

# H-Net Reviews

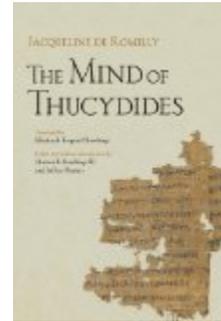
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jacqueline de Romilly. *The Mind of Thucydides*. Translated by Elizabeth Rawlings. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. xviii + 195 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-5063-1.

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## Inside the Head of Thucydides

*The Mind of Thucydides* is a new translation of Jacqueline de Romilly's 1956 groundbreaking study, *Histoire et raison chez Thucydide*. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings provides the first English translation of the work. Her translation is clear and approachable. Rawlings has done a great favor to students of Thucydides by making Romilly's work available to an English-speaking audience. With this work Romilly revolutionized how scholars approached and studied Thucydides. Instead of analyzing the accuracy of his narrative on the Peloponnesian War, Romilly examines how Thucydides thought. She treats the history like a piece of intellectual art and Thucydides like an artist. As Hunter R. Rawlings and Jeffrey Rusten emphasize in their introduction to the new translation, "Rather than mining the text for clues to its layers of composition, or for its disclosure of historical data, she treated The Peloponnesian War as a work of art deserving rhetorical and aesthetic analysis, confident that a literary approach to Thucydides offered a more productive and nuanced way to study the text" (p. xi). Romilly viewed Thucydides' work as carefully constructed and organized into coherent groups. In these groups he used reasoning to seek truth. She argues that his ultimate goal was absolute intelligibility in his history through the use of reason. Romilly's new point of emphasis on the thinking behind Thucydides' words heavily influenced the field, and her method has dominated the study of Thucydides for over fifty years.

The book has four major chapters, each of which had appeared in earlier lectures and essays. Although

the chapters build upon one another, they too can stand alone as separate case studies. Romilly included a brief introduction and conclusion. The editors of the new translation have added their own preface and introduction. They also provide readers with a useful index of Thucydidean passages discussed. Romilly addresses Thucydides' Greek throughout the work, but all ancient Greek has been translated.

In her introduction Romilly emphasizes that Thucydides was an interpreter and creator, who successfully achieved a balance of objectivity and personal creation. Her focus is on the methodology of Thucydides and not a universal examination of the text. She finds Thucydides' personal intervention and interpretation even in seemingly straightforward narrative accounts of war. Romilly argues that Thucydides was confident that reasoning could supplement the facts and help breathe life into history.

The first chapter investigates the methodology behind Thucydides' account of the failed Athenian siege of Syracuse. This account centers on whether or not the Athenians will be able to isolate Syracuse with a siege wall. For Romilly this account is an example of Thucydides' emphasis on perfect unity of action. He used this method to help clarify his portrayal of events and to act as a guiding thread for the progress of his history. Thucydides was not interested in the particulars of battle, preferring overarching tactical intentions. His accounts meld broad unity with deep interpretation. Romilly ar-

gues that Thucydides created unity through selectivity. He used specific language throughout his history to characterize similar concepts and to “draw attention to linkages among the relevant passages” (p. 18). Thucydides ignored details that did not relate directly to his unified themes, giving a unique clarity and focus to his work. In his accounts Thucydides preferred to use alternating sequences as a structural form. Romilly demonstrates that this allowed him to split his work into tightly linked groups or “episodes” with carefully selected beginnings and endings. Thus Thucydides created “bridges between these succeeding moments that accommodate the dual demands of unity and analysis” (p. 36). Romilly does not find it easy to distinguish between sections of interpretation and sections of pure narrative. She concludes the chapter by discussing how Thucydides’ use of pauses, contrasts, and suggested connections shares traits with rhetorical traditions found in earlier Greek poetry, tragedy, and philosophy.

In chapter 2 Romilly discusses Thucydides’ battle accounts. After briefly examining battle accounts found in Homer, Herodotus, and the Greek tragedies, she concludes that Thucydides’ narrative is located at an intersection between Herodotus’ universalized, explained battle and the tragedians’ unified, internalized battle. Like his other episodes, Thucydides’ battle accounts have an inevitable unity where intention governs action. Romilly divides the battle accounts into simple forms (no speeches involved) and complex forms (speeches included). She argues that Thucydides used speeches to fight the battle intellectually in advance. He then reinforced these battles of argument with the events of the actual battle. Romilly argues that this methodology does not sacrifice pathos or concrete realism. In fact, it allowed Thucydides to create profound lessons on the importance of reason to victory. She demonstrates that he subordinated moral qualities to intellectual ones. For Thucydides, only “chance” threatened the superiority of intelligence, and it should be minimized through discipline. Romilly concludes that no historian before or after Thucydides demanded so much intelligibility or rational accounting of battle.

Chapter 3 examines Thucydides’ antithetical speeches. These speeches sharpen Thucydides’ ideas and provide rich analysis. Romilly states, “These debates allow Thucydides to exhaust every aspect of a situation” (p. 106). She argues that Thucydides follows a rhetorical

tradition founded and expanded by Protagoras. Romilly then argues that Thucydidean antilogies all share similarities in arrangement, expression, and manner of argument with the Camarine antilogy and the Tetralogies of Antiphon. She concludes that Thucydides used antithetical speeches and antilogies to introduce a more concentrated analysis, to the benefit of his narrative’s clarity, without abandoning objectivity.

In the final chapter Romilly analyzes the Thucydidean account known as the “Archaeology.” In this account Thucydides argued that the Peloponnesian War was more important than events preceding it. She maintains that the account is innovative in its focus on civilization, commerce, lifestyle, and habitat. Thucydides used his reason to recreate a past that lacked reliable source material. Romilly shows that he used the same constructive rationalism and intellectual methods in this account but pressed further in search of the truth. She considers Thucydides’ arguments directly, in terms of their conclusions, and in light of modern scholarship. She states, “In no other text does the triumph of reasoning in all its aspects appear so absolute” (p. 164). Romilly attributes any inexactness in Thucydides’ work to the limitations of reasoning. To demonstrate continuity from Homeric Greece to his own time, Thucydides looked at Greece in general terms with a broad basis. He eliminated variations from his account. This has opened him up to criticism from modern scholars. Yet Romilly concludes that Thucydides’ reasoning and method in the “Archaeology” remain consistent with the rest of his work. In fact, she finds it more original.

This book, although well argued and illuminating, is highly specialized. Its nuanced arguments on the intellectual methodology of Thucydides will be mostly lost on undergraduates and general readers. The target audience is those who have a solid understanding of Thucydides’ history and the historiographical traditions that surround his work. To appeal to a wider group of readers, the book would benefit from a concluding section at the end of each chapter. Romilly covers a great deal of textual analysis and theory. Concluding sections would help clarify her dynamic arguments to those lacking a background in Thucydidean studies. Yet with this minor suggestion in mind, the study is well organized into sub-chapters. Romilly’s analysis is thorough and convincing. It is no wonder that her literary approach to the study of Thucydides found so many supporters.

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