

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

A military study

J. F. Lazenby

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THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

The range and extent of the Peloponnesian War of the fifth century BC has led to it being described as a 'world war' in miniature. With the struggle between Athens and Sparta at its core, the twenty-seven-year conflict drew in states from all points of the compass: from Byzantium in the north, Crete in the south, Asia Minor in the east and Sicily in the west.

Since Thucydides described the war as 'the greatest disturbance to befall the Greeks', numerous studies have been made of individual episodes and topics. This authoritative work is the first single-volume study of the entire war to be published in over seventy-five years. Lazenby avoids the tendency of allowing historiography to obscure analysis, and while paying due attention to detail, also looks at the fundamental questions of warfare raised by the conflict.

Within a narrative framework, Lazenby concentrates on the fighting itself, and examines the way in which both strategy and tactics developed as the conflict spread. Not afraid to challenge accepted views, he assesses the war as a military, rather than a political, endeavour, evaluating issues such as the advantages and limitations of sea power. A readable and clear survey, this text offers a balanced discussion of controversial themes, and will appeal to ancient historians, classicists and all those who are interested in military history.

John Lazenby is Emeritus Professor of Ancient History at Newcastle University.

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TO ELLIE,

who, having been found at the age of two
apparently reading a book on naval history,
might one day read this

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PREFACE

Soon after I graduated, I was invited to supper by Tony Andrewes. The only other guest was A. W. Gomme, and I suppose the seed of this book was planted then, though it has taken a long time to come to fruition. The commentary on Thucydides they wrote with K. J. Dover remains an indispensable tool for anyone studying the Peloponnesian War, and more recently the commentaries of Peter Rhodes and Simon Hornblower, whose friendship I am lucky to enjoy, have added to our understanding. The latter in particular acted as adviser to my publishers, and his comments were both encouraging and helpful.

All students of the war also owe a debt of gratitude to Donald Kagan's monumental, four-volume study. My approach is somewhat different, partly because within a single volume I had to leave much out, partly because I am dubious, for example, about some of his more speculative views on the political situations in Athens, Sparta and elsewhere. But where I differ from him, I do so with trepidation.

My own approach may seem too narrow. I can only say that I am aware that war cannot be entirely divorced from politics and economics, and that much recent work has been devoted to literary aspects of Thucydides' work. But, considerations of length apart, I am happier with military matters, and I also felt that Thucydides' contribution to our understanding of classical warfare has perhaps not been as fully appreciated as it should be.

I think it was G. R. Elton who once remarked, in a radio broadcast, that the first thing to do on approaching a historian is to listen for the sound of buzzing. I have as many bees in my bonnet as the next person, but to two in particular I will freely admit. The first is that I think the Spartans are too harshly treated in much modern writing on ancient Greek history. In the case of the Peloponnesian War, it seems that, just as the French can hardly accept that Napoleon was beaten at Waterloo, so modern scholars can hardly bear the fact that the Spartans defeated the Athenians. I hope to go some way towards redressing the balance.

Second, and more importantly, I have long believed that many studies of ancient warfare are bedevilled by a failure to appreciate that it was technologically very different from modern warfare. It is perfectly acceptable to look for modern parallels – I do it myself – but one must not get into the habit of thinking that

PREFACE

the recent conflict in Iraq, for example, is the same as the Athenian invasion of Sicily only with guns and aircraft. Basically the difference is between an amateur approach to warfare and a professional one. I hope that this book will help to make that clear.

Years of travelling and working in Greece left me with an abiding love of the country and its people, and, I think, added to my understanding of its classical history. The Greek love of argument goes far to explain the birth of democracy, for example, and their pride of place, as well as the nature of their country, the kaleidoscope of its classical political geography. In my previous book, *The Defence of Greece*, I looked at the war in which the ancient Greeks showed what they could do, against vastly more powerful enemies, if enough of them were prepared to sink their differences. In this one I examine the longest and most catastrophic of their internal quarrels. It is safe to say that after it the Greek world was never quite the same again, and within the lifetime of a single, long-lived man like Isokrates it had been more or less forcibly unified under Macedonia. That is the tragedy of the war.

I have to thank my grandchildren – especially the dedicatee – for emulating their parents' forbearance in keeping out of my way when I was writing this. Above all, I have, as usual, to thank my wife. Not only does she continue to bear, with at least outward equanimity, my very different interests, but, among other things, patiently taught me how to use her Apple Mac when my Amstrad finally failed me, and helped me with the index.

Finally, I would like to thank successive assistant editors at Routledge who have shown patience and understanding at a difficult time, and encouraged me to persevere.

