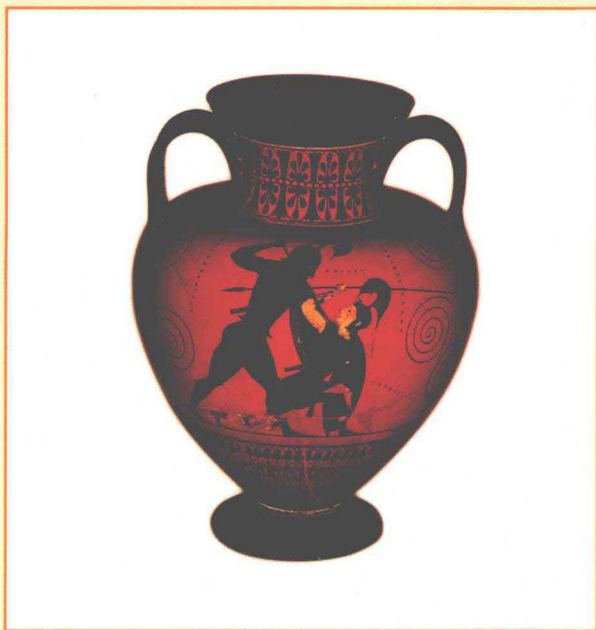


THE
PELOPONNESIAN
WAR
THUCYDIDES



TRANSLATED BY WALTER BLANCO
EDITED BY WALTER BLANCO
AND JENNIFER TOLBERT ROBERTS

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Thucydides
THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR



A NEW TRANSLATION
BACKGROUNDS
INTERPRETATIONS

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BOTH OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



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INTERPRETATIONS

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Translator's Note

I have tried to make a translation of Thucydides' famously difficult text that would be accessible to students and general readers. To do so, I have relaxed the compressed, often crabbed, syntax of the speeches and have adopted a relatively colloquial vocabulary for them and for the narrative as a whole. I offer no apologies. A strict rendering of Thucydides' speeches would make them seem as artificial to modern readers as Sidney's *Arcadia* or Lyly's *Euphues*, and would, as a result, deprive the history of the utility Thucydides himself desired for it as a work of permanent value. I will be very pleased if this text engages readers in one of the greatest histories ever written and enables them to follow some of the scholarly debate that surrounds it.

I want to thank some of those who have helped and encouraged me over the four years it has taken to complete this task. Walter Dubler has been the ideal general reader of early drafts of this translation. Professor Mireille Azzoug, Director of the Institut des Etudes Européennes of the University of Paris coddled me with a teaching schedule that made long hours of translation possible during my year as Visiting Professor. Arthur Brimberg, M.D., kindly read the description of the plague and correctly diagnosed it as essentially undiagnosable. Stuart D. Warner patiently won me over to his views on the meaning of *syngraphein*, and James Romm and other members of the Fordham University Department of Classics made valuable comments on the translation during a talk I gave there last fall. Many thanks to Carol Bemis, our editor at Norton, for the thorough professionalism with which she has led this book from proposal to publication, and especial thanks to Dr. Robert Lejeune, who was endlessly generous with his time in helping us solve all manner of computer and word processor problems. Thanks also to Dr. Judith Esterquest and to Dr. Mark Nevins for the enthusiasm they have always shown for this project. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many commentators—Andrewes, Dover, Gomme, Hornblower, and Lamberton, among others—who have led me through the Scylla and Charybdis of this text. My final and greatest debt is of course to my wife, Ingrid, for her loving support and clear-eyed common sense.

WALTER BLANCO
February, 1998

Introduction

Twenty-five hundred years ago, there was no sovereign nation known to the world as Greece. Throughout the region of the Aegean, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, dozens of towns whose inhabitants spoke primarily Greek exchanged goods, fought wars, and shared in assorted religious and athletic festivals such as the Olympic games. The primary political unit was the polis, or city-state, an urban center linked to its surrounding countryside. Some of the squabbling city-states were allied with the powerful polis of Sparta, but it never occurred to any of them to form a single Greek nation.

Shortly after 500 B.C.,¹ a terrifying threat from Persia galvanized the Greeks' sense of a common culture. Although Persian designs on Greece ultimately proved fruitless, it would be impossible to overestimate their consequences for world history. For when Darius, the intelligent and ambitious king of Persia, attacked the area around Athens at the beginning of the fifth century, Athens, Sparta, and other Greek states united to protect the civilization of what they were coming to call Hellas (the modern Greek name for Greece) from absorption into the Persian empire. In 490, Darius's expeditionary force was defeated by a small Greek army at the battle of Marathon northeast of Athens (see map, p. 34). Darius planned to avenge this defeat with a full-scale invasion, and when he died a few years later, the war against the Greeks was taken up by his son Xerxes. In 481, many Greek city-states formed an alliance known as the Hellenic League to counter Xerxes, and by 479 they had they succeeded in expelling the Persians from the Greek mainland.

