

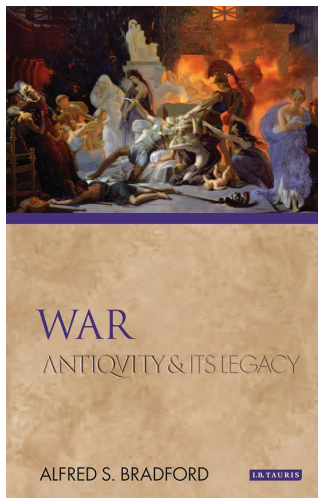
## Book Review

### War: Antiquity & Its Legacy

Bradford (A.S.), Pp. xvi + 176, maps. London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2015. Paper, £17.99. ISBN: 978-1-84885-935-7.

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*War: Antiquity and Its Legacy* is an offering in the Ancients and Moderns Series published by I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury. The general aim of this series is to show how Antiquity remains relevant in the modern life of today. Since the first publication of this book in 2015 its subject matter and content have become ever more relevant and the discussions relating to war and the legacy of war have intensified since the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine and more recently in Israel and Gaza. What is especially good about this volume is that it is geared towards a readership that is non-specialist

or even a student who is approaching the subject of war for the first time. It thus became a very valuable introduction to students and teachers alike when approaching warfare in Ancient Greece and Rome as well as what impact ancient warfare had on the modern concept of war. In respect to both ancient and modern warfare Prof. Bradford finds himself quite uniquely qualified to write this book as he is a veteran of the Vietnam War who experienced harsh combat conditions while being deployed as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in 1969.

The book begins with an introduction that identifies the author's key thought process, namely that of the logical flow or progression between the past and the present highlighting the lasting impact that ancient texts can still have on current soldiers or normal civilians who face war on a daily basis, even if only on the news. It is Bradford's contention that the Greeks and the Romans were the originators of the vocabulary, ideas and philosophy of war that we can most easily associate today with modern conflicts. It is perhaps very important that we pause a moment here to note that this distinction in concepts of warfare is only applied to the extent of war's western legacy. Bradford throughout the book also continues to differentiate western and eastern concepts of war; this is a very important attribute when a student or teacher is introduced to these concepts for the first time.

The first chapter starts with Homer's *Iliad* and the myriad of influences that it would have and would continue to have in subsequent Greek, Roman, Medieval and modern works and the various writers associated with those works. The *Iliad* serves as the central primer for the rest of the chapters that follow on from the first chapter. Bradford clearly identifies the Homeric epic as the foundation of all subsequent thinking on war. In effect The Homeric epic not only creates the foundations for the concept of war but is responsible for the entire thought legacy of war as well. Bradford makes the discussion on the academic work of the *Iliad* enjoyable which is really important if you are a new student confronted with the *Iliad* for the first time. I felt it rather a shame that Bradford had only one chapter in which he could discuss the *Iliad* and its influence on modernity. I think this could probably have been a book on its own because it certainly has enough meat on its bones to be fleshed out into one. The brevity of the chapter does not however detract from Bradford's discussion and the intermingling with his own experiences on the battlefield. Concepts such as friendship, heroism, cowardice and violence are discussed, which to my mind is the most human discussion for students that I have ever read.

The next two chapters are devoted to the discussion of major battles from the Bronze Age to the Iraq War and it is in this discussion we see Bradford for the first time connecting the dots from the ancient to the modern. In what might seem a huge amount of information Bradford shows great skill in condensing it for us into something that is far more manageable. From Alexander the Great to Blitzkrieg, Bradford continuously highlights what he deems to be the universal themes of war. Even in his introduction Bradford stated that his outpost in Vietnam would have been instantly recognisable as a military camp to Greek and Roman soldiers, despite the change in tactics and technology. Technology might have changed but conventional military tactics have a certain amount of universality to them regardless of age. This question is yet another example of Bradford planting a seed in the student mind that will become worthy of further debate and study.

I believe that chapter four is the most brilliantly written and presented part of the book. Bradford gives an overview of the most influential historians, philosophers, anthropologists and psychologists that have written about war. He starts with Hesiod and Plato ends with Machiavelli, Kant and Clausewitz. In his reading and discussion of these authors Bradford manages to define the key question that links the ancient to the modern: whether a War is just or justifiable. The question of the legitimacy of a war remains a potent question, and is never a simple one. Bradford allows for enough intellectual discussion in this chapter that a new reader, student or teacher can begin to debate and think about the justness of any conflict and whether there are a set of common denominators that any conflict must have or adhere to be classified as just. A western reader must be aware that this would apply just as much to an eastern conflict as to any that might have happened through the actions of those in the west.

The final two chapters of the images and the writing of war are conceived from the perspectives of Thucydides, Tacitus and Ammianus. These chapters are likened to a modern-day war diary and should not be taken as an archaeological account of the events that these ancient historians were writing about. They are very

personal accounts that are subject to the normal biases of any contemporary diarist. This does not mean that these chapters are useless because in actual fact they prove to be the best introduction to memoir and the potent images of war for any general or student audience. And in these final chapters Bradford focuses our attention and reminds the modern reader quite correctly that 'Greece and Rome can still speak directly to us' with their vivid and potent prose.

*War: Antiquity and its Legacy* is undoubtedly an ambitious book to write, given all the pitfalls of ideology that a modern historian is bound to face in writing such a book. But Bradford manages to do this very successfully. The experience that Bradford has delivered is

a book that is extremely readable, fascinating and accessible to a readership that extends well beyond the strictly academic. The non-specialist reader is given so much in so few pages that can only attest to the brilliance of Bradford as an author as well as a teacher. Although war is a drug and a drug that humanity doesn't seem to want to kick, I still believe that Bradford's work is a success and will undoubtedly draw many other readers to this series by I.B. Tauris. I would heartily recommend this book to any teacher or student audience that wishes to delve into the complex world of the legacy of warfare both ancient and modern.

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