

BOOK REVIEWS

George Cawkwell, *Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 162 pp.

This book presents a series of observations and analyses concerning Thucydides and the Peloponnesian war. One cannot address the history of the 'greatest war' without dealing with its historian. And likewise, any treatment of Thucydides and his historical writing must take into account the subject matter of his work. In his very learned and highly readable style, Cawkwell succeeds in encapsulating both of these discussions into his book. And by admirably doing so, the focus shifts constantly between an examination of the historical events and an exposition of the views and judgements of Thucydides. The reader does not in any way notice a gap or a leap in the account. Several sections were previously published by Cawkwell. This may contribute to the fact that the chapters themselves are somewhat loosely connected and do not cohere to form a comprehensive whole. However, one theme is found throughout the book, namely, that Thucydides is no longer regarded as an infallible writer, and his judgements have to be considered for their truthfulness in each and every case.

Cawkwell begins with a brief outline of Thucydides' writing and then proceeds to examine five aspects of the war, which correspond to five stated opinions of Thucydides. These concern the cause for the outbreak of the war, the reason for the Sicilian expedition in 415, the leadership of Athens during the war, its decisions and strategy, and finally, the nature of the empire. In his first book, Thucydides claims that the 'truest reason' of the war was Sparta's fear of the growing strength of Athenian power, which 'forced her to go into war' (1.23.6). Our author finds this explanation to be correct. By placing the Megara Decree and the Athenian intervention in Aegina shortly after the defensive alliance with Corcyra and not before that, Cawkwell is able to treat these measures solely as strategic preliminaries to the imminent hostilities (pp. 26ff.), thus showing that Athens did not pursue a policy deliberately leading to war. Furthermore, he argues that in this account Thucydides did not revise an original one which gave Corinth a prominent part in precipitating the war. Any tension between the roles of Corinth and Sparta, Cawkwell believes, merely points to a change of emphasis in Thucydides, from the description of the origins of the war (the Corcyran and Potidaean affairs) to the spelling out of its true and profound cause (p. 22), respectively. Another 'truest' cause is given in book 6. The desire of the Athenians to make the whole of Sicily subject to themselves is pronounced the 'truest explanation' for setting out to campaign against it (6.6.1). This account is viewed by Cawkwell in exactly the opposite terms: it is not true, and is related to a later insertion. From the narrative itself it is clear that the objectives of the expedition were more modest, aiming at Syracuse and Selinus alone, in order to curb their power (through Athens' allies, Segesta and the exiles of Leontini) and ultimately to prevent them from helping Corinth (pp. 81-2). When Thucydides came to acknowledge this, he seems to have added a passage in his famous postscript (2.65.11) to the effect that the expedition was not so

great a mistake, as that 'the men who sent it made further disadvantageous decisions to those who had gone'.

That postscript (2.65), written in all probability when the war was over, receives Cawkwell's attention next. In it Thucydides included an appraisal of Pericles as a statesman and a harsh verdict on his successors. Was Thucydides right? Cawkwell reminds us that the clash between Athens and Sparta spelled a deadlock — the one invincible at sea, the other unconquerable by land. Therefore, it appears that in his strategy, Pericles simply wanted recognition that Athens was untouchable; he did not seek a complete victory (p. 43ff.). But Sparta did, Cawkwell points out, even at the price of getting support from Persia and leaving the Greek cities in Asia to the King's mercy (p. 46ff.). Those who followed Pericles' policy would have been compelled either to uphold the deadlock or to lose the war, which means that Thucydides was wrong in his confidence that adherence to Periclean strategy could have secured the safety of the city (p. 56). The only alternative to that predicament was a strategy of the general Demosthenes, conjecturally reconstructed by Cawkwell, which apparently aimed at forcing Sparta into war in the Peloponnese (pp. 50-4). As for those unnamed successors of Pericles, those 'demagogues', whose actions brought the downfall of Athens, the judgement of the ancient historian may be right. That is, apart from Alcibiades, against whom a great deal of injustice was done, in Cawkwell's opinion, by Thucydides (pp. 89ff.). But generally speaking, Thucydides' view of Athens' leaders was not entirely without foundation, according to Cawkwell. He agrees with the observation that Cleon, in particular, should not have rejected the Spartan peace offer made in 425. Arguably, Athens would have been in a favourable position had she accepted it, leaving her power unchecked while endangering Sparta's credibility and leadership (pp. 64ff.). This peace would have given Athens no new immediate gains for her empire, but a chance to survive the war, thus fulfilling Pericles' policy.

