

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

HOBBS’S THUCYDIDES

Luca Iori, *Thucydides Anglicus: Gli Eight Bookes di Thomas Hobbes e la ricezione inglese delle Storie di Tucidide (1450–1642)*. Pleiadi 19. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2015. Pp. xx + 308. Paperback, €52.00. ISBN 978-88-6372-850-7.

Hobbes’s translation of the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre* (1628) was the first made into English from the Greek text; it was preceded by that of T. Nicolls (1550), made from the French translation of C. de Seyssel (1527) which was itself made from the Latin translation of L. Valla,¹ and was followed in England by an edition of the Greek text with Latin notes by J. Hudson (1696). This book begins with four chapters on Greek studies and the knowledge of Thucydides in England between 1450 and 1642 (but despite the dates on the title page has little to say of 1450–1500), and then proceeds to four chapters on Hobbes and his translation. After the Conclusion there are a catalogue of sixty manuscript and printed versions of Thucydides acquired by Oxford and Cambridge libraries up to 1650, a bibliography, and indexes of names of persons and of passages in Thucydides.

In ch. i Iori stresses that, if England could not match continental countries for works of classical scholarship until after the Restoration of 1660, from the beginning of the sixteenth century study of the classics was widespread. Crucial were the foundation of St. John’s College, Cambridge (1511), Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1517), and at a more junior level the refoundation of St. Paul’s School, London (1512), while about the same time the nobility who did not send their sons to school took to employing tutors of Latin and Greek, and some of the leading clergy attracted scholars to their households. Religious changes contributed to the development of Greek studies, and the Regius Chairs of Greek at Cambridge and Oxford were established in the 1540s. As careers in government and in the Church were separated, classics became an essential part of a gentleman’s education, and B. Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* (1528) and T. Elyot’s *Boke Named the Governour* (1531), with their recommendation of classical learning, were extremely influential, though Puritans objected to the study of pagan texts. Textbooks of Greek grammar were published, beginning with one by N. Cleynaerts in 1530. Steady expansion under

¹ Criticised for compounded inaccuracies by Hobbes, second and third pages of ‘To the Readers’. (I cite the impression of 1634, available online but without the map of Greece at <https://archive.org/details/eightbookesofpeloothucuoft>.)

Elizabeth continued under James I and Charles I. Books such as J. Brinsley's *Ludus Literarius, or Grammar Schoole* (1612) and the *Directions for a Student in the Univerſitie* (perhaps by R. Holdsworth, Cambridge, 1630s) show the range which an ambitious student could be expected to cover.

In ch. ii Iori considers the grammar schools. Thucydides and the other historians were not among the authors fully studied, but grammatical examples and maxims were excerpted from them (and Thucydides' speeches could be set as a punishment). Works such as Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* (a rhetorical handbook perhaps of the fourth century, which was prescribed for study in various places) included the life of Thucydides and selections from his history.

Ch. iii is devoted to Oxford and Cambridge, which in various respects were transformed between the mid fifteenth and the mid seventeenth century. At Oxford Thucydides is mentioned in the statutes only of Corpus Christi (1517) and of St. John's (1557), but the statutes are not a fair reflection of the academic activity which actually occurred. At Cambridge, for instance, J. Cheke, Regius Professor of Greek in the 1540s, read Thucydides with his students and possessed an Aldine text which he heavily annotated. As for libraries, a copy of Valla's translation given to Balliol, Oxford, in 1478 is uniquely early; Corpus Christi, Oxford, acquired four copies of Thucydides between 1517 and 1537, and Cambridge University Library one in 1528/9, but otherwise acquisition of Thucydides began only in 1560. Thucydides was not prominent among the authors in private ownership, but in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was a steady increase both in library copies and in private copies.

