



Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, and the Genius of Leadership

Barry S. Strauss

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In *Masters of Command*, Barry Strauss compares the way the three greatest generals of the ancient world—Alexander, Hannibal, and Caesar—waged war and draws lessons from their experiences that apply on and off the battlefield. Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar—each was a master of war. Each had to look beyond the battlefield to decide whom to fight, when, and why; to know what victory was and when to end the war; to determine how to bring stability to the lands he conquered. Each general had to be a battlefield tactician and more: a statesman, a strategist, a leader.

Tactics change, weapons change, but war itself remains much the same throughout the centuries, and a great warrior must know how to define success. Understanding where each of these three great (but flawed) commanders succeeded and failed can serve anyone who wants to think strategically or has to demonstrate leadership. In *Masters of Command*, Barry Strauss explains the qualities these great generals shared, the keys to their success, from ambition and judgment to leadership itself.

The result of years of research, *Masters of Command* is based on surviving written documents and archeological evidence as well as the author's travels in Italy, France, Greece, Turkey, and Tunisia in the footsteps of Alexander, Hannibal, and Caesar.

Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, and the Genius of Leadership Details

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Dvd (VanitasVanitatumOmniaVanitas) says

Saggio davvero bello e godibile, tipicamente anglosassone nello stile di scrittura.

Tre vite, tre nomi leggendari della storia mondiale (antica e moderna) messi a confronto nel segmento centrale della loro vita, giudicati secondo i canoni della loro epoca (com'è giusto che sia) e secondo quelli senza tempo dell'arte della guerra, del comando e della politica.

Sapere chi fu il più grande è abbastanza inutile e plenoastico, e Strauss investe come risposta a questo domando l'ultimo capoverso dell'ultimo capitolo. Giustamente. Furono uomini eccezionali, fulmini a ciel sereno e protagonisti di cammini assolutamente irripetibili e presi letteralmente a modello e a esempio da innumerevoli personaggi nel corso della storia.

Forse solo Napoleone ebbe un impatto sul suo tempo e sui secoli a venire così importante, sia come stratega militare che come capo politico; tuttavia quei tre hanno influenzato i 2000 anni di storia a noi più prossimi in maniera pesantissima. Il che, non è poco.

Dice Strauss che dei tre, Cesare fu il miglior politico (senza dubbio) e il più lucido nel delineare strategie efficaci a lungo termine. Figura straordinaria, d'intuito forse inarrivabile, Cesare dalla sua ebbe gli anni passati da giovane nella politica romana, dove da bravo aristocratico maneggione cominciò a comprendere il funzionamento della macchina del potere (esperienza che agli altri due mancò, invece) e il fatto di cominciare la sua sfolgorante ascesa da uomo fatto e finito (Cesare va alla guerra in Gallia alla veneranda età di 42 anni): ciò gli garantì una maturità di pensiero e di azione senza pari.

Alessandro fu grande stratega, grandissimo comandante di campo, dotato di intuito fulmineo e pensiero rapidissimo, entrò nella storia come un lampo: una luce sfolgorante e un successivo tuono che cambiarono per sempre lo sviluppo successivo dell'Europa e dell'Asia occidentale. Fu tuttavia anche uomo dai notevoli vizi, posseduto da manie di grandezza senza confini che lo portarono a ampliare l'impero conquistato oltre i limiti fisici entro cui esso poteva essere contenuto, perdendo la fiducia del nucleo macedone del suo esercito (che come noto si ammutinò in India) e disinteressandosi quasi totalmente delle questione amministrative dopo la conquista. La sua opera venne proseguita dai suoi generali, i diadoci, che allegramente passarono i successivi decenni a ammazzarsi fra loro dividendo le spoglie dello sterminato territorio. Non fu un gran politico insomma, ma un comandante straordinario e un visionario che diede il là alla prima globalizzazione (culturale, soprattutto) conosciuta.