The unity inspired by the Persian threat was short-lived, however. Though the Greeks had come to view their civilization as a cohesive entity that required protection from external enemies, still they chose not to band together in a political unit larger than the polis (plural, poleis). They sought safety against the Persians in alliances rather than political unity. Apprehensive about another invasion, many of the Greek city-states nearest Persia joined together in a powerful maritime organization designed to keep the Persians in check. Originally the Greek states looked to Spartan leadership for this alliance, but in time they settled on the Athenians, and as the years passed, the Greek world came to be divided into two spheres of influence, one Spartan and one Athenian: the Spartans led a loose association of mainland states known to historians as the Peloponnesian League, while the Athenians stood at the head of the maritime organization which came to be known as the Delian League, because its treasury was kept on the Aegean island of Delos. To some extent, this breakdown corresponded to different ethnic and linguistic groups among the Greeks, the Athenians and their allies in the Ionian group and the Spartans and theirs in the Dorian group. (Very broadly speaking, Ionian culture was more easygoing, Dorian culture more austere.)

As the danger of a third invasion appeared to recede, however, the autonomous city-states of the Greek world reverted to their customary quarreling,

1. Unless otherwise noted, all dates in the Introduction and in the notes to *The Peloponnesian War* are B.C.

and ironically, the very project that had brought the Greeks together proved to contain within it the seeds of a new struggle. For the large role played by the Athenian navy in defeating the Persians caused a significant shift in the balance of power among the Greek states. Sparta, once the undisputed military leader of the Greek world, now would have to share that leadership with Athens. Some Spartans accepted this change graciously, but others were apprehensive about the growth in Athens' influence and prestige.

Greek civilization thrived during the decades that followed the Persian Wars, and because the Athenians collected tribute from their allies in exchange for policing the seas, the prosperity of Athens was particularly noticeable. Under the leadership of the charismatic statesman Pericles, beautiful temples were built to adorn the Athenian acropolis. Drama flourished, inspired by the astonishing victory of the tiny coalition of Greek states over the monolithic Persian empire. Nevertheless, throughout the 470s and 460s, there were some in both Athens and Sparta who sought to cripple their rivals, and in fact an undeclared war—the so-called “First Peloponnesian War”—broke out between the Athenian alliance and Sparta's Peloponnesian League in 461.

The terms of the Thirty Years' Peace that ended the war in 446 at first seemed to offer the two leagues the prospect of amicable coexistence. Athens and Sparta each agreed to respect the other's sphere of influence. No state could be compelled to join either alliance; neutrals were free to join either side; and disputes were to be submitted to arbitration. But the Thirty Years' Peace lasted only fourteen years. The reasons for this are several. First, inevitable ambiguities in the treaty combined with the complexities of the international situation to leave the door open to further conflict. Second, even after 446 there continued to be factions in both Athens and Sparta whose members were eager for war. Third, Athens' great commercial rival, Corinth, was a key member of the Peloponnesian League and continued to regard the Athenians with suspicion.

Corinth and Athens had enjoyed friendly relations for many years when, in 461, the Corinthians became involved in a bitter border dispute with their neighbors the Megarians. Megara, lying between Corinth and Athens on the narrow isthmus that separated mainland Greece from the Peloponnese, decided to defect from the Peloponnesian League and ally with Athens instead; it was Athens' acceptance of this decision that prompted the First Peloponnesian War, and the Corinthians never forgot the slight. Years later, when the Thirty Years' Peace had been in force for a little more than a decade, tensions between Athens and Corinth erupted again, and this time the consequences were still more serious.

In 433 conflict developed between Corinth and its colony Corcyra. Although Greek colonies were politically independent from their mother states, sentimental ties generally bound them together. Corinth and Corcyra, however, had been hostile to one another for years. When Corcyra, a neutral power, sought to ally with the Athenians, everyone in Greece understood that it was because the Corcyraeans anticipated a Corinthian attack. The projected alliance, therefore, was highly problematic. The Athenians understood that accepting Corcyra into their naval confederacy would increase the likelihood of war with the Peloponnesian League. Leaving Corcyra undefended before the onslaught of the powerful Corinthian navy, however, presented a different set of problems, for the Corcyraean navy, though smaller than that of Corinth, was large enough so that Corinth's conquest of Corcyra would tip the balance of Greek naval power in favor of the Peloponnesian League. The Athenians decided to make an alliance with Corcyra. Though they were careful to define the alliance as de-

fensive only, this fine point was of little significance in view of the impending Corinthian attack, and in the conflict that ensued, Athenians and Corinthians found themselves fighting hand to hand.

