



The Society of Ancient Military Historians

President: Prof. Jonathan P. Roth, Vice-President: Dr. Benjamin M. Sullivan, Secretary/Newsletter Editor: Dr. Ioannis Georganas, Book Review Editor: Prof. Lee L. Brice

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Message from the President

When the SAMH was founded, its purpose was to give a voice to those who felt that military history had been marginalized in the academic study of the ancient world. Looking back thirty years later, it is clear that ancient military history has come a long way. Nevertheless, there is much work remaining to be done. While war, armies and, often, navies were a central part of ancient cultures and civilizations, it is still rare to see a military historian in the Classics or History Departments of major universities. The main centers of the study of ancient warfare continue to be small liberal arts schools and state universities. While there are many brilliant and hard-working young graduate students doing important research, jobs in the field are scarce, and there remains a prejudice against military history among hiring committees.

When I was on the job market in the 1990s, I was told by my advisor that I would never get a job with just a specialty in military history, and that I should have “two arrows in my quiver.” I added “ancient race and ethnicity” (mainly the study of ancient Jews, as my dissertation was on the Jewish War). I doubt I would have been hired in a tenure track position with that addendum. Unfortunately, I would have to give the same advice today to young military historians.

There are certainly bright spots. Ancient military history has always been popular, and this remains the case. Even academic books on the subject sell well, and one can study the subject also on television, on the internet and in documentaries (of course of varying quality). Reenactors of many ancient periods are thriving, and reenactment has become an integral part of the study of ancient military history, and has led to some important advances, for example Ann Hyland’s work on the Roman saddle. Indeed, there is probably more interaction between academics and the public in our field than in any other. The militaries, both in the United States and elsewhere,

are beginning to rediscover the value of the study of history, and of ancient history. This is reflected in teaching at the military universities, and in the writings of strategists.

While we have much to do, let us be thankful for the progress we have made, and dedicate ourselves to working together in the future.

Jonathan P. Roth
President, Society of Ancient Military Historians

Message from the Secretary

It is my honor and pleasure joining the SAMH team as the new Secretary/Newsletter Editor. As most of you might not know me, I should introduce myself: I am an archaeologist from Athens, Greece. I hold a PhD in Archaeology from the University of Nottingham, UK and my area of expertise is the archaeology of the Early Iron Age Aegean.

I am particularly interested in burial customs and the construction of identities but also in weapons and warfare in the Late Bronze (Mycenaean) and Early Iron Age Aegean. Lately, I have acquired a taste for Late Roman and Byzantine warfare. My work on ancient weapons and warfare has appeared in several books, journals, and encyclopedias. I am also an active field archaeologist, having worked in projects in Greece and Bulgaria. Since 2005, I have been serving as President of the Athens-Greece Society of the Archaeological Institute of America.

As the new Secretary, I am more than happy to handle any inquiries and feedback, as well information about upcoming conferences, events, CFPs, books, and so forth.

Ioannis Georganas
Secretary, Society of Ancient Military Historians



Books Available for Review

Books Received as of Autumn 2013

The following books have been received for review (those with an asterisk are already assigned to reviewers). Qualified volunteers should indicate their interest by sending a message to ll-brice@wiu.edu, with their last name and requested author in the subject line. They should state their qualifications (both in the sense of degrees held and in the sense of experience in the field concerned). Volunteers are expected to be familiar with the topics and will submit reviews of no greater than 800 words within 120 days. Graduate students are welcome to volunteer, but should contact their supervisor to ascertain that a review is appropriate at this time.

Matyszak, P. *Sertorius and the Struggle for Spain*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. xviii, 182; ISBN: 9781848847873, \$39.95.

Matthew, C. and M. Trundle, eds. *Beyond the Gates of Fire: New Perspectives on the Battle of Thermopylae*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. xii, 228; ISBN: 9781848847910, \$32.95.

Powell, Lindsay. *Germanicus: The Magnificent Life and Mysterious Death of Rome's Most Popular General*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. 376, ISBN 9781781591208, \$39.95.

Book Reviews

Meier, Christian, *A Culture of Freedom: Ancient Greece and the Origins of Europe*, introduction and translation by Kurt Raaflaub, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 344 pages. 978-0199747405, \$29.95.

This book concludes a trilogy of biographical types (an important personality, Caesar; a city, Athens; and now the birth and youth of a culture, Greece) by the esteemed German historian Christian Meier. Within its pages, Meier searches for the origins of Greek culture and its connection to liberty as well as ties to the beginnings of Europe. This focus makes sense as the book was originally penned in German for a continental audience. Unfortunately, European readers are apt to be disappointed as the Europe that held sway until roughly the second half of the Twentieth Century is not one that shows much commonality to the Greek political culture of the ancient demos.

