
Nagy, Blaise. *A Thucydides Reader: Annotated Passages from Books I-VIII of the Histories.*

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An important decision for any teacher of Attic Greek is the selection of the first extended text to read following the completion of a basic grammar textbook. Most teachers choose Plato for the beauty of his writing, the intrinsic interest of his content, and the availability of excellent annotated editions. For the teacher or student more interested in Greek history than Greek philosophy, however, Nagy has provided a fine alternative to Plato in his Thucydides reader. He has judiciously chosen 105 passages culled from all eight books of Thucydides' *Histories* and provided annotations appropriate for a third-semester college or fourth-semester high school student of ancient Greek.

Nagy opens with a three-page English introduction to the author and the work. The Greek passages selected cover most of the sections that students of the Peloponnesian War would find most interesting. These include Thucydides' introductory sections explaining why he has written the *Histories* and his methodology (Book I), Pericles' funeral oration and the plague in Athens (Book II), the Mytilene debate (Book III), events at Pylos (Book IV), the Melian dialogue (Book V), and the departure and defeat of the Sicilian expedition (Books VI and VII). Nagy closes with two brief selections from Book VIII on the oligarchic revolution in Athens.

Each passage begins with a brief (four or five sentence) but helpful English introduction. The Greek passages vary in length from 10 to 40 lines, most being around 15-25 lines. Depending on the amount of grammatical depth the teacher chooses to emphasize, most of these passages can easily be assigned for a single class period. Some of the longer passages would probably need to be divided into two class periods. There is, altogether, much more Greek text in this volume than could be read in a single semester. The teacher will need to make choices among the passages.

The annotations focus on grammar and syntax. They stay clear of literary or historical interpretation, and they are deliberately thin in the vocabulary help

they provide. Nor has Nagy provided a Greek word glossary for the student. The expectation is that the student will need to have and to use a real Greek lexicon. The intermediate Liddell-Scott would be sufficient. If students are only using the glossaries from their grammar textbooks, they will be in trouble. Part of the (commendable, I believe) discipline of this text is that it forces the student to develop a comfortable facility with a good Greek lexicon.

Although his notes are lean on vocabulary help, Nagy has made them very friendly for the lexicon user. Most verb forms are parsed, so the student is provided the first principal part for easy location in a lexicon. This is a tremendous time-saver for students, while still forcing them to use their lexicon for unfamiliar meanings. Participles are also parsed in the notes — a very welcome feature for a writer like Thucydides, whose style is participle-heavy. Genitive absolutes and articular infinitive constructions are regularly identified, further allowing the student a real sense of reading the Greek rather than of decrypting a code by having to look up verbal forms in every clause. The one area in which Nagy does provide needed vocabulary assistance is with Greek idioms. This is especially helpful, for students can spend much fruitless time trying to look up these elliptical phrases, whose idiomatic uses can be quite far removed from their literal components.

Another virtue of this collection is that the grammatical annotations of each passage are independent of the grammatical annotations of the other passages. What I mean by this is that the teacher is free to pick and choose passages throughout the book in any order, without sacrificing any grammatical assistance in the notes. Some student texts will annotate certain constructions once or twice, and then expect that the student will have learned them and so will stop annotating them in later passages. This is a good strategy as long as the student is reading continuously from beginning to end. But Nagy continues to note the same difficult constructions in the passages, regardless of how often that construction has appeared earlier. The teacher is therefore free to skip passages at will and not worry that the student will find himself at a loss with a construction only annotated in a previous section that may not have been assigned.

Finally, Nagy states clearly that this text is not designed to replace the teacher — it is not intended to be used as a self-paced independent reading text for the untutored student. The teacher needs to supply context for the selected Greek passages, ideally with a set of good historical maps and English translations of the texts leading into the Greek selection.

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Publisher's Response

At one time we distributed a long list of commentaries saved from oblivion by a publisher in England. It was a grand mission of which we were grateful to be a part. The market for modern commentaries is small, as any publisher in Classics can confirm, so, when that company took over its own distribution, we were not at too great a loss. But we had learned that there is a need not only for commen-

taries at the undergraduate and secondary levels, but also that there was a need for new ones specifically designed for American students of the Classics. We are doing very few of them, but Blaise Nagy's *Thucydides* is the model, and we appreciate this reviewer's insightful analysis of what we are trying to accomplish. We naturally hope that the study of ancient Greek will flourish and that we can make a small but lasting contribution to the field.

Ron Pullins
Focus Publishing