

SIMON HORNBLOWER, *Commentary on Thucydides: Volume III: Books 5.25-8.109*, Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2008 (repr. 2010), pp. xix+ 1107, ISBN 9780199276486.

This immensely learned tome represents a fine and weighty (literally no less than metaphorically) summation of Hornblower's *magnum opus*, volume I of which was first published two decades ago. Like its predecessors, it is a splendid supplement to—and also, in many aspects, an important advance on—A.W. Gomme, A. Andrewes and K.J. Dover's *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides (HCT)*.<sup>1</sup> The volume contains over 1,000 pages, so here I shall endeavour only to draw attention to some aspects of it that strike me as especially noteworthy.

Characteristic of the entire volume (and H.'s scholarly stance more generally) is the articulation of positions that bridge—or at least moderate between—the poles of 'literary' and 'historical' approaches. H. is aligned with those scholars who regard Thucydides as a consummate narrative artist, and seek to explain his challenging text as it stands and as a unity, before leaping to explanations in terms of manuscript imperfections and incompleteness.

H.'s narratological sensibilities (informed particularly by the studies of Thucydides by Connor, Rood, and Dewald, whose works receive frequent acknowledgment,<sup>2</sup> as well as H.'s own extensive work in this area) produce many fine observations and readings. The concept of focalization enables one for example to distinguish at 5.40 between real Spartan attitudes and the (possibly irrational) conclusions the Argives leap to (pp. 94-5), or to appreciate how, in narrating the Herms affair, Thucydides conceals his own opinion by focalizing the narrative through others (p. 375). 'Stylistic enactment' (the term is Michael Silk's: p. 552) explains the polysyllabic vocabulary and 'unusual piling up of heavy "building"-words' in the narrative of the wall-building race of Athenians against Syracusans (7.6.3-4; H. includes a charming visual depiction of the moment at which the Syracusan wall passed the Athenian: p. 553) and thus argues against the need for editorial amendment, or how at 8.27.3 'the narrative brusqueness nicely enacts the sudden sulky gesture' of the Argives' return home (p. 830). The reference to Troy's fall in the Sicilian Archaeology is a 'seed' for later, indirect allusions to the same subject (pp. 268-9).

Direct and indirect discourse also receives ample treatment, including §7 of the Introduction. Indirect speech, including that of book 8, is not a sign of

<sup>1</sup> Andrewes and Dover took over the task of continuing Gomme's unfinished commentary from 5.25 (making use of notes left by Gomme on 5.25-116).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984), T.C.B. Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation* (Oxford 1998), C. Dewald, *Thucydides' War Narrative: A Structural Study* (Berkeley 2005, orig. 1975 *Diss.*).

drafts waiting to be fleshed out, nor of the reduced veracity of the material, but explicable in terms of narrative strategy: it can enable the narrator to inject more information himself, or to avoid undermining a binary generated by the opposed direct speeches of other characters (here H. follows Wade-Gery). Speaker anonymity is a narrative strategy that for example lends authority (in the case of the Syracusan general at 6.41), or adds to the atmosphere of terror surrounding the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE (p. 945).

At the same time H. insists that one not throw the historical baby out with the narratological bathwater. He does not deny the possibility of chronological layers, and takes care to moderate his emphasis on Thucydides the artful narrator with Thucydides the mortal recorder of real events over a long stretch of time, living in exile for part of it and ultimately leaving his work unfinished: a situation that inevitably produced some anomalies and some provisional narratives. Thus the very first section of the Introduction is devoted to the *Thukydidesfrage*: 'The dates and stages of composition' of the narrative under discussion, which, inasmuch as it includes the middle of book 5 and all of 8, marked by verbatim treaties and large amounts of indirect discourse, does indeed focus attention on the classic crux of the History's composition, and how far the text as we have it is a completed work. H.'s view is that the problems presented by book 5 are more numerous and intractable than those presented by 8; and the commentary focuses much close attention on them. He speculates (p. 770) that Thucydides might have filled in 'the Persian factor'—the elision of Persia's influence in the final stages of the Peloponnesian war—by introducing Cyrus in 407 BCE (here and elsewhere H.'s approach is often refreshingly imaginative and speculative). At 8.28.2, even as we may invoke the narrative technique of depriving readers of information, so as to increase surprise at outcome, equally 'the historical background is undeniably left too gappy for intelligibility. Some revision and amplification was called for' (p. 832). H. observes the closural texture of the final pages of the History, with its 'purification-of-Delos theme' that harks back to the beginning of the work, and implicit references to the end of Herodotus' *Histories*; but the latter feature might be natural in view of the Hellespont location, and 'it may be that Th. planned further structural uses for Delos' (p. 1054). In any case Thucydides presumably intended to take his account to the end of the war (and the mention at 8.101.2 of 'dinner at Arginousai' is a seed that looks forward to the battle of Arginousai and its notorious aftermath: p. 1045).