Meier surely speaks for many Europeans when he explains how "it is difficult to comprehend what it meant to be responsible for the whole, without higher authorities,

Silva, L. *Viriathus and the Lusitanian Resistance to Rome 155-139 BC*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. 327, ISBN: 9781781591284, \$39.95.

Taylor, M. *Antiochus The Great*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp.192. ISBN: 9781848844636, \$39.95.

Publishers interested in submitting books for review should send them to the book review editor: Lee L. Brice, History Dept. MG438 Western Illinois University, 1 University Cir., Macomb, IL 61455, USA.

SPECIAL OFFER

Routledge are delighted to offer the members of the Society of Ancient Military Historians a 20% discount on all their History books when ordered through [Routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com). Please enter discount code **SAMH14** at the checkout to take advantage of your discount.*

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without blinkers, everyone together and working for themselves rather than everyone in his proper place guided from above—free and thus vulnerable, extending feelers in every direction, constantly posing new questions, and testing themselves and their words imaginatively, artfully, and always as if for the first time," (45). Meier reckons that Greek culture was a new beginning, not a continuation of times past, an assertion to which Americans would easily assent. He labors to explain this alien world to Europeans.

In his goal to establish whether the Greeks represent Europe's prehistory or the first chapter, Meier concedes legitimate objections exist. He spends considerable space tracing (sometimes meager) Greek origins to Europeans ways of thinking while noting that Europe as a concept emerged only in the Middle Ages, despite the Greek designation in antiquity of that geography being a distinct Europe. Even so, the connections are not always clear. Meier's defense translates awkwardly: "The limited sources we possess for countless historical phenomena often do not allow for precise and certain statements. Precisely marked imprecision is the closest one can get to



meeting the demand for precision,” (287). Meier honestly relates how he set out to discover and explain – in a comprehensible way “if possible” – how the Greeks we know became the Greeks we remember. Meier occasionally trips in his overall pursuit of clarity and comprehension, especially in English translation, in conveying the truths he has revealed. Although he wrestles with the beast mightily, the comprehensible part of his argument sometimes remains lost in translation.

Although the more important deficiency in *A Culture of Freedom* is its failure to show a clear resemblance between the values of ancient Greece and subsequent European history, the book succeeds, ironically, in what it delivers from its text: an unstated but obvious connection between the culture of freedom in Ancient Greece and the origins of the United States. American eyes will easily recognize the enduring threads of freedom from Athens: self-reliance, self-defense, and consensual government born and nurtured independent of monarchs, autocrats or aristocrats of the European tradition. Whether overtly intended it or not, this origins link is a more persuasive one than what Meier offers for Europe in his treatise.

Despite this significant shortcoming in tying the ancient past to the common European experience, one should not be deterred from appreciating Meier’s deep insights into the ancient Greek mind. True, *A Culture of Freedom* reflects more Greek kinship to the American experience than it does to traditional European political practices from the Middle Ages to modernity. Still, European readers will recognize merits from Meier’s research showing the renewed influence of a Greek’s culture of freedom on their continent today after some fitful starts over the years. All should find a profound and serious study of the past that demonstrates vibrant relevance to the present.

Patrick Swan (patrickaswan@gmail.com)
Independent Scholar

Michael Pitassi, *The Navies of Rome*, Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2010. Pp xxvii, 348. ISBN 9781843836001. \$34.95. First print, hardcover: 2009. ISBN 9781843834090. \$80.00.

Michael Pitassi, *Roman Warships*. Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2011. Pp xii, 191. ISBN 9781843836100. \$90.00.

Michael Pitassi’s *The Navies of Rome* seeks to present a narrative military history of Rome from its foundations in the eighth century BC until its collapse in AD 476, bringing to light, placing emphasis on and demonstrating the role played by ‘one of the largest navies the world has

ever seen’ (p. ix). He rightly claims that ancient authors have focused extensively on the actions of the legions and have neglected the importance of the navies in winning Rome her empire in the third century BC and maintaining its sea power afterwards (ix-xi). This trivializing, partially from a deficiency of literary evidence – itself based upon the Roman emphasis on land warfare – has colored modern historians’ attitude towards the Roman navy, or rather their lack of interest. Although there have been previous efforts to address these matters, Pitassi uniquely attempts to cover Roman naval history in its entirety where others have focused on particular eras or individual problems.