Because their relations with Corinth had grown hostile, the Athenians became uncomfortable at the large role Corinthian magistrates played in the government of the northern Greek city of Potidaea, which was in the uncomfortable position of being both a Corinthian colony and a member of the Athenian confederacy. Athens' neighbor Megara also played a major role in the escalation of hostility between the Athenians and the Peloponnesian League, to which Megara had returned by the terms of the Thirty Years' Peace. The chronology of this friction is somewhat uncertain, but around 432 the Athenians, angry with the Megarians over assorted disputes that had arisen as a result of the border they shared, passed a series of decrees barring the Megarians from trading in the ports of the Athenian confederacy. Since nearly all ports of significance in the Greek world were in this confederacy, this constituted a stranglehold on Megarian trade. The Athenians insisted they were acting in keeping with the terms of the Thirty Years' Peace and were merely regulating trade within their league; the Megarians—and the Spartans—saw things differently.

Such in brief were the long- and short-term causes of the brutal and debilitating war that consumed the Greek world for over a quarter of a century. The feelings of Panhellenism and mutual goodwill that had burst forth in the wake of Persia's defeat did not endure, and by the end of the period known as the "Pentecontaetia"—the era of (almost) fifty years between 479 and 431—the Greek poleis had embarked on a war that would alter definitively the course of Greek civilization.

Many opposed the war. Though the Spartans and their allies declared war in 432, fighting did not actually break out for a year, so great was the ambivalence on both sides. The embassies the two sides anxiously exchanged, however, served only to delay open hostilities, not to prevent them. Finally, in March 431, the Spartans' ally Thebes attacked Athens' ally Plataea by night. This action was a clear breach of the Thirty Years' Peace. Both sides made final preparations for war, and in May the Peloponnesians invaded Attica.

Both sides expected to win the war; indeed, optimists in both Athens and Sparta believed that matters could be resolved within one or two campaigning seasons. Greeks generally fought in the warmer weather and took a break in winter, though these niceties would not always be observed during the Peloponnesian War, and what had passed for "wars" in previous decades—even, in fact, the chilling war with the Persians—had generally been decided in a few decisive engagements. The strengths of the two alliances that faced one another in this war were radically different, and the difference facilitated dramatically divergent forecasts of the future. With the fruits of their far-flung commerce and the tribute from their empire—for the Delian League had evolved unmistakably into an Athenian empire—the Athenians had much more money than the Peloponnesians, and at sea they held the undisputed advantage. Athens alone possessed over 300 ships, and about a hundred more could be expected from its allies Chios, Lesbos, and of course Corcyra. The Peloponnesians—principally Corinth—could not expect to muster much more than 100 ships, and their crews were not nearly so well trained as those of the Athenians. By land, on the other hand, all Greece was agreed that no polis was a match for Spartan troops, who spent their whole lives in daily preparation for the hour of battle. If the Spartans could do one thing, it was fight infantry battles. At a local level, moreover, the Athenians were outnumbered on land. Pericles reassured his con-

stituency that they could put 13,000 men in the field and count on 16,000 others—the very young, the very old, and the resident aliens known as metics—to defend the city walls of Athens, its port the Piraeus, and the Long Walls that had been built to connect them (see map p. 37). He also listed 1,200 cavalry, some of them mounted archers, and 1,600 bowmen on foot. But the army that invaded Attica in 431 included at least 30,000 fully armed soldiers from the Peloponnesus and Boeotia, and perhaps as many as 50,000.

Traditionally, conflicts between Greek states had been decided primarily on land by combat between the heavily armed infantrymen known as hoplites. Although the mountainous topography of Greece might seem to dictate the use of fast-moving, light-armed soldiers, nonetheless hoplites (so-called from the round shield known as a hoplon that they carried) had formed the core of the Athenian and Peloponnesian infantry since well before the Persian Wars. Indeed, Greek states continued to rely primarily on hoplites even after the impressive success of the fourth-century commander Iphicrates in using light-armed troops. Though lightly armed soldiers played some role in the Peloponnesian War—as, for example, under Demosthenes at Sphacteria—the bulk of the fighting fell to hoplites. Outfitting themselves at their own expense with shield (about three feet in diameter, made of wood fortified by metal), helmet, shin guards, a spear some six feet long, and a sword of about two feet, hoplites came from the Greek middle class. They moved in densely packed units known as phalanxes. A hoplite phalanx was at least eight men deep, and sometimes much deeper. Each man relied for protection on the shield of his comrade to the right. A solid line of overlapping shields indeed provided a formidable defense, although the man at the right end of every line remained vulnerable, and for this reason, as Thucydides tells us, a phalanx tended to shift to the right. Periodically the ranks of hoplites were eked out by mercenaries, and in an emergency by slaves. The same was true of rowers in the navy, who were ordinarily drawn from the lowest class of citizens because those who could afford a set of hoplite armor chose to serve in the infantry. Nevertheless, rowers played a crucial role in warfare.

The Athenian and Peloponnesian navies consisted of ships known as triremes. Invented at some point during the seventh century to improve on the power of the already existing two-banked model known as the penteconter, the trireme with its three banks of oars was more expensive to build. Experience showed, however, that the increased power of the vessel made it a worthwhile investment. Archeologists examining the remains of triremes have concluded that they must have been at least 100 feet long, under twenty feet wide, and under eight feet high. Each was propelled by a complement of 170 men; plainly these sailors operated under oppressively cramped conditions, though the arrangement of rowers in three tiers reduced crowding somewhat. The 170 sailors were accompanied by thirty additional men—ten infantrymen, four archers, and sixteen assorted others, including a helmsman, a boatswain, and a pipe player.

Practice was essential, and it went on throughout the war. Thucydides reports that the Athenians manned forty ships to send to Sicily in 426—not the year of the famous and disastrous Sicilian expedition, but eleven years earlier—in part because they needed to keep the navy in shape, and a later historian, Diodorus of Sicily (first century), reported that the Spartan admiral Mindarus spent five days training and exercising his men while preparing to fight the Athenians off the Ionian coast in 411. Triremes were fitted with rams of timber cased in bronze, useful for pounding enemy ships to loosen their seams, and practice included work on ramming maneuvers.

The finest triremes of the fifth century belonged to the Athenians. Pericles' strategy for winning the war was grounded in his keen awareness of Athenian strengths and weaknesses. The Athenians, he proposed, should abandon the countryside to the enemy, whom they stood little chance of defeating in a pitched battle, and retreat behind the Long Walls. A steady supply of foodstuffs from the cities of the empire would be guided safely into port by the Athenian navy, cutting off the possibility of a siege. Meanwhile the powerful Athenian fleet would harass the enemy's coasts. Two things were essential for the strategy: Athens had to refrain from trying to expand its empire and to make peace as soon as Sparta was willing to accept the status quo. Pericles' plan had much to recommend it, but it did not take into account either a foreseeable difficulty—the natural urge to fight that would come over the average soldier when he saw his land being ravaged—or an unforeseeable one, the dreadful plague that entered the city and spread quickly in the unsanitary and overcrowded urban area. The populace was so frustrated by Pericles' policies that they deposed him in the summer of 430; they re-elected him in the next elections, but he promptly died of the plague. After his death, the Athenians did choose to march out and meet the Spartans in battle.

The Peloponnesian War gets its name because the primary source for it has been the history written by Thucydides, an Athenian general. Obviously the Spartans must have called it the Athenian war, but it has been known to history as the Peloponnesian War. This first phase of the Peloponnesian War, the ten years known as the Archidamian War (431–421, named after the Spartan king Archidamus), was perceived by some contemporaries as a war in itself. It was Thucydides who enshrined the view that these ten years were in fact part of a longer war that heated up again after 421 and then continued until 404. In any event, fighting did cease for a few years after the Peace of Nicias ended the Archidamian War in 421, but the international scene was extremely tense—Spartans and Athenians actually faced one another in battle at Mantinea in the Peloponnesus in 418—and by 415 it was clear that the war was back on.

In June of 415, a huge Athenian armament set sail against Syracuse in Sicily, ostensibly in response to an appeal from Athens' Sicilian ally Egesta, but in reality to expand the Athenian empire to include this very fertile island. Pericles would not have approved, although given the restless adventurism of the Athenian people, the desire for this kind of enterprise might also have been foreseen. The expedition had been encouraged by Pericles' young and hot-headed ward Alcibiades, whose good looks and showy lifestyle charmed the populace. Nicias, the conservative older general who had helped negotiate the Peace of 421, opposed the expedition; nevertheless, the Athenians sent him as Alcibiades' colleague. The Peloponnesians threw their support to Syracuse, and the adventure ended in disaster for Athens. Nicias was put to death, thousands of his fellow soldiers were killed or enslaved, and the huge fleet was lost.