Again, in keeping with this moderate approach, alongside sensitive narratological commentary we find plenty of hard-core historical analysis (regarding topographical locations, military strategy, numbers, and so forth), which often shines a light back on the interpretation of the narrative. Especially helpful are H.'s frequent discussions of epigraphical problems. A lengthy note (p. 460) weighs new positive arguments for a 415 BCE date of the Athenian inscription listing contributions by Sicilian and South Italian allies and notes that the case against that date is yet to be made; thus Thuc. either was ignorant of the facts, or suppressed them, which prompts the further question: 'How reliable generally is Th.'s account of the bleak reception of Athens by the Greek cities of S. Italy?' H.

suggests that Thucydides shaped the evidence to 'present as black and dramatic as possible picture of the cool reception given to the Athenian fleet in 415' (416). Elsewhere too inscriptional evidence is deployed in interrogating Thucydidean omissions, for example, the omission of a reference to an Athenian-Egestan alliance at 6.6 (305-7: Thucydides most likely was wrong: p. 307). In the detailed and helpful discussion of the 'Quadruple Alliance' inscription, its relationship to Thucydides, and the nature of the treaty itself (pp. 109-112) Lorenzo Valla's Latin translation (which H. calls upon repeatedly) allows H. to plump for an alternative reading of Thucydides' text and conclude that Thucydides' version was strikingly close to that of the inscription (p. 111). Appropriately, the commentary also contains illuminating discussion of Thucydides' own innovative use of inscriptions (e.g. *ad* 6.55.1).

There is also much careful onomastic sleuthing throughout, thanks to the recently published *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*. Syracusan Athenagoras (whose speech, ironically enough, is the strongest defense in Thucydides of democracy in the Athenian manner) is probably attested epigraphically, so there is less reason to suppose he was invented by Thucydides (p. 408). 'Euphemus' is so prevalent at Athens that its meaning 'auspicious speaker' may not have resonated strongly (p. 493).

H.'s comments are frequently informed by an expansive array of ancient and modern literature, and the position he arrives at nuanced and thought-provoking. In his treatment of poetic/literary influence in the context of Thucydides' depiction of the Athenians' slaughter at the river Assinaros (7.84), for example, the literary aspect of the scene is very effectively brought out through consideration of its reception in modern writers of fiction (an Iris Murdoch novel and lines of the modern Greek poet Serefis), its Orphic and Homeric resonances, and Ps-Longinus' assumption that Thucydides must have been exaggerating. H. agrees with another scholar that such an account should not be dismissed as "mere" literary effects: 'But equally, the possibility that [Thucydides] depicts the exact truth does not absolve us from the obligation to ask what, if any, predecessors and mythical paradigms he reached for, when trying to achieve the effects which would best convey those historical truths' (pp. 734-5).

In various places Thucydides' reputation as objective, reliable reporter is further put to the test. H. points to frequent instances of the historian's own agenda shaping his narrative, and in this regard and others he comes closer to his much-maligned continuator Xenophon. Thucydides' presentation of the Sicilian expedition as the upshot of the Athenians' irrational impulse is contested by the way his account (including intertextuality with Herodotus) points to a history of mainland interest in the West. Thucydides has diminished the role of the Boule in recounting decisions made regarding Athens' Sicilian expedition for the sake of this picture of Athenian impulsiveness. The impression Thucydides gives of the Athenians as a whole instantaneously rejecting Nikias' advice (7.16.1) 'cannot be right'. Again, if Plutarch's account of Alcibiades' itinerary is correct, Thucydides' account at 6.88.9 must be 'radically incomplete', 'paint[ing] Alcibiades blacker than he really was' (p. 510). Appendix 2 demonstrates at

length that the number Thucydides gives for the defeated Athenians and allies at the beginning of the retreat from Syracuse ('no fewer than 40,000': 7.75.5) must be greatly exaggerated. In other ways too Thucydides is nudged off his Olympian perch. As H. notes of Thucydides' assumption of readers' topographical knowledge at 6.50.4, 'When Xenophon does this sort of thing, he is scolded for it by commentators'. Elsewhere Thucydides is 'patchy' (6.62-71, where revision would have lent greater clarity).

