



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

There were two ancient military historical panels at the 81st Annual Meeting of the Society For Military History, held in Kansas City, Missouri (USA) from April 3 to April 6th, 2014. The first, entitled "War in the Ancient World" was chaired by Dr. Sarah Melville, Assistant Professor of History at Clarkson University, whose field is ancient Assyrian warfare. Unfortunately, two of the scheduled speakers, Dr. Brian Nakamura, Associate Professor of History at Southern Connecticut State University, who was to speak on "Building Fear: The Construction of Siege Towers as Psychological Warfare in Classic Antiquity," and Dirk Yarker, an adjunct in the History Department at Southeastern Iowa Community College, were unable to attend. Dr. Melville read Mr. Yarker's paper "The Role of the Roman Army in Britain" which analyzed the garrison from the perspective of an occupation versus a peacekeeping force. Dr. Jessica Clark, an Assistant Professor of Classics at Florida State University and author of the forthcoming *Triumph in Defeat: Military Loss and the Roman Republic* (Oxford), spoke on "The Management of Defeat: Definitions and Redefinitions from the Roman Republic." She discussed the Roman manipulation of information about defeats, focusing on the wars in Spain.

The second panel "Ancient War as a Transformative Force" was chaired by Dr. Lee L. Brice Professor of History at Western Illinois University whose two most recent books, *Warfare in the Roman Republic: From the Etruscan Wars to the Battle of Actium* and *Greek Warfare From the Battle of Marathon to the Conquests of Alexander the Great* are both being published by ABC-Clio this year. Dan Powers, independent scholar, who had been scheduled to speak on "The Influence of Achaemenid Persia on "Multi-Troop" Tactical

Development in Classical Greece" was not able to be present. Dr. Michael Pavkovic, Professor of Strategy and Policy at the United States Naval War College, spoke on "Rome Goes to Sea": The Punic Wars and Naval Transformation of Rome," pointing out that the successful program to develop as a naval power in that conflict representation a major change in Roman war making. The next speaker was Dr. Jonathan Roth of San Jose State University, whose talk "Hellenistic and Roman Judaism and the Invention of Religious War" argued that changes in Jewish belief in the First Centuries B.C. and A.D. made possible a form of religious terrorism.

Jonathan P. Roth
President, Society of Ancient Military Historians

Message from the Secretary

It is my pleasure to present the latest issue of *Res Militares*, which includes a very interesting report on two ancient military historical panels at the **81st Annual Meeting of the Society For Military History** by our President, Prof. Jonathan Roth, as well as three very informative book reviews.

I am also thrilled to report that our official Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/192741547422716/>) has now over 125 members!

As usual, 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****Res Militares, Society for Ancient Military Historians,
Books Received, Spring 2014**

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 llbrice@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.

Carey, Brian Todd. *Warfare in the Ancient World*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. 184, ISBN 1844151735, \$19.95.

*Gordon, C. D. *The Age of Attila: Fifth Century Byzantium and the Barbarians*. Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013. Pp. vii, 263; ISBN 9780472035786, \$24.95.

Grainger, John D. *Roman Conquests: Egypt & Judea*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. xvii, 206; ISBN 9781848848238, \$39.95.

*Levithan, Josh. *Roman Siege Warfare*. Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013. Pp. vii, 247; ISBN 9780472118984, \$60.00.

Powell, Lindsay. *Eager for Glory: The Untold Story of Drusus the Elder Conquer of Germania*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. xxxiii, 234; ISBN

Book Reviews

James Romm *Ghost on the Throne: The Death of Alexander the Great and the Bloody Fight for his Throne* New York: Vintage Books, 2011. Pp. xii, 389, ill., maps. ISBN-9780307456601, \$17.00.

Reviewed by W. Lindsay Adams
(winthrop.adams@utah.edu)

The last dozen or so years have seen a deluge of books on Alexander, his campaigns, and the sources for both. Among the best of these was James Romm's edition of

9781783030033, \$24.95.

Ruggiero, Paolo de. *Mark Antony: A Plain Blunt Man*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. 295; ISBN 9781783462704, \$39.95.

Sampson, Gareth C. *The Collapse of Rome: Marius, Sulla & the 1st Civil War (91-70BC)*. UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2013. Pp. 284, ISBN 9781848843264, \$29.95.

