

examines the failure to shape good faith between Rome and Perseus in order to understand why tensions escalated so quickly. Drawing on behavioural theories concerning decision-making, Maier's contribution offers a way to resolve the contradictions of literary sources, wherein both parties appear reluctant to engage in war despite the fact that it rapidly ensues. Maier capably demonstrates how this might help us understand these narratives: the main actors respond to perceived threats and risks (often presented by third parties, for their own reasons) and act out of a desire to avert the risk of loss of status. Intriguingly, Maier posits a generational divide among Rome's senators, with the younger generation rejecting the open dialogue between parties favoured by the older generation, further escalating the conflict and also demonstrating the flexibility of diplomatic culture.

From misperceptions to deliberate manipulation, the final contribution by Wendt examines how the ritual script of diplomacy could be altered in order to redefine diplomatic relationships. Using three case studies of Romano-Parthian diplomatic encounters between 96 and 1 BCE, Wendt demonstrates how 'diplomacy is and was influenced and shaped by the communicative expectations of those involved' (p. 187). These expectations were exploited often to the advantage and self-promotion of the individual Romans involved: Sulla, Pompey and Augustus in Wendt's case studies. Wendt's contribution also reflects on how diplomatic encounters and etiquette were clearly relevant aspects for how ancient authors presented individual political development and behaviour. While there existed an expectation of diplomatic etiquette, the flexibility of diplomacy meant it could be used to 'create or underscore hierarchies' (p. 196).

A great achievement of the volume is that it succinctly demonstrates the value and relevance of examining the forms and language of ancient diplomatic processes. By focusing on a key element of ancient diplomacy – good faith – the contributions offer ways into understanding how diplomatic actors variously interpreted and manipulated shared codes of communication. As I. Neumann stressed, it is not that the tasks of diplomacy change; change occurs rather 'in the general political and social fields that surround diplomacy' (I. Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites. A Critical Enquiry* [2013], p. 3). The volume illustrates, across various historical contexts, how ancient diplomacy was flexible and needs to be understood within the political and social fields of each instance. The editors and contributors have unquestionably expanded the scope of ancient diplomacy, emphasising the need to understand it as far more complex and nuanced than traditionally conceived.

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GENERALS OR TOO MUCH GENERAL?

EVANS (R.), TOUGHER (S.) (edd.) *Generalship in Ancient Greece, Rome and Byzantium*. Pp. xiv + 362. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Cased, £90. ISBN: 978-1-4744-5994-5.

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Conceiving a collective book is one of the most complex operations for a scholar – and even more is actually 'creating' it. Especially if the book is the result of a conference,

as this one partially is, since it takes its lead from a panel on ‘The Art of Generalship: Late Antique, Byzantine, and Chinese Ideals’ held at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2014 and whose temporal range was extended afterwards to encompass the ancient Graeco-Roman world. The difficulty lies not only in holding together *membra* otherwise *disiecta*, but in ensuring that each one plays its part within a single body. The spirit that should animate this body – out of metaphor: the theme of the book – is that of generalship. A very important theme, to which Y. Le Bohec has dedicated a relevant book (*Les grands généraux de Rome ... et les autres* [2022]) published in the same year as this volume.

In the introduction Evans and Tougher introduce the various themes discussed in the following chapters: the role of luck, the different ways of leading the army, the evolution of generalship, the consequent flourishing of specialised treaties, the amateurism of generals in the ancient world, the role of the Roman and Byzantine emperors in military campaigns and the existence of different traditions of generalship in Islamic and Chinese culture. It seems clear that each of these topics could, in fact, be the subject of a single collective volume; however, the editors note that, although the book deals with specific aspects of generalship across an extensive chronological period, ‘common themes and concerns emerge across the chapters. These include the subjects of speeches of commanders, gender (especially the virtue of courage) and cross-cultural comparisons ... [and] also encompass commemoration of both military victories and defeats and the intersection of the political and military roles of leaders’ (p. 5). Evidently, the points in common are not enough to allow the editors to organise the contributions by themes. Not by chance, then, the choice is to organise the sixteen chapters in chronological order, which gives a more solid ground for readers.