Infine, la palma di miglior comandante in campo va all'uomo che osò l'impossibile, ossia sfidare lo stato più potente del mondo antico sul suo territorio, dopo aver attraversato le Alpi d'inverno (e mica c'erano i trafori autostradali) e aver sconfitto Roma in tre sanguinose battaglie per poi disintegrarne quasi completamente le forze, sbaragliando l'esercito campale più grande da loro mai messo in campo fino a quel momento nel più perfetto e letale balletto bellico che la storia d'Occidente avesse (e abbia) mai visto. Ma, dopo Canne, ad Annibale mancò l'audacia di Cesare e Alessandro, e invece di assaltare Roma temporeggiò, sperando che la città si arrendersse: ma Roma era un monolite di granito all'epoca, e non si arrese. La guerra si trascinò negli anni, a totale deleterio dei Cartaginesi, che in una guerra di logoramento non potevano vincere contro le infinite risorse dei Romani. Alla fine, tutto ebbe termine a Zama, in Africa, dove il genio di Annibale trovò pane per i suoi denti (Scipione) e comunque quasi riuscì a vincere: tuttavia, anche nella sconfitta, Annibale

seppe essere lungimirante e negli anni che successivamente i Romani gli lasciarono passare a Cartagine seppe dimostrarsi ottimo politico, risolvendone l'economia. Ormai tuttavia Annibale aveva liberato il mostro, che nei decenni successivi avrebbe finito per divorare la sua città e l'intero Mediterraneo.

Un'osservazione: viviamo in tempi bui, di democrazia in agonia e politica rissosa e priva d'idee, incapace di affrontare i grandi problemi del presente. I tempi assomigliano insomma a quelli in cui venne a trovarsi Cesare, che fu semplicemente il migliore a emergere dalle ceneri della seconda guerra civile; differentemente da Silla, il vincitore della prima guerra civile che non tenne per sé il potere ma dopo appena un paio d'anni lo riconsegnò contro ogni previsione al Senato, Cesare non ebbe scrupoli a farsi dittatore a vita e re di fatto (ma non di nome), semplicemente perché aveva perfettamente capito che la vecchia Repubblica aveva fatto, da qualunque parte la si guardava, il suo tempo e che c'era disperato bisogno di pace e stabilità, di un nuovo ordine politico impeniato sulle nuove classi emergenti (provinciali e notabili popolani) e sul decisionismo. Infatti le cose, con Augusto, andarono esattamente in quella direzione.

Banalmente, mi sa che siamo nelle stesse condizioni, e che il Cesare dei nostri tempi sia ancora di là da venire, ma che prima o poi arriverà (e non giudico se sia un bene o un male - probabilmente un male, dato che anche il pur lungimirante e clemente Cesare, al bisogno, sapeva essere lupo fra i lupi e che comunque finire alla mercede delle bizze di un uomo solo al comando non ha MAI portato bene ai singoli individui).

Chiudo con l'ultimo paragrafo del libro, che nella sua concisione estrema mi pare un'ottima anticipazione dello stile dell'opera per chi volesse cimentarsi con la lettura:

"In conclusione fu Cesare il più grande dei comandanti del mondo antico. Annibale è l'eroe delle cause perdute e delle battaglie perfette. Alessandro è un astro senza paragoni. Cesare, con tutti i suoi difetti, si avvicinò più di tutti all'arte dello statista."

Amen, mi verrebbe da dire.

Lettura molto consigliata.

Louise says

Good analysis of the leadership qualities of the three great commanders of the ancient world. Strauss discusses each of their campaigns and the political environment in which they took place.

Strauss notes that all three had to go to war: Alexander needed a successful conquest to earn respect in the kingship he inherited; Caesar had too many enemies to distinguish himself in Rome; and Hannibal had limited career options in Carthage or Spain and perhaps none outside of the military. This makes you ponder how much of war is waged, throughout history to today, for career purposes.

While these commanders had brilliant careers, they had weaknesses and there were losses among their historic wins. Both Caesar and Alexander, who inspired incredible loyalty, experienced mutinies. Alexander didn't grasp the strategic importance of a navy. Hannibal had great tactics but, overall, poor strategy. One, among many interesting observations is that while all were great, none of them really ended their war(s) in a satisfactory way.

Military parts are written in a way the general reader can understand, which puts the focus on the discussion of leadership.

Charles says

This is a great introduction to three of the most important historical figures of the Classical Age. Since lack of historical knowledge is a plague upon the land in these latter days, Strauss does us a great service by providing a popular, concise history of these men. He compounds this service by drawing parallels and contrasts among them, making it easier to understand and remember each, and caps his effort by drawing permanent, generally applicable lessons from the lives of each.

