

NOTICES

GERSBACH (J.) *The War Cry in the Graeco-Roman World*. Pp. vi + 161. London and New York: Routledge, 2023. Cased, £120, US\$160. ISBN: 978-1-032-24858-5.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23002111

G. has identified an interesting area for examination: the many different ways in which soldiers and their leaders prepare for battle and the effect – intended and unintended – on the enemy (or the enemy’s effect on them). He includes many examples of the planned and the unexpected.

However, readers who expect a discussion of the title’s ‘war cry’, beginning, perhaps, with an analysis of the *Iliad*, will discover that G. declares the term inadequate and invents one of his own. Readers will have to decide on the felicity of G.’s suggested replacement, ‘battle expression’. Justifying this term is one of the recurrent themes of the book. G. points out that ‘war cry’ varies according to circumstances and cultures and is only one part of the clash of armies, while the term ‘battle expression’ includes speeches, taunts, victory songs, dance, clapping, stamping, raising arms, clashing weapons, in short, all the actions, verbal and non-verbal, between the decision to engage in battle and the meeting of the battle lines. As further proof of the case against ‘war cry’, G. cites (oddly) the many different English translations of the Greek *alalazein* and its derivatives.

After Chapter 1 (an explanation of the issue) the book proceeds in an orderly fashion through an analysis of the sources (2); the ‘atmosphere’ of the battlefield (3); two chapters (4 and 5) on the motives behind the expression (group cohesion and enemy intimidation), followed by a discussion of religion and battle (6), identity (7), oaths (8) and a conclusion (9).

While G. has presented an interesting subject, there are many flaws, not least of which is the basic concept that Romans and Greeks are one entity, a dubious proposition especially as applied to the way in which they waged war. Moreover, the title’s term, ‘Graeco-Roman World’, would seem to include all the societies and cultures therein – Celts, Germans, Numidians, Persians, Parthians et al. –, but to G. the cultures that are not Greek or Roman are ‘other’. In his analysis of the sources – in translation – he greatly underestimates the number of Greek men in the audience who would have experienced battle. His tendency to stretch the meaning of his term leads to some odd statements, such as, ‘Macedonian armies professed their admiration and loyalty to Philip II through their incorporation of the sarissa into their battlefield customs’ – as though they had chosen this weapon (p. 23). In Chapter 3, ‘Battlefield Atmosphere’, and throughout, G. makes a ludicrous comparison of ancient battle to a football match. Football players are not engaged to kill or be killed. G. uncritically accepts the ancient sources, as Plutarch’s statement about the Ambrones – ‘The noise . . . would have included the ground shaking due to the leaping of hundreds of thousands of men’ (p. 30). And he tends to lump sources together, regardless of how far apart they are in time or space. In Chapter 4, ‘Group Cohesion’, he accepts Herodotus’ rendering (7.9B.1) of Mardonius’ account of Greek warfare as fact (p. 39): ‘Greek phalanx warfare was by an agreement whereby opposing Greek military forces would arrange to meet face-to-face on a given day’. In a lengthy treatment (pp. 101–6) he discusses the role of the songs of the Spartan Tyrtæus before and after a campaign, but he omits the *Castoria*, the song sung by the Spartan king to initiate the Spartan advance. In Chapter 8, ‘Battlefield Oaths’, he cites the oath of Plataea (questionable) and the oath

of the sworn bands (obscure), but not the well-established oath that the 300 men of the bodyguard swore to the Spartan king.

While this book presents an interesting topic, it has critical flaws.

University of Oklahoma

ALFRED S. BRADFORD
abradford@ou.edu

RATHBONE (Y.), RATHBONE (D. W.) *Literary Sources for Roman Britain*. Fifth edition. (LACTOR Sourcebooks in Ancient History 11.) Pp. 93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, on behalf of The London Association of Classical Teachers, 2023 (first edition 1977). Paper, £12.99, US\$16.99. ISBN: 978-1-009-38321-9.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23002548

The interaction of Britain with Rome has long been a source of fascination, be it in terms of archaeological finds (especially since the introduction of the metal detector), inscriptions (cf. LACTOR 4) or literary sources (cf. S. Ireland, *Roman Britain: a Sourcebook* [third ed. 2008]). The current volume, the fifth edition of a work that first appeared in 1977, but identical with the fourth edition except for a change of publisher (from the London Association of Classical Teachers, 2012), continues the radical revision that marked that edition's distinction from the first three produced. Rather than arranging texts simply by date of composition, as had earlier been the case, requiring readers to produce a connected narrative of their own, it groups texts according to the historical events being described. So, for instance, the section on the description of Caesar's invasions draws not only on material from the mid first century BCE but also from writers like Cassius Dio (early third century CE). Further facilitating its use is the structuring of historical periods into 26 separate sections, each represented by a letter of the alphabet (e.g. Caesar [A], Augustus [B], ... *Notitia Dignitatum* [Z]); each section often allows further subdivisions depending on changes of source or narrative development. In the case of longer texts such as Caesar's narrative of his invasions these subdivisions are often prefaced by useful introductory indications of content. The result is a highly user-friendly work that its intended audience (A-Level students) has long been denied by the volume's limited availability, a work that allows readers to navigate painlessly through the often broad spread of historical events. Further improvement upon earlier editions comes in the editors' fresh translations of lengthy commentaries, such as those of both Caesar and Strabo on the invasions, but a major weakness of the volume lies in the continued failure to include Tacitus' account of Agricola's campaigns in Britain on the grounds that translations are readily available elsewhere. This is indeed the case, but it involves additional expense for readers, while the overall volume of text required by its inclusion might easily be reduced by omitting the outline of earlier events, the geography and peoples of Britain (transferred into other sections), extraneous details of Agricola's career and the clearly fictitious speeches inserted to enliven the narrative. That said, however, the volume, a compilation of many hands' work, remains a highly valuable resource that marks a welcome return to availability, wide-ranging in its scope, facilitating an easy passage through events by its competent translations, and