

**Jessica H. Clark and Brian Turner, eds. *Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society*. Leiden: Brill, 2018. ISBN: 978-04-29858-3 (hardback), 978-90-04-35577-4 (e-book).**

This is the second volume in Brill's series on *Warfare in the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Not counting the introduction and epilogue, it consists of fourteen essays on military defeat in the Ancient Near East (Part 2), Classical and Hellenistic Greece (Part 3), and Republican and Imperial Rome (Part 4), and it covers nearly two millennia. In their introduction (Part 1), Turner and Clark review trends of recent scholarship, focusing primarily on studies after Rosenstein's seminal work, *Imperatores Victi*, published in 1990. Given the breadth and scope of the volume, the editors have not attempted to provide a comprehensive study of defeat. Instead, they have included contributions that can serve as case studies to demonstrate "the explanatory power of the lens of defeat" (13). By examining military failure, historians are able to identify how societies continue on after suffering losses on the battlefield and what are the stress points within a particular cultural system (17). The contributions are, as a result, eclectic, but at the same time, this approach allows the reader to draw interesting connections that might not otherwise be detected. As Rosenstein notes in his epilogue, three themes appear prominently in these case studies. They examine what are the consequences for the soldiers and civilians of the losing side, how blame for defeat is either assigned or evaded, and what is the significance of the literary representations of military failures. Battles are often remembered in ways that allow the defeated to claim victory, and sometimes this misremembering can result in additional losses.

In Chapter 2, Melville explores Assyrian ideology of defeat. Because the Assyrian kings avoided recording their own military failures, she begins by examining how they explained their conquests. Assyrian texts and iconography typically depict the defeat of the enemy as the result of divine abandonment and godnap to make it easier for the vanquished to accept Assyrian rule. This same ideology was used in turn to explain Sargon's death when on campaign against a minor Anatolian ruler. If the gods withdrew their support from him, then failure on the battlefield was not due to military ineptness, and the Assyrians needed only to appease the gods to recoup their losses. The next two chapters are on the Persian empire. Rop argues that the Persian king often reassigned a satrap who failed on the battlefield (Chapter 3). Satraps were not normally executed unless they were guilty of rebellion. Thus, the killing of Tissaphernes, who was falsely charged with treason, ought to be regarded as an assassination by his enemies. In Chapter 4, Hyland explores what happened to the Persian soldiers after they were defeated at Issus and Gaugamela. Although some soldiers returned home on their own, many regrouped because they had no other means to secure food and shelter.

For Part 3, the authors focus primarily on the political and strategic consequences of Greek views on defeat. Foster examines Thucydides' account of the battles at

Delium and on Epipolae to show how his history was intended to critique Athenian policies (Chapter 5). In contrast to his Athenian readers who believed that these losses were the result of bad luck, cowardice, or divine will, Thucydides suggests that they were caused by human mistakes and miscalculations that are often made in the thick of battle. Because the Athenians did not understand the real reasons for their military failures, they were unable to properly assess the political and military policies of their leaders, who were increasingly encouraging them to take greater risks as the war dragged on. Similarly, Trundle argues that the Spartans failed to prepare properly for naval warfare because they assumed defeat was the result of cowardice, not military skill or training (Chapter 7). The heroic stand at Thermopylae loomed so large in the Spartan imaginary that their soldiers either had to fight until the bitter end, even when defeat was inevitable, or retreat and be ridiculed for cowardice. The losses at Leuctra, Megalopolis, and Sellasia were thus more costly than they needed to be. This image of a noble defeat also captivated the Athenians. As Goldman explains, Ctesiphon was acquitted of the charges that Aeschines lodged against him because the jury found Demosthenes' explanation for the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea more appealing than Aeschines'. If the Athenians had convicted Ctesiphon, they would have had to accept a less flattering portrayal of themselves (Chapter 6). In the case of Ptolemaic Egypt, defeat caused military policies to change in spite of ideology. Johnston suggests that the losses at Panium forced the Ptolemies to turn more to the Egyptian population to fill their armies. Because the Macedonian phalanx no longer dominated the infantry, the Ptolemies had difficulty buffering the political influence of the Macedonian aristocracy (Chapter 8).

