athens. Yet this isn't entirely convincing. It doesn't make a lot of sense that Sparta's conduct of the war until the first truce is so limited and so doesn't seem particularly fear driven - invading Attica each summer (providing the omens were favourable and there were no earthquakes or festivals). This is another level at which Thucydides is intriguing, fear can be the general psychology background of a society yet the practical application of policy is capable of a range of nuance. One of the Spartan kings (they had two at any one time) Agis seems to be the key figure here. Through the speeches we get an illusion of being close to the mind of a character, yet the information that Thucydides does share with us holds us at arms length too, and much is obscure. Is there enough in Thucydides' description to imagine a power struggle between the king and the ephor - the senior magistrate who speaks in favour of immediate war with Athens, that is realised in Agis' conduct of the war? Is the debate expressed to show how politicians manoeuvre with human emotion to win personal advantage?

Then again Thucydides is writing from hindsight. In his remarks on Pericles and poor decisions made after his death he refers to the eventual ending of the war (pp107-109), while at the time his fellow citizens did not enjoy quite the same advantage of perspective. My feeling was that Thucydides came close to blaming the citizens for being capable of being manipulated by others, but perhaps I was reading too much into him.

If you are tempted to dip your toes in and test the waters of Thucydides I'd suggest starting with the Sicilian expedition. It comes relatively late in the war but is a good narrative block with swings of fortune and the sad picture of Nicias, the commander of the Athenians on the verge of battle with the Syracusians, *appalled by the position of affairs, realising the greatness and the nearness of the danger...and thinking, as men are apt to think in great crises, that when all has been done they have still something to do, and when all has been said that they have not yet said enough, again called on the captains one by one, addressing each by his father's name and by his own...* (p399)

Also of interest two new books on Thucydides' history:

<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/a...>

(view spoiler)

(view spoiler)

The Edition and the Translation

I bought while I was still at school. Then I'd stop off on the way home and root about in a second hand book shop and exchanged an entire one and a half UK pounds for this small, old, Everyman pocket sized edition. True to my on going austerity reading project (view spoiler) I decided to finally read it all the way through.

The edition uses the 1876 Richard Crawley translation (view spoiler), perhaps stylish in its day but some of the word choice introduces its own distance between the original and the contemporary reader for instance his use of the term capital (ie in terms of finance rather than centre of government), heavy infantry for hoplite (which I was ok with until I remembered my paternal Grandfather served in a light infantry regiment), with 'first rate' and 'cruiser' used to describe the ships. The more you are familiar with the mid

Victorian British military the clearer you'll find Crawley's account of the Peloponnesian war. The problem for me was that this introduces doubt as to what else is obscured through his word choice and AC's recommendation in a comment on one of my status updates is to go for the Rex Warner translation available in Penguin if, gentle reader, you are tempted to give Thucydides a go in English.

Erik Graff says

For over three years I was a history major at Grinnell College. In the junior year only one course requirement remained, historiography, a course taught by only one faculty member. That was fine by me until we got to Augustine's City of God which, at the time, I thought was absolutely crazy and unreadable (I've since read it). Having almost completed the requirements for a religion degree as well by then, I switched majors and graduated on schedule.

Although Augustine was unsupportable, I very much enjoyed being made to read Thucydides' History as anyone would because of how his seems so modern and objective an account.

What is interesting in this regard is how unique Thucydides is. To my knowledge, no other historian approaches what we regard as serious historical scholarship until the Enlightenment, until more than a thousand years later. Read Herodotos, Diodoros, Livy or Suetonius to see what I mean. Tell me if you can think of an exception. The only one who comes to mind is Caesar whose account of the Gallic Wars approaches history.
