

BOOK REVIEW

Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society. By J. H. CLARK and B. TURNER, eds. Leiden, NL.: Brill Publishing, 2018. Pp. 382. Hardback, \$172.00. ISBN 978-90-04-29858-3.

How do societies deal with defeat? That, in short, is the focus of this volume. First is an introduction by Turner and Clark explaining the approach, informed by the view that defeat is complicated and should be seen as an “intense” negotiation between winner and loser, leaders and led. The overarching purpose of all contributors is both to show how defeat as an analytical category can illuminate the ancient societies concerned, and to pave the way for further exploration of a potentially profitable topic. This is followed by three sections on the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome and concludes with an Epilogue by Rosenstein.

The contributions on the Ancient Near East are among the volume's strengths. Melville's discussion of Assyrian ideology and defeat identifies the Assyrian tendency to ascribe both victory and defeat to the gods as a double-edged sword. Rop examines the assassination of Persian general Tissaphernes to challenge misconceptions peddled since antiquity concerning the arbitrary and punitive vengefulness of Persian rulers. As Rop suggests, it was the Greeks who executed generals and this is an excellent contribution which speaks to key issues in the wider (mis)representation of Persian kingship. Hyland, in turn, offers a useful chapter on the impact of logistics and infrastructure on non-elite soldiers in the aftermath of Persian defeats.

The Classical Greek and Hellenistic section is also of high quality and clarity, and it shows that “thinking with defeat” can indeed shed light on seemingly well-worn topics. In his analysis of Thucydides' presentation of Athenian defeats Foster argues that Thucydides' candor in attributing defeat to enemy superiority or insurmountable obstacles as opposed to supernatural intervention and the cowardice of one's own forces was in stark contrast to other cultural representations of defeat. Goldman in turn discusses Demosthenes' funeral oration for the dead of Chaeronea and how it was used to help Athenians come to terms with defeat,

manage perceptions of his own role and present the defeat as a “species of victory.” In keeping with the volume’s success in engaging with “big” topics, Trundle examines perhaps the most iconic defeats of all—those of Sparta—and contends that Sparta’s creation of an ideology of victory or death initially resulted in its hegemony but became a self-destructive precedent. To conclude this section Johstono traces the impact of defeat at the battle of Panium on the Ptolemaic Macedonian phalanx-class and argues that, along with onerous conscription and a constant struggle with an Egyptian insurgency, Panium accelerated the demise of this Greek settler-soldier community.

The quality and clarity of the contributions to the larger Roman section is more variable. Clark considers how Romans represented the defeats of the mid-republican period, with a specific focus on Spain, and reveals how in the aftermath of defeat historians sought solace in the heroic roles played by youthful Romans, and that the Roman elite could exaggerate the scale of failure for their own ends. Richlin’s chapter centers on the experience of defeat, and explores comedy—often performed by slaves and before those enslaved in war. In one of the stronger contributions Östenberg turns to nature as a Roman explanation for defeat. The Varian disaster along with Samnite and Punic War case studies clearly demonstrate how Roman sources saw nature, combined with a treacherous enemy and complacent leadership, led to defeat.

In two good contributions, which are nevertheless somewhat underwhelming in their conclusions, Turner and Ward both appear to attest to the difficulty of identifying cultural or political patterns in imperial military history. Turner looks at reaction to defeat in the Julio-Claudia era and concludes that there is no clear pattern apart from the fact that emperors were ultimately responsible. Ward considers the impact of defeat on professional Roman legions and explains that there was no standard practice for how emperors dealt with defeated or disloyal legions.

Dimitriev discusses how later rhetorical tradition responded to the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea and explains that historicity was, by Roman times, less important than having at one’s disposal a range of rhetorical tools with which to discuss defeat. Caldwell III effectively addresses the defeat of Valerian and reveals differing narratives; some sought to rehabilitate Valerian, while Christians and Constantine attempted to cast his capture as God’s will. The ambiguity about what happened to him and that he never returned added to the “malleability” of his story for centuries to come.

Rosenstein's conclusion, entitled "Looking Ahead," summarizes the volume and identifies the key themes which unite it: responsibility or defeat, impact on those directly involved and literary representation of defeats. He ably recaps how the contributions illustrate these three themes, providing an overarching coherence which would otherwise have been lacking. Rosenstein also poses questions of future research, from generals who *were* punished for defeat to the effects of defeat on the rank and file, and examples of how failure in fact caused political upheaval and change.

The volume does fulfil its main objective, which is to demonstrate the value of "thinking with defeat" and to promote deeper examination. Crucially, the volume also leaves the reader with a better understanding of how ancient societies reacted to defeat. The contributions are generally stimulating and the volume as a whole is well-conceived and executed. Several contributions will be of interest to a wider readership, and this is in no small part to their success in engaging with some well-worn topics and somehow succeeding to say something new about them.

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