

Introduction

‘War is too serious a matter to be left to the military’, Lloyd George told Aristide Briant—summarizing two key elements in the equivocal attitude to war which has characterized European thinking over the last few centuries. The perception of war as ‘serious’, and the idea that there is a separate social entity known as ‘the military’ which is somehow set aside from the rest of society and different from the rest of us, and whose business is war.

To the ancient world, too, war was a serious matter. In fact, the perception of war as serious was one of the traits distinguishing (to their own eyes, at least) civilized Greeks and Romans from the uneducated barbarians. The eagerness to go to war over trifling matters was part of the ‘barbarian’ stereotype, e.g., the Celts of Polybius or the Centaurs of Greek mythology.

But while the ancients had commanders and armies, even professional commanders and professional armies, the concept of ‘the military’ is a modern one. The Athenian strategos was not a part of ‘the military’; nor were the trierarchs. The consuls of republican Rome and the legates in the provinces did not belong to a separate ‘military’. In the utopian world of Plato’s *Republic*, the ‘guardians’ form a separate caste within society; in real-life Athens or Rome, civilian and military functions were filled by the same persons. The farmer or artisan went to war as a soldier, the political leaders as military leaders. A male member of the Roman elite could in turn serve as a civilian magistrate, as *pontifex*, and as military commander. The division of society into watertight civilian, military and religious compartments was developed by St Benedict of Nursia but not fully evolved until the 18th century. As history has shown, it involved the risk that civilian society could lose control over the military establishment—or end up being dominated by it. It also, however, made it easier for the inhabitants of one

compartment to shirk their own historical responsibility and pass the blame to the others. Field commanders have reviled the politicians for their lack of nerve and failure to ‘hold the home front’, e.g., the British command during the Boer War, or the German Army after the defeat of 1918; and the politicians have, on other occasions, been equally quick to blame ‘the military’.

The idea of a separate ‘military’ sphere has also imposed itself on historical scholarship, and the academic community has shown a similar readiness to pass the responsibility for the study of war to ‘military historians’, who are seen not as colleagues practising a specific sub-discipline, with its own methods and sources (like ancient history, or agrarian history, or economic history) but representing a special culture and ethos, a field at once unattainable, unsuitable and uninteresting for those engaged in ‘proper’ historical research. The post-1968 antagonism between ‘humanists’ and the military establishment, and the rejection by modern historical scholarship of traditional political history as ‘kings and battles’ have only served to reinforce this division.

When the idea for this conference was first formulated in the autumn of 1996, it was based on a realisation that the study of war, as Lloyd George might have said, was a serious subject; far too serious to be ignored by students of ancient history, philology, archaeology, philosophy, or religion. It was felt that a conference bringing together Classical scholars, prehistorians, historians of later periods and scholars of military history and strategy might open new discussions on a subject which, however serious and unpleasant, has been of great importance through European history. At the same time, it was hoped that some traditional academic misconceptions and stereotypes about military history and historians could be eradicated.

That the organizing committee was not entirely at ease with the subject, nor themselves immune to such stereotypes, can be seen in the paper which was drawn up in the autumn of 1996 to outline the aims of the conference. 'War involves not only military history', it states, 'and decline and fall of cultures but apparently also a potential of cultural creativity. This experience seems to offer new possibilities for a positive approach to the study of war. This need not be the monopoly of those who glorify war or support violence, but may be of importance to all scholars who want to dig deeper into the history of culture'. The Peloponnesian war, Alexander's expedition against Persia and the Roman wars of conquest are cited as examples of war which have had profound cultural and social consequences.

Comparing this draft with the conference as it actually took place, two points are striking. First, none of the participants made any attempt to 'glorify war or support violence'. Second, despite its title, the conference did not primarily deal with *war*, that is to say wars as individual events, but with *warfare*, the process or method of making war. In the long-term view, preparation and preparedness for war have probably been greater forces in the transformation of society than the wars themselves.

Two textbook examples of the interrelation between the development of military tactics and society are taken from the political history of Athens. First, developments in land warfare and introduction of the heavily armed hoplite soldiers led to a dependence on middle-class soldiers which eventually led to a transfer of power from the aristocrats to the propertied middle class, that is, to democracy; later, with the increased reliance on oared warships in the grand strategy of the Athenian empire, it was the turn of the less privileged *thetes*, among which the rowers were recruited, to secure significant political concessions.

Like other Great Hypotheses of classical scholarship, the 'hoplite revolution' has to some extent been a self-confirming model, as new evidence was interpreted against the background of the established theory. The idea of a close link between hoplite warfare and the rise of the *polis*, and its logical converse, the absence of hoplite tactics and social values in the *ethne* of central and northern Greece, seemed to find support in the literary

evidence, e.g., Thucydides; but then most of the writers on fifth-century history are outspokenly Athenocentric and quick to represent their peripheral compatriots as 'backward'. In current scholarship, the idea of the introduction of hoplite tactics as a watershed in Greek history no longer finds general acceptance, and the three papers by Catherine Morgan, Hans van Wees and Vincent Gabrielsen which open this volume are each in their way concerned with re-evaluating the connection between personal wealth, political status and military service.