By this time Alcibiades, under suspicion at home for scoffing at time-honored religious customs, had defected to the Spartans, who at his instigation had fortified a post at Decelea in Attic territory. The Peloponnesians also rose to the naval challenge and built a sizable fleet. The Athenians struggled on, however, and it was not so much the resourcefulness of Sparta that determined the outcome of the war as the intervention of Persia. Beginning in 412, the Persians consented to back Sparta financially, in exchange for the promise that the victorious Peloponnesians would return the Greek cities on the western coast of what is now Turkey to Persian rule.

After over two decades of fighting, in 405 the Persian-backed Spartans defeated the Athenians decisively in the battle of Aegospotami, and by 404 the war was formally brought to an end. Sparta had won; but what, really, had the Spartans gained by the painful loss of life among their fighting men? Some advocated obliterating Athens from the face of the earth, but cooler heads prevailed and the city was spared. A puppet government of thirty pro-Spartan oligarchs was set up in Athens—the so-called “Thirty Tyrants”—but this bloody regime proved so unpopular that when the Athenian democrats organized to overthrow it, they received some support from Pausanias, the young king of Sparta. Fearing the alliance of the murderous oligarchs with Sparta’s successful general Lysander, architect of the victory at Aegospotami, Pausanias helped arrange an agreement among the various factions. Democracy was restored at Athens, the oligarchy overthrown, and the first recorded amnesty in history ratified by both parties.

Nor did Sparta retain hegemony in Greece throughout the decades that followed. In the 390s, Sparta alienated its allies one by one, with the result that by 395 Corinth and Thebes joined with the Athenians, who had shown great determination in rebuilding their economy, in making war on the Spartans. Although the peace treaty of 404 stipulated the end of the naval confederacy and thus signaled the end of the Athenian empire, by 377 Athens inaugurated a new naval alliance known today as the Second Athenian Confederacy, organized on a more egalitarian basis than the earlier fifth-century league. By the 360s, Thebes occupied the most prominent position in Greek intercity politics. Finally, in 338 the crafty Macedonian king Philip II defeated a hastily formed coalition of Greek states at Chaeronea in Boeotia and brought the freedom of the poleis to an end. Assassinated two years later, he was succeeded by his son Alexander, whose conquest of large chunks of western Asia, as well as Egypt, earned him the surname “the Great.” With the death of Alexander in 323, the classical Greek world came to an end. Alexander’s empire was divided among various generals, and throughout the Mediterranean world a new composite culture came into being, to which historians have given the name Hellenistic, meaning Greek-like but not entirely Greek. In this world there was no longer room for the polis that was a sovereign nation, whose citizens argued passionately about matters of war and peace, of right and wrong, and listened to the kinds of speeches we read in Thucydides’ history. By 300, the world of the Peloponnesian War was very much a thing of the past.

No historian can be certain which changes in the Greek world of the fourth century can confidently be ascribed to the long war of 431–404, or just how the debilitating effects of that war contributed to Philip’s success in conquering Greece. It is clear, however, that the prolonged war accounted for the decline of Corinth as a major power. Together with the plague, moreover, the war took a considerable bite out of the Athenian population. As many as 50,000 men, women, and children probably died in the epidemic. War casualties were never added up by the Athenians as far as we know, but they seem to have included at least 5,000 hoplite soldiers and 12,000 sailors (including some 3,000 executed by Lysander after Aegospotami). This was a huge number when one bears in mind Athens’ male citizen population in 431, probably about 43,000. Contemporary sources, moreover, claimed that the Thirty Tyrants of 404–403 killed 1,500 citizens. It seems safe to say that the number of adult male citizens in 403 was half what it had been in 431. Where were women to find husbands?

In Sparta, depopulation within the citizen class was also problematic; when women began maintaining the population by conceiving children with

non-citizen fathers, a whole new class was created, fostering social change—something Spartans feared even more than most Greeks. Though radically different from Athens, the social, political, and economic structures of Sparta were not any better able to protect the state in a long war. In order to appreciate the particular kinds of strains posed by this war, it is necessary to understand some basic facts of Greek life that Thucydides does not tell us, because he imagines that we know. For all his claims of creating a *ktēma eis aiei*, a “possession for all time,” Thucydides assumes a contemporary Greek readership for his work. He expects his readers to know the Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Herodotus’ *Histories* of the Persian Wars, and he assumes a general knowledge of the Greek polis and the Greek lifestyle.

