



Assumption
University

Digital Commons @ Assumption University

History Department Faculty Works

History Department

2021

Review of *Why Study History?* by Marcus Collins and Peter N. Stearns

Barry Knowlton
Assumption University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/history-faculty>

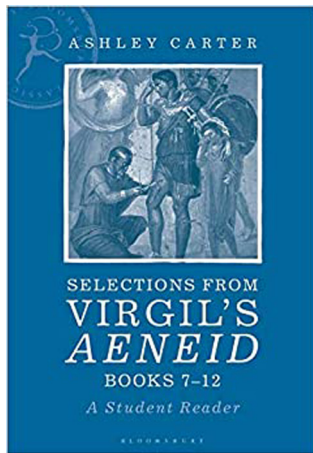


Part of the [Classics Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Knowlton, B. (2021). Review of *Why Study History?* by Marcus Collins and Peter N. Stearns. *The Journal of Classics Teaching* 22(44): 119-120. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631021000283>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption University. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@assumption.edu.



devices will be of great help to students and to teachers, both experienced and less experienced. One of Carter's many strengths is his ability to understand what students (and teachers) find difficult as well as what they enjoy, so in the word order section he rearranges a three-line section of Latin into word order which is accessible to the inexperienced student and then explains why it is so in clear and accessible language. It is this explanation that is most helpful, since inter-linear numbering of word order can only

take a student so far. An alphabetical list of persons and places precedes the actual Latin selections and, given the list of Turnus' allies in Book 7, this is a life-saver! Once you reach the Latin selections themselves you will find them clearly set out in manageable chunks with clear and practical notes on the facing page along with suggested questions to aid literary, and wider, understanding. For students who have not encountered Virgil before, the passages are well chosen to showcase the story and Virgil's skill with words and introduce the student to epic poetry in an engaging way – omens and portents, Allecto, the shield of Aeneas, moments of pure emotion such as Euryalus asking Ascanius to take care of his mother if he dies, similes such as that of the poppy when Euryalus does die, the death of Camilla, the pursuit of Turnus by Aeneas and the revenge taken for Pallas' death. Many of these are the well-known passages of the *Aeneid* but the helpful commentary really assists in bringing out underlying meaning and showing how the narrative of this epic tale rises and falls. There is something here for all tastes and a good overview of the story along with plenty of examples of Virgilian narrative and characterisation. I would most certainly recommend this for any student, or teacher, who is teaching Virgil either to GCSE or A Level.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000271

Why Study History?

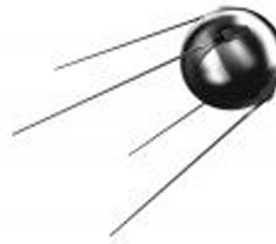
Collins (M.) and Stearns (P.N.). Pp. viii+197.
 London: London Publishing Partnership, 2020.
 Paper, £12.99. ISBN: 978-1-913019-04-4.
<http://londonpublishingpartnership.co.uk/why-study-history/>

B. C. Knowlton

Assumption University, Worcester, MA, USA
 bc.knowlton@assumption.edu

This book should take its place on the crowded shelf of those volumes that have addressed the question, described the practice, or defined the nature, of history; that have asserted the use, endorsed the pursuit, or imagined the future of this academic endeavour; that have insisted on its rethinking, undertaken its deconstruction, or gone once more unto the breach in defence of this humanistic discipline.

Why Study HISTORY?



On the one hand, it is odd that there should be so many such books, since most working historians would agree that the methods and materials of their craft are fairly simple and straightforward, and that the work of history is to augment our knowledge and enhance our understanding of the past. The historical books that matter are the ones that present the specialised research of professional historians; the what-is or why-study history books are mere historiography.

On the other hand, these books do reflect the state of the specialisations, and the shape of

the debates that go on among and between them. They are themselves source materials for a history of the discipline. We can read them to get a sense of the interpretive trends and turns that plot the progress of the profession. The differing opinions of E. H. Carr and G. R. Elton can be comfortably accommodated within a survey course; Keith Jenkins' two books and new journal have no doubt encouraged the broadening of offerings and the diversifying of hiring. But if historians simply get on with their teaching and research without considering what they are doing and why, or whether they will be able to keep doing it, they might be surprised that historiography has come to this.

Why Study History? raises not so much an academic as an existential question. It might be argued that some of the more recent historiographical trends – those typically deplored as 'postmodern' – are what have brought history to this crisis; but I will not take that up here. It is just the sort of argument we cannot afford to indulge in, if we are afraid that unless we can get enough students, our programs will be shut down and we ourselves turned out. This consideration is what should make this book of interest to Classicists.

This is the first published volume in the London Publishing Partnership's *Why Study?* series, which is intended to address and assuage the concerns of prospective students that a particular course of study promises a sufficient return on investment. There is not at present a *Why Study Classics?* volume in preparation, but it would surely not come amiss. Marcus Collins and Peter N. Stearns insist that history is practical; that those who choose to study it do enjoy it; and that it prepares them for a wide range of satisfying and remunerative careers. They begin by addressing the misconception that under current conditions, only businesslike and technological courses of study are viable and advisable. The study of history is not so obviously and instrumentally connected to the jobs that follow from it, which may not be as immediately lucrative as some others; but students of history will have skills and knowledge that are wanted in the working world.

Collins and Stearns make the case for the study of history with an earnestness that takes the edge off the desperation. They have plenty of pertinent and persuasive data, and beyond insisting that history is rather than is not practical they reaffirm everything that the most convinced and committed historian would want to say or want said about their profession. Thus, we read that 'the study of history is really about gaining habits of mind, not winning prizes for factual retention', and that 'the world today simply can't operate without historians and historical training'.