Strauss's focus is, of course, on the military aspects of each of Alexander, Hannibal and Caesar, though he does touch on their political abilities as well. The campaigns of each are viewed through five stages: Attack; Resistance; Clash; Closing The Net; and Knowing When To Stop. Coupled with this are ten qualities of successful commanders: ambition; judgment; leadership; audacity; agility; infrastructure; strategy; terror; branding; and divine providence. The structure of the book is to, in essence, rate the performance of each of the three protagonists, in each stage, on each quality. Then, ultimately, Strauss gives a #1 ranking to the Most Successful Commander. (No, I won't spoil it by saying who that is!)

This is not an executive leadership book, of course. Strauss does not generally try to suggest that you should try this at home (particularly "terror"). But the qualities he analyzes are certainly frequently applicable to other life contexts, and therefore the book works both as history and, to a limited extent, as guidance for one's own life, if one has the ambition to command and succeed.

Strauss manages to cover a wide range of important events, mostly battles, without seeming cursory. The Granicus River. Gaugamela. Cannae. Zama. Thapsus. Pharsalus. It's quite an accomplishment, if you stop and think about it, given that most of these events could rate a short book of their own. And Strauss manages to coherently weave each of them into the overall narrative, while writing about each of them compellingly. Somehow he manages to add enough anecdotes, written in vivid language, to bring each event alive, without drifting into history by anecdote. It's a pretty impressive accomplishment.

Many of the lessons Strauss draws out, though well drawn out, are common sense. But many are not. One of his big focuses is "closing the net," where he emphasizes the need to follow-up on victories, along with the difficulties in doing so. "A victor's biggest mistake after winning a great battle is to expect success to fall into his lap. On the contrary, since necessity is the mother of invention, the vanquished are likely to be more ingenious than ever, and perhaps even more dangerous." This is useful to remember.

None of this is idol-worship. Strauss criticizes his protagonists as much as he recognizes their accomplishments. And he notes the overriding vice of successfully military men—that though "No one every understood better than these three that war is politics. . . . then, at the moment of triumph, no one ever forgot the rule that war is politics as completely—or as disastrously—as they. Flush with victory and drunk with success, each man did the one thing that no successful general can ever dare do: he succumbed to his own vanity. Modern generals are not immune to excessive pride. But, in democracies at any rate, laws prevent any one individual from doing too much damage. History tells a cautionary tale."

And that's the real value of this book. It informs us today, both in what to do, and in what not to do. Great history transmits universal principles, and the more people read books like this, the better off our society will be.

Jim Yavenditti says

Good analysis of the leaders during their war periods... would have loved to get more analysis about those leaders when they weren't really leading troops. It couldn't really be done with Alexander the Great, but perhaps could have been done with Hannibal and definitely could have happened with Julius Caesar. I liked how Strauss organized his book-- giving examples for all three, rather than treating each individual leader in separate 'sections' of the book.

Annabelle says

Truth: I wanted to chuck the book even before I was done with the first chapter. The reason? Too many cliched, hackneyed phrases about wars and the men behind them. It's a good thing I checked the back jacket, and saw the price I paid for it. That made me decide to trudge on. Things get interesting by the second chapter, and the momentum carries all the way until the last page.

No doubt Barry Strauss's research was thorough, but his narration glosses over the details. This reader soon got over that once I realized that hey--his narrative style was not out to compete with that of Edward Gibbon's. Strauss's is more of a conversational approach, like attending a series of free-wheeling lectures on the military and tactical strategies, and failures, of Alexander, Hannibal and Caesar.

All three were ambitious, with the audacity to see that ambition through. Yes, Alexander preferred military manoeuvres to running an empire, and very likely, men over women. A superb general, especially at a tactical level, where quick, decisive decisions were required. Fought among his men out in the field. Among the three discussed in the book, he exposed himself most to physical danger. Kid thought he was a god, heir to Achilles, and given his two-million square mile booty, I don't blame him. He took off with ambition. Ambition did him in. He just didn't know when and where to stop (he did, at India, but he had plans to take over Arabia, before dying of a fever a month short of his thirty-third birthday). Like the author, I agree with his deathbed edict that only "the strongest" should take over his abominably large sandals. In the many years to come, Alexander would be the yardstick for excellence for men like Caesar.

