

**Jeremy Mynott (ed., trans.), *Thucydides: The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*.** Cambridge texts in the history of political thought. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. lxiv, 690. \$27.99 (pb). ISBN 9780521612586.

This remarkable edition of Thucydides promises to provide students of political thought with “all the necessary historical, cultural and linguistic background they need.” The author, trained in Classics, enjoyed a career at the Cambridge University Press (editor, director, executive) and has published on ornithology and an intriguing essay on the anthropology of bird-watching: *Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience* (Princeton 2009). Mynott, then, is not a classical philologist or ancient historian, but the preface and introduction convey his long-standing interest in translating and interpreting this difficult thinker and more difficult writer and neologist.

Even the title seeks to escape the “anachronistic concepts [and bias] derived from later developments and theories,” such as “political party” and “civil war” (xi–xii). Mynott sees the work as a “sustained and sophisticated study of political power itself,” but does not state his own interpretation of that study. Although his goal is to “assist readers in making their own judgments” (xl), the biographical thumbnail-sketches preceding the text certainly point readers in specific directions, e.g., Nicias “a large and tragic figure,” Theramenes “Athenian statesman,” Thucydides “exiled from Athens for his supposed failure” at Amphipolis.

The conflict between historical particularity and political theory that Thucydides poses is not addressed. Thomas Hobbes, who is quoted from his introduction to his own translation of the “most politic historiographer that ever writ,” fudges this issue that irritated Robin Collingwood (*The Idea of History*, Oxford 1946: 28–31): “What is the matter with the man, that he writes like that? I answer: he has a bad conscience.” The product “is not history at all, but natural science of a special kind.” With Thucydides “the historical thought of Herodotus was overlaid and smothered beneath anti-historical motives.” The problem of the veracity and fictionality of the speeches especially exercised Collingwood. Indeed, the most charitable interpreter of Thucydides’ tortured and obscure statement of his method (1.22.1)—if honest—throws up his hands in weighing the residue (if any) of words or concepts actually delivered from Thucydides’ invention, distortion, compression, or interpretation. But practical literary criticism and the nuts and bolts of doing ancient history demand that one come to some resolution about what Thucydides alleges he is doing, what he actually did, and even his *bona fides*. More than one scholar (e.g., Virginia Hunter, Ernst Badian) has concluded that he is making things up to confirm preconceived patterns or showing political bias of a journalistic sort. Those who think speeches are reported conscientiously, although not verbatim (an obvious impossibility before cameras and recorders on every street corner and in every boardroom and bedroom), have been sneeringly deemed “fundamentalists,” that is believers in Thucydides’ holy writ. Unless one has struggled to read him in his original idiolect of Attic, and it was a struggle for Dionysius as well as Cicero, can

one justifiably interpret the subtleties of his dense expression and brachyologic mental process—"more thoughts than words" (Marc. *Vita Thuc.*) 50?

While interest in narratology and other sorts of literary analysis has somewhat smothered Collingwood's argument challenging ancient historiographers, dazzled political philosophers have found Thucydides' tricky verbal ambiguity and authorial reclusiveness convenient for authorizing their own views, often quite contradictory views, of (say) the *realpolitik* in the dubiously known exchange at Melos between Athenian commanders and Melian delegates facing the chopping block. Thucydides warranted these modern excavations of his generalizations (in his own voice and in his antilogic speakers) by asserting (1.22.4; cf. 3.82.2) that he offers not only a clear view of the past but also "what can be expected to happen again some time in the future in similar or much the same ways." Thucydides *malgré lui* nevertheless does not codify, does not dogmatize or argue ideologically. As Hans-Peter Stahl so elegantly argues (*Man's Place in History* [Swansea 2003]; not in the bibliography), usually both characters and speakers' expectations are up-ended, whether Pericles', Brasidas', or General Thucydides' own, not to mention those of minor characters and psychologized crowds. No one's fancy rhetoric will solve the conflict between Thucydides' nomothetic and idiographic proclivities and approaches to phenomena. But this is not Mynott's interest or problem. To his credit he protests against colleagues' "extracting neat 'opinions' in lazy support of one's favorite causes and arguments" (xxxix, *absit nomen*)

