

B. Campbell, *War and Society in Imperial Rome 31 BC – AD 284 (War and Society)*.  
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(hbk); 0 415 27882 1 (pbk).

This book is a synthesis of recent scholarship and an attempt to summarise the complex military history of the early imperial period. The text does not appear to be meant as an authoritative statement, neutrally presenting the opinions of the various scholars in the field without much comment, nor is it a polemic, C.'s version of the Roman army. Rather C. produces a number of loosely related arguments and explanations over a whole range of issues, such as strategy, warfare and its conduct, Roman military expertise, the linkage between soldiers and the communities in which they operated, the relationship between soldiers and politicians, and, finally, the display of victory and the role of the military in Roman culture. Although touching on the more technical areas of the Roman army, C. remains true to his subject, war and society, rather than digressing extensively on the army as institution, or on the equipment or mechanics of the army. The analysis is careful, the text heavily annotated, the writing clear. Like other books in the series to which it belongs, it is a good place to start students investigating the army of the period and could be seen as a companion piece to C.'s collection of source material on the army published a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> There may be oddities in its composition, C. works primarily from textual and documentary material rather from archaeology, and others would certainly have given the book different emphases, but it is a useful analysis of the current state of knowledge across a range of areas.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Campbell *The Roman Army 31 BC – AD 337: A Sourcebook* (London and New York, 1994).

C.'s synthesis reflects, as one would expect, some of the confusions and debates in the scholarship on the Roman army, but these confusions are often internalised rather than being resolved with the result that seemingly contradictory statements catch the eye. For instance, the Roman army is described as a 'total institution' (p. 45), providing the complete social environment for the soldiery, but while soldiers in Britain lived a life of isolation from the surrounding society, in other provinces there were 'opportunities for a considerable degree of integration' as 'soldiers lived and worked side by side with the local population' (p. 99 – 100). C. denies that soldiers 'made a substantial impact on the development of local communities' (p. 104), concluding that any affect the soldiers had would have been 'limited, indirect, and largely accidental' as the veterans brought with them 'some vague idea of Roman values' (p. 104). Yet, 'the army also brought with it a range of activities and facilities associated with a settled urban environment: piped water-supply, baths, amphitheatres, hospitals, and other carefully planned buildings... Such buildings would be for the troops' own benefit, but there is evidence that they contributed expertise and muscle to local projects' (p. 95): the very stuff of Roman civilization, at least if we follow Tacitus' *Agricola*. Any historian grappling with these problems will inevitably discover that the relationship between soldiers and society was multifaceted, and the dogmatism with which this issue was once discussed is sensibly avoided here. Nevertheless, C. neither emphasises the incoherence of that relationship, which is in itself an analytical position, nor attempts to resolve or assess the varied nature of the relationship.

Similar tensions mark C.'s discussion of strategy. C. notes that there is very little in the way of political justification for Roman military activity in the source material, but still suggests that Roman policy was generally defensive. Nevertheless, C. argues that Trajanic expansion was essentially for glory, and find little justification for the military adventurism of Augustus, though, puzzlingly, C. accepts the traditional denigration of Augustus' military activity, claiming that he was no a warrior. Roman strategic policy is strangely ambivalent, with authors proclaiming that Rome was due empire without end at more at less the moment when others appear to be shoring up defences and proclaiming an end to expansion. Again, C. does not resolve this problem, nor focus on it so that the reader can be made aware of the contradictions in Roman policy.

C. represents the imperial army as an Augustan creation, reflecting the general impression that we receive from our sources of fundamental change in the early imperial period but many of our sources share our benefit of considerable hindsight. The adoption of the Augustan period as a starting point reflects a common and convenient *caesura* in historiography generated by the political change. By starting in 30 BC, C. underplays continuities with the Republic, perhaps especially important in the relationship between the army and society. The emphases on a rural soldiery, the political benefits of *gloria* and (relatively) unrestrained imperialism were, it could be argued, features of both Republican and imperial armies. Similarly, the common tendency to compress the evolution of the imperial army into the Augustan period is not resisted, though the institutional framework of the army continued to evolve throughout the Julio-Claudian period at least. Similarly, C. suggests a relatively clear break at the end of the period,

suggesting that the age of the imperial army was over by 284. Historians have to stop somewhere and 284 is as good or bad a date as many others and the army of the fourth century appears rather different from that of the first in institutional form. Yet, like most other social institutions, the army was in a more or less continuous state of evolution throughout this period and many of the same issues of negotiation between local elites and the military figure in the informative mid-fourth-century literary and documentary sources.

C.'s task in this book is unenviable. So many of the issues central to his theme are unsettled in contemporary historiography in ways in which they were not even twenty years ago, and C. gives an impression of a subject in some flux. C. does not cut through these difficulties to offer new interpretations, but that is not his intention. This book sets out to do a job, and does this effectively, offering students and the general reader a plausible, readable interpretation of the Roman army and society. The book might have been enhanced if the contradictions and difficulties that face those studying these issues were more fully exposed.

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