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.

Telford, Lynda. *Sulla: A Dictator Reconsidered*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2014. Pp. 298, ISBN 9781783030484, \$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, IL61455.

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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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the *Landmark Arrian*. It is interesting to note that Arrian wrote seven books to cover Alexander's thirteen year reign in his *Anabasis Alexandri*, including one more, the *Indica*, to cover the journey back from India. It constitutes Arrian's best known work, largely because of the subject, but Arrian wrote a much more extensive study of the years from Alexander's death in 323 BCE to the last assembly of the Grand Army at Triparadeisos in 321 BCE, taking ten books to cover three years. Clearly a complicated period and one that fascinated Arrian. It is only natural then that Romm, following the *Landmark Arrian*, was likewise drawn to the period following Alexander's death.



Romm is not alone in that. Robin Wakefield's *Dividing the Spoils* and an anthology from an Alexander the Great International Symposium, *After Alexander* (ed. by E.M. Anson and V.A Troncoso) both came out in 2012. Ed Anson's *Alexander's Heirs* is just out this year. But Romm's *Ghost on the Throne* is unique. Though it uses notes to elaborate on problems and as a guide to further reading, it is written for an educated audience more than for a specialist. He has a lively and clear narrative style, emotive of the events and people involved. The scholarly debates are mentioned, such as the chronology for the period or the Tombs at Vergina, with helpful notes, but they do not distract from the excellent narrative.

Ghost on the Throne covers the events and characters from the death of Alexander to the eclipse of the Argead Dynasty in 308 BCE. The Introduction ("The Opening of the Tombs") deals with the excavations at Vergina in a lively fashion (Manolis Andronikos is seen as a Howard Carter like figure that gives an immediacy to the event), followed by a well informed and balanced discussion. The first two chapters cover the death of Alexander ("Bodyguards and Companions) and Perdikkas the Chiliarch's coming to power ("The Testing of Perdikkas"). After that the narrative covers actions that occurred simultaneously at vastly separated areas. In the Preface Romm lays out his approach after Chapter Two as series of "snapshot like frames", done to keep the events places and characters clear. It is an approach that is eminently successful. Chapter 3, "The Athenians Last Stand (I)," encompasses the events and characters (Demosthenes, Phocion, Hyperides, Aristotle) in Athens immediately following Alexander's death. Chapter 4, "Resistance, Rebellions and Reconquest" covers the same period as the previous chapter but in Egypt and the Persian East (the Mercenaries Revolt, Perdikkas and Ptolemy, and Chandragupta in the Sind). The next two chapters are organized in the same parallel fashion: Chapter 5, "The Athenians Last Stand (II)" lays occurrences in the Aegean the year after Alexander's death, while Chapter 6, "Death on the Nile" tells the tale of the fall of Perdikkas. The sequence continues in Asia in Chapter 7 ("The Fortunes of Eumenes"), for the years 321 to 319, then switches back to Greece, but also covers the Siege of Nora in Chapter 8 ("The War Comes Home"), dealing with the same period. Chapter 9 ("Duels to the Death") brings the two narratives back together, involving the continuing struggle for the control of Macedonia as well as Antigonos the One-Eyed's pursuit and destruction of Eumenes at the Battle of Paraetacene, in a well explained section that will be welcomed by readers interested in military history. Chapter 10 ("The Closing of the Tombs") brings the narrative, and the Argead Era, to an end: 316 to

308 BCE. A poignant Epilogue describes the death of Heracles the son of Barsine, and the sad tale of the end of the Argeads, as well as some of the characters that filled the last several chapters, but lived on.

Ghost on the Throne is well illustrated with good maps, uncluttered and clearly illustrating the scenes of the specific chapters. The Notes are identified by page and the italicized phrase from that page, rather than specific citation by sentence or paragraph. These discuss interpretations and scholarly contexts for the noted items, including references when necessary. The result is that they are "user friendly" rather than ponderous. Much the same can be said for the brief Bibliography, organized by topic, and meant as a starting set of references and works in a field that is extensive.

The book is an ideal introduction to the period, especially for context and background. It should be useful both in a classroom and general interest readers.

Christopher Matthew A Storm of Spears: Understanding the Greek Hoplite at War. Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2012. Pp. xxi + 314. ISBN 978-1-61200-119-7 (Hbk.).

Reviewed by Benjamin M. Sullivan (bsulliva@binghamton.edu)

It should be emphasized from the start that the book under review is not properly history. It is rather antiquarian research, specifically the branch dealing with military matters – the erudite study of the ancient world approached systematically and synchronically, rather than diachronically as history usually would. The purer forms of antiquarianism have waned since halcyon seasons in the Renaissance and early modern period, but military antiquities, at least, seems to be thriving today. Two new research methods, the physical recreation of ancient battle by modern re-enactors and experimental archaeology, are at least partly responsible for this vigor.

The author, C. Matthew (M. henceforth), forcefully advocates the new methods. His study uses them to illuminate the hoplite phalanx, the characteristic tactical formation of the Greek city-states during their flourishing in the archaic and classical periods (c.700-323 BCE). Hoplites, heavily armed infantrymen, fought in close order as a phalanx. The essential equipment items were a long thrusting spear and a large, round shield. Historians usually win knowledge of the hoplite phalanx only with considerable difficulty, from spare battle accounts in classical Greek historians like Thucydides and Xenophon, from the archaeology of weapons and armor, and by



interpreting the iconography of Greek vase painting (which often had martial themes). Experimental archaeology and physical recreation are newcomers in this field, but as M. shows, have much to teach historians about the way hoplites fought.

The book divides into two parts: the first addresses the individual hoplite (Chapters One through Eleven), then Chapters Twelve through Fourteen cover hoplites collectively, that is, the phalanx. Twenty-four mostly color plates illustrate a few key ancient artifacts and many of M.'s physical recreations. The book's central thesis, introduced in Chapter Two, is that the hoplite handled his long spear not by thrusting it overhead, as usually believed, but either in a low motion or an initially couched "underhand" thrust.

First, the criticisms. These may preponderate, but none of the flaws highlighted are fatal. The first two problems are perhaps understandable in antiquarian work. For one, there is no indication from M. why any of this should matter to those who are not students of ancient warfare, or what the hoplite phalanx had to do with Greek history generally. Second, M. rarely tracks change over time. The reader is dropped into the middle of events to ponder a fully formed, timeless phalanx. M. also tends to treat chronologically disparate and dubious sources en masse, as valid for all eras. This tendency is usually harmless, since his real contribution consists not in interpreting ancient sources but illustrating the limits of hoplite performance with his experiments. When the lack of source criticism and unconcern about diachronic change combine, as when M. discusses the notorious questions about divisions and command structure in the Spartan army (Chapter Twelve), the results can be seriously misleading. There are odd bibliographic inclusions, and conspicuous absences too. For example, M. leaves out J. Lazenby's fundamental study on the Spartan army, a startling omission. Had it been included, it would perhaps have helped M. handle the problems of the Spartan army.

A somewhat uncritical positivism pervades the book. For his experiments, M. often relied on calculations derived from ancient evidence that is extremely difficult to interpret. M. states (89-90), for example, that: "Greek hoplites (at Thermopylai) of the front rank, using a rearwardly balanced weapon that was longer than the Persian spear, and wielding that spear in the underarm position while adopting an oblique body posture in close-order, would have had an effective range of around 220cm; almost a metre's advantage over their opponent." He does not, however, adequately inform the reader that the state of our sources leaves almost every element of these propositions open to debate.

For all this, M.'s understanding of what was practically possible on the battlefield is superb. Indeed, everyone who writes about hoplite battle will have to take M.'s conclusions very seriously. A fundamental insight follows immediately on his discovery that the spear was thrust low or underhand (Chapter Four). When Greek vase painters depicted figures using an "overhead" grip, they did not, as all have assumed, mean to portray a hoplite thrusting with the spear, necessarily balanced well to the rear of its length, but rather a warrior throwing the lighter, thinner javelin, balanced as it had to be at the shaft's center. M. patiently explains (Chapter Four) that the hoplite could only fight effectively when he stood knees bent, faced somewhat obliquely to the oncoming target, rather than fully squared up or sideways-on like a fencer, and we begin to wonder at how little scholars have considered physicality in their study of this consummately physical subject. Pressing on, M. deflates more theories, usually about minor matters, like the idea that hoplites regularly used the spear's metal butt-spike as a weapon when the shaft broke. Even so, when M. solves the problem of the mysterious cord that ringed the shield's inside circumference (it allowed the bearer to adjust a standard sized shield to his forearm length), interested readers will delight at his ingenuity and wonder again at earlier scholars' solutions.

The book raises a host of new questions about the phalanx, not least how we should now interpret the fighting depicted in early vase paintings. Historians can look forward to the incorporation of M.'s important findings into broader studies. Enthusiasts of all kinds will find his book a welcome addition to their libraries.

Dan Howard *Bronze Age Military Equipment*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Military 2011. Pp. xi, 166. ISBN 978-1-84884-293-9. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Alex Vlastnik (at-vlastnik@wiu.edu)

Howard's work, *Bronze Age Military Equipment*, provides readers with an effective in-depth look into the armaments of various Aegean and Near Eastern armies as well as their implementation. Howard selects the date range of 3000-1200 BCE for the scope of his work. The book is subdivided into five chapters exploring, Bronze Age warfare, weapons, chariots, armor, and shields. Howard's book is aimed at a non-specialist audience and achieves his goal of challenging established views surrounding Bronze Age technology and tactics.

In this work Howard argues that militaries were well adapted to the nature of Bronze Age combat and their



equipment was effective at providing both offensive and defensive advantages. Howard's methodology in approaching this subject relies on the use of archeological evidence tempered with literary sources and iconographic evidence. However, Howard warns against overemphasizing images of equipment in forming analysis; due to the stylized nature of many depictions. Howard also 'tests' many different weapons, armors, and vehicles. He frequently cites his own experiences with these replicas and acknowledges when no experiments were conducted. These studies take into account a human element that is in danger of omission in a work focused exclusively on equipment, but in this case it is confined to the physical limitations of the human body.

All five of the chapters are researched and discuss a different aspect of technology or tactics. The two standout chapters in this volume are chapters three and four, dealing with chariots and armor respectively. Howard's chapter on chariot warfare discusses work by other scholars such as Robert Drews and Roger Moorey and takes the stance that chariots were primarily used as platforms for archery. Howard also makes the questionable claim that large scale chariot battles took place in Greece, citing literary sources as well as Linear B records from Knossos. Chapter four, dealing with armor, spends a considerable amount of time discussing the Dendra panoply excavated in 1977. Working with a reconstruction of the armor, Howard places the weight of the panoply at 25kg and makes the claim that it would be no problem to "run, jump or fight with most contemporary weapons" (79) while wearing the armor.

Howard also includes four appendices exploring Homeric shields and armor, appearance of Bronze Age warriors, and sword typologies. As a reader begins the four appendices, one will notice a change in approach as the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* take center stage. Howard uses Lattimore's translations for all Greek passages making the appendices approachable given their reliance on the original Greek of the *Iliad*. Throughout the book a multitude of images are presented including but not limited to inscriptions, replicas, diagrams, and graphs. These images are unobtrusive and help augment the

author's description at key points. For discussions on sword typology these images prove necessary.

Howard also owes much to the work of previous scholars, chief among them being Nancy Sanders's 1961 work on sword typology and the scholars that later refined her original system. In his first two appendices Howard also calls into question representations of Homeric equipment based on traditional depictions. He attempts to go back to the Greek text in order to discern the nature of shield construction as well as methods employed by soldiers using them.

A deficiency in Howard's work is that the armies of the Aegean and Egypt tend to take center stage. While most likely due to the availability of source material, it is nonetheless an issue. Also, Howard's study is focused on the technology and tactics of the Bronze Age, ignoring aspects. On account of this choice, the book should be classified as a traditional techno-centric military history. Howard's discussion of sword typology also has the tendency to become quite technical which while, laudatory for its depth, has the potential to become tedious depending on the readers interests and prior knowledge.

However, readers with a background in the subject as well as those with limited knowledge will find sections of interest in Howard's work. *Bronze Age Military Equipment* effectively adheres to its scope as well as its central argument and accomplishes its goal of challenging established views making it valuable for historians interested Howard's research or a reader curious about Bronze Age military technology.

Announcements

International Ancient Warfare Conference 2014 (Aberystwyth, Wales, 1-3 July)

The programme of this conference can be found at:
<http://ancientwarfare2014.wordpress.com/programme>

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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