The book is well researched and Pitassi provides some thought provoking insight. However, the work is heavily reliant upon other studies and there is little referencing of ancient sources. Yet, since the work is more general rather than scholarly – the Roman military specialist would not find much value in it – the reduction of references to ancient texts serves to remove a hindrance to a broader audience. The bibliography includes entirely English monographs – no journals – reducing the ability of a serious scholar to examine important omitted works or discussion in the journals. The book is most useful to (military) historians wishing to learn more, in general, about the role Rome’s navy played in history or for the history of naval warfare. All the same, due to its narrative structure covering Roman history and informing the reader of political and historic events with which it does not presuppose they are familiar, it is accessible to a novice for whom the appendices are also a benefit. The deficiency of this heavily narrative based structure is in minimizing analysis.

Pitassi presents a chronological narrative (i.e., campaign history), dividing his work into nine chapters based upon significant periods distinguished by relevance to the history of Roman naval warfare. Endnotes follow each chapter. The margins assist in quick referencing by providing a running chronology alongside the narrative. For large portions of the book, particularly the beginning, while the left page continues the main discussion and narrative the right page is filled with numerous ‘encyclopedic’ entries committed to addressing specific topics such as a technical term (‘The Corvus’, p.57), historic event (‘Building of Portus’ p.227), or person (‘Ptolemy’s Geographia’, p.263). Some of these ‘entries’ are of great value, presenting a visualization of otherwise complex matters (e.g., ‘Rowing Systems’ p.33, ‘The Boarding Gangway’ p.109, ‘Evolution of the Ram p.133), allowing even a reader intimately familiar with the events to gain a better appreciation for how the techniques, tactics, and technology might have actually worked.



Chapter One [1-41] covers the foundation of Rome until the First Punic War; Chapter Two [43-81] the First Punic War; Chapter Three [83-117], from the end of the First Punic War through the end of the Second; Chapter Four [119-49], the third and second century BC and to the end of the Social War; Chapter Five [151-82], from Sulla's eastern command until the assassination of Caesar; Chapter Six [183-218], the end of the Republic down to 13 BC; Chapter Seven [219-51], Augustus' reign through to Vespasian's ascension; Chapter Eight [253-80], the Flavian period until Diocletian's ascension; Chapter Nine [285-314], Diocletian's reign through AD 476.

Ancillary sections include a list of plates [vii]; list of illustrations [vii-viii]; an introduction [ix-xiii]; a 'general chronology' usefully broken down by chapters [xv-xxvii]; 14 plates of ancient depictions and reconstructions of ships [inserted 196-97]; 40 images of ships, tactics, maps, fleet dispositions, and battle plans; 5 appendices on rulers [315-17], naval personnel [318-19], ship type: crew [320-22], ancient-modern place names [323-27], and nautical terms [328-30]; bibliography [331-35]; and index [337-48].

Overall, the work reads well and is successful for what it proposes to be: a work directed at the non-specialist. There is original thought provoking insight delivered by Pitassi, and the numerous maps and battle plans make following the history of the Roman navy much more maneuverable. Although called *The Navies of Rome*, the subject is more focused on the campaign history of the navies rather than on the navies themselves, perhaps misleading a potential audience. Those wishing to familiarize themselves with this portion of Roman military history will find Pitassi an excellent narrator who provides plenty of suitable and helpful ancillary material and explanations that will aid them in making it through some of the more elusive technological concepts and terminology.

Deficiencies are primarily with the press: a lack of any sort of numbering of pages before the text proper begins at page 1; the chapter titles do not rightly conform to the dates they are covering and there are inaccuracies (e.g., Chapter 2 listed as '264 to 218 BC' in the contents is then '264 BC-241 BC' in the chapter heading, and the chapter actually begins at 272 BC); there is a lack of conformity in orthography: some of the better known persons are listed by their Latin names, 'Antonius' for Antony, while others maintain their more popular names 'Vespasian'; place names are likewise disorganized (e.g., both Rhenus p.162 and Rhine p.246 appear), some place names are referred to by their ancient names while others by their

modern ones ('Danubius' p.230 but 'Nile' not Nilos p.176, 'Hispania' p.93 but 'Brittany and Normandy' p.160).

