

REVIEWS

Peter Heather, *Rome Resurgent: War and Empire in the Age of Justinian* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 408.
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Peter Heather has continued his sequence of lively texts on late antique and early medieval topics with this volume that is centred on the wars of Justinian's reign but ranges more widely from the fall of the Western Empire to the Arab conquests. Although warfare is at its heart, it is in no sense a military history since actual campaigns are narrated at appropriate length but not with every last detail. Rather, if it has to be characterised, it is a political history in which military strategy plays a prominent role, naturally since victory was vital for imperial reputations.

In the same way as Procopius grounded his accounts of Justinian's wars in the events of the previous century, so too Heather provides copious background to the age of Justinian, drawing on his various publications on the western empire and its tribal neighbours and successors, while his analysis of the imperial office harks back to his work on Themistius. All this is a useful reminder that Justinian's empire was, in essence, the same formation as that of Constantius II or Theodosius II. He also, rightly, includes Justinian's protracted religious endeavours within his compass.

For Heather the key questions about Justinian's military activities are why they were undertaken, whether they were worthwhile, and what impact they had on the future stability of the Eastern Empire. The Ostrogothic war was opportunist and Khusro's 540 invasion a response to Justinian's western successes, but Heather argues that both the first Persian war and the Vandal conquest were prompted by internal political considerations: in the mid-520s Justinian was keen to consolidate his claim to succeed his uncle and so supported actions to antagonize the Persians since Hypatius, Anastasius' nephew, had been associated with efforts at reconciliation, while in 532 Justinian needed to rebuild his credit after the Nika Riot and the failure of negotiations to terminate Christological disputes. Both scenarios are plausible, but counter arguments are possible: on Persia, our only account of events, in Procopius, presents the Persian ambassador, Seoses, as primarily responsible for the failure since it was only after his hostile introduction of the issue of Lazica that the Romans

countered by clarifying that they were proposing a second-class adoption, the implication being that the process would otherwise have proceeded without a hitch – even though Hypatius was said to be opposed to it; as to mid-532, if Justinian was still nervous after crushing the Nika rioters and punishing suspect senators, it might seem unlikely that he would dispatch his most loyal general with a significant force of trustworthy troops on a distant and dangerous gamble.

As to the balance sheet of Justinian's conquests, the inclusion of the massive human cost immediately creates an irreversible deficit so that Heather rightly concentrates on the economic aspect, which permits him to reach positive assessments. For Africa this is in line with the recent consensus that sets aside Procopius' gloom over protracted Berber troubles to recognise the benefits of a century of relatively peaceful rule. For Italy the conclusion will be more contentious and relies in part on the argument that the eventual partition of Italy into Lombard and Roman spheres in the seventh century broadly mirrored the division that Justinian was prepared to agree with Witigis in 539/40 until Belisarius' opportunism disrupted this approach, so that Justinian cannot be held fully responsible for the difficult later stages of the war.

Heather also defends Justinian against the charge that his western adventures fatally undermined the resilience of the East, thereby facilitating the threats to Roman control in Africa and Italy and paving the way for the Arab conquests. In Africa the inevitable consolidation of Berber tribal groups was already underway during the Vandal period and Justinian's commanders eventually managed the challenge. For Italy the Lombard invasion in 567 was comparable to Gothic and other moves in the fourth century, an escape from a threatening power north of the Danube, in this case the emerging Avar federation whose own presence on the fringes of Europe resulted from the expansion of the Turkish Khaganate in central Asia. The failure of Heraclius to handle the Arab inroads in the 630s was the consequence of almost five decades of conflict between Rome and Persia, with Khusro II's campaigns being triggered by Maurice's overambitious peace settlement in 591. Thus, Justinian is absolved of direct responsibility for subsequent problems in all sectors.

Heather's style is lively – a victory is 'thumping' (19), imperial constructions provide 'photo opportunities' (39), the Alans' home is their 'stomping grounds' (126), Heruls run 'slap bang' into Vandals (138), the Beroeans 'made a rookie error' (218), Peter the Patrician is the 'East Roman 007' (269), and many more. This gives the narrative a contemporary feel, which is underscored by various current or recent historical and cultural allusions – the Iraq and Afghan wars (238), Northern Ireland peace process (204), Monty Python (168). Quite how well language and allusions will age is impossible to say: we can all hope that 'Donald Trump eat your heart out' (87) will have lost its resonance before too long; the reference to Michael Gove's desertion of Boris Johnson's Conservative leadership bid in 2016 (32, recycled at 84) will already tax many memories, especially outside little England; the notion of Theodora as Justinian's Mrs Simpson (90) is another very British allusion.

There are a few misrepresentations. It is implausible that Belisarius at any stage in his career controlled 7,000 personal *bucellarii* (50). The assertion that Justinian expelled the senators from the imperial palace (110) on 18th January at the end of the Nika Riot disregards the plausible statement in the *Chronicon Paschale* (624) that he instructed them to return to guard their houses, though Procopius does say that Hypatius and Pompeius did not want to leave. Singara could not have been refortified by Justinian (224), since it was under Persian control after 364 (as shown on Map 6, whose dotted line for Khusro's 540 invasion is incomplete). The unwary might infer that Justinian was buried in Hagia Sophia (269) rather than Holy Apostles. Slavs in their wooded retreats were the target of Maurice's order to the Balkan army to winter north of the Danube, not the more accessible Avars on the Hungarian plain (317). There is something missing in n.4 on p.364.

Students and lovers of history will enjoy reading this volume and profit from it while academics will be challenged to respond to Heather's relatively positive assessment of the impact of Justinian's initiatives. There is something for everyone!

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Linda Yuretich (trans.), *The Chronicle of Constantine Manasses*. Translated Texts for Byzantinists 6. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. Pp. xviii + 320.
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This latest addition to Liverpool's series of translations presents a work originally written sometime between 1145 and 1148 for the Sevastokratorissa Eirene, the widowed sister-in-law of Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). The author, Constantine Manasses, was a typical man of letters of the period, who also wrote a description of a journey to Jerusalem made in 1160 and an erotic novel entitled *Aristandros and Kallithea*. The latter was recently translated by Elizabeth Jeffreys in another volume of the same series, *Four Byzantine Novels* (2012). The work translated here is a chronicle which begins with creation and ends in 1081 with the accession of Manuel I's grandfather, Alexios Komnenos. It was clearly designed to entertain rather than to be a dry record of events as it was written in verse and combines classicizing vocabulary and Homeric imagery with occasional rather indelicate passages. The coverage is also very selective. A good deal of space is devoted to the Trojan war, in a version of events that differs from that of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, to the foundation of Rome and to Julius Caesar and Augustus while Alexander the Great is passed over quite quickly. That choice may well say something about how twelfth-century Byzantines saw their past.

Linda Yuretich's translation is based on the Greek text published by Odysseus Lampsidis in 1996 but she also takes into account the later life of the text. It was