

**Lukasz Różycki, *Battlefield Emotions in Late Antiquity: A Study of Fear and Motivation in Roman Military Treatises*. Leiden: Brill, 2021. Pp. viii, 334. US \$174. ISBN: 9789004462410.**

One of the most important kind of sources for our understanding of warfare in the ancient Mediterranean world is the military manual (or treatise or handbook).<sup>1</sup> Late antiquity is particularly well served, for we are blessed with at least two important texts, Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, written at the end of the fourth or the first half of the fifth century (CE), and Maurice's *Strategikon*, published between 590 and 600 CE. Then there are the smaller manuals, like Urbicius' *Epitedeuma* (sixth century CE) and the anonymous *De Re Militari* (fourth century CE), as well as Syrianus Magister's *De Re Strategica*, which may or may not date to the sixth century CE. Vegetius has received most of the attention, with scholarship ranging between the dates of his work and his later reception in the late medieval and early modern worlds. Maurice's *Strategikon*, widely seen as the most reliable manual when it comes to the warfare it describes, has been relatively well served.<sup>2</sup> Różycki's book offers a novel approach to the ancient military manual, in part through his emphasis on their value as sources for questions beyond tactics and textual issues, in part for his use of comparative evidence from the middle Byzantine period, like the *Sylloge Tacticorum* and the *De Velitatione Bellica*. Though its emphasis is on the late antique world, and the sixth century CE especially, it deserves to be read by all those interested in pre-modern warfare, including those with interests in earlier (Classical) and later (Byzantine) periods in Mediterranean history.

The book has five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter one, the shortest in the book, explores concepts of war and violence in Roman military treatises. Here, Różycki ranges widely between training for war, the avoidance of pitched battle, the value of hunting, and the role of the commander. In the next chapter, two, Różycki shifts to fear and its manifold forms in combat. He discusses fear as a psychological factor in combat, and more particularly fear of the enemy and the unknown, fear of combat itself, fear of the conditions, and even fear of equipment. Indeed, as Różycki notes, fear was one of the principal stressors in combat, and, by his reckoning, one of the chief functions of ancient Mediterranean militaries outside of wartime was preparing soldiers to overcome that fear, one way or another. To that end, courage, its opposite, played an important role in late antique combat, which was also the case with the theoretical literature from the middle Byzantine period.

Where chapter two focused on the causes of much of the fear soldiers might experience on the field of battle, chapter three shifts to using fear to one's advantage.

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<sup>1</sup> A small note: I use "military manual" instead of "military treatise" not because of any disagreement with Różycki about his preferred choice; rather, through force of habit, for I think they are largely interchangeable in this study.

<sup>2</sup> And we, this reviewer especially, are eagerly awaiting the publication of Philip Rance's two-volume translation and commentary of Maurice's *Strategikon*.

Some ways that commanders could improve the morale of their men at the expense of the enemy was by showing to the enemy how they treated prisoners of war, and by effectively using scouts to learn what their foes were up to. The sounds of combat, like war cries (the Roman *barritus/barditus*), or the lack thereof, were also effective. Other subjects include spies, deserters, and more. In chapter four, the commander's role is even more prominent, and Różycki argues that a big part of holding such a high-ranking position was manipulating the soldiers to suit your objectives. This could be achieved through manifold ways, such as by ensuring the soldiers' discipline, a task made easier by military law, parts of which are found in works like Vegetius and Maurice. Różycki goes beyond the law, however, and looks at other means of manipulating the men, for instance through controlling the flow of information. Różycki also discusses the place of the exhortation, and like others before him notes that the military manuals can tell us a great deal about how they worked in practice – a marked contrast with the historians (a point he does not get into). Perhaps the biggest (pleasant) surprises in this chapter are the central role played by military law throughout, and his extensive use of Theophylact Simocatta, a writer usually held in lower regard than other historians like Procopius, or even Agathias, and least when it comes to military matters.

The final chapter, five, looks at what happens after battle, and Różycki's discussion is wide-ranging. At the start, he seems to move away from psychology towards the elements of pitched battle. For example, one of the first issues he covers is the difference between the picture of battle provided by ancient histories and that provided by military manuals, with Różycki unsurprisingly arguing that the historians are usually devoid of realism in their writing, at least on this matter. But he soon shifts to other matters, like pursuit, wounds, and more, with many of the topics, like envelopment, sure to be familiar to those well-acquainted with ancient battle. The psychological side of battle returns a little later, with the chapter including an interesting treatment of, among other things, the reversal of emotions that could come in pursuit, when fear of the enemy changed to the release in tension that pursuit enabled. There are lots of interesting points throughout, like Różycki's overview of *defensores* and *cursores*, and his emphasis on the importance of the distribution of booty. Occasionally he exaggerates what we know though, like when he claims that the earlier imperial legionaries would take comfort, when wounded, in their knowledge of the care they would be provided with by the state. Overall, however, this insightful chapter rounds out an enlightening book. Ultimately, Różycki concludes that getting soldiers mentally prepared for battle was paramount, and commanders were instrumental in making this happen.

A few things stand out about this work. Although some might be reticent at Różycki's aimed employment of psychological research in his approach to the military manuals, he deploys a light touch, with that material featuring much more prominently when he is setting up the book in the introduction than later on when he gets into the core of his discussion. For Różycki, fear is central, the real determinant of how a battle is

fought, and so his book falls in line with other research that has looked beyond the tactical, though he plays down the impact of cultural factors, which have featured in other scholarship. He regularly draws attention to less familiar works, at least to this reader, though I suspect this will be no less true of others who read this book. This is particularly true of the great Polish research that he draws upon. This book also raises some interesting questions for future research, like more study of the relations between commanders and their men in late antiquity, a subject only little served.<sup>3</sup>

Różycki's book is thoroughly researched and full of insight. If there are faults (and perhaps they are not), they lie primarily with regard to where Różycki falls with respect to two central issues. First, to what degree should we let texts, even military manuals, speak for themselves? How much can we be sure that the information that these texts include has some bearing beyond the literary or intellectual sphere, as Różycki argues they do? If the ancient, late antique, and Byzantine, historians are increasingly being read more critically, with an eye towards their literary features and the wider cultural milieu that underscore them, as is the case with other comparable didactic treatises, like earlier Roman ones on agriculture, should we not employ similar caution with these?<sup>4</sup> Second, the use of comparative evidence, in this case military manuals, from the middle Byzantine world, implies that Różycki is a believer of the "universal soldier", the idea that a soldier's biology supersedes the impact of his wider social and cultural context in determining how he – it is invariably a he – experiences war. On the other hand, while this has led other scholars to argue for the applicability of PTSD research for understanding the ancient combat experience, Różycki does not believe that it should be applied to the late antique context. It is a contentious issue, and even if one accepts the universalist position, more attention could have been paid to why the specific late antique context was less important than the underlying human biology.

As I have argued, however, this is a good, insightful book, which is likely to leave its reader, much like this one, with years' worth of ideas for future research. Even the two points noted in the previous paragraph, the positivistic take on the manuals and the preference for the universalist soldier, are less complaints and more marks of abundant big, stimulating topics that he covers, and I hope that this book engenders much more research that makes military manuals the foci. In the end, this important work deserves a wide audience.

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<sup>3</sup> Note, for example the books by M. Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army in the Later Roman Empire, AD 235–395* (London: Routledge, 2017), and D. Parnell, *Justinian's Men* (London: Palgrave, 2017), two of the few examples we have (and both in the bibliography).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, C. Robb, *Technical Ekphrasis in Ancient Science and Literature: The Written Machine between Alexandria and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), which covers a wide range of different treatises, military ones included.