The Camden chair of ancient history was established at Oxford in 1622, and Lord Brooke's chair of history at Cambridge in 1627; in Holdsworth's *Directions* (above) Thucydides was one of the authors to be read after the B.A. Those who read Thucydides read him for his language and for his anthropological-political content. In R. Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570) he was compared with Sallust and Livy; J. Rainolds cited him for parallels to the usage in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1570s). Material was culled from Thucydides and other authors for commonplace books. D. Wheare, the first holder of the Camden chair at Oxford (1622-47), in *De ratione et methodo legendi historias dissertatio* (1623) devoted his first chapter to a survey of political and ecclesiastical history in periods, and remarked on Thucydides and other sources for the *pentekontaetia* and for the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides was used by G. Harvey when reading Livy with P. Sidney (1570s), and books I-II by H. Cuffe when after serving as Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford (1590-7) he became secretary to the Earl of Essex.

Ch. iv completes the first half of the book, with a study of Thucydides and the English nobility. Thucydides, in Latin translation, was among the authors prescribed for the literary, moral, and political education of the princes Arthur

and Henry (later Henry VIII) at the beginning of the sixteenth century; and in the next generation Henry's children read Thucydides. James (VI of Scotland and I of England) had a classical education: the lack of positive evidence that he read Thucydides may be accidental; Thucydides is mentioned in the *Basilicon Doron* written for the education of his sons Henry and Charles (later Charles I). Prominent members of the court, such as Cranmer, are known to have possessed copies of Thucydides. Continental scholars such as Erasmus recommended education in the classics, and were followed by Elyot's *Booke Named the Governour* (1531: above) and other works. Elyot limited the historical reading to Latin, but Thucydides was among the authors recommended by L. Humphrey in *Optimates, siue De Nobilitate* (1560; translated as *The Nobles, or Of Nobilitye*, 1563).

Lessons for the present day could be drawn from history, as when P. Loiseleur de Villiers in a letter to F. Walsingham (1584) cited Thuc. 1.141.6 on the division among the Peloponnesians, or F. Bacon in *Considerations Touching a Warre with Spaine* (1624) cited Thuc. 1.23.6 on the causes of the Peloponnesian War. And J. Selden in his *Marmora Arundelliana* (1628) used Thucydides to provide a background to and commentary on Lord Arundel's inscriptions.

In ch. v Iori turns to Hobbes and his translation of Thucydides. Born in 1588, Hobbes studied at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, from 1603 to 1608. Then he was tutor and secretary to William Cavendish (from 1626 Second Earl of Devonshire) until his pupil died in June 1628; through Cavendish he came into contact with Bacon, and became a member of the Virginia and the Somer Islands Companies, and his catalogue of the library of Hardwick Hall shows the impressive range of books available to him.

His Thucydides, the first work published as his, was perhaps the fruit of four years' work, and he says that he paused before publishing it.² The book was registered at the Stationers' Company on 18 March 1627/8; the title page bears the date 1629, but Hobbes was able to send a copy to a friend on 1 January 1628/9. It was reprinted in 1634 and 1648. In his introductory matter, where he made use of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Thucydides*, Lucian's *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit* and other works, Hobbes pronounced that Thucydides was

a Workeman ... in whom ... the faculty of writing History is at its highest. For the *principall* and *proper worke* of History, being, to instruct, and enable men, by the knowledge of Actions *past*, to beare themselues prudently in the *present*, and providentially towards the *Future*, there is not

² Third page of 'To the Readers'.

extant any other (meerely humane) that doth more fully, and naturally performe it, then this of my Author).³

Now for his writings, two things are to bee considered in them, *Truth*, and *Eloquution*. For in *Truth* consisteth the *Soule*, and in *Eloquution* the *Body* of History. The latter without the former, is but a picture of History; and the former without the latter, vnapt to instruct.⁴

As well as translating punctiliously, and directly from the Greek, Hobbes supplied maps, a drawing and a gazetteer, an index, and in the margins summaries, and notes on political–moral, philological–literary, and historical–antiquarian matters. Iori justifiably regards this work as an important milestone in the reception of the classics in England.

