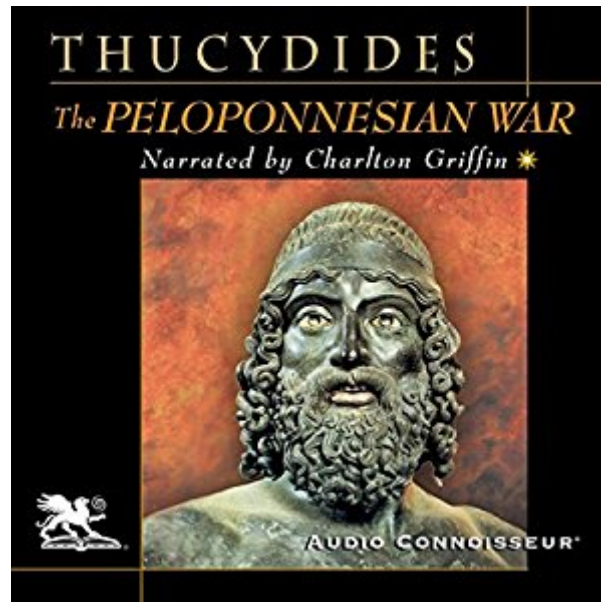


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The Peloponnesian War



Synopsis

Historians universally agree that Thucydides was the greatest historian who has ever lived, and that his story of the Peloponnesian conflict is a marvel of forensic science and fine literature. That such a triumph of intellectual accomplishment was created at the end of the fifth century B.C. in Greece is, perhaps, not so surprising, given the number of original geniuses we find in that period. But that such an historical work would also be simultaneously acknowledged as a work of great literature and a penetrating ethical evaluation of humanity is one of the miracles of ancient history. For in the pages of Thucydides we find examples of every ethical and political problem ever faced by democratic governments in the last 2,400 years. And it was all organized and written with a breathtaking skill and dramatic intensity which have never been equalled. Thucydides was an Athenian noble born around 455 B.C. whose antecedents could be traced back to the great Peisistratus and Cimon. In 424 B.C., Thucydides was in command of naval forces attempting to defend Amphipolis in Thrace. Although unsuccessful through no fault of his own, his enemies in Athens blamed him for failure and engineered his exile. It was a fortunate event, for it was upon this accident of history that Thucydides gained the opportunity to become the chronicler of events in Greece. In complete contrast to the furious passions which raged around him, he described events with a cool detachment and an absolute impartiality that is little short of miraculous. He is believed to have died violently, perhaps while writing, in about 400 B.C. His manuscript simply breaks off in mid paragraph. The Peloponnesian War is organized into eight parts ("books"). This recording uses the highly esteemed translation of Benjamin Jowett. There are several essays preceding and following the work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Thucydides edited by Terry Wick comes from an older translation that has a rather good reputation. I found that this version was easier to read than the esteemed 'landmark' edition (which has summaries, pictures, and maps), because there is more text and less distraction! Not much room in the margins, though, unfortunately. All in all, this translation is literal and generally quite good -- a good choice for studying or pleasure. However, most people I've spoken to have LOVED the landmark, so I also do not hesitate to suggest it. The text itself will drag in places if you are not completely gung-ho for everything about war. However, contained within are a lot of remarkable insights about the human condition which have remained stable for thousands of years. Well worth the struggle.

I read this years ago as a young soldier. It was required reading for cavalry officers in my regiment. I thought I would load it up on the Kindle and read it again with the benefit of 25 years experience. The text is, of course, marvelous. However, the formatting is awful. Sentence breaks don't line up, but rather break at odd intervals through the page. It makes reading considerably less enjoyable. If there is a way for me to repair this I hope someone will let me know. Otherwise - needs work is the best I can say.

I bought this for a few pennies to have on my Kindle; it would not have otherwise made it onto my purchase list for paper books. On the Kindle it was an enjoyable and enlightening read. Previous customer reviews give ample detail regarding its significance and its relevance to modern times. Read in conjunction with *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad*, it's easy to see how many of the battles fought between Athens, Sparta, and their surrogates could have become epic tales and poems in their own right. The history of the Peloponnesian War almost acts as a historical counterweight and literary jumping off point for more deeply appreciating the Homeric poems. It is an amazing and well written factual history that adds another dimension to the fictional literature of ancient Greece.

Contrary to statements by other reviewers, I can report that this text is properly formatted, at least on a Kindle 3. The lines are occasionally short, but only because the following word is long, and Kindle can not break and hyphenate words. That said, I find it very legible. A serious student will be disappointed by the absence of book and section numbers, the standard way of making reference to passages in this classic text.

