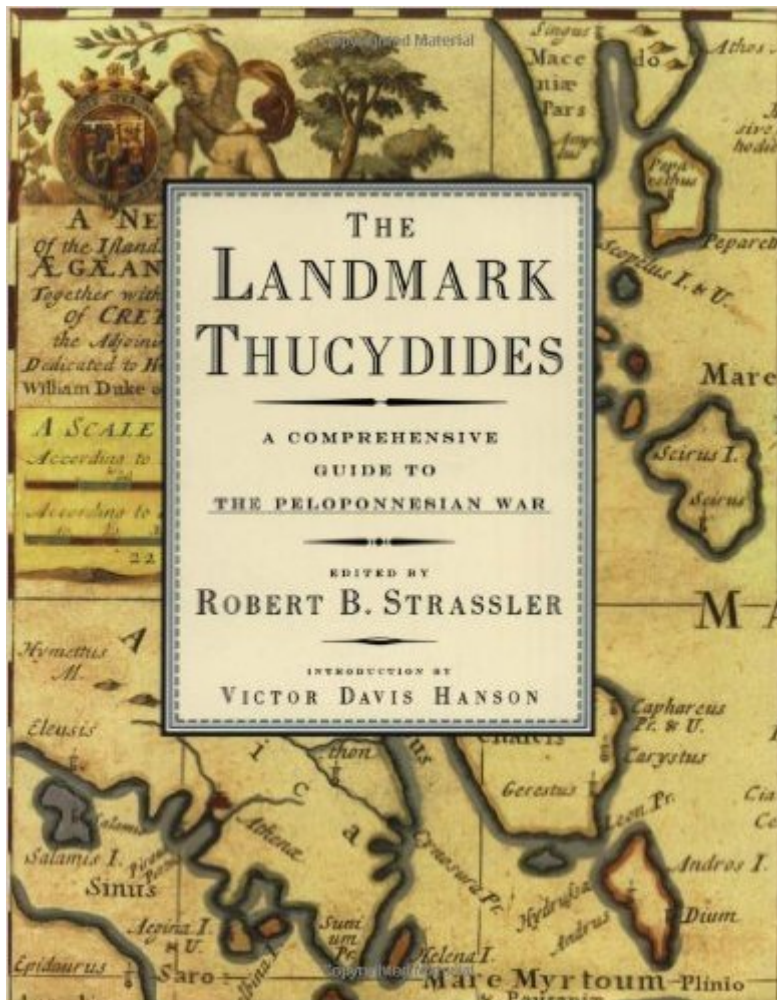


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The Landmark Thucydides



Synopsis

Thucydides called his account of two decades of war between Athens and Sparta "the possession for all time," and indeed it is the first and still the most famous work in the Western historical tradition. Considered essential reading for generals, statesmen, and liberally educated citizens for more than 2,000 years, *The Peloponnesian War* is a mine of military, moral, political, and philosophical wisdom. However, this classic book has long presented obstacles to the uninitiated reader. Written centuries before the rise of modern historiography, Thucydides' narrative is not continuous or linear. His authoritative chronicle of what he considered the greatest war of all time is rigorous and meticulous, yet omits the many aids to comprehension modern readers take for granted—such as brief biographies of the story's main characters, maps and other visual enhancements, and background on the military, cultural, and political traditions of ancient Greece. Robert Strassler's new edition amends these omissions, and not only provides a new coherence to the narrative overall but effectively reconstructs the lost cultural context that Thucydides shared with his original audience. Based on the venerable Richard Crawley translation, updated and revised for modern readers, *The Landmark Thucydides* includes a vast array of superbly designed and presented maps, brief informative appendices by outstanding classical scholars on subjects of special relevance to the text, explanatory marginal notes on each page, an index of unprecedented subtlety and depth, and numerous other useful features. Readers will find that with this edition they can dip into the text at any point and be immediately oriented with regard to the geography, season, date, and stage of the conflict. In any list of the Great Books of Western Civilization, *The Peloponnesian War* stands near the top. This handsome, elegant, and authoritative new edition will ensure that its greatness is appreciated by future generations.

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Customer Reviews

Robert B. Strassler's edition of the famous Richard Crawley translation of Thucydides is a remarkable work, not only because of its intrinsic merit but also because it is quite simply unique. Mr. Strassler has provided the ultimate in critical apparatus, an exhaustive series of tools with which to understand and appreciate one of the great books of world civilisation. I have never seen anything like it. First of all, there is the index; if an index can be said to be a work of art, the Strassler index is a work of art in the way it organises and informs the text. Next there are the maps - dozens of them - not clumped together in the middle of the book or hidden away at the end, but strategically placed throughout the appropriate points in the text, right at the reader's fingertips when he or she needs them. The footnotes (yes footnotes, not those pesky and inconvenient endnotes!) would fill a small volume of their own and add immeasurably to one's understanding. And as if this were not enough, there are 11 appendices - short essays by prominent classical scholars on different aspects of the Greek world in the time of Thucydides, from "Athenian Government" and "Trireme Warfare" to "Religious Festivals" and "Classical Greek Currency." As far as I am concerned, the only problem with Mr. Strassler's edition is that it has made me greedy for more of the same - a similar edition of the Mahabharata, say, or Gibbon! Any takers?