It is Hannibal who seems to me the most human among the three, even though no mention is made of his personal relationships--a tragedy; another reason may be his failure at siegework, made all the more glaring because the other two excelled at it. Hannibal also strikes me as the most audacious (anyone who risked crossing the Alps in late November would be either crazy or audacious). He may have been the most capable combatant on the field. While ambitious, history insists he did it for Carthage, not so much for personal ambition. Hannibal must have been a terrible yet gentle force to reckon with, having convinced whole Celtic tribes to join him on that terrible trek to Italy. And, as the author constantly reminds us, unlike the other two conquerors discussed in this book, Hannibal's ragtag, multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-lingual army, and whom he could bend so skilfully to his will, never mutinied against him. This in spite of being away from the home country for seventeen harsh years. Hannibal betrayed his pragmatic, human side when he asked to meet with arch-enemy Scipio Africanus on the eve of his last battle, and defeat, at Zama. This is further confirmed when, safely ensconced at Carthage after Zama, he reinvented himself as a maverick politician and statesman.

One of my recent reads was The 12 Caesars. It mentions Caesar having once been the lover of a rich, influential old man, King Nicomedes of Bythinia. I forgot the ugly word used for men like the young Caesar,

but given his ambition, it's very believable--he seems like the kind of guy who was up for anyone for as long as it got him a leg up militarily, and politically. A seasoned conqueror of Gaul by the time he crossed the Rubicon in his fifties, he gets the author's (and my) nod as the most pragmatic and thorough strategist. Unlike Alexander, he fought with the big picture in mind, and that was to be Rome's dictator for life. Among all three, it's Caesar I'm most familiar with, having read up on quite a few books about him and the other, less interesting Caesars. He still intrigues me the most. And because it mentions his military and psychological failures, this book humanizes Caesar to me in a way the other, more detailed books, did not. But I'm still on the lookout for the book that can truly define this complex, enigmatic man for me.

Visuals that will stay with me long after I forget my musings here is the carnage at those pitched battles (imagine slipping on blood and entrails while battling at some dusty valley), calmly narrated by the author, death counts ticked off as if he were merely counting heads of tilapia. He writes in a way that makes you feel you were actually there, observing from some safe slope, silently rooting for your bets, in the heat of the moment before the trumpets sound the impatient call to battle.

Ian Dickson says

Not dry in the slightest. From their beginnings through to their deaths and the political aftermath, Strauss brings these three to life in a way that drives history and the affect their actions took on history. Great example being Hannibal had a memorial built and dedicated to him on the alleged spot he died, by a Turkish general and politician in 1939, completed in 1981. Alexander and Caesar's final resting places are lost to sand and ruin. Worth the read if a student of history, or a passing one.

Bernhard says

Das Buch - so dachte ich - wäre eine spannende, wenn auch vielleicht etwas hinkende historische Vergleichsangelegenheit. Am Ende muss ich sagen, dass ich sogar ein wenig enttäuscht bin. Betrachten wir uns den Titel, würden wir denken, dass wir vielleicht etwas über den Genius des Anführers erfahren. Allerdings liefert Strauss weder eine griffige Definition dessen, noch wendet er die wenigen Punkte, die er dafür aufstellt, wirklich an. Wir lernen, dass ein Feldherr seine Angriffsfenster erkennen muss, nach dem ersten Schlag mit aufkommenden Widerstand fertig werden muss, dann den Hauptkonflikt strategisch und taktisch führen muss, dann seine Operation/Kampagne abschließen muss und schlussendlich erkennen muss, wann er genug haben muss.

Zu Beginn rückt er zudem noch zehn Schlüsselqualifikationen in den Fokus, die ein erfolgreicher Feldherr mitbringen muss/sollte:

- 1.Ambition
- 2.Urteilskraft
- 3.Führungsqualität
- 4.Mut (oder gar Tollkühnheit)
- 5.Agilität (hier in Form von Anpassungsfähigkeit)
- 6.Infrastruktur
- 7.Strategie
- 8.Terror (er sieht die Fähigkeit dazu sogar aufgrund von Alexander dem Großen und Caesar als sehr zentral an)

9. Branding (Selbst-Propaganda)

10. Vorsehung (bei ihm göttlich geprägt, weil Divine Providence) - oder für mich trivialer: Glück

Darüber hinaus werden sie aber nicht wirklich zu einem Analysewerkzeug, auch wenn sie hier und da festgestellt werden. Jetzt eilt Strauss - faktenreich - durch die bekanntesten Feldzüge Alexanders, Hannibals und Caesars, um nach den fünf oben genannten Phasen zu prüfen, ob die drei wirklich große Feldherren und Führungspersönlichkeit sind.