Pitassi does much the same for the individual Roman naval vessels in *Roman Warships* as he did for Roman naval warfare in his first work: he presents a study of the development and evolution of Roman warships for the entirety of the Roman period. The book really is akin to *Navies in approach, format, and content*: it is not for the specialist; it is aimed at a broader audience; it provides excellent descriptions and illustrations that make the technical aspects more accessible; and the research limitations of *Navies* persist: only English monographs; access to ancient sources is often indirect; and when ancient sources are examined it is only through translations (p.187). References only appear in endnotes, and they are less than sufficient: e.g., he vaguely leads the reader to Appian's *Civil Wars* on p.113, without direction to the exact passage. His reconstructions, although admittedly speculative by nature, are reasonable enough, and allow the reader to better understand the content than would be possible from examining the source material alone.

The book is divided into two parts: 'I: Interpretation', the more general information, includes three chapters: Chapters One [10-16] and Two [17-36], respectively, lay out the sources and then try to interpret them, establishing parameters for Pitassi's methodology and addressing the restrictions of the sources and the problems inherent in the forms of evidence available. Chapter Three [37-66] breaks down an ancient ship into its individual parts, giving a series of descriptions ('Figureheads', 'Anchors', etc.); it includes an number of useful labeled diagrams and reconstructions.

'Part II: The Ships' includes five chapters, more technical in nature – each devoted to ships of a particular chronological period, and a summary chapter. Chapter Four [69-88] covers the ships of the eighth-fourth centuries BC; Five [89-114], the third-second; Six [115-34], the first centuries BC and AD; Seven [134-51], second-third centuries; and Eight [152-73], the fourth-fifth. Each ship type, after being set into its historical context, is given its own consideration: evolution, tactical advantages/disadvantages, suggested dimensions, crew sizes, etc. Chapter Nine [174-76] provides a brief summary/conclusion of Roman warships and comments on its intact legacy.

Ancillary sections include a list of illustrations [vii-x]; an 'Introduction' [xi-xii]; 25 plates [inserted 52-53]; 92 figures; 29 plans; 4 appendices of an extremely valuable



chronological chart showing the 'service life of ship types' [177], a glossary of ship types [178-80], a museum list where raised wrecks can be visited [181], and a nautical terms glossary [182-86]; a bibliography [187-88]; and an index [189-91]. In general, the press has improved on this work from what they did with *Navies*, presenting a visually appealing product with little to leave about which to complain.

Pitassi again achieves what he sets out to do: provide a comprehensive look at the warships of ancient Rome, directed at a general audience. Specialist will, as with *Navies*, find it of less value and criticize it for not being what they want, but that is to fail to understand the nature of the work. It does not attempt to be something that it is not. Rather, it sets itself as a useful work for the non-specialist to better appreciate and understand Roman naval warfare, an excellent compliment to its predecessor, *The Navies of Rome*. I suggest that the two be approached together as they go hand-in-hand: read the campaign history of *Navies* while referencing *Warships* to better understand the vessels, crew, technology, etc, in those campaigns.

Even those more familiar with Roman military history and who are willing to admit that the traditional inclination has been to relegate Roman naval history to an inferior status will benefit from reading Pitassi's works.

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Announcements

Call for Papers: International Ancient Warfare Conference 2014

This conference will be held from the 1st of July 2014 to the 3rd of July 2014, at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. It is supported by Aberystwyth University and the University of Wales: Trinity Saint David.

Conference Organiser: Geoff Lee (Aberystwyth University).

The conference is aimed equally at postgraduate students, early career researchers and established academics. The intent is to facilitate a multi-disciplinary conference and therefore researchers from any relevant discipline are encouraged to participate. Papers on any aspect of Ancient Warfare are sought. These will be of thirty minutes duration with ten minutes for comments/questions.

The deadline for submission of abstracts, which should be of c. 300 words, is January 24th 2014. All contributors will be required to pay a fee which is £15:00 for current students and £20:00 for other participants.

If you are an experienced academic willing to act as a chair please contact me.

The conference BLOG can be accessed here: <http://ancientwarfare2014.wordpress.com/>

Aberystwyth is easily accessible by rail. Postgraduate students needing help with their travel costs are encouraged to apply to the Thomas Wiedemann Memorial Fund (<http://www.thomaswiedemann.org.uk/>). Accommodation and meals will not be arranged for the conference. However, as Aberystwyth is a popular seaside holiday resort there is an abundance of accommodation available. The National Library has a canteen and a café and there are also several good places to eat within easy walking distance. To submit an abstract or for more information please contact the conference organiser at: geofflee101@yahoo.co.uk

To have your event or news included in the next issue of *Res Militares*, please contact Dr. Ioannis Georganas: i_georganas@yahoo.com with details. If you have any suggestions or feedback on this issue of *Res Militares*, please send it to Dr. Georganas.



Membership Application Form for the Society of Ancient Military Historians (SAMH)

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