Part 4 on Rome takes up half of the volume with seven contributions. It is also more varied. Clark, Östenberg, Dmitriev, and Caldwell focus on historical accounts and literary representations of defeat. Clark uses Livy's narrative of Roman campaigns in Spain during and after the Second Punic War to show the reasons why a loss may sometimes be downplayed or exaggerated in the sources (Chapter 9). Östenberg describes how the Romans blamed the uncivilized landscape and harsh climate for their setbacks as they attempted to expand their empire. By refusing to change their ways in spite of the savagery of the enemy and the wildness of the territory in which they fought, the Romans triumphed in the face of defeat (Chapter 11). Dmitriev and Caldwell consider the literary reception of military failure. Dmitriev explores how Greek intellectuals used the encounter between Demades and Phillip after the battle of Chaeronea to justify their own social status under Roman rule (Chapter 14). Caldwell discusses how the capture of Valerian is remembered differently in Persian, pagan, and Christian accounts of Late Antiquity (Chapter 15). Richlin, Turner, and Ward examine the political and sociological significance and psychological ramifications of defeat. Richlin shows how Plautus provides the soldiers, slaves, and civilians captured in war a medium to express how war had affected them (Chapter 10). Turner considers how the Julio-Claudian emperors responded to losses on the battlefield (Chapter 12). As the commander-in-chief, the

emperor was ultimately responsible for the failures of his army. Therefore, he needed to show his resilience after military setbacks. Sometimes the emperor downplayed a defeat. At other times, he avoided engaging in battles. And when his armies suffered a defeat, the emperor often attempted to recoup the losses. In Chapter 13, Ward examines the reasons why an emperor might change a legion's designation or title. Although there was no standard practice when a legion suffered a terrible defeat, legions that revolted were often disbanded or deprived of their designations.

Clark and Turner are to be commended for bringing together such diverse and insightful case studies on military defeat in the ancient Mediterranean world. The contributions are for the most part quite original and thought-provoking, but defeat is a vast topic. It is not always easy for the reader to see what connects the essays other than that they examine war from the vantage point of the defeated. This is not in itself a problem, but a narrower topic would made it easier to draw connections between studies of different geographical regions and historical periods.

ANDREW WOLPERT  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
wolpert@ufl.edu

## Table of Contents

### Part 1: Introduction

1. Thinking about Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society  
Brian Turner and Jessica H. Clark

### Part 2: The Ancient Near East

2. Ideology, Politics, and Assyrian Understanding of Defeat  
Sarah C. Melville
3. The Assassination of Tissaphernes: Royal Responses to Military Defeat in the Achaemenid Empire  
Jeffrey Rop
4. Achaemenid Soldiers, Alexander's Conquest, and the Experience of Defeat  
John O. Hyland

### Part 3: Classical Greece and the Hellenistic World

5. Military Defeat in Fifth-Century Athens: Thucydides and His Audience  
Edith Foster
6. Demosthenes, Chaeronea, and the Rhetoric of Defeat  
Max L. Goldman
7. Spartan Responses to Defeat: From a Mythical Hysiae to a Very Real Sellasia  
Mathew Trundle

8. "No Strength to Stand": Defeat at Panium, the Macedonian Class, and Ptolemaic Decline  
Paul Johstono

**Part 4: The Roman World**

9. Defeat and the Roman Republic: Stories from Spain  
Jessica H. Clark
10. The Ones Who Paid the Butcher's Bill: Soldiers and War Captives in Roman Comedy  
Amy Richlin
11. Defeated by the Forest, the Pass, the Wind: Nature as an Enemy of Rome  
Ida Östenberg
12. Imperial Reactions to Military Failures in the Julio-Claudian Era  
Brian Turner
13. "By Any Other Name": Disgrace, Defeat, and the Loss of Legionary History  
Graeme A. Ward
14. Recycling the Classical Past: Rhetorical Responses from the Roman Period to a Military Loss in Classical Greece  
Sviatoslav Dmitriev
15. The Roman Emperor as Persian Prisoner of War: Remembering Shapur's Capture of Valerian  
Craig H. Caldwell III

**Part 5: Epilogue**

- Looking Ahead  
Nathan Rosenstein