Iori's ch. vi is devoted to linguistic aspects of the work. Hobbes described his version as 'Interpreted with Faith and Diligence Immediately out of the Greeke',⁵ and he did indeed fluently but accurately translate the Greek text, as neither Valla–de Seyssel–Nicolls nor F. di Soldo Strozzi (1550: translating the Greek into Italian) did. There are, however, occasional expansions, sometimes but not always placed in brackets, and omissions of phrases which seemed redundant or problematic; and there are changes in the grammatical structure, of kinds which modern translators commonly find desirable, and renderings which are interpretative rather than purely literal. Hobbes mentioned his use of the edition of 'Æmilius Porta [Portus, 1594], not refusing, or neglecting, any version, Comment, or other helpe I could come by':⁶ although he was not uncritical, he often used English words cognate with Portus' Latin words, or gave a rendering informed by comments in Portus' edition. His other main resource (as Iori illustrates from the treatment of words for 'fear') was J. Scapula's *Lexicon Graecolatinum* (1616), of which there was a copy at Hardwick Hall.

A good translation was considered to be one which reflected the style of the original; and Hobbes did this in such matters as word arrangement (chiasmus and the like), forms of construction (such as — *ἐνεκα* rendered 'for — sake'), and alliteration, while adding to features of the original (sometimes with echoes of the Authorised Version of the Bible) to fit the Grand Style of his own time. Iori sees this as an important feature of Hobbes's humanism and of the culture of the Elizabethan–Jacobean élite.

In ch. vii Iori turns to the content of Thucydides. Hobbes was typical of his time in his use of 'antiquities' to illustrate and explain the Thucydidean

³ First page of 'To the Readers'.

⁴ Fourth page of 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides'.

⁵ Title page.

⁶ Third page of 'To the Readers'.

narrative. Most of the marginal notes serve to summarise the text, but some, distinguished by an asterisk, are explanatory, and these sometimes cite another ancient text. As in his translation Hobbes was often indebted to Portus and Scapula, but by no means always. Sometimes he had an eye to his own time, as in a dismissive note on oracles,⁷ or in a comparison between ballots in Athens and in contemporary Venice.⁸

There were precedents for the inclusion of maps and other drawings, for instance those provided by A. Palladio for an edition of Caesar (1575), and in England those included in W. Raleigh's *History of the Worlde* (1614). Hobbes equipped his Thucydides with maps of Greece and of Sicily, and of Pylos and of Syracuse, and a drawing of the siege of Plataea.⁹ The rudimentary map of Pylos seems to be Hobbes's own work. Sicily, with an acknowledgment,¹⁰ and Syracuse are based on maps in P. Clüver's *Sicilia Antiqua* (1619)—but the map of Syracuse with attention to Thucydides omits some of the later developments present in Clüver's map and adds the walls built in 415–414—and Plataea is based on a drawing in J. Lipsius' *Polioretica* (1596). For the map of Greece the basic outline was taken from the *Atlas* of G. Mercator (1589), but Hobbes himself located within it the places needed by readers of Thucydides,¹¹ and compiled the gazetteer in which he cited and discussed sources for the locations. One recent work which he used for that was A. Ortelius' *Thesaurus Geographicus* (1587).

Ch. viii, entitled 'Atene e Londra', discusses the political significance of Hobbes's translation. Hobbes commended Thucydides' writings as 'hauing in them profitable instruction for Noblemen, and such as may come to haue the managing of great and waighty actions'.¹² Later in his verse autobiography he said of Thucydides,

Is Democratia ostendit mihi quam sit inepta,
Et quantum coetu plus sapit unus homo.¹³

⁷ P. 65, on 1.126.6.

⁸ P. 46, on 1.87.2.

⁹ Sicily, before p. 349; Pylos, before p. 215; Syracuse, before p. 405; Plataea, before p. 155.