Although the introduction of the hoplite phalanx was decisive for the development of Greek warfare, Dr Morgan suggests that what we have is rather a 'hoplite evolution', disparate in time and space. There is much evidence to suggest that in marginal regions of, e.g., the Peloponnese, military innovation was diffused through the institution of mercenary service. Further, the archaeological distribution of graves with weapon deposits will not support a clear-cut distinction between *ethne* (primarily in Thessaly and the North) and *poleis* (in Central Greece and the islands), and the pictorial evidence from pottery, often cited as evidence of middle-class solidarity and changed attitudes to war, is also in need of critical re-evaluation.

In the traditional view of the hoplite army, the soldier's place in the line of battle was closely linked to his place in the tax census, and the development of Athenian democracy in turn linked to society's increasing military dependence on the hoplite middle-class. This idea of the hoplite phalanx as a socially homogenous unit is questioned by Hans van Wees, drawing on quantitative data to show that property classes in fact did not coincide with the categories of military service: apart from the *zeugitai*, a large number of poorer citizens from the *thetes* also served as hoplites. This leads van Wees to reject not only the traditional picture of the middle-class hoplite army, but also the connection between increased military recruitment and the extension of the franchise.

Military service, taxation and social divisions also form the starting-points of Vincent Gabrielsen's study of naval warfare, comparing classical Athens with Hellenistic Rhodes. In the early fifth century, the Athenians broke with an older tradition of privately owned warships, replacing it with a navy financed from public funds, captained by trierarchs who in theory are volun-

teers, in practice often compelled to accept this onerous *leitourgia*. Rhodes, on the other hand, remained loyal to the privateering tradition, basing its naval power on individual citizens financing and operating their own ships. The difference between the two policies is reflected in naval tactics and in the ships themselves: classical Athens preferring the formal naval battle and the specialised warship, the trireme, whereas for the Rhodians, naval action means raids, a view reflected in a preference for the light and multifunctional *triemolia*.

The Seleucid kingdom, which is at the focus of Michel Austin's contribution, was neither democratic nor aristocratic; it was essentially a military monarchy, where the rôle of the king was at once defined and legitimised by his leadership in war. The king's person was the locus of state authority, a fact reflected both in the importance and influence of doctors at the royal court, and conversely, in the lack of any Seleucid ideological policy. The diffusion of Greek culture, or indeed any uniform culture, was not high on the royal agenda. There was a circle of court intellectuals: poets, *literati*, geographers, but compared with their contemporaries in Pergamon or Alexandria, Seleucid patronage of the arts and sciences—even of military technology—was unimpressive. In the environment of the Near East, mobility and leadership were more important than poliorketics and naval power.

In any Greek state, war was a recurrent fact of life, just as warfare was a recurrent motif in the visual arts. Indeed, many artists must at least once in their lives have experienced war at first hand. Lise Hannestad explores the evidence of Greek art for contemporary warfare. Visual art has often been invoked in the study of e.g., technology and fighting techniques—but at least as important are its sociological and ideological implications. As in Greek literature and philosophy, visual art, too, is focused on the fate of the individual: on 'the face of battle' and the ultimate individual battle-experience, death. The viewpoint represented is that of the individual soldier. War as seen from the perspective of the commander—representations of massed, impersonal formations, as on the famous Chigi vase—are exceptional.

This focus on the individual enables Lise Hannestad to follow the evolution of the male rôle-model as reflected in grave reliefs. Surprisingly, as early as in late

fifth century Athens, the civilian citizen, not the warrior, is the dominant type on Athenian funerary monuments. Later, in the Hellenistic period, military representations on grave reliefs are even rarer, reflecting an evolving division of labour between the peaceful citizen of the *polis* and the mercenary soldier.

Education, being concerned with the formation of the individual, can also provide information about prevalent rôle-models in ancient society. As a case study, Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen examines the place of geometry in the academic curriculum and in practical warfare. The contrast between the philosophical Greeks and the practical Romans is a cliché which has often been over-elaborated, and in this case, at least, there is little difference between the Greek, Hellenistic or Roman periods. Geometry was taught as a core subject in the schools, and considered a prerequisite for a number of other subjects. There is no direct relation, however, between academic geometry and its practical applications on the field of battle or in military strategy. The most obvious practical application of geometry in the Roman army is for castrametation, but even here, the military application of geometry was primarily inspired by civilian town-planning.

In the Hellenistic world, citizen armies on the model of classical Athens or Sparta were by and by displaced by mercenary forces: the defence of the state was now in the hands of paid foreigners. At Rome, developments followed the same overall trend, but with significant differences. In Lawrence Keppie's paper, we see how the Roman army evolved from a conscripted citizen militia composed of landowners to a professional volunteer army in the course of the second century, and how this was followed by a change in recruitment patterns from the time of Augustus onwards. The proportion of Italians dwindled, and provincials moved in to take their places, attracted by the opportunities of social advancement offered by army service. By the second century AD, Rome and Italy were defended by armies of non-Italians, but loyal to the Roman Empire from which they were recruited.

