

Victor Davis Hanson (ed.), *Makers of Ancient Strategy: From the Persian Wars to the Fall of Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford 2010, 265 pp.

The volume consists of an introduction by Victor Hanson, ten chapters, all provided with both 'further readings' and notes (of an uneven level of complexity), and a general index. For unclear reasons one paper (by Lee) is provided additionally with bibliography.

In the 'Introduction,' Hanson offers us some information about the idea of this book and a synopsis of all the contributions interspersed with his own reflections. More about this essay will be said later.

In the first chapter ('From Persia with Love. Propaganda and Imperial Overreach in the Greco-Persian Wars'), written in an ornate style (I would say too ornate), Tom Holland analyses the ideology of Persian kings (especially Cyrus and Darius I) and, more widely, Persian imperial mentality, as a kind of 'collective strategy maker', which brought into the ancient Near East a new way of proceeding with conquered peoples. In this strategy, minimization of violence was accompanied by propaganda that used local traditions and/or cults. At the same time, conquerors invited local elites to collaborate. By a kind of *coup de force*, the usurper Darius enriched this ideology with a religious dimension: in the dichotomy of Truth and Lie, the Persian king became the soldier of Ahura Mazda, God of Truth, and so was 'condemned' to a never-ending march against the enemies of God. This ideological construct guaranteed stable rule as well as constant expansion. The encounter with the Greeks changed everything. With its dynamic competition inside the elite, which could not be used *en bloc* as a basis for stable rule, the world of the Greek *poleis* differed from all states and tribes the Persians had conquered before. Now, their imperial strategy was unable to cope. The clash between Persian imperial strategy and the Greek coalition – led by the Spartans, of whom the

conquest of Messenia made a 'community of warriors,' and the Athenians, who, from the times of Cleisthenes' reforms, were animated by a revolutionary spirit that produced an effective mobilizational ideology – could only result in Persian disaster.

In the next contribution ('Pericles, Thucydides, and the Defense of Empire') Donald Kagan traces a picture of Periclean imperial strategy. After Cimon's death, Pericles had to defend the Athenian Empire against different enemies: Spartan symmarchy, members of the Delian League, interior opposition. The context for his strategy was furnished by the balance of power as well as by cultural change, which took place in the middle of the fifth century BC. The Homeric ideal of striving for *arete* was substituted by the idea that every Greek had the right to live free in a free state. Imperialism seemed irrevocably condemned by the philosophers reflecting on the excess (*hybris*) and retribution (*nemesis*). Pericles managed to create the intellectual and institutional frames for a new vision of Athenian imperialism, whose main characteristics were a kind of pacifism and capacity for self-restraint. The final disaster of Athenian empire was due to its maritime character, which resulted in a constant tendency to expand. In a sense, Pericles' strategy contradicted the very nature of Athenian *arche*. Eventually its strength turned out to be Pericles himself, as Thucydides so aptly observed.

David L. Berkey ('Why Fortifications Endure: A Case Study of the Walls of Athens during the Classical Period') adopts a different perspective. His hero is not the individual or collective makers of strategy, but a strategic problem that found different solutions in different periods. Author argues that 'by examining their [= the walls of Athens] history during the classical period, we are able to ascertain their shifting strategic value and suggest contemporary historical parallels to these ancient relics of Athens's imperial glory' (p. 59). After having discussed strategic importance of the Athenian fortifications during the great conflicts of the Classical Period (with a strong bias to the first half of the fourth century BC) and having pointed out ever-important role of fortifications in the modern world, Berkey discusses the symbolic meaning of Athenian Walls. While constituting an element of military strategy, at the same time they communicated a political line to actual and potential enemies and allies. To the Athenians themselves they were a source of pride and self-confidence.

In the fourth chapter ('Epaminondas the Theban and the Doctrine of Preemptive War'), Hanson describes Epaminondas' strategy during the invasion of Peloponnesus in 370/369. The theoretical frame is furnished by the modern distinction between preventive and preemptive wars. Preventive war is a war started by a strong state against a weaker one with the justification that inactivity will favour the growth of the opponent's power and result in its aggressive moves. It rarely finds assent among international public opinion. Preemptive wars differ

from preventive wars in that there is a real, imminent threat and the 'aggressor' is usually the weaker side. For Hanson, Epaminondas' expedition was the second case: against common opinion, he argues that Sparta was far from being broken at Leuctra and was stronger both subjectively and objectively. Finally, Hanson evaluates the effects of Epaminondas' strategy judging it by universal goals of preemptive wars and comparing it with American goals in the 2003 war against Iraq.¹

The aim of Ian Worthington's paper ('Alexander the Great, Nation Building, and the Creation and Maintenance of Empire') is, first, to show how Alexander established his empire and to discuss the problems he faced in ruling a huge multicultural population, and second, to examine 'the approaches and strategies he took to what might be called nation building' (p. 118). After a short presentation of Alexander's administrative measures, Worthington argues against the thesis that his aim was to create a kind of 'common world' and shows how restricted were his politics of conciliation between Greek and Eastern World, and even his tolerance to Eastern cultures. The chapter ends with a short evaluation of Alexander's 'national' strategy.