The first chapter by C. Kucewicz, ‘Kings, Tyrants and Bandy-Legged Men: Generalship in Archaic Greece’, focuses on the way in which troops were managed in the Homeric and Archaic worlds, emphasising the need for generals not only to use example and to show valour, but also to manage discipline. According to Kucewicz, the reorganisation of the militia of the *polis* from the sixth century BCE onwards resulted in increased tactical and strategic capabilities. This is an accurate article that would, however, have benefited from M. Lupi’s studies on Sparta, G. Brizzi’s on infantry fighting methods and L. Loreto’s on the categories of strategy and tactics applied in the ancient world.

Evans’s chapter, ‘Commemorating Thermopylae: The *andreia* of Glorious Defeat as a Literary Construct’, conducts a detailed and thorough historiographical analysis of the sources relating to the battle of Thermopylae, focusing not on generalship *per se*, but on how an inadequate management of the army – in this case that of Leonidas – was subsequently commemorated. The collected volume on the commemoration of war edited by M. Giangiulio, E. Franchi and G. Proietti (2019) would perhaps have provided additional insights to this interesting and rich paper.

N. Rockwell’s contribution, ‘Plato on Military and Political Leadership’, deals with Socrates’ and Plato’s thinking on generals, which, rather than tracing the Platonic idea of a general, focuses on what Plato says about the relationship between political leaders and generals.

In Chapter 4, ‘Reconstructing Early Seleucid Generalship, 301–222 BC’, A. McAuley has two points of merit: that of focusing on case studies, in particular the figure of Alexander of Sardis, whom the author has already dealt with, and that of starting from the terminological problem of *strategos*. The study reveals that generals among the Seleucids from 301 to 222 BCE were not only commanders and confidants of the king, but also administrators and governors, with specific relations and influence in the territories

where they were sent. This facilitated the possibility of usurping power, which prompted Antiochus III to construct a more restrictive system with clearly defined competences.

M. Taylor's chapter, 'Generalship and Knowledge in the Middle Roman Republic', is devoted to the selection of generals in the Middle Republic. Taylor rightly points out that the command rotation system was unique in comparison to other Republics such as Athens and Carthage, and that consuls already had a great deal of military experience before holding office. However, more questionable is his assertion that they did not necessarily have experience in grand tactics, something that would not be necessary because 'most generals simply deployed the standard *triplex acies*, in part because it required no extra mental effort on their part' (p. 92). Some useful, albeit cursory analogies with the contemporary world make Taylor's chapter even more interesting, which would have benefited greatly from B. Bleckmann's work on aristocratic competition, Brizzi's on Scipio Africanus and M. Bellomo's on military commands between 264 and 201 BCE.

D. Nolan's paper, 'Command Assessment in the *Bellum Gallicum*: Caesar and *Fortuna*', is devoted to the role of luck in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*. Some interesting data emerge, such as the fact that the term is not mentioned when there are adverse or favourable weather conditions, and that *Fortuna* comes into play, instead, when the commander does not have the opportunity to meet with the enemy. This useful work perhaps suffers from the lack of a more thorough discussion of the term in other Latin authors as well as from the lack of confrontation with the works of L. Canfora, Le Bohec, L. Fezzi and Loreto on Caesar.

D. Crosby's chapter, 'Remembering P. Quinctilius Varus: Opposing Perspectives on the Memory and Memorialisation of the Failed General in the *Annales* of Tacitus', is a literary-historiographical investigation into the memory of the defeat at Teutoburg, which focuses, above all, on the way in which Tacitus interprets it. In Tacitean narrative Varus would have been used as a symbol, observed from a Germanic as well as a Roman perspective, a conclusion that can be shared without assuming, as Crosby does, that 'Tacitus could have written about all of the events in the principate of Tiberius without reference to the *clades Variana*' (p. 124), additionally because the elaboration of the massacre in an anti-Varian key originated in the context of the trials against members of the *partes Agrippinae*, of whom Varus' widow, Claudia Pulchra, was a cousin.

