

Mauricio G. Álvarez Rico, *El Campamento Militar Griego en Época Clásica*. Madrid: Polifemo, 2013. Pp. 221. ISBN 978-84-96813-78-6.

This book is a revised version of Álvarez Rico's (henceforth A.) doctoral dissertation presented in 2010. In this work, A. surveys the Greek practices regarding military encampment during the classical period, aiming at offering a comprehensive reconstruction of such practices and customs (page 26). The author does not specify his target readership, but the book seems especially useful for students, while perhaps a bit introductory for scholars and too detailed for the general reader.

A.'s starting point is his overall impression that scholarship has paid little attention to the subject of Greek military camps, betraying a lack of confidence in the organizational capacities of the Greeks on the part of modern scholars (23–26); the author reacts against what he thinks is a general lack of interest for Greek practices and against the idea that the Greeks had no rules whatsoever for setting up their camps, which he considers a widespread view (25). This might seem an overreaction to me: current scholarship has studied in detail the meagre information stemming from the available literary sources (Pritchett's *GSAW*, for example), and I think that this scarcity of literary and archaeological information should be taken at face value (i.e., the Greek literary sources had little interest in camps). Thus, the general conclusion that "the Greeks had no regular practices" (25), meaning nothing regular or fixed, seems to me completely justified, as long as the lack of a fixed plan does not mean complete disorder, but just a different and changing order every time. The author himself acknowledges this point in his conclusion (203–204).

The book offers no explicit definition of or justification for the scope of the study, and it is the nature of the sources that determines a focus on the classical period and more specifically on the 4th century. These sources are exclusively literary and mostly authored by the classical historians, with an exaggerated overreliance on Xenophon. A. tends to judge the relevance of the information provided by the historians according to their familiarity with the military, and as a result Xenophon becomes for him the best and most complete source, not only because of his detailed accounts of military camps, organization and ordinary life, but also because of his profile as a professional soldier and troop leader. Homeric evidence is also surveyed, but A.'s analysis of the epics seems to have no great impact on his later study of classical practices, apart from some observations on vocabulary.

The book is structured in a linear and straightforward set of chapters. The first three of them can be differentiated as a sort of "introductory" section. Chapter 1 oddly deals with the principles of "castramentation" in Spanish 19th-century military doctrine; it apparently intends to act as a theoretical setting for the book, but its introduction is not justified and it is in fact disjointed from the rest of the discussion. Chapter 2 opens with a survey of the recent literature on Greek military camps, and the problems attached to their study; engagement with scholarship is rather superficial (only to emphasize its lack of interest in the topic, allegedly as a result of Polybius' influence). The second part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of the sources, mainly Xenophon (and secondarily Thucydides and the *Iliad*). Chapter 3 is focused on the Greek vocabulary for camps, emphasizing the lack of technical or

specialised vocabulary, which the author relates to the “disorganized” nature of archaic Greek warfare (37). The study of classical vocabulary revolves around the term “*stratopedon*”, whose first uses in Greek the author connects (quite conveniently, but perhaps uncritically) with the Herodotean story about the Greek mercenary camps in Egypt in times of Psammetichus (38), and thus with the expansion of Greek mercenary service in the Eastern Mediterranean. Incidentally, his conclusions about the etymology of the word betray a misunderstanding of Chantraine (39–40) and inspire a misguided theory about the Anatolic origins of the term. There is also an interesting discussion about the use of the term “*hopla*” to designate a specific part of the camp (44–50).

The following chapters seem to reproduce the natural sequence of activities of a Greek army while setting up the camp: Chapter 4 surveys the information regarding the choice of the location for the camp and concludes that it seems to be determined by logistic, tactical, and sanitary considerations. It also studies naval camps, and temples and sanctuaries as military camps. Chapter 5 deals with the organization of the camp, suggesting that it is arranged according to the different contingents of the army and to the presence of “tent units” or “groups”, in a fairly simple and straightforward way. Specific areas, such as the tent of the commander, ritual or sacrificial spaces, or areas for assembly or booty, for animals or market, are listed by the author, but literary support is extremely poor. His final use of Xenophon’s ideal presentation of the military camp in the *Cyropaedia* as a source is a good illustration of the methodological problems of such inquiry.