As Greek poleis, Athens and Sparta had much in common. In both states people spoke Greek, worshipped the traditional Olympian gods, valued a government based on law, and cherished their independence. Slave labor formed an important part of both states’ economies, and in neither Athens nor Sparta could women participate in government. All able-bodied male citizens were expected to serve in the army. In other respects, however, the states were very different. The Spartans prized martial valor above all else and had organized their state to promote military strength. At birth, Spartan infant boys were presented for inspection to state officials who decided whether they were sturdy enough to be raised. (Weaklings could be disposed of in Athens too, but there the decision lay with the father alone.) Spartan males were separated from their mothers at the age of seven so they could be raised by soldiers. They remained among men at least until the age of thirty, and even if they were married, men under thirty could not live with their wives on a regular basis. The unusual social and economic system of classical Sparta was made possible in part by an exceptionally high ratio of slave to free citizen. The adult male citizens of Sparta—a few thousand strong—were able to live in barracks and share common meals because the land was worked by a large population of state serf-slaves called helots. Handicraft occupations were relegated to a third class, the *perioikoi* (literally, the “the people who lived in the vicinity”), who were neither citizens nor slaves. Helots and *perioikoi* had no civic rights. Members of both groups might serve in the Peloponnesian land or naval forces, though the Spartans were understandably skittish about placing weapons in helot hands. Among the male citizens—who were assigned equal plots of land by the state—authority was allotted as follows: two men, one from the family of the Agiads and another from that of the Eurypontids, served concurrently as kings. The power was passed down in each family, usually from father to son. Keeping some kind of check on royal power were five ephors, literally “overseers,” who were elected from a limited number of prestigious families, and twenty-eight men over sixty years of age who comprised the council of elders, the *gerousia*. Periodically the army met as an assembly, the *apella*, which could vote—by banging on shields—after hearing speeches by prominent men. This assembly, however, did not debate.

Most power at Sparta lay not in the *apella* but in smaller bodies of government. At Athens, by contrast, where the assembly debated loudly and long, power truly lay with the adult male citizenry, who had the authority to impeach any magistrate or general whose conduct had displeased them. By the time of the Persian Wars, the Spartan state had already been organized for quite some time along the principles outlined above, but in Athens, the state was still evolving. Early in its history, the state of Athens had come to include all the little towns on the peninsula of Attica, a territory of about 1,000 square miles. Tradition ascribed the unification of Attica to the legendary king Theseus. As in most

parts of the Greek world, kingship failed to endure in Athens, and with the passing of time, the political base of government gradually broadened. The duties of the king came to be performed by three officials known as archons. At first these served life terms. During the eighth century, the term of the three archons was shortened to ten years; by around 650 we see nine archons serving for a single year. Continuing social and economic unrest led the Athenians to appoint a lawgiver, Draco, to formulate a written code of law. His harsh code—later described as written in blood rather than in ink—failed to put an end to tensions within the state, and shortly after 600, Solon was asked to arbitrate among the various classes. Solon established a sliding scale of privilege among the various classes that made up the Attic citizenry, dividing Athenians into four groups based on income. Only the highest class was eligible for election to the position of archon, but the middle two classes could hold lower offices, and everyone was eligible to participate in the assembly of citizens and serve on juries.

In 560 the energetic and ambitious Peisistratus set himself up as tyrannos of Athens by a military coup. Inevitably translated by the English word “tyrant,” a tyrannos was originally just a strongman who came to power outside traditional legal channels; often his regime fostered the general welfare and was affectionately regarded. Peisistratus’ sons, however, were unable to retain popular support. Hipparchus was assassinated in 514 and Hippias driven into exile in 510. Popular perceptions of the Peisistratids were of great interest to Thucydides, and he discussed them at length in Book 6 in the context of the religious scandals of the year 415.

Shortly after the end of the Peisistratid era, a reformer from the celebrated family of the Alcmaeonids (to which Pericles also belonged) reorganized the Athenian citizenry into ten tribes, breaking down the tribal loyalties among aristocrats that had been making life difficult for ordinary people. Under Cleisthenes’ system, each tribe chose by lot fifty councillors to serve on the boule (Council of 500) and elected one strategos. Most often translated as “general,” a strategos (plural, strategoi) also had considerable political influence, and had the right to summon the assembly and to address it before others could speak. The term of strategos was only one year long, but it could be, and often was, renewed at the next election. The painful experience of the Persian Wars suggested to the Athenians that the job of strategos was the really significant one, and that it would be a safe democratic measure to begin selecting the archons by lot. Combined with terms of a single year, the use of the lot to select officials was to become one of the most important devices by which the Athenians blocked the development of a self-interested political elite. A check on individual ambitions was also provided by the curious procedure known as ostracism, named for the broken piece of pottery that the Athenians used as a ballot to determine if any citizen should be banished to preserve order in the state. The man with the most votes against him would be compelled to leave Attica for ten years. He did not stand accused of any crime, and when the ten years were up, he was free to return and resume his civic and property rights. By this inverse popularity contest, the Athenians sought to prevent another tyranny and provided redress other than civil war for those occasions when two or more men locked horns over the best policy for the state.