The final chapter deals with the speech Diodotus is made to deliver during the Mytilenean debate. Diodotus claims that the *demos* in the subjected states of the Athenian empire is well disposed to the ruling city whereas only the 'few' are hostile (3.47.2). How much truth was there in this statement? Thucydides himself does not seem to share this sentiment, for in an earlier passage he said that Sparta had won the sympathies of all by promising to liberate Greece (2.8.4). If the subjects of Athens all wanted freedom, the Empire was not so 'popular'. Cawkwell tries to show that there was no reason for it to be so (pp. 99ff.). Athenian interference in the jurisdiction of the allied states, the takeover of their lands and the implantation of cleruchies, the presence of overseas supervisors — all created deep resentment for the rule of Athens. Moreover, the maintenance of the empire depended more upon the activity of leading individuals in the cities, than on the support of the lower classes (pp. 104-6). Thucydides' judgement was right, Cawkwell contends, and Diodotus' words did not reflect the factual reality of the empire.

Cawkwell does not concentrate exclusively on the explicit opinions of Thucydides, and examines his silences as well. Their nature is twofold: on the one hand, they show Thucydides to be rationalist and scientific. The great plague that struck Athens in 431, for instance, was transmitted by contagion (2.47.4), the implication being that it was not heaven-sent, even if Thucydides does not say this in so many words. In his book the gods are 'conspicuous by their absence' (p. 3). On the other hand, the silences may show Thucydides to be a poor judge of strategy and biased. Thucydides failed to give sufficient credit to Demosthenes, 'the greatest general of the fifth century', in Cawkwell's view (p. 17). Demosthenes is not accorded the opportunity to present his strategy, nor is he lauded

for his merits at his death; his successes are all attributed to pure chance (pp. 50-4). So much for the omissions. However, when Cawkwell does address the utterances of Thucydides, he stresses *what* Thucydides says, rather than *how* he says it. A consideration of the ways in which Thucydides fashioned his narrative, arranged his material, positioned the passages or used rhetorical devices is what appears to be 'conspicuous by its absence' in Cawkwell's own book.

Cawkwell's decision to discuss the conduct of Athens' leadership during the war in two separate chapters, one devoted to strategy and the other to the politicians and their policies, has no basis in the historical reality, and stems from his own interest when examining the views of Thucydides. This leads to a curious conclusion. Cawkwell strongly suggests that there may have been collusion between Demosthenes and Cleon on policy towards Sparta. Nevertheless, he seems to be commending Demosthenes for his strategy while at the same time he criticises Cleon on political grounds, because of his refusal to accept the peace offer of 425 (p. 55, 65-6, 74) — in one case diverging from Thucydides' verdict, in another agreeing with him. But Cleon and Demosthenes must be dealt with together and bear the same judgement if indeed the pair cooperated and strove to achieve the same goals. Conversely, two other chapters are divided because of their historical subject matter, when they should have been combined from the historiographical point of view. Both the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war and the Sicilian expedition are discussed in terms of the 'truest' causes. The same approach prevails in the two accounts: by 'truest' Thucydides must have meant a deeper cause than a mere pretext, not the avowed one of the participants themselves.

While the book is guided by two different and sometimes conflicting points of view, that of commenting on the writing of Thucydides and that of describing the historical reality of the Peloponnesian war, Cawkwell succeeds in illuminating both levels in a new and attractive way. His work provides a fascinating insight into the area that is found at the crossroads between historiography and pure historical questions. As such it is sure to be of interest for historians in general, and not only for students of the 'greatest war'.

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Only seasoned scholars should write introductions to their subjects. The responsibility of simplifying vast and complex knowledge for beginners, navigating through scholarly controversy and making a subject pertinent and interesting while avoiding oversimplification, should fall only to the most experienced hands.

Prof. T.J. Luce has spent his professional life thinking and writing about ancient historiography. He has produced both detailed studies and general assessments of individual texts (most notably of Livy, Tacitus and Herodotus), and before his retirement was known as a masterful teacher. The Routledge editor Richard Stoneman invited him to write this survey, which, in the words of the preface, 'is introductory in nature and is aimed at A level and first-year undergraduates'. Luce was the right man for the job, and he has written a very good book.