

BOOK REVIEW

War and Society in Early Rome: From Warlords to Generals. By JEREMY ARMSTRONG. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv + 317. Hardcover, £64.99. ISBN 978-1-107-09357-7.

Armstrong's new book on warfare in early Rome (c. 570–338 BCE) presents us with a much appreciated opportunity to revisit discussions on the significant impact of warfare on (early) Roman society. In six chronological chapters, Armstrong presents his thesis: Roman society from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE transformed from a coalition of warlords into a civic society with an army fighting for common goals. He rejects old hellenocentric models (esp. 10–11), instead relying heavily on van Wees highly revisionist 2004 book (*Greek Warfare: Myth and Realities*). A metanarrative approach is suggested (16), focusing on the big themes (17: a new paradigm).

Chapter 1 focuses on the evidence. A section on the methodology for the literary evidence (36–39) sets out the principles for his approach: the amount of reliable information cannot exceed what can have been reliably transmitted from the past. The documentary evidence, viz. lists of magistrates, wars, treaties etc. of each year seems to have been transmitted relatively intact. The more narrative aspects of Rome down to the 4th century probably originated in oral traditions and certain core aspects may have been maintained (cf. Cornell 1995, *The Beginnings of Rome*). This seems a sensible approach. The chapter ends with a brief overview of the archaeological evidence.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the 8th to the 6th centuries. Armstrong argues for the emergence of a regional aristocracy of “proto-patricians”, mobile with an extra-urban identity, and dominating the region’s warfare and of a “settled, community-based population of the lower socio-economic classes” of “proto-plebeians” (54). The *rex* was typically a powerful member of the gentilicial elite, supported by his clan etc. (59). Armstrong unsurprisingly concludes that the role of the *rex* was largely confined to warfare, religion and justice (62). Warfare during the period was dominated by the regions clans (69–72), even if there were community-based regulations.

Chapter 3 on Rome's regal army focuses on the Servian reforms, emphasizing a shift— or rather operating side by side—from the curial organization associated with the proto-urban/plebeian population, to the centuriate assembly, a new administrative structure designed to include and give power to the *gentes* who were increasingly settling in and around the city (82–86). Armstrong suggests that the 'Servian' centuriate system was only instituted after the establishment of the Republic (84–85), in what seems an arbitrary piece of rewriting. The period also sees a continued presence of independent, warlike clans, led by so called *condottieri* (86–93). Armstrong rejects the traditional model of the Roman hoplite phalanx (111–126). He concludes that warfare in this period— continuing low-level raiding—remained largely the preserve of the region's clans led by mobile aristocrats, not the communities.

Chapter 4 focuses on the fall of the Roman *rex* and the rise of Rome's aristocratic Republic. The war duties of the *rex* are shared out among *praetores et al.* At the same time there is a continuing power of the archaic warband (136–146: mobile clan warlords: Porsenna, Tarquin in exile, Coriolanus, Attus Clausus, Herdonius etc.). Raiding for plunder is still the principal motive for war, but there is a shift to land rather than portable wealth. We also see the emergence of a landed aristocracy (157–163), with evidence for individual clan leaders defending parcels of land (Tarquins, Attus Clausus, Cincinnatus, Fabii), as well as the emergence of community-based military forces (163–171), with the plebs gradually coming to have some involvement in warfare (166–167 on *imperium*; 170–171 on *ager publicus*). In the early 5th century BCE the existing urban political structure began to realign itself in opposition to Rome's new gentilicial regime.

Chapter 5 concentrates on state formation and the incorporation of the plebs (185–211). The period sees the first steps in integrating the gentilicial and urban communities: the Twelve Tables, standardizing social/economic relations between the two groups, the Valerio-Horatian laws, and the institutions of the military tribunes, consular tribunes, and the censorship. The period also sees a continuation of the warband ethos (210–211). Armstrong accepts that a primitive system of state payment for military service introduced in late 5th century. This is the beginning of the state taking over patronage of military service. There is a shift in this period away from raiding to conquest of territory and strategic dominance over the region.

Chapter 6 focuses on the Gallic sack—with only slight destruction— and its aftermath. There was now consular tribunate in every year, bringing to an end the archaic state. There is further integration of patricians and plebs, with a gradual rise of patrician/plebeian aristocracy. There was willingness after the *Tumultus Gallicus* to commit resources to common defence (257–260: the Servian Walls). The expansion of the citizen body, all increasing Rome’s military might, resulted in an end of the archaic warband and the small independent central Italian community. The result is the new Roman citizenship, dependent on indicated political affiliation (255–256). The period sees an increasing state control of warfare.

Armstrong is to be recommended for this stimulating and provocative book, even if, at least to this reviewer, it was felt at times that he was pushing some of his interpretative lines too far beyond the ancient evidence. He presents what, at times, are highly conjectural reconstructions of the development of the Roman state and society. Gentilicial theories are fashionable, and the notion that warlords were an important feature of archaic Roman society has now become accepted consensus, but Armstrong pushes it all to the point where a unified Roman state and society does not emerge till the 5th/4th century BCE. Despite these objections, this book is undoubtedly bound to stimulate much further.

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