His translation offers a panoply of readers' helps including the usual 25 page introduction, a list of dates, and indexes of names (431 of them) and a good one for topics (including, e.g., assassinations, atrocities, and executions). One also encounters unusual aids: biographical notes on major and some minor figures (do you remember Salynthius, Xenares?), a glossary too far of noticed Greek mythological figures (Pelops, Ge, Hermes), brief equivalents and explanations for Greek terms for calendars, coinages, and distances (stade, *pekus* [*sic*]), a glossary (e.g., acropolis, *hesuchazein*, *peribolos*, *phule*), and an unusual and attractive appendix of selections on Thucydides' ancient reception quoting Cicero, Dionysius, Plutarch, Quintilian, and even the obscure fabulist biographer and critic known as "Marcellinus".

And more: a select, briefly annotated bibliography of translations and further reading,<sup>1</sup> a synopsis of both the narrated events and the speeches, and thirty two-color maps (without any elevations) are included in the text and available on the website: [www.cambridge.org/thucydidesmaps](http://www.cambridge.org/thucydidesmaps). One profits from over 175 pages of supplementary materials, Mynott provides marginal sub-chapter numbers, e.g., 6.50.2, and left-page headers with the date, e.g., Summer 415-14, and right-page headers with the inclusive chapters, e.g., VI 50-2.

Mynott follows Thucydides in dividing his text by years of the war. After his first two divisions for Book I—"Introduction" ("Archaeology" and Methods), "Background to

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<sup>1</sup> Disclosure: my own 2006 "Barnes and Noble Classic" heavily annotated, lightly modified Crawley translation of Thucydides, perhaps hard to come by in Britain, is absent from his list.

the War” (Causes, Propaganda Issues, First Skirmishes)—every year of the twenty-one for which we have text constitutes a chapter. Thus, pp. 338–49 offer “Chapter 11” of the fighting. Titling this section the “Eleventh year of the War 421–20 [V 25–39]” provides an obvious but seemingly unprecedented, fresh way to appreciate the historian’s severely, some asseverate excessively, chronological approach. Mynott offers twenty footnotes here and one cross-reference to a map of central Greece. This rethinking of effective presentation characterizes the entire volume.

Mynott boldly tries to alert readers to problems of translation and interpretation through his numerous footnotes. Many notes transliterate thorny Thucydidean words or concepts or point out how the length and structure of Thucydides’ *clausulae* cannot and should not be imitated in English. The interpreter’s honesty is more admirable than the project feasible, however, when the intended reader is Greekless. Even native readers of ancient Greek struggled with this intentionally difficult author, not writing to please the crowds—”not just a performance piece for the moment” (1.22.4).

Mynott’s glossary includes both definitions of words that are “anglicised” (transliterated) and not translated, like *metics* and *polemarch*, and “transliterated terms that are translated in the text” with their nearest equivalent for the context. Many terms were fluid when Thucydides wrote (like *aitia*, *dianoia*, *metabole*, *stasis*)—inconveniently for our comprehension—so the task is difficult. Sometimes one of these slippery terms has a footnote and reference to the glossary when it occurs, but the text does not (really, cannot) always point readers to the Greek word or its associated interpretive issues. The presumed audience, in these circumstances, has no way of knowing whether a word translated as “fear” stands for *phobos*, or *deos*, or poetic *deima*, or the rare (as noun, twice) *orr[h]odia*—which does receive a note—or the related reactions arising from fear-induced *ekplexis*, *kataplexis*. In general, the notes on textual passages are very helpful, although no eleven-page glossary can adequately describe the variations that Thucydides plays on chance and necessity (*tuche* and *anangke*). Mynott thinks (xxx) they “over-interpret” Thucydides who believe that he was consistent in subtle distinctions between words with similar meaning.

The translation smoothed out many terrifyingly abrupt transitions and relentless compressions. It reads [too] well for the modern reader. The speeches do not feel sufficiently different from the narrative, thus losing epigrammatic and antithetical powers found in Richard Crawley’s justly praised version. I recommend Mynott’s version most highly, nevertheless, for advanced discussions of Thucydides’ ideas, although its \$28 list price (\$25 online) will discourage adoption for the moment, when the “Landmark” Strassler/Crawley Thucydides with its more generous selection of maps can now (August 2013) be bought new for \$16 online. Altogether, this edition in a crowded field offers many unique annotations complementing its fresh and accurate translation.

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