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The Legitimacy of Force in a Multipolar World

ÑACO DEL HOYO (T.), LÓPEZ SÁNCHEZ (F.) (edd.) *War, Warlords, and Interstate Relations in the Ancient Mediterranean*. (Impact of Empire 28.) Pp. xiv + 504, ill. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. Cased, €143, US\$165. ISBN: 978-90-04-35404-3.

The early twenty-first century has brought sharply into focus questions about the supremacy of superpowers on the international stage, with a moving towards a system where no single state monopolises control. Such a reality, the editors of this volume claim, helps us approach the state of anarchy in the Mediterranean between the fourth and first centuries BC. The volume – developed from a 2013 conference on multipolarity and ‘warlordism’ in the ancient Mediterranean and published in Brill’s *Impact of Empire* series - draws heavily on social sciences for theoretical frameworks within which to ‘challenge certain prescribed perspectives on the relationship between war and politics in classical antiquity’ (p. 2). While the idea of a multipolar world (and fluctuations between unipolarity and multipolarity) is readily accepted by the contributors, agreement on how applicable the concept of ‘warlordism’ is to interstate relations is far more contested.

All chapters seeking to understand the concept of ‘warlord’ engage with a theoretical framework, however there remains debate as to what, in fact, constitutes a warlord: not only is differentiation between warlord and illegitimate ruler difficult, but distinction between warlord and state-nominated general is, at times, problematic and several papers interrogate the positions of generals, who may be assessed against the criteria for warlords. For example, Gómez-Castro (pp. 54-63) sees the Spartan general Lysander as possessing the main characteristics of a modern warlord - an individual who uses the opportunities that war brings for his (and others) benefit - yet he also emphasises that Lysander’s actions operated within the political system, rather than necessarily against it. In the following chapter, Sekunda (pp. 64-88) does not view the Athenian general Iphicrates as a warlord because he was a *strategos*

with legitimate power from the state, and stresses rather his reliance on the social networks (in particular the gymnasia) of his *lochagoi*. Both Rich (pp. 266-294) and Rosenstein (pp. 295-307) succinctly contest the usefulness of ‘warlordism’ for analysing war, politics and legitimacy of violence in the Roman Republic, seeing the institutional structures of the state as providing a barrier against homegrown ‘warlords’. Naco del Hoyo and Principal stress in their chapter (pp. 380-414) that since there was no term or complex definition in the ancient evidence, Sertorius cannot be labelled a ‘warlord’. Of course, on such a definition there would be no warlords in the ancient Mediterranean and Coşkun considers the possibility of warlords in terms of *tyrannos*, *lēstēs*, *pirata*, *usurpator*, *praedo*, and *latro* (pp. 204-230). Nevertheless, they argued that from a functional viewpoint Sertorius’ actions do align with a modern framework of warlordism. On different grounds Zoumbaki (pp. 251-379) concludes that we can neither called Sulla a warlord nor can we deny the application of the label, citing his fluctuating relationship to legitimate, central power at Rome, his reliance on his army as a result and his varied interactions (oppressive and beneficial) with regional communities. The difficulties of ascribing an individual’s actions as ‘warlordlike’ are due not just to establishing a set of criteria, but also to the ever-changing nature of their relationships to centralised institutional power and how their position in relation to such power was perceived.

Very loosely speaking, there is some consensus that a warlord is an individual seen to be in some way acting independently from the state, deriving power and influence from military force rather than from legitimizing political power, yet the approaches given in the various contributions demonstrate the difficulty of coming to an agreement on an appropriate definition. Tuplin, in his examination of various regional secession crises between 540s-340s in the Achaemenid Empire (pp. 17-35) – the first of several papers to examine the

relationship between mercenary armies and the rise of potential warlords - stresses that definitions of warlordism depend on the central government as a legitimate power, acting as a point of reference (a warlord rules 'independently of central government'), and that from the viewpoint of those attempting to secede from Achaemenid rule the goal was complete detachment rather than 'autonomous symbiosis'. What this volume repeatedly emphasises as key to the debate is the question of legitimacy, particularly given the accepted stance in developed world to see state-controlled violence as legitimate and all other forms as illegitimate. As Coşkun remarks in his 'somewhat failed study of 'warlordism'' we should 'look more closely at how legitimacy of rule or, alternatively, of the use of violence is constituted, denied or negotiated, and how partisan interests [...] manipulate the representation of legitimacy' (p. 220). Through various examinations of 'warlordism' this volume raises the question (and to some extent provides a range of answers) of what place there is for alternative forms of governance and legitimate forms of control in the ancient Mediterranean world.

The volume comprises twenty chapters, divided into three chronological sections: 'Achaemenid Persia, Fourth Century Greece, and Carthage', 'The Hellenistic World and Rome' and 'A Necessary Epilogue'. The editors stress the discrepancy between the variety of the regional-political systems in section one and the second 'more coherent section...whose obvious core is Rome's hegemonic role in a multipolar scenario, which progressively led to unipolarity' (p. 7). Indeed, whilst the volume reads as a game of two halves, its arrangement does serve to emphasise the nature and development of interstate relations over the period.