J. F. Lazenby
Newcastle upon Tyne, April 2003

ABBREVIATIONS

AC	<i>L'Antiquité classique</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AP	<i>Athenaiôn politeia</i> (Constitution of the Athenians)
ATL	B. Meritt, H.T. Wade-Gery and H. McGregor, <i>The Athenian Tribute Lists</i> , 4 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1939–53)
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
Beloch, GG	K. J. Beloch, <i>Griechische Geschichte</i> (second edition; Strasbourg, and Berlin and Leipzig, 1912–27)
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BSA	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
Busolt, GG	G. Busolt, <i>Griechische Geschichte</i> , 3 vols (Gotha, 1893–1904)
CA	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CAH ¹ v	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> (first edition), vol. v (Cambridge, 1927)
CAH ² v	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> (second edition), vol. v (Cambridge, 1992)
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
CSCA	<i>California Studies in Classical Antiquity</i>
DS	Diodoros
FGH	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , 15 vols (Berlin, 1923–30; Leipzig, 1940–58)
Fornara	Charles W. Fornara, <i>Translated Documents. Archaic times to the End of the Peloponnesian War</i> (second edition; Cambridge, 1983)
Frontinus, <i>Strat.</i>	Frontinus, <i>Strategemata</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HCT	A. W. Gomme, K. J. Dover and A. Andrewes, <i>A Historical Commentary on Thucydides</i> , 5 vols (Oxford, 1959–81)

ABBREVIATIONS

Hdt.	Herodotos
<i>Hell. Ox.</i>	<i>Hellenika Oxyrhynchia</i>
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
Isokrates, <i>Panath.</i>	Isokrates, <i>Panathenaïkos</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
LCM	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
ML	Russell Meiggs and David Lewis (eds), <i>A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions</i> (Oxford, 1969)
Nepos, <i>Alc.</i>	Cornelius Nepos, <i>Alicibiades</i>
OCD ³	Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds), <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (third edition; Oxford, 1996)
Plato, <i>Charm.</i>	Plato, <i>Charmides</i>
Plato, <i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
Plut., <i>Alk.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Alkibiades</i>
Plut., <i>Kleom.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Kleomenes</i>
Plut., <i>Lyk.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Lykourgos</i>
Plut., <i>Lys.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Lysander</i>
Plut., <i>Nik.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Nikias</i>
Plut., <i>Pel.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Pelopidas</i>
Plut., <i>Per.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Perikles</i>
Pritchett, <i>GSAW</i>	W. Kendrick Pritchett, <i>The Greek State at War</i> , 5 vols (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971–91)
Pritchett, <i>SAGT</i>	W. Kendrick Pritchett, <i>Studies in Ancient Greek Topography</i> , 7 vols (Berkeley and Amsterdam, 1965–91)
RE	<i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
RhM	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
RIL	<i>Rendiconti dell' Istituto Lombardo, classe di lettere, Scienze morali e storiche</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
Syll. ³	W. Dittenburger, <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> (third edition), 4 vols (Leipzig, 1915–24)
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
Thuc.	Thucydides
Xen., <i>Anab.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>
Xen., <i>Hell.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Hellenika</i>
Xen., <i>Hipparch.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Hipparchikos</i>
Xen., <i>LP</i>	Xenophon, <i>Lakedaimoniôn politeia</i> (Constitution of the Spartans)
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF GREEK NAMES AND THE TRANSLITERATION OF GREEK

Greek names have traditionally been Latinized, so that 'Herodotos' becomes 'Herodotus' and 'Perikles' 'Pericles'. I prefer straight transliteration in most cases, but I make no claim to complete consistency: even I cannot bring myself to spell 'Thucydides' 'Thoukudides'. However, I always spell the same name in the same way.

For the benefit of those who cannot read Greek, I have used transliterations of other Greek words and phrases. Long 'e' ('η') appears as 'ê', and long 'o' ('ω') as 'ô'. Iota subscripts are placed after the letter they subscribe, as they were by the classical Greeks. Thus 'α' becomes 'ai', 'η' 'êi' and 'ω' 'ôi'. Rough breathings appear as 'h'.

All translations are my own.

BACKGROUND

On a rainy, moonless night in the spring of 431, a force of a few more than 300 Thebans entered Plataia at about the time of ‘first sleep’ (2.2–3).¹ Twenty-seven years later, almost to the day (5.26.1–3), a starving Athens, blockaded by land and sea, was forced to accept Sparta’s terms. During those years, war raged the length and breadth of the Greek world, from Byzantion in the north to Crete in the south, and from Asia Minor in the east to Sicily in the west. Since at least the first century this conflict has been known as the ‘Peloponnesian War’, and only



Map 1 Greece and the Aegean