In the sixth chapter ('Urban Warfare in the Classical Greek World'), John W.I. Lee reviews various types of urban combat (by which he means only battles in the streets *inside* a city and determined by its topography; sieges and assaults, determined by fortifications, are excluded). Then he investigates ancient city as a battleground, evaluates the capabilities of classical Greek armies for urban operations and assesses the place of urban warfare in classical Greek military thought. Finally, he tries to 'put the classical experience into broader historical context to see what lesson it may hold for today's strategists and battlefield commanders' (p. 140).

With Chapter Seven by Susan P. Mattern ('Counterinsurgency and the Enemies of Rome'), we reach the Roman World. This is about how Romans (once again a collective strategist) were dealing with insurgencies and banditry in the Empire from ca. 100 BC to ca. 200 AD. Mattern begins with a short overview of Roman administration and military effectiveness (in her opinion very restricted), which could be used to deal with any revolt. Then she discusses the complicated question of the relation between revolts and banditry. As to Roman methods of peacekeeping, Mattern argues that historians put too much weight on the role of army and uniform province administration and too little on the dynamic situation

¹ I confess I can't grasp Hanson's idea about what kind of war the Iraq War of 2003 was: compare 'truly preventive wars (...) such as the Iraq War of 2003' (p. 101) and 'preventive invasion of Iraq' (p. 102) with 'their [sc. United States] and its allies'] preemptive effort to remove Saddam Hussein' (p. 109) and '[i]n both the ancient Peloponnese and contemporary Iraq, preemptive war was intended to lead to the creation of new democratic states (...)' (p. 110).

between the Roman state and the local situation, including power relations in the provinces, Roman diplomatic activities, collaboration of provincial elites, and everything concerned with the working of social institutions. In a sense, her conclusions join the conclusions of Heather's study concerning Roman methods of dealing with their barbarian neighbours (see below).

Barry Strauss' contribution is the only one that covers all of classical antiquity ('Slave Wars of Greece and Rome'). A short comment upon the (scanty and biased) sources is followed by a categorisation of slaves in view of the slave revolts. Strauss finds operative the opposition between chattel slaves and communal slaves, whose policing represents different sets of problems to their masters. After discussing briefly the known cases of the revolts by common slaves (Spartan helots' uprisings being the most famous example), he focuses on the 'Golden Age' of the chattel slaves' revolts, namely the second half of the second and the first half of the first century BC. Not surprisingly, the place of honour is given to the war with Spartacus. Strauss traces the circumstances which contributed to the frequency and wide range of slave revolts in the last century of the Roman Republic, the (poor) organization of rebels, their ideology (or lack thereof) and strategy. Finally, he explains why slave revolts were all doomed to failure and looks for a lesson to be learned. What he finds instructive in the slave wars is that an organized state is usually stronger than unorganized masses.

Like Hanson's contribution on Epaminondas, Adrian Goldsworthy's chapter ('Julius Caesar and the General as State') is focused on an individual strategist. Yet, there is a great difference. While Hanson focuses on the way Epaminondas won an important campaign of 370–369 during which he undercut Sparta's military prominence, Goldsworthy gives an overview of Caesar's career from its very beginnings to its very end, trying to extract those elements that made him different from the rest of the Roman elite of his times. Goldsworthy traces Caesar's climbing republican *cursus honorum*, his policy toward the native population during his term as governor of Gaul, the way he was forming and handling the legions and, finally, his strategy in the war against Pompey and his followers. The sad, if unexpected, lesson follows: Caesar was finally victim of his own moderation, which cost him his life. The much more ruthless Augustus died in his own bed.