In other ways too, the Thucydides that surfaces from H.'s pages is not so unique and eccentric a figure as the Thucydides of much modern scholarship, who, as Loraux famously expressed it, 'n'est pas un collègue' (whether of ancients or moderns). A particular emphasis of the volume is on Thucydides' close relationship with Herodotus. Herodotean resonances (in content and expression) cluster most thickly in book 6 (especially in the Pisistratid excursus and Alcibiades' speech at Sparta) and at the end of 8. H. underlines the need to consider Thucydides' narrative techniques in light of Herodotus', and even raises the intriguing possibility (p. 437) that one may speak in certain instances of (the elderly) Herodotus' reception of (material recited by) his near-contemporary Thucydides, rather than just vice-versa (cf. Hornblower 2010<sup>3</sup>, and this volume's Introduction §6 on possible recitation units, including the Sicilian narrative, which H. suggests divides into two sections of four hours' performance each; the Pisistratid excursus' 'flamboyantly polemical opening' is explicable by its independent existence as a recitation unit). This performative aspect again aligns Thucydides more closely to Herodotus than usually supposed, as well as to contemporary oratory (the commentary includes frequent comment on the rhetorical features of Thucydides' text), and H. raises the possibility of a surprising new context, that of sympotic recitation (there may be a 'performative sympotic' aspect to the Melian dialogue: p. 220). The commentary also joins other recent scholarship in drawing out theatrical dimensions of Thucydidean narrative<sup>4</sup>, and pays particular attention to the theatrical culture of West Greece. Indeed much of the narrative artistry that H. illuminates invites comparison with the work of skilled dramatists, ancient or modern (e.g. indirect speech as a device that keeps the focus on the two key protagonists; the narrative seed which proves significant, which recalls Chekhov's gun). Though Thucydides famously opens his work with the remark that he 'wrote up' the war, H.'s Thucydides thus reflects and even participates in the fifth-century performance culture.

Of course, the commentary also keeps constantly in view Thucydides' important forerunner, Homer, and also the wider historiographical tradition (Xenophon, the Oxyrhynchus historian, Ephoros, Polybios, etc.).

The commentary often asks us to rethink old categories and assumptions (eg p. 508: what we term the 'Sicilian expedition' also involved South Italy; p.

<sup>3</sup> "Thucydides' Awareness of Herodotus, Or Herodotus' Awareness of Thucydides?", in *Thucydidean Themes*, Oxford 2011, 277-85 (a reprint with corrections of a paper published in V. Fromentin, S. Gotteland, and P. Payen, *Ombres de Thucydide: la réception de l'historien depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'au début du XXe siècle*, Bordeaux, 2010, 27-33).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. E. Greenwood, *Thucydides and the Shaping of History*, London 2006, chs. 2 and 5.

789: the oddity of our common practice of referring to the final phase of the Peloponnesian war as the 'Ionian War', even though much was fought in the NE Hellespont region.) Interesting too are the observations on deliberate ambiguity or, in H.'s expression, 'polyinterpretability', for example in Thucydides' assessment of Nicias (7.86.5). H. makes the obvious but important point that Thucydides could have chosen to express himself unambiguously, and wonders whether ancient readers would really 'unerringly have plumped for the 'right' way of taking the words' (p. 742, cp. pp. 505-6). Subsequently (p. 1036) H. observes that 'some of Th.'s most important political judgments present great difficulties of interpretation, and can be taken more than one way': thus does difficulty in the Greek signal deliberate ambiguity? - is Thucydides (as H. puts it at p. 742) - 'covering his back'?

Further aspects worthy of note include the extensive treatment of the 'colonization of Sicily theme' (H. observes that this not only concerns Athens as a colonizing power, but the concept of colonial kinship, and how such relationships may be perverted by war); the sensitive analysis of agency and responsibility in Thucydides' account of the massacre at Mycallesus; and the discussion of thematic connections between the Melian dialogue and its narrative context. Numerous notes are enriched by the inclusion of abundant observations on the text by other scholars (esp. Griffiths and Pelling) who read H.'s work in advance of publication—which lends this volume a nice collaborative air, in the spirit in fact of *HCT*.

To conclude, H.'s masterful commentary is extremely helpful, in its comprehensive coverage of the text and its context, in its full and detailed treatment of the scholarship on Thucydides that has appeared since *HCT*, and in its concern to address head-on and in a balanced fashion some of the most profound dilemmas of interpretation that Thucydides' History presents and that have generated starkly divergent views of the author and his project from ancient times to the present. It is also very accessible, with almost all Greek translated, and H. has a gift for conjuring up a vivid scene himself, so as to round out Thucydides' elliptical text and give us a better view of the situation described and its attendant ironies (as at p. 787 of the *theoroi* swarming back to Athens after 'enjoying themselves' in Corinth, only to return after the Athenian vote 'with homicidal military intentions'). There is plentiful cross-referencing throughout, to the volume itself and its two predecessors. This 2010 reprint still contains a good smattering of typographical errors, which in the case of such a large and impressive tome would be ungracious to dwell upon, if it wasn't that H. gives such a full account of the typos, misreferences, omissions (e.g. p. 780: 'Rood isn't helpful on this'), and so forth of others—which seemed to me to take up unnecessary space in an already voluminous book.

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