This review is for the Penguin paperback edition, published in 1954, and translated by Rex Warner. This edition is still in print, and can be found [here](#), with the only difference being a slightly newer introduction by M. I. Finley (1970). Several newer translations have been published since Mr. Warner's--a Norton Critical Edition (Walter Blanco, 1998), a Hackett Classics (Steven Lattimore, 1998), an Oxford World's Classics (P.J. Rhodes, 2009), and a Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edition (Jeremy Mynott, 2013). Many of the public domain editions of this book (and print-on-demand editions) use the Richard Crawley translation of 1874. The fact that Penguin has not found it necessary to contract a new translation almost 60 years after Rex Warner's effort is interesting--I suppose it might suggest two ideas; one, that Mr. Warner's translation is superlative, and needs no improvement, or, two, that the translation is at least sufficient, especially after considering the cost of a new one. Since I have zero knowledge of Greek, the question of translators and their styles is important to me, and to some extent I have to rely on the judgment of the publishing house--or, perhaps it's better to say that I have to rely on my impression of the house's reputation. Since I can't believe that Penguin, Oxford, Norton or Cambridge would deliberately put out a substandard text, I suspect that any of these translations would be suitable, and would really come down to the way the reader responded to the individual translator's style; I ended up appreciating Rex Warner's 1954 effort a great deal--to the extent that, while comparing it to snippets of the others, I still preferred Mr. Warner's. Unfortunately, the Penguin editions are lacking in supplementary material and good maps--this 1954 edition has four maps placed on the last pages (and it appears that the newer editions follow the same pattern), which I thought failed to match the intricacy of the text. It seems to me, based on the available 'look inside' features provided by [this link](#), that all of the other choices have pro and cons associated with them, whether that be trade-offs between content, price and translation. The Cambridge edition, while the most expensive, has 30 maps placed at appropriate places within the text, and other material that seems as though it would be helpful to the student. The Oxford has a fifty page introduction and 9 maps, and is one of the least expensive options. And, while the Norton has no look inside feature, previous experience with these editions tells me that they generally have an interesting selection of supplemental essays and critical interpretations, which, as a non-student, I've always enjoyed for giving me a broader perspective. I don't think any of these would be a bad choice for the initial experience with this work, and any particular version might be all the Thucydides one feels he or she needs. But with the penguin edition, even though I liked the translation, I also felt as though I was missing a lot of context, especially when it came to geography and familiarity with the different peoples. It wasn't

until after I'd already begun reading that I learned of *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* by Robert Strassler, which uses the older, Richard Crawley translation, but appears to be jam-packed with supplemental material. For myself, this looks like a good solution and companion to what I've already read, and if, someday, I were to run across the Norton Critical edition, I would consider picking that up as well, simply for the critical essays. As to Thucydides himself, all I can say is that I enjoyed the work immensely. With many of these ancient works, I've been intimidated, thinking that I will not be able to appreciate them in all their complexity. Part of this problem is due to the older translations, which could sometimes be so stilted that I just couldn't penetrate their meaning. I've run into several like this, and it's been a barrier to enjoying them for what they are worth. I did not have that problem with Warner's Thucydides--the style is formal, but not in a heavy-handed way, and relatively clear. Thucydides himself, as I understand it, was not the plainest writer--his own style is complex and layered, and it seems as though all the translations I was able to look at reflect this. For those readers who are only interested in the events of the war itself, Donald Kagan's *The Peloponnesian War* might be a better choice. But Thucydides is more than simply an account of the war. In its own way, his history is also an inquiry into values, and an examination of human nature. It is certainly not history as we generally think of it today, yet regardless of its deficiencies, it also seems greater than a just a narrative. It is mandatory for anyone interested in historiography.

I once was in the U.S. Army. As part of our job we were always encouraged to study history to see how people thought and wars were executed. No war is ever the same so what we are reading to learn is the why. There is also how people responded to different tactics and strategies. I found this easy to read as the translation made it appear like we were reading today's news. Not just the acts but the politics of the time. There are great descriptions of the time and place. The only thing that is missing is visual maps to put the places in perspective. Luckily you can get maps of the time off the net as a supplement. I have a paperback edition which is easily navigated and you can place sticky notes in. I also have a kindle version which you can put book marks in. the problem with the kindle is the text-to-speech has a horrible time translating place and people names. The advantage of the kindle is it moves you forward so you do not doddle. I am contemplating a hard copy for the library and reverence. There is enough detail that it may require a second reading after you have digested the first. I am also looking for some good books to tell me what I would have noticed in this book. Comment Comment | Permalink

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