¹⁰ Acknowledgment on the map; cf. third page of 'To the Readers'.

¹¹ Cf. third page of 'To the Readers': 'I was constrained to draw one (as well as I could) my selfe'.

¹² Third page of Epistle Dedicatory.

¹³ *Vita Carmine Expressa* (i.e. *Thomae Hobbesii Malmesburiensis vita, Authore seipso*, 1679), lines 81–2; in his own translation (*The Life of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Written by himself In a Latine Poem; And now Translated into English*, 1680), 'He says Democracy's a Foolish Thing, | Than a Republick Wiser is one King'.

Iori warns us to take that with caution; but he still accepts it as Hobbes's ultimate lesson from Thucydides.

The title page of the 1628/9 impression (reproduced on Iori's p. 218) shows on the left Sparta, Archidamus, and οἱ ἄριστοι (the best men) and on the right Athens, Pericles, and οἱ πολλοί (the many). Hobbes's introduction, taking the fact but not the interpretation from Marcellinus' *Life of Thucydides*, 23, says that Thucydides 'had no desire at all to meddle in the government, because in those times it was impossible for any man to giue good and profitable counsell for the Common-wealth and not incurre the displeasure of the *People*'. After developing that theme over some lines he concluded, 'By this meanes it came to passe among the *Athenians*, who thought they were able to doe anything, that wicked men and flatterers draue them headlong into those actions that were to ruine them; and the good men either durst not oppose, or if they did, vndid themselues'.¹⁴ However, 'Nor doth it appeare, that he magnifieth any where the authority of the *Few*; amongst whom he saith euery one desireth to be the chiefe, and they that are vnderualued, beare it with lesse patience then in a *Democracy*; whereupon sedition followeth, and dissolution of the government'. Thucydides praised the rule of Pisistratus and of Pericles: 'So that it seemeth that as he was of Regall descent, so he best approved of the *Regall Government*'.¹⁵ The same dislike of democracy is apparent in several of Hobbes's translations and marginal notes.

All this is to be seen in the context of the British crisis concerning the Thirty Years' War and the powers of the king, which came to a head with the Petition of Right, passed by both Houses of Parliament in May 1628 and accepted by Charles I in June. Hobbes's patron Cavendish was caught up in these affairs, trying to keep his balance between the two sides; but he died on 20 June. Hobbes read in Thucydides of Pericles' successors that 'through priuate quarrels about, who should beare the greatest sway with the people, they both abated the vigour of the Armie, and then also first troubled the State at home with diuision', which could be seen as a lesson for contemporary Britain.¹⁶ Hobbes's translation was registered at the Stationers' Company on 18 March 1627/8, the day after the opening of the Parliament which was to pass the Petition of Right. And in 1648, when the Civil War which had begun in 1642 moved into its second phase, Hobbes (from 1640 in exile in France) had his translation reprinted.

In his Conclusion Iori stresses that the shortage of translations and editions would give a misleading impression of the reception of Thucydides in Britain: Hobbes's translation was indeed a landmark, but it did not appear suddenly

¹⁴ Second page of 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides'.

¹⁵ Third page of 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides'.

¹⁶ P. 117, translating 2.65.11.

out of nothing. And it was enlisted in later debates, such as that between J. Harrington and M. Wren on monarchy and republicanism in the 1650s.

Insiders will notice in Iori's book occasional outsider's slips: Queen's College, Cambridge, with the apostrophe thus misplaced; Caius and Gonville College, in that order. Iori keeps Anglophone readers alert by writing indifferently of the Seicento and of the seventeenth century. More seriously, when men and their works are mentioned in more than one place, what is said of them is not always as well coordinated as it might be. But these are small matters, and Iori has produced a fascinating book which does a very good job, both of setting Hobbes's translation in its context and explaining its importance, and of showing how skilfully Hobbes went about his work.

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