Wir lernen einiges über die Feldzüge der drei, allerdings wirkt das Schema, so lose es ist, draufgepresst. Relativ schnell fällt auf, dass Hannibal da gar nicht so sehr reinpasst, wie Herr Strauss sich das vielleicht in der Konzeption gedacht haben mag und so wird sein Anteil kleiner und kleiner.

Darüber hinaus findet allerdings auch keine Analyse statt, und darin liegt die zentrale Schwäche dieses Werkes. Jetzt eilt Strauss auf etwa 250 Seiten Kerntext also durch deren politisch-martialisches Leben, zeichnet die groben Leitlinien und Entwicklungen nach, ohne natürlich in die Tiefe gehen zu können im historischen Rahmen, allerdings auch ohne die Führungsqualität zu analysieren. Stattdessen erhalten wir permanent Zuschreibungen, wie genial, wie toll, wie einfallsreich oder anpassungsfähig sie waren. Aber wir bekommen keine wirkliche Erklärung, warum ihr Handeln genau das ist.

Ebenso unklar ist, wie weit Strauss den Führungsgenius oder das Charisma fasst. Zwar verweist er am Ende immer wieder auf den Feldherren, doch andere Bereiche gliedert er ein, um sie dann wieder auszugliedern (Das Staatsmännische oder allgemein die Propagandafähigkeit einer Person abseits des Schlachtfeldes), wenn sie ihm nicht mehr passen.

Oder anders gesagt: bevor ich dieses Werk gelesen habe, wusste ich durch die Schulbildung geprägt, dass Alexander, Caesar und Hannibal zu den großen Feldherren und Kriegstreibern der Antike gehören. Nach Lektüre habe ich andere Adjektive für ihre Größe, aber immer noch keine Gründe. Nur weitere Zuschreibungen. Das war doch sehr enttäuschend.

Der Stil des Buches ist spröde. Strauss ist in seinen ewig wiederkehrenden Floskeln (...as the crow flies...) gefangen, seine Schlacht- und Taktikbeschreibungen sind sehr skizzenhaft und die Gesamtstrategien sind selten vollständig und dadurch nicht vollends nachzuvollziehen für den Laien. Wenn jemand Straussens Wissen hat, wird er viele Nuancen sicher verstehen und ähnliche Schlüsse möglicherweise treffen können. Wer nicht dieselbe Ausgangslage hat, tappt im Dunkeln oder in der blutigen Mutmaßung. Wir müssen uns auf Straussens Zuschreibungen verlassen, die...mitunter problematisch scheinen.

Sein Schlusskapitel beantwortet dann auch für ihn die Frage, wen er von den dreien als das größte Genius hält: am Ende entscheidet er sich für Caesar. Warum? Das kann ich nach dreimaliger Lektüre der zwei Seiten noch nicht so recht beantworten. Aus Gründen, würde ich vermuten. Am ehesten dadurch, dass Caesar für ihn doch am ehesten an einen Staatsmann rankommt, also doch die Sphäre des Feldherren verlässt.

Gleichzeitig gibt er Alexander die Krone der besten Propaganda und größten Ambition, während Hannibal für ihn Epitom der verschwendeten Kampfeskraft, des Siegens ohne Nachhall ist. Straussens Weg dahin ist allerdings wenig nachvollziehbar, da er im politischen Leben Hannibals durchaus konstatieren muss, dass Hannibal nach seiner Feldherrenzeit noch ein äußerst erfolgreicher Politiker war, doch das tut er wenig überzeugend damit ab, dass er Hannibal durchaus vorwirft, dass dieser mit der späten Nachkriegsblüte Karthagos erst den Untergang eingeleitet hätte, weil Rom Karthago sonst ignoriert hätte. Er wendet also Hannibals Erfolg gegen diesen, was er im Gegenzug dazu bei Alexander, dessen Reich ja sofort in den Diadochenkriegen unterging, gar nicht so recht tun will. Und die Auflösungserscheinungen zeigte Alexanders Reich ja bekanntlich auch schon zu Lebzeiten.

