

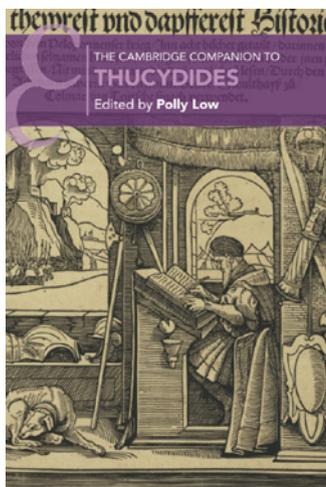
## Book Review

### The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides

Low (P.) (ed.) Pp. xviii + 382. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Paper, £29.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-51460-7.

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This new *Cambridge Companion to Thucydides*, edited by Prof. Polly Low from the University of Durham, has brought together some of the world's finest scholars to contemplate the various aspects of the writings of one of the most difficult of the Ancient Greek historians, Thucydides. Although for many of us our first encounter with Thucydides probably occurred very early on in high school or at University, I would go as far as to say being introduced to Thucydides is one of the basic cornerstones of anyone studying any aspects in the Classics

curriculum. From archaeology to historiography, Thucydides is studied by all. And to study Thucydides, teachers and students really need a Companion like this, especially if they wish to do justice to the man and the period that he wrote in.

This new book certainly does provide some excellent new answers, applications and receptions of the work of Thucydides and, considering how many volumes of other publications of a similar theme there have been since 1968, this is quite a feat. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is one of the earliest and most influential works in the western historiographical tradition. It should then come as no surprise that the Companion covers no less than 20 chapters. They cover an astounding array of topics from perspectives and interpretations to the significance of the text over the following centuries. The most difficult part of this book is not in the reading but in condensing a review that will be helpful to both students and teachers of Ancient Greek history alike.

For the teachers and students of Thucydides, Low's companion is of great importance because the various methodologies and receptions contained therein provide a comprehensive overview and understanding of teaching Thucydides in the 21st century. Low and her fellow contributors have completely outdone themselves in

writing this volume and thereby inspiring a new love and understanding in teachers and students approaching Thucydides for the first time. The volume takes the reader on a journey from non-specificity to having closer specialist knowledge and understanding of the text and its subsequent influence.

Low's *Companion* can be broken into three sections. First, where the nature, details and perceptions of the text are explored alongside the historical methodology. The second group of chapters is an analysis of how the work complicates or provides clarity and understanding of the period of the Peloponnesian War. This understanding is not limited to the well-known historical questions explored many times before. Low's volume takes this well-trodden terrain and expands the thought surrounding the questions. This is quite an achievement that properly reflects the quality of the contributors involved in writing the *Companion*, not to mention the quality of their scholarship. Truly magnificent contributions are made in the areas of war, politics and the nature of empire. It is written with a vibrancy that will attract a beginner and a specialist reader, which I think ultimately should be the goal of any Companion to a Classical subject. The third part of the volume explores the continuing legacy of Thucydides through antiquity, late antiquity, Byzantium and straight through to the present day.

This *Companion* alone, I believe, can make the claim that it presents a more broadly defined reception of Thucydides as a teaching tool in the art of Rhetoric in the Byzantine era; also how changing ideas on identities both national and personal changed the nature through which Thucydides had been read. This is a very thought-provoking achievement that will undoubtedly create much future scholarship for a greater teacher and student readership. Low and her contributors should be congratulated even further: they have succeeded in making an already difficult work more readable and liveable for a new generation of teachers and students. The work of Thucydides was once very limited to the readership of those students and teachers involved in the study and research of the Classics or even those involved in the teaching and research of Ancient History, but with this new addition Low has introduced the possibility of studying Thucydides in the light of modern political and international philosophy and theory as it pertains to subjects such as leadership and war. The broadening of the reading horizon of Thucydides makes an introduction to *The History of the Peloponnesian War* more accessible to students outside the normal Classics program or curriculum.

The volume does not neglect translation studies of Thucydides either. The somewhat tricky task of translating what we must in the end remember is an unfinished work gets significant attention in the final chapter. Jeremy Mynatt must be particularly congratulated for Chapter 20 as it very neatly encapsulates the work of the many other contributors that preceded it. It remains true that although the work of Thucydides is one that sheds much light on a very controversial part of Ancient Greek history, it also complicates so much else, especially translation studies. And this is not even a modern complaint as Dionysius of Halicarnassus already criticised the work for its bleakness. The fact that this *Companion* manages to illuminate these difficulties in a fresh way is yet another indication of the quality of the work produced.

A special mention must also be made in this review of Prof. P.J. Rhodes, who passed away shortly after the manuscript was

submitted. His chapter on Thucydides' use of evidence and sources will not only help to secure his legacy as a great commentator on Thucydides but also it will cement the reputation of this *Companion* as the best possible academic work that serves as an introduction as well as a faithful guide to an Ancient Greek author that many in modern scholarship would regard as being uncompanionable. Low

and her fellow contributors have made a difficult subject, Thucydides, less daunting and considerably more fun. In the end as a teacher or a student this is all we can ask for when studying and researching a complex man writing during a complex time.

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