Chapter 8, 'Decius and the Battle near Abritus' by D. Potter, is a thorough article that combines new literary data (fragments of the Scythian Affairs of Dexippus) and archaeological ones (excavations at Dryanovets, near ancient Abritus) for some interesting considerations on how Decius defended the Roman borders.

C. Whately's paper, 'Ammianus and the Heroic Mode of Generalship in the Fourth Century AD', examines the way in which Ammianus Marcellinus describes the battles between 358 and 378 CE, showing a preference for generals not fighting in the front line, a tendency, for Whately, of a 'post-heroic' approach in fourth-century military thought.

The next seven chapters are devoted to studies on the period after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. M. Stewart's work, 'The Fine Line between Courage and Fear in the Vandal War', is a study of the vocabulary of fear in Procopius and its links to the earlier historiographical tradition, M. de Marre's paper, 'The Generalship of John Troglita: Art in Artifice', is a study of the Byzantine general John Troglita, who, despite his successes against the Vandals, did not receive much recognition, while E. MacDonald's chapter, 'The Best of Men: Cross-Cultural Command in the 630s AD', focuses on the representation of the generals involved in the battles of al-Yarmūk and al-Qādessiyah in Byzantine, Sasanian and Arab sources that converge into masculine identities with well-defined traits.

With Chapter 13, ‘Tian Yue Marshals His Tropes: Public Persuasion and the Character of Military Leadership in Late Tang China’, we make a jump to China: D.A. Graff offers an in-depth overview of the speeches of generals during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), a period in which, unlike earlier periods in which they are very rare, we have examples of speeches occurring during particularly dramatic moments.

The next paper is a rich and well documented work by P. Rance, ‘The Reception of Onasander’s *Strategikos* in Byzantine Military Literature’, which shows, among other things, how the strategic reorientation into a more offensive direction in the Arab-Byzantine conflicts between the late ninth and tenth centuries coincides with a florescence of Byzantine military writing and book production, in which the generals link up with their Roman predecessors.

Tougher’s Chapter, ‘Generalship and Gender in Byzantium: Non-Campaigning Emperors and Eunuch Generals in the Age of the Macedonian Dynasty’, analyses the way in which the sources looked at non-campaigning emperors and some eunuch generals, both praised for their courage in light of their successes.

The last chapter by D. Krallis, ‘The Politics of War: Virtue, *Tyche*, Persuasion and the Byzantine General’, studies, within various Byzantine sources, the skills needed to be a good general, in which a continuity with Roman military thought emerges.

These chapters are, on the whole, in-depth works, with a marked tendency, however, in some cases, to avoid non Anglo-Saxon scholarship, even when written in English – an increasingly less isolated phenomenon that is rather perplexing. The single-page epilogue by the two editors (p. 306) is tangible evidence of the lack of a spirit that would have given vitality to the various parts of this book; with a very general title, in view of its content, this work appears more like an interesting miscellany of a journal dealing with a common theme than a collected volume. In whichever way one wants to look at it – as a necessarily incomplete mosaic or as a portrait à la Arcimboldo –, readers are still able to learn and discover much about various aspects of generalship in the Graeco-Roman-Byzantine world. This volume doubtless contributes to a better knowledge of it.

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THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST IN THE PAST

PODANY (A. H.) *Weavers, Scribes, and Kings. A New History of the Ancient Near East*. Pp. viii + 662, ills, maps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £26.99, US\$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-005904-0.

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In this delightfully readable work P. describes the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia from its urban origins (c. 4000 BCE) up to the fall of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great (331 BCE). Yet unlike other historical surveys chronicling the passage of time mostly through achievements and events related to kings, this book tells the story of Mesopotamia’s expansive history through the ordinary lives of individuals who hailed from many different social ranks and employments across the wide spectrum