A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War by Victor Davis Hanson

Brilliant, Lucid, Readable

One of our most provocative military historians, Victor Davis Hanson has given us painstakingly researched and pathbreaking accounts of wars ranging from classical antiquity to the twenty-first century. Now he juxtaposes an ancient conflict with our most urgent modern concerns to create his most engrossing work to date, A War Like No Other.

Over the course of a generation, the Hellenic city-states of Athens and Sparta fought a bloody conflict that resulted in the collapse of Athens and the end of its golden age. Thucydides wrote the standard history of the Peloponnesian War, which has given readers throughout the ages a vivid and authoritative narrative. But Hanson offers readers something new: a complete chronological account that reflects the political background of the time, the strategic thinking of the combatants, the misery of battle in multifaceted theaters, and important insight into how these events echo in the present.

Hanson compellingly portrays the ways Athens and Sparta fought on land and sea, in city and countryside, and details their employment of the full scope of conventional and nonconventional tactics, from sieges to targeted assassinations, torture, and terrorism. He also assesses the crucial roles played by warriors such as Pericles and Lysander, artists, among them Aristophanes, and thinkers including Sophocles and Plato.
Hanson’s perceptive analysis of events and personalities raises many thought-provoking questions: Were Athens and Sparta like America and Russia, two superpowers battling to the death? Is the Peloponnesian War echoed in the endless, frustrating conflicts of Vietnam, Northern Ireland, and the current Middle East? Or was it more like America’s own Civil War, a brutal rift that rent the fabric of a glorious society, or even this century’s “red state—blue state” schism between liberals and conservatives, a cultural war that manifestly controls military policies? Hanson daringly brings the facts to life and unearths the often surprising ways in which the past informs the present.

Brilliantly researched, dynamically written, A War Like No Other is like no other history of this important war.

My Personal Review:
Victor David Hanson is the famous classicist who has soared to the top of the best seller non-fiction charts with outstanding historical works! I have never read a Hanson work without being informed about the way war in all its nefarious aspects has influenced the course of Western civilization from the Greeks to the present day of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In this new seminal work Dr. Hanson provides a modern examination of the Peloponessian war (the first major Civil War in World History) between democratic and empire expanding Athens in Attica and the militaristic oligarchic society of Sparta in southern Greece. Throughout these pages the author quotes the classical writer Thucydides whose book on the Peloponessian War fought in the 5th ca. B.C. is told from the perspective of an Athenian general officer. Thucydides was skeptical of human nature and critical of warfare so he is still pertinent today!

Instead of a blow by blow account of the horrific lengthy war the author focuses on the major factors in the conflict with chapters devoted to such subjects as:

Walls-the importance of siege warfare

Horses-how mounted Syracuse calvary forces destroyed the Athenian invaders on Sicily.

Plague-a brilliant discussion of how plague ravaged Athens during the war.
Ships— the crucial importance of sea power chronicling how landlocked Sparta developed a powerful naval force which defeated the vaunted Athenian navy and won the war.

Land— how crop destruction and fire destroyed the lives of many bucolic farmers.

Throughout his writing Hanson wants us to see how devastating is warfare to the common soldier/civilian drawn into the horrific maelstrom of war. Hanson does not glorify war but like General William Sherman manifestly makes evident the fact that war is hell.

In these pages you will meet such men as Pericles; explore the building, manning and fighting done on Greek warships called triremes; understand ancient economies and witness brutality in the several slaughters of this ancient war.

Any educated reader will find insights and parallels to modern warfare in these many pages.

This book like all of Dr. Hansons outstanding historical works is highly recommended!

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