Am Ende stellt er also für sich fest, dass Hannibal nach Caesar der größte Diener Roms war, und alles in einem Duktus, der einen fast glauben lässt, er habe sich im Laufe des Buches mit Hannibal entzweit.

Ob die drei letztlich wirklich den Begriff Genius tragen dürfen, ist ebenso unklar wie seine Definition. Zwar sucht er auch nach Fehlern und Macken, aber so wirklich aussagekräftig verrechnen will er dies nicht.

Wie dem auch sei: letztlich ist die Idee des Buches wunderbar, allerdings beantwortet es die eigene Prämissen für mich nur unzureichend (ich stelle natürlich zur Debatte, dass ich das Werk und seinen Inhalt nicht ausreichend verstehe). Es scheitert an seinem Anspruch. Es ist zu trocken, um populärwissenschaftlich tauglich zu sein, aber zu wenig wissenschaftlich, um die Diskussion um dieses Thema entweder voranzubringen oder gar zu prägen. Mit Glück reibt sich jemand an der Meinung von Strauss und legt ein umfassenderes, analytischeres Werk nach. Das wäre wünschenswert.

Letztlich darf man aber durchaus loben, dass Barry S. Strauss einen doch recht geordneten, wenn auch stark verkürzten und zurechtgeschnittenen Ritt durch die Feldherren geschichte der drei Protagonisten betreibt und viele nützliche Fakten präsentiert, die durchaus zum Einstieg in das Thema genutzt werden können. Die Bibliographie sieht sehr solide aus.

Wer sich allerdings mit dem Protagonisten beschäftigt hat, und sich mit den jeweiligen Zeiten auskennt, kann sicher auf die Lektüre dieses Werkes verzichten. Wer einen lockeren, wenn auch problematisches und streitbaren Einstieg in den Vergleich wegen möchte, darf sich gerne an das Werk trauen und sich seine eigene Meinung bilden.

Nick says

I'm on the fence about Masters of Command; on one hand, it's a very good read that disassembles and examines the battles of the three great generals - Hannibal, Caesar and Alexander. The reconstructions of battle are gripping and suitably epic. However, the analysis of why these generals were great does drag a little bit. I take issue with Strauss' assertion that Divine Providence played a role in the victories these men attained; I'm not sure if he's chalking up grit, determination and luck to fate, or if he truly believes the gods played a role in the victories.

It was an alright read and historically accurate, but it really wasn't to my tastes.

Juliew. says

Compelling account of three of the world's most famous conquerors. The book purports to show their successes, their failures and their similarities through the stages of battle. Who had the best attack, resistance, clash and who knew how and when to end it? What were their plans to govern their new found empires and who succeeded with these plans and who failed? The author brings some interesting and insightful perspectives into these three geniuses of war and I thought it was well written and knowledgeable.

Jerome says

I've never read too much about ancient history before reading this, so a lot of it was new to me. That being said, it is still worth a read.

However, it does seem like Strauss maybe oversimplified his subjects in order to make them conform to his

own theories. Also, there is very little on actual leadership; it's mostly just opinion, and with little insight into what made people follow these leaders.

Strauss' book is more a work of history than an analysis of leadership. Still, it is very readable, detailed and well-paced.

Jack says

Short. Succinct. Well-written. A fantastic book comparing the greatest conquerors of ancient times. Ceaser, the cunning politician turned military commander. He conquered Gaul and turned his troops against Pompey and his fellow Romans. He destroyed the Roman Republic and died by its hands. Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who was never defeated until his best student destroyed his army at Zama. He fought for over 18 years against the Roman republic and devastated its armies. Yet, no one flocked to his banner.

Reinforcements never came. He was chronically short of manpower while Roman armies rose from the ashes. His war only succeeded in destroying his homeland, Carthage and started the Roman Republic down its path to Roman Empire. Alexander, the youngest of them all was never defeated. He destroyed the Persian Empire but he did not stop war. Alexander the quintessential warlord continued war. Alexander was bored by statecraft. His empire disintegrated upon his death issuing in the age of the Hellenic Kingdoms. Which is best. Well it depends as usual. I will end with a curious fact. The word Tsar and the word Kaiser are Russian and German forms of the word Ceaser.

