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James Gersbach, *The War Cry in the Graeco-Roman World*, London and New York: Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies, 2023. 161 pp. ISBN 9781032248608.

Within the daunting task to redefine our understanding of the war cry in antiquity, this book unveils the concept of “battle expression” as wider output involving this phenomenon. On exposing the limitations of the term “war cry”, Gersbach asserts that the modern-day misconceptions obscure the nuance cultural significance attached to the warfare expressions from the 5th century BC to the 6th century AD. To achieve its objectives, the book adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating Graeco-Roman literary sources with the available archaeological evidence, to which he dedicates a chapter assessing their validity, reliability, and relevance.

The main contribution acknowledges the introduction of the concept “battle expression” to circumscribe the visual and auditory manifestations exhibited by military forces prior to, during, and after engagements in ancient warfare. On this account, the association of a psychological dimension structures the guiding thread of Gersbach’s proposal, thereby establishing a central thematic axis within his proposition. Through this conceptual framework, a particular advantage of this book is worthy of mention: the recognition of this battle performances in fostering ongoing group cohesion and intimidatory tactics in Antiquity. Thus, the incorporation of “battle expression” as a conceptual tool not only enhances scholarly discourse on ancient warfare but also sheds light on its broader socio-cultural implications.

Even though it is an ambitious proposal, this study encompasses some gaps. Firstly, the title lacks precision, as it fails to align accurately with the content of the work. The subject of study aims precisely to challenge the notion conveyed by the title, thus necessitating a closer alignment between title and content should be mandatory. Moreover, the book fails to adequately convey the ambitious nature of its endeavor. Due to its brevity, it does not sufficiently address the monumental task of reinterpreting the war cry historiographical approach within the vast chronological framework. A more expansive treatment would enhance the depth of analysis and understanding required for such a significant undertaking. Furthermore, the proposal's endeavor to achieve a more comprehensive understanding remains inadequately defined for scrutinizing the mechanics of warfare. Post-battle occurrences, such as the Roman triumph, appear unsuitable for this approach, thereby underscoring potential limitations.

To address these identified shortcomings and foster a further analysis, the research could benefit from integrating additional theoretical frameworks. Notably, the incorporation of speech act theory holds promise in enriching the analysis, particularly in elucidating the performative nature of war expressions. For instance, the consideration of speech act theory could enrich the analysis, particularly in the understanding of the weaponization of the war expressions. By integrating such theoretical perspectives, it could deepen its insights into the connection between propositional content and performative utterances within the context of warfare. Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize that battle expressions operate within the realm of communicative acts, extending beyond linguistic articulations to encompass non-verbal manifestations seeking tangible outcomes.

On a formal account, the book’s structure compels a thematic design over a chronological sphere to highlight, over eight chapters and a conclusion section, the multifaceted nature of ancient battle communications. Chapter 1–2 constitute the fundamental tenets of Gersbach’s arguments. The performative array toward the battle expression itself conveys the conceptions of warfare as portrayed in Greek and Roman sources around several key themes, notably patriotism, xenophobia, political propaganda. He states that battle expressions encompass visual and auditory displays aimed

at boosting morale and intimidating adversaries, which could either occur spontaneously or be meticulously rehearsed by military units.

Further on, the brief chapter 3 encompasses imposing auditory environmental factors as a manifestation of battle expressions. Through this, it shows the atmosphere conditions created by armies during the warfare strategically used to induce fear and anxiety in enemy forces, while leveraging geographical features like hills and valleys to amplify the effect through echoing sound waves, provided a significant military advantage. By exploring avenues to extend this initial approach, we may uncover possibilities for integrating diverse cultural and historical contexts, thereby enriching the framework's applicability beyond the Graeco-Roman sphere. The 4th and 5th chapters circumscribe the psychological factors on the construction of the moral of group and the frightening of the enemy troops. The propensity for fear and panic to be spread among troops highlights the importance of efforts made by armies to maintain cohesion and resolve. Therefore, in expense of taunting the enemy, the book underpins fear a key factor in the literary strategy, highlighting the importance of efforts made by armies to maintain cohesion and resolve.

Chapter 6 offers a brief discussion about the *pean*, Bellona, Mars, the *Genii*, and the *Salii* on account of the religious expressions. It states how military units and entire armed forces adopted religious traditions, incorporating hymns and ritualistic actions to invoke divine favor and spiritual determination prior to battle, not solely in the aftermath. In this chapter, important military music scholarship has been ignored and it does not commit in the discussion of silence in the advance of Roman troops, but is not a surprise, as it is a constant variable the lack of historiographical engagement. The 7th chapter analyzes the military and sociopolitical factors in the construction and reaffirmation of an identity within the troops. Therefore, it features the cultural incorporations of battlefield practices in the distinction traits in a military force. In the 8th chapter, the focus is on oaths as an expression to ensure the victory in fulfillment with a socio-religious nature in a group cohesion event.

Overall, this research comprehends the limitations of battle cries as a category lacking a solid conceptual development that adequately encapsulates and rationalizes the complexity of the phenomenon. The examination of ancient military forces requires a description that extends beyond their role solely as instruments of combat, instead necessitating a comprehensive understanding of it as an essential component of society, economy, and politics.¹ Gersbach apprehends it and develops his thesis among this guideline in a wide-ranging development, as the concept of "battle expression" conveys on a more accurate reflection of the ancient sources. This approach not only enriches our understanding of ancient warfare but also highlights its interconnectedness with broader historical and social dynamics.

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¹ Erdkamp (2007), 1–3.