The first ostracisms took place in the context of the Persian Wars, when Aristides, who would later carry out the assessment of the various members of the Delian League, lost out to his rival Themistocles. Having received the greatest number of votes, Aristides was banished for ten years, though under the stress of the war, the Athenians decided to recall him before this term was

up. Themistocles himself was a later victim of the procedure. In the conflicts over Athenian imperialism during the Pentecontaetia, ostracism befell Thucydides, the son of Melesias, a relative of the historian (Thucydides, son of Olorus.)

Around 460 the Athenian constitution received additional fine-tuning at the hands of one Ephialtes, who transferred most trials to the jurisdiction of the people, undermining the authority of the august Council of the Areopagus, which had previously heard many cases. After effecting this democratic reform, Ephialtes died under mysterious circumstances and the leadership of the democratic party fell to his associate Pericles. A few years later, the historian Thucydides was born into this proud imperial and democratic state. (We must always bear in mind that “democracy” to Greeks meant equal opportunity for rich and poor male citizens to participate in government, rather than in the modern sense that accords civic rights to both sexes and outlaws slavery. Slavery existed in all Greek states, and women voted nowhere. The belief in the superiority of male citizens to slaves, women, children, and non-Greeks, i.e., the lack of any concept of universal human dignity, may have contributed to the Greeks’ eventual ability to make war brutally and indiscriminately on other Greek males as well.)

Thucydides was born into a wealthy family around 460, and like other Greek aristocrats, he probably never had to support himself by working. Almost nothing is known about him beyond the details that can be inferred from his writing; it is fitting that so little is known of the personal life of this man who was determined to excise all such details from his history. From his account of the Peloponnesian War, we learn that his family owned gold mines in Thrace and that it was for a military failure in Thrace, where he served as strategos during the Peloponnesian War, that he was exiled from Athens in 423. The two may be connected; it is possible that Thucydides was devoting too much attention during his generalship to family business and not enough to state business, and that genuine laxness led to his failure to prevent the key post of Amphipolis from falling into Spartan hands. On the other hand, Thucydides and his colleague in the Thracian region, Eucles, had the misfortune to be pitted against the eloquent and enterprising Spartan commander Brasidas, a formidable opponent. Thucydides’ exile deprived him of the opportunity to see political developments in Athens at first hand, but he had many informants for Athenian affairs, and it may have done his history more good than harm. Leisure for travel and writing fostered the development of his work, and he plainly profited from conversations with soldiers on the Peloponnesian side—quite possibly with central figures such as Brasidas himself, about whose motives he seems strikingly well informed. The combination in a single person of the citizen’s passionate involvement with the exile’s special perspective is only one of many parallels between Thucydides and Machiavelli.

Though he did not complete his narrative, Thucydides lived to see the end of the war and probably died around 400, perhaps violently: several sources report that he was murdered. One tradition maintained that his unfinished manuscript survived because his daughter preserved it. The text breaks off while he is recounting the events of 411, and it remained for his younger contemporary Xenophon, also an Athenian, to tell the story of the war’s last years and the final Spartan victory. (Xenophon’s account appears on pp. 353–77 in this edition.) It is possible that Thucydides would have broadened the scope of his history had he lived to complete and revise it. The role of Persia, for example, which became increasingly prominent during the years after 411, might have been re-ex-

amined and explored more deeply. It seems likely, however, that the essential focus of the manuscript as it now stands is an accurate indicator of his priorities as a historian. Much that another writer might have chosen to stress was de-emphasized in his work, and much was left out entirely. Foremost among Thucydides' omissions is the role played by economic considerations in the international conflicts of the fifth century. Attica was not rich in natural resources, and we would like to know more about how the Athenians financed this war: it is only from other sources that we know the imperial tribute was raised in 425. The land of Attica was suited to the olive tree; it also provided clay, marble, and—fortunately for the Athenians—silver, without which it is difficult to see how they could have built the fleet that had defeated Xerxes at Salamis. Timber and grain, however, were conspicuously lacking. Ancient historians are notorious for giving economic factors short shrift in their writings, but the Athenians were no fools, and they felt their dependence on foreign markets for vital imports quite keenly. Grain was necessary to stay alive, and timber to build ships. These needs explain in part the watchful eye the Athenians kept on the Black Sea area and on the world of the western Greeks in Sicily and southern Italy. In addition, the trade rivalry between Athens and the Isthmian city of Corinth was central to tensions between Athens and the Peloponnesian League.

