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October 24, 2008

The Book of War

The Making of the Roman Art War 400 BCE-1617.

The aim of this paper is to offer an overview on my current research on the “art of war”, intended as a literary genre, during Greco-Roman Antiquity and the Renaissance. The main argument is that the very core of the discourse of war has from the beginning been shaped –surprisingly enough- by a literary approach, and not, as one might expect, by issues related to the development of technology. In this paper I concentrate in particular on the tension between writing and action, i.e. between theory and practice within Roman culture. There is astonishing continuity in the argumentation within the Western “art of war” which I discuss through the reading of texts coming both from classical antiquity and the Renaissance: Cicero (*De oratore*), Sallust (*Bellum Iugurthinum*), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), Polybius, Musonius Rufus, Vegetius, Machiavelli (*Dialogo sull’arte della guerra*) e Patrizi (*Paralleli militari*).

More specifically, my book concentrates on three epochs. I will begin with what is in fact the latest phase chronologically - the Renaissance – in order to explore the characteristics of the genre *arte della guerra* (the Italian label was diffused all over Europe) in its richest form, and to provide a basis for considering its earlier development; I will also argue that the Renaissance represents the culminating moment of the reception of the ancient discourse on war, which subsequently entered a phase of crisis with new technological developments (e.g. gunpowder and firearms) and new modes of conceptualizing war and tactics. I will then move back in time to the earliest surviving textual examples of this discourse in ancient Greece immediately after the Peloponnesian War (early 4th century BCE). Moreover I will discuss the dichotomy between theory and action in war on the basis of some Greek and Roman literary texts such as Polybius, Sallust, Cicero, Ovid, Musonius Rufus. The last part will focus on Vegetius’ *Epitoma rei militaris* (4th-5th centuries CE) which I argue was the first accomplished “art of war” of the kind which was formalized during the Renaissance; here I aim to shed light on the late antique cultural and literary context in which this text arose, a period often neglected in academic research in the fields both of literature and the history of knowledge.