Nathan Albright says

As someone who likes reading about classical military history [1], this book is something that is pretty obviously something that would interest me. And given the author's own work as one of the main contemporary classicists with a strong interest in military history in the ancient Greek and Roman world, this book is well within the author's wheelhouse. This is the sort of work that fulfills expectations--you know enough of the author's work to know that he is quite capable of writing very well about the subject matter and find that he does so in a way that is not necessarily surprising but is definitely excellent. This book has the feel that the author is trying to pivot from writing about ancient history for a small audience to writing about a larger audience that wants to view military history as a way to examine successful leadership qualities in general. The work does not make a full shift to shallow numbered leadership principles as some authors make their career on, but it certainly is a move to try to make classical military history more generally accessible and more obviously relevant to a wider audience. How you feel about that aim will greatly influence how you feel about this book.

In about 250 pages or so, the author manages to conduct a parallel analysis of three of the most notable ancient military history commanders in Alexander of Macedon, Hannibal Barca, and Julius Caesar. He begins with an author's note, chronology, glossary, and maps to set the context for the analysis that follows. After that the author defines ten qualities of successful commanders (1) and examines how they apply to the three leaders in question. The author then examines the three ancient generals according to six criteria, namely how they handled their initial attacks (2), dealing with resistance (3), the clash between these leaders and their most powerful adversaries (4), closing the net towards victory (5), and knowing when to stop (6), something the author does not believe any of these leaders knew how to do well. The author then gives a

conclusion, acknowledgements, and notes and an index. Overall, the work does a good job at presenting some of the notable aspects of Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, Hannibal's efforts in the Second Punic War, and Julius Caesar's career after crossing the Rubicon.

Is this a great book? I'm not sure. It is a very good book, a very competent book, a thought provoking work that offers a skillful comparative analysis of three famous generals about whom much has been written and whose efforts have served as an inspiration to many. The author is candid about their flaws--he notes that Alexander was careless about political matters, that Hannibal had a major strategic flaw in not seeking to defeat Rome and in not understanding the strength of its political system, and that Julius Caesar had an immense laxity with regards to logistical matters. This book is no hagiography, but it does give appropriate praise as well as trying to keep an air of drama and reflecting on the fact that great commanders often do not fit in well with their own political cultures. It is easy for a successful leader to seek political power and to denigrate the political process and to solve social and political and diplomatic problems mainly through force. It was as true in the ancient world as it is true today that when you are a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. And if you like reading about ancient military leaders in parallel, even if you already know about them a great deal, this book certainly has a great deal to offer.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2018...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

Chris says

Strauss is always very readable and this book is no exception. The writing is top notch and he does very well in using classical resources and modern scholarship in analyzing the military and political abilities of these 3 great leaders. My only complaint is the lack of maps supporting the text. Given how much of the ancient world Alexander conquered it seems only natural that some visual reference points should have been included. Aside from that this is a very good book.

Owen O'Neill says

Overall, I found this book very well written with cogent arguments. I liked his treatment of the topic, and found his breakdown of the elements convincing. The analysis is well thought out, and presents a nicely balanced view that does not overstep the bounds of the available data.

This book is accessible to non-experts and writing is engaging and lively. There are points on which I would have liked a little more depth, but I understand why he kept to the level he did. I would heartily recommend it to anyone interested in leadership, whether from a historical or current perspective.

Heather says

Outstanding analysis of three of the arguably greatest military leaders in world history: Alexander, Hannibal and Caesar. And who better to break down the discussion than Barry Strauss who is a history and classics professor at Cornell University.

In the book Strauss breaks down the 10 Qualities of Successful commanders: 1. ambition 2. judgment 3. leadership 4. audacity 5. agility 6. infrastructure 7. strategy 8. terror 9. branding 10. divine providence. From here he gives us the 5 stages of war, seen in every war known to man throughout all history: attack, resistance, clash, closing the net, and knowing when to stop. It is these 5 stages of war where Strauss builds the rest of his book with examples from all three men, showing leadership traits that we modern mortals can use in our lives and businesses.

It is a brilliant tour de force and an unusual read for those like me who normally read straight up business books on leadership. With this book you can learn from the best of the best. Thank you Barry Strauss for showing us the way.