The volume closes with a polemical study by Peter J. Heather ('Holding the Line. Frontier Defense and the Later Roman Empire') directed against *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third* by the strategic analyst Edward N. Luttwak. Heather criticises Luttwak's influential idea that starting in about the Severan Era the Roman Empire consciously stepped back from an expansionist policy and moved toward fortifying the imperial frontiers against smaller barbarian incursions and backing them with mobile field armies, which were to push away the bigger groups of invaders in particular regions. In Heather's

view, the Roman emperors of Late Antiquity were directed in their decision-making much more by the needs of internal politics than by an overview and understanding of what was going on outside the Roman frontiers. If we find any kind of consistent external policy, he argues, it is in a Roman diplomatic strategy backed by the limited (one might say ritual) use of the imperial army. The failure of this policy was in no way militarily predetermined. What made it unworkable was, immediately, the Huns' migration, first into the Black Sea area and then to the Hungarian Plain, which rapidly changed the structure of the Germans' world and provoked their crossing the Roman *limes* simultaneously in many places. The Roman Empire could not withstand this simultaneity. In the long perspective, the decline of the Roman Empire was determined much more by the deep transformation of Germanic societies due to the long-time influence of the Roman World than by its internal problems.

The chronological, geographical, and topical range covered in this volume are too vast for a single reviewer to evaluate honestly every contribution in detail. However, as far as I can judge, all are worth reading. Even if not every one sheds new light on old problems, each constitutes a competent overview of their respective fields of research. In what follows I will concentrate on the overall idea of this book.

From the introductory essay we learn that the volume was conceived as a kind of supplement to *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret and issued by Princeton University Press in 1986. Paret's book, in its turn, was an expanded and updated version of *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* edited by Edward M. Earle and issued by the same publisher in 1943. At the same time, Hanson declares that 'the contributors were encouraged to develop a topic close to their interests rather than mold material to a thematic template' (p. 4). This explains, but does not justify, some omissions. For example, if, as seems to be the case, the volume was meant to show strategy in the wider socio-political context, one would expect something more than a couple of sketchy remarks (Holland, Lee) about the hoplite phalanx, which determined a great part of the ancient history (a very strange deficiency indeed in a volume edited by Victor Hanson!). Nor there is any chapter on the much-discussed question of the driving forces of the Roman conquest during the Early and Middle Republic. Finally, although we have individual chapters on Pericles, Epaminondas, Alexander, and Caesar, of the two greatest strategy-makers of ancient world, namely Hannibal and Pyrrhus, the former doesn't appear on any of the 250 pages of this book and the latter is mentioned only once (ironically, in the context of his failure at Argos in 272).

The absence of a chapter on the hoplite phalanx is probably more than an accident. The main idea of this volume, inherited from its predecessors, is 'the

relevance of the past to the military challenges of the present' (p. 1). Hence, there is much here about revolts, banditry, street fighting, fortifications, and governance. These topics find an (imperfect as it is) analogy in the modern world with its broken balance of power, and especially in the asymmetrical tactics of the conflicts, which constitute the point of reference for all the contributors, namely the American "war" on terrorism, which has resulted in military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, in turn, the occupation of these countries. The hoplite phalanx, which was not just a way of infantry tactics, but a phenomenon that determined (and at the same time was an expression of) the ancient Greek and Italian city-state, seems too idiosyncratic of the ancient world to fit the purpose here. The result is that we do not receive an overview of ancient strategies, but a choice of topics that purports to furnish an analogy to modern warfare.

What, then, is the relevance of these 'selection of ancient strategies' we find here to modern warfare? Does the volume prove that, due to the immutability of human nature, as Hanson puts it strongly, 'the study of history, not recent understanding of technological innovation, remains the better guide to the nature of contemporary warfare' (p. 2)?² From this point of view, the volume seems to me half-successful.

For a long time, Victor Hanson has been trying to persuade modern strategists that they would profit from learning ancient history. He argues that despite the centuries that separate us from antiquity, ancient history is still the best school of military thought because '[t]he Greek and Roman writers who created the discipline of history defined it largely as the study of wars, as the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius and Livy attest' (p. 3). (Let us note, by the way, that the two last-named are completely absent from this book.) In this respect, he places himself in a long tradition which is at least as old as Casaubon's unfinished edition of Polybius and much more recently had its last *floruit* with an overflow of studies dedicated to looking for an analogy between the opposition of Athens and Sparta during the Pentekontaetia and the global bipolarity of the Cold War period. His own contribution consists of an imposing comparison between Epaminondas' Thebes and Bush's America with ancient Sparta playing tacitly the role of Hussein's Iraq (or, if one prefers, Iraq playing the role of ancient Sparta). One can disagree with this comparison and the lesson(s) the author draws from it, but this is at least a challenging construction.