But the book is aimed at those who would study history rather than those who are already doing so. The historical examples they adduce are straightforward and familiar, and the philosophical speculation does not venture much beyond a confirmation of Santayana's claim that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. Their survey of the sorts of history one might study covers everything from the old-fashioned to the up-to-the-moment: from Intellectual and Diplomatic to Environmental and Digital History. Collins is British, and Stearns American; and they want to be as encouraging and informative as they can to those who might study history in either a British or American university. It is interesting to see how differently history is done on either side of the Atlantic; but given the book's stated aim and intended audience this means that any given reader will have to get through or around a fair amount of irrelevant content. Nevertheless, wherever and however history might be studied, 'students choosing history, and the anxious parents of those students, can rest assured that a history focus is a solid career move.'

It is good that we have this book; and that it is a book of this sort. The nature, practice, pursuit, or future of history does depend on there being people who want to study it. Those who have studied it may be keen to teach it, but we cannot assume that the students will come; nor should we assume that those who do intend to enter our line of work. Everything has a history, and so those who study it should be able to do anything. It is in the best interest of the discipline, both intellectually and institutionally, to make history truly practical where it might otherwise become merely instrumental.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631021000283

Leading the Roman Army. Soldiers and Emperors 31 BC- 235 AD

Eaton (J.). Pp. xiv+205, colour pls. Yorkshire and Philadelphia: Pen & Sword Books, 2020. Cased, £19.99. ISBN: 9781473855632

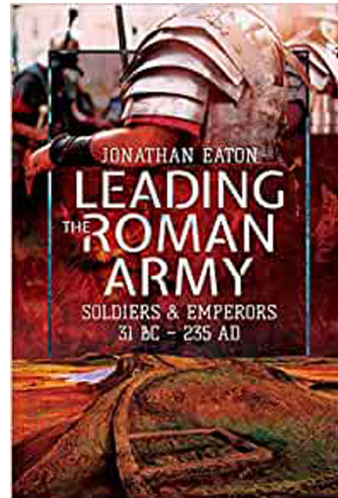
Danny Pucknell

Cardiff and Vale College
Pucknell_3@hotmail.co.uk

At its core, this volume offers a survey of the relationship between the Roman Emperor and the Roman army, a narrow exploration of the co-dependency between these two entities. Eaton carefully introduces his intentions for this 130-page study: 'My research is not limited to the relationship between the emperor and the soldiers but aims to encompass the power relationship which existed between different levels of the army.'

In order to achieve this, Eaton has divided his work into six separate, yet interconnected, chapters. The first chapter deals with the military unit which commands perhaps the greatest name recognition of all Roman forces, the Praetorian Guard. Instead of a general history of the Guard, (of which there are some fine examples), Eaton uniquely focuses on the office of the Praetorian Prefect.

In his examination of the Prefecture, Eaton selects examples of 'notable' holders of the position of Prefect. In particular, he is interested in why these individuals were promoted and whether this



was a result of valorous deeds, a personal friendship with the emperor, or just good timing on the part of that Prefect. Alongside his examination of the Prefects, Eaton suggests that the Guard was vital for the emperor's survival. He uses the example of donatives given to the Praetorians by various emperors and the control of the watchword by personal issuance. In essence, Eaton suggests, the emperor had to secure the loyalty of the Praetorians as they were the closest military force to hand.

On occasions this meant sourcing trusty allies from across the empire. Overall, this first chapter is a well-argued and constructed one, although, early on, it is apparent that this read is intended for those with an already keen interest in the Roman army and a passable working knowledge of the Guard and individual emperors over the span of the first and second centuries AD.

Chapter two takes a deeper look into the inner workings of the armies, assessing the maintenance of military discipline and morale among the legions. Eaton astutely isolates the key factors of Roman military ideals and attacks the perceived wisdom. He notes that the Roman ideals of *virtus* and *disciplina* are too polarised (p.25). Instead, Eaton uses the ideals and provides examples of each; he contends that *virtus* could also be shown through manual labour and an ability to endure hardship as well as great deeds achieved on the battlefield. For this, he suggests that the emperor is the example which all legionaries should follow. This is best exemplified by a lengthy discussion on the legionary standard being seen as inextricably linked to the person of the emperor, as he was the source of all military glory. Here Eaton has broken some new ground, rather than maintaining the polarity, which is a subject of other works; he has revealed that the concepts of *virtus* and *disciplina* are bound together in a system of praise and reward for both the martial (winning a military honour), and the menial (constructing the palisade, digging the latrines) tasks within the military system.

Naturally, this leads Eaton to next focus on the career of the empire's centurions in Chapter 3, discussing the office in general, the requirements for advancement, and examples of how far an individual may rise once he has reached the level of the 'centuriate'. Overall, the author suggests that the emperor was forced to walk a fine line between military disciplinarian, exemplar of *virtus*, and benefactor. He managed this carefully, using the centurions as his rank which enforced discipline, yet inspired others around them to feats of martial valour.

Chapters four and five have a greater political angle, focusing on who leads the army, and whether soldiers in the legions were aware of political changes, perhaps far from their own positing. Chapter five, in particular, addresses the idea of community within the legions, through letters, or 'gossip' shared by those who had been away in postings elsewhere. Yet, Eaton argues, the major method of receiving information was through official statements via the emperor, which did not always have to be literary. An example can be seen through Eaton's images of coins. Small phrases in Latin meant that the messages they conveyed were accessible to all. Eaton