Chapter 6 discusses the shape of Greek camps, either circular or square, but the evidence is indeed scanty, and Polybius’ observation that the Greeks used to follow the features of terrain still seems to stand. There is also a discussion about the different types of camps. Both questions seem to be connected, but the author discusses them separately. He identifies a “marching” camp, a “resting” camp, a “permanent” camp, a “formation” camp (with troops deployed in battle order), a siege camp (which offers a context for a long discussion on Greek sieges), and a final type of camp for fleets and landing forces. Chapter 7 studies the different ways to accommodate the troops and concludes that pitching tents or building barracks seemed to be preferable to bivouacking for Greek armies, while stationing the troops in villages and towns in their path seems to be only the last resort. A discussion ensues about the “tent bands” or *syskeniai*, allegedly improving the bonds between the members of the group, but the author does not explain how this practice can be reconciled with the idea that Greek citizens were recruited according primarily to family and local bonds.

Chapter 8 discusses the fortification of camps, and suggests that only permanent camps (and mainly during sieges) seemed to be fortified, relying commonly on the features of terrain and in some cases using simple defences like palisades or refurbishing previous walls or constructions. Chapter 9 deals with intelligence and security, pointing out that guards were posted only when regarded as necessary and not on a regular basis. There follows a description of the different kinds of guards (in the perimeter of the camp or in advanced posts to watch over the enemy), the night and day watches, the (fairly primitive) use of passwords, explorers and informants,

and the different ways to send information between armies or troops through light or sound signals (among others). Chapter 10, finally, reconstructs the daily life in a Greek camp according to Xenophon's accounts, from meals to assemblies, describing also the different activities of the army, such as foraging, training, or cooking.

The main thesis of the book claims that Greek practices regarding encampment were fairly developed and sophisticated, according to the sophistication of Greek warfare, and there is a general effort to "vindicate" Greek practices against their common reputation as careless or un-professional. In this respect, there is a permanent contrast (sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously) between Greek practices and the "perfect castramentation" of the Romans (33, 68–69, 98), betraying an idealised view of Roman camps: even the brief chapter of "Conclusions" finishes with a final comparison with republican Rome. This creates an illusory aspiration of professionalism: for example, the author recognizes that in Greek culture there is no "theoretical or systematic" exposition of the conditions required to establish a camp (51, 74), but claims that a "general knowledge" of the main rules "had to be" available to Greek commanders (51, 74). This general approach is predicated upon two assumptions: first, that military practices were homogenous among the Greek cities, regardless of the different periods or armies (26) and despite the fact that A. uses partial and more limited sources (mainly Xenophon's *Anabasis*) and then extrapolates that information to the rest of Greek peoples and periods; second, that Greek practices *must* be sophisticated (against their alleged reputation of inferiority compared to the Romans, 26), based on unclear reasons loosely connected to the general reputation of Greek culture. The author, however, implicitly recognizes in several instances (163, 169–70, 203–204) that Greek choices were dictated to a great extent by cultural considerations that led to simpler and more economic practices.

A. shows a tendency to fill the gaps in the information provided by the classical sources with details from military treatises, or examples and anecdotes, taken from the modern era (the Spanish "tercios", the 19th-century Spanish military treaty by Vicente Ferraz, extensively quoted but not included in the bibliography, or the 1869 Spanish military dictionary by José Almirante). The relevance of these illustrations and references could be questioned, but the author seems to use them as a source of inspiration. Finally, the book would have benefited from a more systematic analysis of the different types of camps according to the different military contexts and activities: distinguishing a siege camp from a resting camp is relevant for the examination of the distribution of forces, housing of troops, fortification works, and so on, but the author prefers to integrate the different types into a single and homogenous analysis.

This book is a fine example of literary research, and offers a synthesis of Greek literary evidence on camps, covering all relevant fields rather satisfactorily. The concerns raised here about the author's approach, methodology, and engagement with scholarship do not entirely invalidate the considerable effort devoted to the analysis of classical literary sources.