However, Hanson's text stands apart from the rest. No other contributor makes the comparison between ancient and modern strategy the very core of his

² This opposition is of course rhetorical. However, if we are going to play this game, I venture to say that the American strategists would probably most benefit if the focus of their studies was *neither* technology *nor* ancient history but Islamic culture and anthropology of the Iraqi people and Pashtun tribes.

chapter. True, some are able to draw from their historical analyses conclusions that may have relevance for modern strategy: Heather's study is a good example of this. He comments interestingly upon the risk that highly civilised empires run while educating less civilised neighbours who can one day direct their newly acquired skills or knowledge against their former teachers (here tacitly America is played by the Roman Empire and modern terrorists are disguised as barbarian Germans). Other authors are less successful, and their lessons for the present look surprisingly unrewarding as compared to their penetrating historical analyses. This is the case of Barry Strauss' contribution. He concludes his careful analysis of Roman slave revolts as follows: 'Insurgents can crash onto the scene as loudly as Spartacus and his rebel gladiators did. They can rally religious support and terrorize local population. They can draw other discontented people into their ranks at first. They can even come out of the hills and try to establish their authority over a city or a province. Once the state responds in all its armed might, however, the rebels are usually doomed' (p. 201). One wonders if we really needed a minute study of three slave revolts to reach this conclusion.

Sometimes unrewarding lessons come down to simple, though impressive, analogies: In Holland's essay, the seizure of Babylon by Cyrus in 532 is set together with capture of Baghdad by Americans in 2003 (p. 11) and the burning of Sardis during the Ionian Revolt by 'terrorist Athens' plays the role of the attack on the WTC (p. 23). Berkey compares the destruction of the Athenian Long Walls in 404 to the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989 (p. 68) and the debate about commemorating the Persian Wars in Athens with the controversy about the shape of the "Ground Zero" zone after 11 September (p. 61). These 'pictures' convey to different and remote historical situations an appearance of similarity, but they are heuristically useless. Sometimes the contributors themselves denounce it. Berkey for example writes about his first analogy: 'Although the Athenian walls were designed to keep enemies out and not citizens in [as the Berlin Wall was – AW]' (p. 68). If this is true, where does the analogy lie?

The question is always the same: the contributors draw lessons from analogies, but what are the conditions for an analogy to be legitimate? Goldsworthy's study furnishes a good exemplification of the problem. He compares Julius Caesar's politics in Gaul with United States' politics in Iraq and Afghanistan. He is conscious that the context was different: 'Caesar was not attempting to create a viable democracy and then withdraw. He was engaged in permanent conquest and could be considerably more ruthless in his behavior. The Roman did not have to worry about world opinion' (p. 215). However, at the same time he declares that the situations have much in common: what makes them comparable is a need to create a stable political order through diplomacy directed towards the local chieftains. The lesson is that 'it is too simplistic to think of purely pro-

or anti-Roman factions or leaders within each tribe, in the same way that it is mistaken to speak of a simple divide between pro-and anti-Western groups in modern conflicts' (*ibidem*). Goldsworthy may be right, but before we accept his conclusion, we must take into account what he leaves out, namely the difference in the Roman position and goals in Gaul and the American position and goals in the Near East. The Gauls and Germans *knew* that the Romans were going to stay in their country and they *knew nothing* about 'public opinion'. On the other hand, the "chieftains" in Iraq and Afghanistan *know* that one day American army is to go away and that behind that army there is public opinion, which has the last word in waging war. Hence, the similarity of conduct, if there really was, might be accidental or result from different premises.

It seems that some of the contributors share my doubts. Susan Mattern, for one, frankly confesses that '[f]undamental economic, technological [...], demographic, and social differences between the modern and premodern worlds make this lesson-seeking a very challenging activity, and not everyone agrees that the analogy is appropriate or the scholarly endeavor justified' (p. 179). Two authors (Kagan, Worthington) tacitly refused to play this game, confining themselves to describing ancient strategy without drawing any (too) far-reaching comparison between ancient and modern times.

In conclusion, this volume consists of ten for the most part very stimulating studies, which should be recommended to anyone interested in ancient strategy making. But I am not convinced there is much profit to be drawn from its reading by modern strategists. This does not mean I am advising them against its reading – after all, when Alexander of Macedon began his long march through Asia he had the *Iliad* in his luggage. However, I do not think he brought it to learn how to fight.

The editorial work is generally well done, though there are some errors one would not expect in a book by Princeton University Press. On p. 57 notes 27 to 30 strangely refer to the work of Pericles (sic) instead of Thucydides: 'Pericles 1.143.4' stands for 'Thucydides 1.143.4' and so on. On p. 204 n. 6 we read: 'Thucydides *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* 17.4'. Finally, I wonder if 'for the first time in Attic history' on p. 22 is not a mistake for 'for the first time in ancient [or even: world? – AW] history'. Checking at random, I found only a few minor omissions in the otherwise exhaustive index.

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