BOOK REVIEW


In 2005, a conference on “Greek Taktika: Ancient Military Writing and Its Heritage” was held at the University of Toruń. The conference proceedings to be reviewed here have been available since November 2018 directly from the publisher (https://frug.ug.edu.pl). The delay has led to one paper already being published elsewhere (154-166 is the same as S. Sprawski, “Alexander at Tempe”, in: S. G. Gouloulis and S. T. Sdrolia (eds.), Hagios Demetrios Stomion, Larisa 2010, 433-444), while other papers appear to have been updated to ca. 2010 (one paper refers to a publication of 1994 as published “some sixteen years ago,” 116). There is, however, reason to be grateful for the effort made by the editors to allow readers access to the conference proceedings now.

As Philip Rance states in his very valuable introduction, the volume concentrates “on ancient Greek works relating to tactics and generalship (taktika, stratégika), broadly construed, in contrast to those concerned mainly or exclusively with siegcraft (paliorkēтика) or artillery (belopoika), which merit separate discussion elsewhere” (12). Rance sets out the major research questions, including those of genre, and of philological, historical and literary scholarship, and also surveys the contributions thus making sense of their (otherwise unexplained) order (48-53). The first section thus identified includes papers dealing with the origins of Greek military writings in the 5th and 4th centuries BC: Burkhard Meißner suggests that “Aeneas’ writings did not evolve ex nihilo, but in response to well-established practices of – sophistic – teaching” (78), while Hans Michael Schellenberg examines the validity of employing Aeneas’ writings as sources for ancient history, and Bogdan Burliga studies the extent to which Aeneas understood and illustrated “tactics” in his surviving work. A second section, comprising four chapters, concerns the Hellenistic traditions of tactical handbooks: Alexander Nefedkin examines how Asclepiodotus, Aelian and Arrian
classified different types of cavalry, Nicholas Sekunda updates his previously published work on cavalry organization and Burliga, in a second contribution, argues that some texts show that “pushing tactics were sometimes employed by phalanxes” armed with the sarissa (129). Finally, Schellenberg in his second paper, recommends studying later Arabic translations of Aelianus Tacticus. A third section deals with Polyaeunus. Jacek Rzepka analyses the author’s conception of the Hellenistic monarchy and Slawomir Sprawski argues that Polyaeunus conflated two different Alexanders (II and III) in describing the king’s route over Mt. Ossa to Tempe. In the fourth section, Pierre O. Juhel and Radoslaw A. Gawroński consider how tactical writings can contribute to a better understanding of our evidence about military insignia and equipment. In the penultimate section Wojciech Brillowski states that in these writings rhetorical choices sometimes take precedence over strict accuracy, and Philip Rance shows how Maurice’s Strategikon goes back to Greek military writings. The sixth and last section studies the use of the classical texts in the 16th and 17th centuries: Keith Roberts explores how Maurice of Nassau developed a dominant military system by combining ancient and contemporary examples of war and Richard Brzezinski looks at classical inheritances in Polish culture from the 15th through 18th centuries.

Recent scholarship has seen more work on what the volume calls “ancient military writing” including in 2017 and 2018 fresh bilingual editions of Aeneas Tacticus, Polyaeunus and Onasander, as well as the Taktika by Aelianus, Arrianus and Asclepiodotus and, inter alia, the publication of Brill’s Companion to Aeneas Tacticus edited by Maria Pretzler and Nick Barley (Leiden, 2017, still referred to as ‘forthcoming’ in the present volume). Rance’s and Sekunda’s volume is to be welcomed both as a collection of papers on individual aspects and as a reminder of fields for further study of taktika and stratégika (and ideally poliorkêtika and belopoûka as well), not as an end in itself but as a way towards a better understanding of the societies of the ancient Mediterranean world, the writings they produced and their heritage.

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