Robert Strassler has done a remarkable editing job with Thucydides' Peloponnesian War. He has included three key features which provide the reader much luxury: One, he has provided maps throughout the text, to the extent of repetition, to ensure that textual geographic references are always accompanied, in close proximity, cartographically. Two, he has provided paragraph summaries on the margin throughout the work so that a reader, who has put the edition down for any length of time, may refresh their memories quickly by reading as many of these one to two sentence summaries as necessary. Three, as Thucydides provides his narrative in chronological order, he must often leave one narrative to begin another. Strassler has provided a thread to follow each narrative through to its' end by way of footnotes. These editorial enhancements greatly enrich the reading experience and would be a welcome addition to any historical text. Thucydides, himself, presents the reader with a narrative unromanticized, strictly adhering to the events of the Peloponnesian War. His work possesses many passages that rivet the reader, but also contains areas where the sheer and voluminous recitation of fact can render one foggy. This is not a book for

the light-hearted, though Strassler's editorial enhancements make for a pleasurable experience. It is, in short, a classic which has been classically edited.

This is a superb edition of one of the greatest books ever written. However, there is a MAJOR CAVEAT: the paperback edition has a TERRIBLE BINDING, and will fall apart on you as you read it, guaranteed. This happened to every student in our class. Such a fantastic edition of a classic should obviously be sewn, rather than glued, but the publisher has apparently tried to cheap it out with an inferior glued binding which, I repeat, WILL NOT LAST. We wrote the publisher as a group, but did not receive an adequate response. By all means, use this edition, but if you want to keep it, BUY THE HARDCOVER.

This is a review of Thucydides' The Peloponnesian War rather than Strassler's edition of it, as many of the other reviews more or less are. But hats off to Mr Strassler! He should receive an award, a salary increase, a villa on the Riviera...Something commensurate with his painstaking and infinitely helpful notes and elaborations and maps, maps, maps!-Now I know where everything is. The previous editions of Thucydides I've read were rather scanty on maps (i.e., They didn't have any.) All readers of this edition owe Strassler a bundle for making us more successful readers of an author who, at times, can be a bit on the difficult, if not to say inscrutable, side. What do we have to learn from Thucydides? As several reviewers have pointed out, Thucydides intended his opus as a work for the ages. But what were "the ages" supposed to glean from this first thorough account of war in the Western world?... Why men go to war? How to prevent war? How to be successful in war? What it means to go to war?...Just what did he intend? Nobody really knows the answer to the question. But I've read the work several times (never with a clearer understanding than after finishing the Strassler edition) and have some ideas that might prove helpful. First off, one thing Thucydides almost certainly meant by declaring that his work was for the ages was that war is a permanent condition of mankind. Man has always and will always go to war. It's part of what we would call human nature or (if we wanted to be upscale about it), man's genetic make-up. This means that man is not, as Aristotle famously intoned, the rational animal, but irrational to the core. But, still, what does this really mean? The deepest impression I've always taken away from Thucydides was how moved, how liberated, how emboldened, indeed how festive the people were when they learned of an imminent war. What is this feeling, and why do people react to what, one way or another, is going to bring mayhem and slaughter into the world? In Book Six, concerning the Athenian attack on Syracuse, which Nicias (the Athenian General) and those Athenians with any

military insight at all regarded as the naval equivalent of the charge of the light brigade (or would have thought of it in those terms, if the British had been around to tell them about it at the time), Nicias makes a famous speech before the Athenians, rationally explaining all the reasons that the expedition would prove disastrous. As recorded in these pages, however, Nicias' speech had the opposite of the intended effect..."Everyone FELL IN LOVE with the enterprise." ...So, eventually, the defeated Athenians ended up being held in quarries near Syracuse for eight months under the most extreme conditions before being sold as slaves. Nicias was executed. Thucydides says, "This was the greatest Hellenic achievement of any in this war, or, in my opinion, in Hellenic history; at once most glorious to the victors, and most calamitous to the conquered (i.e., the Athenians)." I think one of the lessons, the most important to me, to take away from Thucydides is that love (that "many splendored thing") can be horribly, horribly dangerous and destructive. What is it that the Nazi soldiers felt toward their Fuhrer, or the Chinese toward Mao, or the Confederate soldiers toward General Lee?---LOVE: a grand, noble emotion...The grandest, the most noble...Thucydides understood more about human nature than many a philosopher. He reached his conclusions from what people did, rather than ruminating about them from secluded groves. The most important thing I have learned from reading him is a different level of introspection. When the band plays The Star Spangled Banner now (as when I was watching the Australian Olympics) and my heart leaps inside me and tears come quickly to the corners of my eyes....I stand back and look at myself and wonder...Is this the way the Athenians felt? What is this sudden whirlwind of feeling, and what sort of acts could it lead me to commit?...What is my nature?

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