

Victor Caston and Silke-Maria Weineck, Eds.

Our Ancient Wars: Rethinking War through the Classics. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. vi + 289 pp. \$45.00. ISBN 9780472052981 (pbk).

There is a clear continuity between ancient and modern warfare. For the last three millennia, states, in one form or another, have fought each other in pursuance of their perceived interests, and for the people caught up in these myriad conflicts, the human experience of war has remained, in essence, broadly constant. Even the experience of combat, despite the endless evolution of weapons and tactics, demonstrates obvious similarities. As the psychological data gathered by Samuel Stouffer and his team after the Second World War reveals, men are generally terrified by the experience of battle. This fear, as Stouffer's team famously demonstrated, manifested itself in a wide range of physical symptoms: modern soldiers experienced, for instance, dry mouths, pounding hearts, trembling limbs, loss of bowel and bladder control, all of which are similarly attested in a wide range of ancient evidence.¹ Naturally, this broad diachronic continuity invites a comparative approach to the study of the human experience of war. Naturally, pushing this approach too far risks re-making the ancients in our own image, yet, a sensible application of this method, which takes due account of historical and cultural differences, can be extremely fruitful.²

That, indeed, is the aim of this volume. It is the result of a conference which took place at the University of Michigan in 2012 which focused on how Western thinking about war 'turns and returns to Greek writing on the subject' (p. 2). A three part thematic structure is adopted, starting with 'Rethinking the Ancient, in View of the Modern' (pp. 17-117), which is followed by 'Rethinking the Modern, in View of the Ancient' (pp. 119-207), and finally ending with 'Other Moderns, Other Ancients' (pp. 209-74).

The first part starts with an interesting discussion by van Wees (pp. 19-37) which aims to explore Greek attitudes to community annihilation, specifically when it happened, why it happened, and in what circumstances it was

1 For the modern experience of war, see S. A. Stouffer, et al., *Studies in Social Psychology in World War Two: Volume II. The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949). For similar experiences in antiquity, see, for instance, Aristoph. *Kn.* 1055-6, *Peace* 239-41, 1179-81; Hdt. VII.231; Hom. *Il.* XIII.279-83; Plut. *Ages.* XXX.2-4, *Arat.* XXIX.5; Polyæn. *Strat.* III.4.8; Thuc. V.10.8; Xen. *Hiero* VI.3.7.

2 For this argument in full, see J. Crowley 'Beyond the Universal Soldier: Combat Trauma in Classical Antiquity', in D. Konstan and P. Meineck, eds., *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 105-30.

considered legitimate. This admirably clear aim, however, is diluted somewhat by a retrospective application of the concept of genocide. This requires the recasting of the *polis* as a national group in order for its destruction to qualify as genocide, an approach that risks a charge of anachronism for very little material gain. Certainly, van Wees succeeds in putting such atrocious acts in a longer context, but his main conclusion, that community annihilation in ancient Greece was an act of 'conspicuous destruction' that was intended 'to assert the power and status of the perpetrator in the face of a perceived challenge' (p. 21) could have been advanced without forcing ancient conduct into a modern concept. Nevertheless, despite this methodological quibble, this article offers an impressive start for what follows.

The next contribution is by Raaflaub (pp. 38-74), who offers an exploration of the impact of war on the home front. This, as he demonstrates, was felt routinely through widespread participation in military training, and more painfully, in the presence of and the care required by the direct casualties of war, particularly the wounded, the dead, and the traumatised, as well as by the often overlooked indirect casualties, that is, the widows and orphans left behind. He goes on to chart the impact of such experiences on the economic, social and political development of Athens, as well as the apparently contrary voices this development provoked, such as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which Raaflaub reads, along with many others, as a peace play.

Potter's contribution (pp. 75-95) then focuses more on historiography and compares the accounts of three famous wars, namely the Peloponnesian War, the First Punic War and the First World War. These narratives, he argues, exhibit strong commonalities that serve to constrain understanding and occlude the operation of historical contingency. Finally, the first part of the volume concludes with Monoson's portrait of the soldier-philosopher Socrates (pp. 96-117), which offers an interesting reconstruction of his military record and his place and reputation within Athenian society.

The second part of the volume, which reverses the comparative focus, starts with Sherman's continuation of the work of Shay (pp. 121-54). This demonstrated that acts which transgress an individual's core norms and values are often associated with subsequent diagnoses of combat trauma and PTSD,³ which, according to Sherman's argument, requires Aristotelian self-empathy for effective treatment. Next, Woodruff examines the interplay between war and education (pp. 153-66). Starting from the Thucydidean premise that war is a violent teacher (Thuc. III.82.2), he argues that wars can generate wisdom, and

3 J. Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).