This loyalty was ensured in a variety of ways, often grouped under the generic label of 'Romanisation'. Veterans were a powerful factor in creation of loyalties and links between Rome and the provinces. In return for

their service to the state, veterans received not only a cash donation on discharge, but immunity from various local taxes and liturgies. This immunity was ostensibly a gift from the Emperor, but in practice at the expense of other, less fortunate fellow-citizens. As Stefan Link's study of veterans and the *munus publicum* demonstrates, the early emperors were clearly aware of this and took pains to keep the number and the extent of exemptions at a reasonable level. Veterans, on the other hand, would like *all* veterans to be exempt from *all* liturgies, an idea that seems to gain some acceptance in the later second century. Even then, however, Imperial rescripts set clear limits to the number and duration of exemptions, and expressly stipulate that veterans' families are not included.

To Edward Gibbon, the early Empire, especially the second century, was a 'golden age'. As Niels Hannestad demonstrates in his detailed examination of Roman state art, however, the emperors did not always share this complacent view of their times. A comparison of Trajan's column with that of Marcus Aurelius shows an increasing preoccupation with the grim horrors of war, and with the inhuman brutality of enemy as well as Roman forces. There are few attempts to disguise the campaign of Marcus as a 'gentleman's war'. Whatever the civilians living far from the frontiers of the Empire may have thought, the emperors clearly appreciated the growing pressure on the borders and the precariousness of the Roman military superiority over the barbarians. By the third century, their civilian subjects, too, had realized this; and the ideal portrait of an emperor had changed from the bearded philosopher of earlier times to a coarse and aggressive physiognomy suggesting brutal efficiency.

Military and social developments in the Mediterranean world dominate our view of the period *c.* 600 BC – AD 500, but this is largely due to the nature of our sources. Decisive military innovations, more difficult to follow but no less important for the history of Europe, took place on the northern fringes of the Greek and Roman world. In Klavs Randsborg's paper, taking the boat-fund at Hjortspring in southern Denmark as the starting-point, the development of Northern European infantry fighting is traced—a parallel, in social as well as in tactical terms, to the introduction of hoplite tactics in the classical world. Randsborg argues that in the North as in

Greece, the transition to fighting with lance and shield in close formation is closely correlated with a decline in aristocratic norms and the rise of new, more complex forms of social organization.

In the final chapter of this volume, K.G.H. Hillingsø reviews the development of European warfare. As he points out, the evolution of land tactics is not a unidirectional process, and change of doctrine is not a logical development towards still higher combat efficiency. Lessons learned by one generation of commanders are sometimes forgotten, to be rediscovered much later. A striking example is the use of heavy cavalry to support infantry charges and harass the enemy infantry, applied on a large scale by the Macedonians. This was not developed by the Romans; on the contrary, Roman tacticians of the late Republic and early Empire used cavalry to a far lesser extent than their Hellenistic predecessors. Then, under the later Empire, the striking power and manoeuvrability of heavy cavalry were once more discovered and exploited by the Roman army. In fact, the result which emerges from this survey of European military development over three millennia is that the soldier of today faces problems and challenges which are surprisingly similar to those facing his Greek or Roman predecessor. This comes out particularly clearly at the personal level, where we are dealing with concepts such as leadership, uncertainty or psychological stress.

This has important implications for the historical study of warfare as well. At the level of the supreme command, it is difficult for a modern student to penetrate the thoughts and motives of long dead commanders. Having extensive sources at our disposal does not necessarily make the task easier. An endless number of causal factors, as well as the elusive but important factor which historians term 'mentality', are interwoven in the decisions of Alexander, Mithridates and Titus—of Frundsberg, Wallenstein or Lloyd George. At the level of the field soldier, where sources of any sort are scarcer, it may nonetheless be easier to reconstruct, in broad outlines, the situation of the individual at a given time and place in history. No amount of training or education will, at the end of the day, transcend the limitations of the human condition.

The nexus between warfare and civilian society is the individual fighter, who is at once a citizen of the *polis* (or

of the *ethne*, or of the Roman Empire) and a soldier. If the soldier was fighting for anything at all apart from his own immediate survival, it was for enrichment, for a piece of land on which to settle, or to save himself and his relatives from destitution and slavery. Even a mercenary cannot function in empty space, and the notion of mercenary service itself presupposes the notion of money, and thus of a *polis* type society.

This volume does not claim to provide one coherent picture of the relation between warfare, culture and soci-

ety in the ancient world. It is not the last word on this subject, or on any other. Instead, we hope that it may provide the first few words for new discussions and indicate some possible methodological directions for future studies. If, in addition, it has helped, in its small way, to break down some stereotypes about 'military' and 'civilians', it will have served its purpose.

September 1999

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen