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Review of *Famous Battles and How They Shaped the Modern World. Volume 1: c.1200 BCE-1302 CE From Troy to Courtrai; & Volume 2: 1588-1943 From The Armada to Stalingrad* by Beatrice Heuser & Athena S. Leoussi

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Beatrice Heuser & Athena S. Leoussi, *Famous Battles and How They Shaped the Modern World. Volume 1: c.1200 BCE – 1302 CE From Troy to Courtrai; & Volume 2: 1588 – 1943 From The Armada to Stalingrad.* Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2018. Volume 1 ix + 197pp. ISBN 978-1473893733 (hardback). Price £25.00; Volume 2 viii + 184pp. ISBN 978-1526727411 (hardback). Price £25.00.

These enjoyable books have grand aspirations. They aim to demonstrate how the memory of battles can be used to achieve certain means, either intentionally or unintentionally; and seek to explore the impact this use of memory has had on the modern world. It enables a reader to understand how battles can crop up in foundational myths of both religion (the wars of the ancient Israelites) and countries (such as The Battle of Teutoburg Forest), and how interpretations change over the years; even encompassing shifting social structures (The Battle of Courtrai) and contemporary media (Stalingrad's relationship with cinema). In achieving its aim of alerting readers to the agendas underlying commemoration, they are exceptional.

The way Heuser and Leoussi have approached their ambitious objective is admirable. Acknowledgement of what the books are trying to achieve is very clearly set out in the introductions to each volume. By drawing together a stellar cast of contributors they have been able to include a range of superbly researched articles, and have had the confidence to rely on the expertise of their contributors. Each is unfailingly up-to-date and brimming with topical ideas. For instance, Mungo Melvin in Chapter 8 introduces his myth-busting analysis of the Somme by referencing the political headlines of Brexit from 2016 (the 100-year anniversary of the conflict). Immediately the reader's mind is focused on the pseudo-battle lines drawn in that 'conflict', from which Melvin deftly highlights the main misconceptions of the Somme.

These books will appeal to anyone looking to break out of the unintentional educational constraints that their school, university or peers have placed round them. They enable one to form a cynical view of how memory can be, and is, manipulated by humankind's endeavors. It is encouraging to see the attempt by each author, and the editors, to strive not to allow their interpretations to be coloured by their personal perspectives.

However, frustration comes in attempting to draw parallels between each article. It is largely up to the reader to decide whether the memory of ancient battles and modern conflicts will travel along the same road in each case, with the latter continually trying

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to catch up with the former in terms of development. The reader will struggle to draw a conclusion as to whether a memory develops in the same way over the years; passing through the phases of fervent nationalism, introspective embarrassment, and scientific scrutiny, that each can sometimes seem to touch upon; like a moody teenager growing up. It would be intriguing to see the editors attempting to tackle this overarching question in a conclusion and bring together the superb work done by the contributors for the sake of completeness.

An interesting aspect of these books is the informal poll drawn from colleagues of the editors in gathering an expert's view of the '*most famous*' battles. Leoussi is transparent in the intentionally Eurocentric focus this has, and deftly counters possible contention in the conclusions drawn from this list. The list itself is fascinating, and another example of the value of these books. It is again left to the reader to research each battle and decide on its own merit; but in this case it is gladdening. It is enlivening to be trusted with this rather than having a Wikipedia-esque diatribe of 'number of participants' or 'casualties' that are often used to list battles forced on one. The very qualitative aspect of this data itself highlights the way battles are remembered.

Likewise, the use of a school survey opens intriguing questions. It is an excellent idea to step away from how learned experts assess the myths of battles to look at them from an educational point of view and the survey itself an interesting window into living memory. It is also agreeable for the editors that both lists produced are similar. This raises a fascinating question with regard to who is being taught what, and how education differs per country. Leoussi is admirably open about the paucity of the sample size and the limits of the survey, but for the purpose of understanding how famous battles will continue to shape modern memory there is real value in exploring this subject throughout Europe. It seems harsh to ignore the Mediterranean countries in this or future surveys, particularly given the prominence of the great battles of Christendom in the books.

I have not drawn a distinction between Volume 1 (1200 BCE – 1302 CE) and Volume 2 (1588CE – 1943CE) as I firmly believe they should be read as one book. To form a proper understanding of how battles are represented in the modern world does require the complete review of the wide spectrum of historical context that these tomes provide, particularly given the continually developing interpretations driven by modern memory, technology and social changes. I give Heuser and Leoussi the benefit of the doubt and park my inner cynic that this isn't a devious marketing ploy; but it has been frustrating to carry two books around when one would have been more

convenient. Then again, as these books teach us in exemplary fashion, history isn't always convenient and transferable and perhaps it serves us to be cynical.

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Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Notes. Plates. Bibliography. Index. 709pp. ISBN 978-0195383782 (hardback). Price £20.00.

Over 16 chapters, Nolan discusses the true impact of battles in the context of the wars in which they were fought. History has tended to measure a war's winners and losers in terms of its major engagements, battles in which the result was so clear-cut that they could be considered "decisive." Marathon, Cannae, Tours, Agincourt, Austerlitz, Sedan, Stalingrad - all fixed in literature and in our imaginations as tide-turning. But were they? Nolan argues that victory in major wars has usually been determined in other ways. Even the most crushing of battles did not necessarily decide their outcomes: Rome lost Cannae but won the war. Nolan also challenges the concept of the "military genius," even of the "great captain". Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus, Frederick, Napoleon are all firmly established in published works and in our minds as such. Thus, Nolan's book directly contradicts those of Creasy, Dodge and Fuller, dear to earlier generations. In that, Nolan reflects the time in which he writes, especially the protracted and costly conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

Nolan systematically analyses the major wars between the great powers, from the Hundred Years War to the Second World War, tracing the illusion of "short-war thinking," the hope that victory might be swift and conflict brief. Nolan argues that the World Wars, the "people's wars", were characterised by stalemate and attrition and were wars in which the crucial arena was not the battlefield but the factory. Modern resource bases backed by national will can overcome a seemingly decisive first strike, as the Japanese found after Pearl Harbor.

It is true that not all great battles are decisive and not all decisive battles are great. Nolan rightly argues that Gettysburg was a great battle but not decisive while Vicksburg (fought at the same time on a much smaller scale) was decisive in that it cut the Confederacy in half. Nolan's argument that truly decisive battles are rare is a strong one. It can be argued that Marathon was merely a temporary check on Persian