Nor is Thucydides the most useful source for the bitterness with which some Athenians plainly regarded the war. From Thucydides, we learn that both sides included some who supported entry into the war and some who opposed it; he also reports a speech by Pericles chastising Athenians who were sending embassies to the Spartans seeking to make peace. His treatment of Pericles' deposition in 430, however, ascribes the Athenians' action largely to emotion. He does not give the names of the politicians who agitated for Pericles' removal, nor the speeches they gave, nor the strategies they wished to deploy in place of his. Nowhere, moreover, does he mention the powerful anti-war plays that were produced in Athens.

The comic dramatist Aristophanes had much to say about the war, none of it laudatory: the *Acharnians* highlights the economic deprivation it brought about. Euripides' exquisitely painful *Trojan Women*, though ostensibly about the sufferings entailed by the Greek victory at Troy, plainly sought to focus the Athenian audience's attention on the horrors of war in general, and perhaps on the recent destruction the Athenians had visited on the people of Melos in particular: the play was produced in the spring of 416, just after the grisly events on Melos narrated by Thucydides in Book 5, and there is no reason to doubt that the audience included men who had taken part in the killing. We learn more about the sufferings of noncombatants from Athenian drama—even when that drama is comedy of the most fanciful and fantastic nature—than we do from Thucydides' detailed narrative of the war. Thucydides' account sheds no light on women's experience during the twenty-seven miserable years from 431 to 404—on the responsibilities they were forced to assume in men's absence, on the impact of the shrinking marriage pool, and on the measures the dearth of citizen husbands forced them to consider. This stunning omission reveals much of what Thucydides thought history was all about. If Thucydides surpassed Herodotus in tough-minded analytical capacity, Herodotus eclipsed him in his grasp of history's richness and breadth.

Thucydides makes plain his familiarity with Herodotus' work. He is open about his wish to distinguish his kind of history from that of his renowned predecessor, remarking pointedly in Book 1 (22) that his work lacks the romantic,

fantastical elements that make for good entertainment but is substantial enough to last forever. So much for the charming tales with which Herodotus had built up to the sober accounts of battles and campaigns—*anecdotes* featuring children raised among sheep, kings who fathered lion cubs, and dolphins who carried famous singers to land. In fact Thucydides was profoundly indebted to Herodotus. What he did for the Peloponnesian War was not entirely different from what Herodotus had done for the Persian Wars; together with Herodotus, Thucydides enshrined the war monograph as an important branch of the genre of history writing, one that is still very much alive today. Like Herodotus, he assembled facts primarily through living informants—what we would call “oral history”—gathering as much data as his lifespan would allow and shaping it into a coherent story of a war and its causes. He also entrenched the convention, conspicuous in Herodotus’ work, of reporting verbatim speeches he could not possibly have heard—a custom that may have its origins in Homeric epic, where speeches figure prominently. To twentieth-century readers, this habit of Greek and Roman historians appears peculiar; today it marks a work as historical fiction—or as history written for children. Ancient readers thought differently. They knew perfectly well that the words they encountered in these speeches were not likely to be the actual words spoken, even in those rare cases where the historian was actually present (as Thucydides surely was, for example, at many speeches given in Athens prior to his exile). By the insertion of speeches in dramatic form, Thucydides and other ancient historians were able to give their text a transparent feel, breaking down the barriers that divided their readers from the actual events described. Readers “listening” to the speeches of politicians addressing the Athenian assembly or generals offering encouragement to their troops were able to enter into the minds of those who had lived the experience the historian sought to bring alive. They also give meaning to and create a context for the torrent of events described in the narrative. Thucydides sets forth his guidelines for composing the speeches in Chapter 22 of Book 1:

As to the speeches of the participants, either when they were about to enter the war or after they were already in it, it has been difficult for me and for those who reported to me to remember exactly what was said. I have, therefore, written what I thought the speakers must have said given the situations they were in, while keeping as close as possible to the gist of what was actually said.

Thucydides was careful to distinguish between his effort to convey what was said—a project in which imagination as well as the thirst for accuracy played a role—and his attempts to discover what actually happened:

As to the events of the war, I have not written them down as I heard them from just anybody, nor as I thought they must have occurred, but have consistently described what I myself saw or have been able to learn from others after going over each event in as much detail as possible. I have found this task to be extremely arduous, since those who were present at these actions gave varying reports on the same event, depending on their sympathies and their memories.

Thucydides expressed serious reservations about Herodotus’ belief in the value of research into the past. At first glance, this seems puzzling; is not history, by definition, about the past? In a culture that was just becoming literate, however—in which extensive written sources for knowing about what happened outside one’s own presence were just coming into being—ascertaining and analyzing