

Joseph Roisman. *The Classical Art of Command: Eight Greek Generals Who Shaped the History of Warfare*. Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0-19-998582-1. b&w illus. 392 pages. \$35.

The Classical Art of Command is a captivating work which provides its readers with the unique opportunity to explore the nature of Ancient Greek generalship, through the analysis of eight individual, famous careers, spanning a period of around one hundred and fifty years. Included in this work, presented chronologically, are chapters on each of the following Greek generals: Leonidas, Themistocles, Pericles, Demosthenes, Lysander, Dionysius I, Epaminondas and Pelopidas. These generals were chosen for this volume not just because of their fame, but also because they were innovators, leaders within their field, and in many ways, their actions and strategies revolutionised the art of command, leaving legacies for those who followed. The careers of these generals perfectly represent the multi-faceted and complex nature of Greek warfare during the Classical Age, and of course these eight men were commanders during some of the most important and interesting battles in Greek history.

The content of this work is well-presented, with full scholarly apparatus. Each chapter has footnotes pointing the reader to further scholarship, making it an excellent resource for both students and scholars. Included are a comprehensive bibliography, with information and notes on the ancient sources themselves (pp. 349–352 and 353–374), and an index (pp. 375–392). Illustrations and maps accompany each chapter, helping the reader to visualise the locations, battle sites, and other features pertaining to Ancient Greek warfare, and the subjects of this book.

The introduction (1–23) offers an overview of how these generals will be examined, in terms of their military leadership, their individual performance, and what impact they ultimately had on Greek history. To introduce the subject, some general background information is provided (4–7), using two examples, Demosthenes and then Dionysius I, to illustrate some of the major expectations of Greek generals, and how they responded to the challenges they faced, and how these were overcome successfully, or in the case of Dionysius, how sometimes the difficulties in topography, or weather conditions, could not be overcome even with good intelligence and sure tactics. The author then devotes a section to a discussion of the responsibilities of these commanders, and how personality played an important role in their success in military leadership (7–9). Information is also provided on the qualifications, offices, and backgrounds common to generals during this age (9–14). Often little is known about the experience or qualifications of these eight men before they became generals, and their individual circumstances vary greatly, but the author discusses the type of office they may have held, based on their origin. Included in this introduction is a brief, interesting overview of land warfare (14–18), dealing with types of soldiers and fighting styles, as well as information on the organisation and nature of the armies of the different locations of Sparta, Athens, Boeotia, Syracuse, Persia, and Carthage (18–22). There is also a section provided on Greek navies and naval

warfare during the Classical Age (22–23). Such information is crucial for helping the reader to understand the varied nature of command during this time, how these generals might face different challenges in organising and preparing for war, and the nature of the opposing armies they faced.

Much of the previous scholarship in this field has explored these generals' careers, through examining their plans and actions. While this book discusses these important aspects, the importance of personality, an often-neglected aspect of ancient Greek generalship, is given a great deal of prominence. In this the author acknowledges how the ancient Greeks themselves believed very strongly that the character of a general was as important as his practical knowledge and craftsmanship. Thus, an understanding of these generals' personal qualities is very important in assessing their relative success in their positions of command. This view informs the individual chapters which follow on each of these men.

The greater part of *The Classical Art of Command* is devoted to a close examination of each of the careers of the eight generals. Each chapter deals with the career of a single general: Leonidas of Sparta (25–56); Themistocles of Athens (57–100); Pericles of Athens (101–143); Demosthenes of Athens (145–185); Lysander of Sparta (187–226); and Dionysius I of Syracuse (227–273). In the final chapter, the careers of Epaminondas and Pelopidas, of Thebes, are examined together, due to their military partnership, and because both are credited with jointly making Thebes the leading power in Greece (275–340). Each chapter follows a similar structure, in that it offers some background information on each general, as well as on his place of origin, often discussing the different expectations and challenges depending on whether the generals were operating with armies from Athens, Sparta, Syracuse, or Thebes. This helps to place each individual within the context of his own time and the personal challenges he faced, with some comment on whether or not these were typical or atypical of others in similar positions.

Each chapter provides the information available from a frequently limited range of ancient source material for the early careers of these generals. The author then discusses at length each of the generals' most significant battles and military achievements. Included are discussions of the battle of Thermopylae during the Persian Wars (Leonidas), as well as the battles of Artemisium and Salamis (Themistocles), the Samian Revolt (Pericles), the complex battles fought on land, and sea during the Peloponnesian Wars (the careers of both Pericles and Demosthenes), the battle of Notium and victory at Aegospotami (Lysander), the Carthaginian Wars (Dionysius), all the way down to the Theban invasions of the Peloponnese (Epaminondas and Pelopidas). Readers will enjoy the vivid descriptions of the battles, often accompanied by colourful excerpts from the ancient sources (Aeschylus' descriptions of the Greek sailors clubbing to death the Persians as though they were a catch of fish, after their defeat at Salamis, springs to mind [p. 87]). Careful source analysis is at the core of each chapter, providing a well-balanced and well-supported view of these battles, as well as background information on the conflicts themselves. Often the author is able to provide a more balanced and nuanced view of certain military conflicts, through careful

examination of multiple source traditions. Of particular interest are discussions of deception and underhand techniques, which all eight generals made use of, even though the source traditions often focus on the more heroic elements of their careers. The concluding statements which summarise each chapter offer remarks on the personality and image of the general, and their relative success, however, the author does not allow the success of these men, or their admirable qualities, to overshadow the occasions where their decisions were actually questionable or ineffective.

The author offers some final remarks to summarise the entire work (341–348), and to underline the common features between these eight commanders. These conclusions also have a brief discussion of the aspects of planning, management and tactics, such as effectively preparing a city for war, the creation of alliances, and the improvement and expansion of their forces (342–345). Also summarised are how their personal qualities played a fundamental role in the success of the Classical commander (345–348). While there are of course differing circumstances around the careers of each of these generals, many common features emerge. For the most part, these men all fought on land and by sea, all commanded both large armies and smaller units, and were required to engage in large-scale pitched battle, siege warfare, and in some case even urban combat. The most common expectation of these men appears to have been that they could rise to multiple challenges and be ‘military all-rounders’ (p. 342). In terms of personality, all were expected to be courageous, and although they all appear to have been driven and ambitious, the author has demonstrated how such qualities as ambition and desire for honour and excellence could either work for or against an individual. Persuasive skills, however, were certainly critical, to inspire loyalty and discipline in their troops, and to convince their city to accept and follow their plan of action. It seems that their personalities also informed their ability to persevere or recover from a setback, and how they might treat the conquered and defeated. The author’s conclusions that the general’s personality greatly influenced the character of his art of command (p. 348) are sound.

Overall, the material in this work is informed, well-presented, and supported by outstanding, careful research. This is an excellent contribution to this area of scholarship, and does a wonderful job of demonstrating the complexities of this type of leadership role, the planning and management of ancient warfare, and sheds new light on a number of well-known and important battles during this age. The general reader, as well as students and scholars, will find this work interesting and insightful. *The Classical Art of Command* will be a fundamental work for research into various aspects of Greek warfare and ancient Greek command during the Classical Age, as well as the lives and careers of these famous generals.

CHARLOTTE DUNN
UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO