



The Complete Roman Army

Adrian Goldsworthy

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The Roman army was one of the most successful fighting forces in history. Its organization and tactics were highly advanced and were unequaled until the modern era. Spectacular monuments to its perseverance and engineering skill are still visible today, most notably Hadrian's Wall and the siegeworks around the fortress of Masada.

This book is the first to examine in detail not just the early imperial army but also the citizens' militia of the Republic and the army of the later Empire. The unprecedented scope and longevity of Roman military success is placed in the context of ordinary soldiers' daily lives, whether spent in the quiet routine of a peaceful garrison or in arduous campaign and violent combat. Key battles and tactics are described, and there are brief biographies of the great commanders.

Drawing on archaeology, ancient art, and original documentary sources, this book presents the most convincing history ever published of the Roman army.

The Complete Roman Army Details

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Dimitrios says

This book is exceptionally good for a number of reasons.

First, it does not confine itself to text descriptions, as it provides an ample set of illustrations that demonstrate aspects like battle formations, weapons, and armour.

Second, it spans through all the time of the Roman dominance in Europe. That is, it starts from the early Roman Republic, it continues with the Roman Empire, and it concludes with the late Roman Empire.

Third, it gives a multi-dimensional perspective of the Roman army. It describes the recruiting system, the battle tactics, the everyday life, the management, the camps, the armours, the weapons, the professions, and the political affiliations with the senators and the Emperor.

I believe that this book is an indispensable aide to anyone interested in the Roman history.

Igor Ljubuncic says

Another excellent history book.

I've always been fascinated with Rome, and reading some more on its fascinating, brutal and super-highly-efficient ways never hurts. This book treats us to some eight centuries of progress in the organization, tactics and weaponry of the Roman army, spanning the three distinct periods: the Republic, the Empire, and the sort-of post-Imperial late antiquity decline.

The Romans left a lot of records and archeology behind, so there's a lot to tell, too. The book goes into vivid detail describing the political, economic and environmental conditions that drove the Romans into creating the best military force till about the industrial era.

In the Republic, soldiers were basically feudal retainers, but they were all citizens, and Romans did not use slaves, not even on their galleys. They had smaller legions, they used other nations for cavalry support, and they slowly developed their unstoppable infantry formation, with the pilum and the shield as their primary weapons. Adrian also treats us to a number of famous, epic battles of this period, most notably the war against the wheat-rich Carthage.

The Empire is all about the power - on all levels. The old ways of the Republic were no longer sufficient to sustain the growth and the expansion, so emperors instigated major changes. The legions became bigger, the old levy method was replaced with a professional system that drew its ranks from the commoners rather than richer citizens of the past, and new ranks were introduced to support the army structure. Even so, senators still meddled a lot in the army's way, and knowing the right people helped get promotions. Again, we learn about some notable battles of this time, including a few famous defeats in Germany and the revolt in Judea.

Late antiquity tells the story of the decline - in every way. Units got smaller, cavalry got more focus, and what remains behind the ruins of the Western Empire is the chieftain-and-his-buddies system that would dominate the dark ages till the resurrection of the feudal system with Charlemagne. And so it goes in circles. We learn more about the escapades in the east, the war against the Persians, the improvements in the weaponry and armor, and the general loss of focus through civil wars. Christianity is mentioned, but it does seem to have had any impact on the army.

Regardless of the specific era, the Roman army was an amazing institution. Soldiers had dog tags, every

activity was logged in detail, and discipline was severe. The fighting methods and the march in silence are just awesome. The Roman army never really had real opponents save for the last century or so. It was always morally and tactically superior.

The service was long, but it came with perks. Legionnaires were not just fighters, they were craftsmen and engineers, and they did everything the army needed. Soldiers also invested money in tombstones, as it was important to be noted after death. We also learn about families and how this worked - as soldiers were barred from marrying.

There's a lot more in the book, including biographies of great commanders, the importance and status of the centurion, unit flags, names and slogans, peacetime activities, fortifications and their purpose, sieges, combat tactics, the auxiliary units, the inclusion of different nations and people within the military ranks, and more.

This is a very varied, colorful book, with lots of great drawings and photographs of archeological sites, quotes, speeches from emperors, intrigue and scheming, detailed descriptions of armor suites and weapons, and logistics. While the focus is on the army, it actually tells a compelling story of a society behind the army, the fine balance between the civil and military power, and how Rome managed to conquer the old world with such a small but elite force of professionals.

Well worth its time. Highly recommended.

Igor

Jane says

A good solid general history of the Roman Army. Short history of Rome, how the Army developed through the years, day-to-day life of the soldiers, command structure and charts of a few of the most important battles. Since 2003 when it was published, I'm sure archaeologists and scholars have 'dug up' [pun intended] more and possibly more accurate information. There was not enough on the Late Imperial army to suit me [only 8 pp.]; I had a couple of questions the book did not answer so I might want something a little more comprehensive. The index was barely adequate. The photos, drawings, and diagrams were fantastic!

Lucia Bradley says

This is a very good, moderately more than surface level review of the Roman Army during late Imperial times. It did have a lot of data I hadn't seen before. It included bits and pieces about the day to day life and the uses of certain equipment, what happened after their service, religion and even what they did off duty.

It isn't as in-depth as some older works, but it is written to make it easier to understand. It also isn't something to be read like a novel, it has a lot more in common with a coffee table type textbook. The art is great though, the writing flows smoothly and I found it pretty nice.

It does give somewhat of a short shrift to the Roman Navy, to the early years, and the end years of the Roman Army. However, those are such different periods with different focuses that it might be for best not trying to cover them as well in more detail.

If you like stuff about Rome and the Roman Army, I definitely recommend this.

John Warren says

very informative and does have outstanding pictures one of those book that u can go back to for references

Daniel Whitfield says

Informative and analytical. This book proves why Adrian Goldsworthy is highly regarded in the Roman empire historical community.

Rod says

Wonderful book. Clear pictures and information, though I would only recommend it to avid Roman adherents.

Conor says

This was a really informative and concise overview of how the Roman Army functioned. This book broke it's analysis down into a of a number of convenient and accessible sections which ranged from 'The life of a Roman soldier' to 'The Roman Army at war'. I found both the greater picture about how an army at war functioned and the smaller picture examining the day-to-day lives of the soldiers who made up the army interesting. I also enjoyed the narrative approach Goldsworthy took to describing the evolution of the army. It was engaging to see how the army began as the militia of a small village, developed into the doggedly determined but ineffective arm of conquest for an ambitious republic, became the seemingly invincible bulwark of ruthless efficiency that maintained Pax Romana with an iron fist before slowly crumbling under the pressures of economic decline and bitter civil war. However it should be noted that the main focus of this book was on the Principate period so if you're interested in the Republic or the Late Empire you will want to check out other books as well. Overall this was a really enjoyable and informative read that I would recommend to anyone with a interest in Roman or military history.

Adam Lofthouse says

An ABSOLUTE MUST for anyone wanting to write or study Roman Military History. The detail is extraordinary, the facts always stand up when cross referenced. It's superbly written, so even if you are a relative novice (which I was when I first read) its easy enough to read and engrossing from start to finish. Four years after I first read it cover to cover there is barely a writing session that goes by when I don't feel the need to pick it up and just double check a fact.

Would also like to give a shout out for the illustrations which are brilliant, and really help to bring to life the words in black an white. Highly recommend!

Luis Sancho says

A very well written, complete yet concise, account of the Roman army. Good illustrations, balanced perspectives

Michael Smith says

The author is an expert in Roman military matters with several previous works to his credit, and even though he's an academic, his style is exceptionally readable without being oversimplified or talking down to the reader. He begins with the origins of the citizen army under the early Republic, made up of soldiers who volunteered as a matter of patriotism. This worked fine for several centuries, when Rome's sphere of influence was still relatively small and campaigns were limited in time. As conquests expanded, though, and continuous occupation became necessary, a full-time professional army became necessary, made up of career soldiers receiving pay. The ethnic make-up of the army also shifted, with a large percentage of non-Italians being accepted -- though they were still citizens, as the law required -- and with a much greater proportion of non-citizen auxiliaries added to the TO. Other sections of the book cover the many aspects of a soldier's life, both on garrison duty (which might be most of the time) and at war. Great attention is given to weapons and equipment, and the author is careful to note the many competing theories based on scarce evidence. The nearly 250 illustrations even include photos of modern reenactors, whose experiments and field trials have answered many scholarly questions. A lovely book, well written and edited, and very useful as a bridge between casual interest and academic study.

Pieter says

Een blik in het dagelijkse leven van een Romeinse legionair: hoe hij leefde, wat hij deed wanneer er geen militaire dreiging was, wie zijn oversten waren. Het boek is geïllustreerd, vaak met foto's van reenactors. Het hoofdstuk over het late West-Romeinse Keizerrijk is zeer summier. Beter hierover inzake militaire strategie "The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire" van Edward Luttwak te lezen.

Shane says

If you are looking for a terrific, detailed look at the Roman military look no further. It's true that naval warfare and marine engagements are given short shrift, but fighting on water was never the Roman preference anyway. For a look at the legions - for most of Roman history the well-trained, well-equipped, multi-skilled land army - this book is the best you'll find.

The book covers 500 years of history, but the time up to Augustus and the Principate is given only 50 pages or so at the beginning of the book, and late antiquity (civil wars, the fall of the West) is given even shorter shrift. However, this leaves 150 or so pages of detailed analysis on all aspects of the late-Republic and Imperial army. This includes equipment and organization, recruitment and training, duty rosters (and even what legionnaires did off duty), legion sieges and heavy equipment, logistics and much more. For example, the author talks about the ways that ancient armies greeted each other, their contrasting methods of attempting to intimidate - Germans with war cries, Romans with a near silent, relentless approach until in spear throwing range when they toss, bellow and surge forward. I've read a lot of Roman history, but I've

never had as clear a picture of what a legionnaire did in battle as I did from *The Complete Roman Army*.

In my opinion, the best parts of this book are those that try to get "down and dirty" with ancient soldiers and officers. A lot of time is spent explaining who these people were, where they came from and what their lives were like. I especially liked how in places the author contrasted the best available evidence with the Hollywood image and explicitly states that "though you've seen *that* on the big screen, what probably happened is *this* instead." Mr. Goldworthy explains both strategy and tactics in detail, down to the level of a front line soldier clashing with his enemy. These sections paint a vivid picture of these people's lives, some of the most dangerous and pointed moments of their lives, and makes their world breathe again.

This is an excellent book on the subject, good for a read-through and as a check-a-topic reference. If you are interested in the topic check this one out.

Timothy M says

I have an odd story with this book, which I bought awhile back after noticing that it was cited in one of my favorite military history books (and, for the life of me, I cannot remember which book that was--I just wrote the citation down in a planner/organizer without any other info...not very smart).

After being unable to find it at any bookstore, or check it out at the library, it became the "odd Roman army book" that I couldn't find anywhere, and I couldn't even remember that stupid citation that I had found so intriguing.

I finally found saw a copy at Borders, but the little bastard was SHRINK WRAPPED.

I suppose I should add that this book is just pricy enough to make you hesitate whether or not you really want it, and it is also...ahem...quite skimpy and short for such a pricy book (especially when you're looking at a shrink wrapped copy...).

Yet, after I bought it (and yes, I felt violated forking out \$30 or whatever for a book that looked like a much shorter version of several other books I have) it is totally worth the price, and out of at least ten books I have on the topic (including the typically very dry, very long-winded, very comprehensive, and painful to read books on Roman military history by classics professors with gigantic sticks up their...well, you know...), this book is easily one of the most useful and informative.

I'd say "accessible" too, but I don't want to dissuade any fellow nerds from checking it out.

In just a few pages, Goldworthy can easily blast through topics which most other authors need one or more chapters' worth of blathering just to half-assedly describe. This is not only because of his excellent, concise writing, but due to illustrations and photographs that are so perfectly selected that it is almost eerie.

Each major phase of the Roman army's history, and the relevant events (e.g. Servian Constitution, the Camillan, Polybian, Marian, Augustan, and Late Roman armies, the Punic Wars, etc.) from the time of the Etruscans to the Byzantine period is covered with 2-3 pages that miraculously condense a freakish amount of info into extremely readable packages. Of particular note is his detailed overview of the pros and cons of the citizen soldier system, as compared to the Marian system, within a few paragraphs (why yes, the way he wrote it IS much more interesting!).

Any Roman history or military history geek, or even anyone who so much as watched an episode of *Rome* on HBO without either throwing something at the TV or kicking their dog, will enjoy this book.

(It even looks nice on a coffee table, especially next to a bunch of snobby, "trying way too hard" coffee table books, bought specifically to impress people!)

J?nis B?manis says

Šo gr?matu, k? atsauci uz literat?ru bieži redz?ju <https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/>, t?d?? ar? nol?mu izlas?t un nebiju v?lies. Autors izvair?s no liekv?rd?bas, valoda ir pat?kama, gr?mata sadal?ta visnota? lo?isk?s noda??s. Autors ar? apzin?ti izvair?s no liekiem visp?rin?jumiem un argumentos patst?v?gi atsaucas uz noteiktiem avotiem. Nedr?kst nepiemin?t ar? milz?go ilustrat?vo materi?lu.

?sum?, tiem, kam Romas armija interes?, un zin?šanas par to ir sal?dzinoši nelielas (piem. man :)) š? gr?mata ir „must read”.

Pie m?nusiem šai gr?matai parasti min koncentr?šanos uz jau profesion?lo Romas armiju, maz?k skatoties republikas laiku un ar? Romas p?d?jos gadsimtus, ka ar? atbilda man?m interes?m un lielu m?nusu taj? neredz?ju. Person?gi b?tu paticis, ja b?tu vair?k kauju aprakstu, un esošie b?tu informat?v?ki.