Part I's focus is the relationship of various different Greek *poleis* to potential 'warlords', bookended by Tuplin's 'Mercenaries and Warlords in the Achaemenid Empire' and two

chapters exploring Tyrian networks and Carthaginian hegemony. Low offers a cogent examination of the interconnectivity of ‘warlord’ commanders and Greek *poleis* (pp.36-53). By dispensing with the traditional polarised view of Greek ‘condottieri’ in relation to the *polis* she provides a far more nuanced presentation of complex and reciprocal relations between commander and city-state. Gómez-Castro’s concise discussion on Lysander likewise seeks to overturn such polarised views of relations. The lens of ‘warlordism’ is employed to differing degrees of accepted applicability by both Sekunda and Pascual González, who stresses that the aristocratic dynastic nature of political and military leadership in central Greece led to such individuals inhabiting roles akin to warlords within a federal organisation, so that Thebes virtually became an imperialistic power (pp. 89-112). To round off the regional diverse analysis of part I, Martí-Aguilar’s ‘The Network of Melqart’ (pp. 113-150) examines how collective origin stories fostered a network of shared identity, whilst also stressing the multipolar structure of such a network meant that there were limits to *consanguinitas*, such as Gadir’s defection to Rome. This awareness of regional rivalry between Carthage and Rome through interpersonal networks is also highlighted by Rawlings (pp. 151-180), who focuses on understanding how Carthage negotiated with ‘warlords’ in various regional and local political contexts. The symbiotic relationship between state and warlord is articulated and linked to Rome’s ability to dismantle Carthaginian hegemony by employing similar interpersonal tactics.

The importance of interconnectivity on the international stage during war continues in the second chronological section, notably in López Sánchez’s chapter on the role of Galatian mercenary armies after the death of Lysimachus in 281 (pp. 183-203). Rather than being an invading force, here the Galatians are framed as, at least in part, ‘integrated into the machinery of Macedonian power’ to be understood as part of the political system. (p. 201).

Coşkun's study of potential 'warlords' in Hellenistic Anatolia provides a strong theoretical framework and detailed case studies (including an appendix cataloguing of military leaders with 'dubious legitimacy') for examining the phenomenon as part of a process of political break-down or the construction of new forms of governance. He succinctly stresses the rhetoric of legitimate rule as a key aspect in understanding the relation between 'warlords' and interstate polarity. The next five papers provide different approaches to understanding Roman power within a system of states and through the lens of warlordism. Eckstein (pp. 231-253) argues that the Rome's asymmetry of power did not equate to an empire, at least in the East, where it did not meet an 'imperial threshold' until the 140s. The critique of Roman 'imperialism' is continued by Champion's exploration of Greek perspectives of the Republic, concluding that it appeared to them less as a 'monolithic governing bloc' and more as a 'mercurial multipolarity', due to inconsistent behaviour by generals in the field and the short-term political alignments of the senators (pp. 254-265). Rich's and Rosenstein's chapters, discussed above, work well together in offering chronological and thematic assessments of the internal stability of Rome, although Rosenstein notes that with Pompey's grants of *imperium* without public office the institutional defences against warlordism began to fail. Fronda and Gauthier's chapter (pp. 308-325) examine the effects of the second Punic war on the asymmetrical power hierarchy of Rome's international system, demonstrating through several case studies that sub-state players in Italy and Sicily were less concerned with unifying with Hannibal against Rome, and more interested in establishing and expanding their own regional hegemonies. This multilateral and complex nexus of interactions is stressed in Sánchez Moreno's chapter, which places the Iberian Peninsula at the centre of a 'crossroads of two imperialisms', underlining the complex relationships and alliance networks with both Carthage and Rome (pp. 326-350). As discussed above Zoumbaki, and Ñaco del Hoyo and Principal interrogate the applicability of 'warlord' to Sulla and Sertorius

respectively, again serving to highlight issues of surrounding legitimate power embedded in the concept. Finally, Rankov provides insight into how certain military structures employed by Republican commanders, who may be seen to possess characteristics associated with warlords, shaped the Roman Imperial army (415-425).

The 'Necessary Epilogue' elaborates on how 'warlordism' is a phenomenon in the process of a failing state beyond Rome's unipolarity, with Wijnendaele examining the repercussions of the execution of Marjorian in AD 461, leading to the disintegration of the western Empire into warlord fiefdoms (pp. 429-451). Here we are faced with the collapse of the system rather than its inception, yet the themes of legitimacy of violence and alternative forms of governance remain crucial. Grasa's examination of 'Contemporary Warlordism' (pp. 452-478) serves to underline not merely the nature of warlords as part of a failed or collapsed state system in terms of legitimate and illegitimate power, but also how this nature is dependent on the geopolitical and economic context.

This volume set out to challenge theses concerning the relationship between war and politics in a multipolar ancient Mediterranean world. It certainly emphasises the complexity of interstate relations and the need to look at the specific geopolitical contexts of interaction which provide opportunities for multilateral connectivity. The volume struggles in certain respects to tie down the applicability of 'warlord' to the ancient context, yet the discussion that arise as a result is perhaps all the more fruitful. The polarised position of potential 'warlords' in relation to centralised government is challenged both in terms of it offering a potentially beneficial 'working arrangement', and in terms of questioning the legitimacy of institutional forms of power and offering potential alternate forms of governance.

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