



Roman Warfare

Adrian Goldsworthy , John Keegan (editor)

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The Romans built perhaps the greatest empire of all time, forged with an unequaled skill in warfare.

Accompany these unparalleled troops from the conquest of Italy thru to world conquest. Watch as defeated armies became allies & future Roman soldiers. Consider the irony of extreme brutality & repression leading to peace & prosperity. All the techniques & the organization of this amazingly advanced fighting force come into focus, from the emphasis on drills to its superior technology & complex bureaucracy.

Roman Warfare Details

Date : Published December 31st 2000 by Cassell & Co. (London) (first published April 1st 2000)

ISBN : 9780304352654

Author : Adrian Goldsworthy , John Keegan (editor)

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : History, Ancient History, Military, Military History, Nonfiction, War, Military Fiction

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From Reader Review Roman Warfare for online ebook

Will Staton says

An excellent macro level overview of the Roman military over the entire course of the Republic/Empire's existence. Given the length of time covered by the book - as well as the shorter length of the book itself - my main complaints are that not enough info was included and that the macro level strategic narrative would have benefited from more zooming in for micro level explanations of particular battles at certain points to highlight the case.

An excellent source for learning more about the Roman military with enough socio-political history included to give the reader important insight into how Rome's political system strengthened military positions and created the foundation for the longevity of success. Definitely worth the read for anyone interested in military history if slightly incomplete due to the massive amount of content and material that can/should be included in such a story.

Nathan says

This review is a tiny bit premature, because I'm about 25 pages from finishing a complete read, but have skimmed the whole thing a couple times.

As a general history of Roman warfighting from the Republic to the end of the West (and a little beyond), it's adequate and interesting.

What I mean by that is that this is a scholarly work, but isn't intended to be read by scholars. It lacks footnotes or any other form of annotation, instead, reserving an appendix at the back of the book listing the primary sources used in each chapter. This, to me, the historian, is inconvenient, but not crippling. I still have direction with which to perform further research.

As a starting point for the casual historian though, this book is, like other books in the Smithsonian History of Warfare, an interesting and relatively quick read. The author is quite knowledgeable on the subject, and having the series editor of John Keegan, lends additional credibility to the history.

I found it pleasurable to read, filled with interesting points of view that I hadn't considered before, and has pointed me at a whole bunch more reading - with context to put it in.

If you read history, you could do far worse than purchase this book.

Billy says

A concise, well-illustrated primer on Roman warfare spanning from the early Republic to the end of Empire. A great book for someone newly interested in Rome and for the expert. I downgraded the book because of some poor editing and tiny print on the maps.

José says

This book dives right into every aspect of the Roman legion. It covers everything from battle formations to tactics and technology. It does a great job of illustrating how the Roman army was transformed from a citizen militia during Republican times to a professional force in the days of the Empire.

A.J says

This was a great book. Lots of information and will almost definitely re-read. Interesting to see how the power of the Roman Empire decreased with the influx of foreigners into its ranks; foreigners who were unable to identify with Roman patriotism and fought mostly as mercenaries. More importantly, it is interesting to note the following three things: 1. How an empire declines with the decline of its military. 2. The military declines because the politicians became self-centered, greedy and prone to partisanship, 3. They became that way because they lost their moral code. A simplification, to be sure, but one that bears weight.

This book focuses primarily on the structure of the Roman army and the tactics used, but you can see how the political situation at the Capitol almost always had a direct effect on the efficiency and victory of the Roman army.

Anyways. Great read.

Mike Nesemann says

Nice job, with plenty of maps and pictures, explaining evolution of Roman army. I haven't read a lot of Roman history (I gave up 1/2 way through volume 4 of Gibbon's Decline and Fall) so am in no position to comment critically on content. But I enjoyed his weaving of the military tactics and structure with the political evolution of Rome, going from basically raiding expeditions lead by chiefs to the highly organized structure most of us think of. The Roman's habitual disdain for negotiation was something new to the ancient world and their implacable approach to rival states inevitably resulted in an expanding empire. He shows how military prowess became critically important for political advancement and how the growing empire made it impossible to rely strictly on family to lead the far flung legions. A professional army grew and successful commanders became dangerous. By then, most soldiers came from poorer families and signed up for 25 years of duty. However the Senate's refusal to provide for any sort of "retirement" system made them ever more dependent on their commanders to take care of them, increasing their loyalty to the individual commander, not the State.

It is an amazing story - when you consider that at its peak, the Empire, stretching from Britain to the Danube and east into Turkey and along the Black Sea, held sway over about 70 million people, but had only 30 formal legions (about 250,000 men). He is certainly an authority, getting into as much (or more) detail as one might wish, including such fascinating nuggets as the fact that since elephants could turn and run amok amongst their own troops, the mahout had a mallet and chisel to sever the spine if needed!

This book could be appreciated and enjoyed by anyone with an interest in history, political as well as

military, and is not just for military history aficionados.

Brent McCulley says

An intriguing short handbook on the art of Roman warfare, Goldsworthy presents his thesis nicely, in six organized sections which follow chronologically, outlining the historical developments of Roman warfare, and all of its virtues and vices. This edition is handsome; full page colored pictures, and detailed maps and geographic planes are presented throughout the book which help the reader understand different battles, techniques, flanks, and positions. I am so fascinated by Roman history, and this subsection of such, which was so vital to Roman strength, vitality, and resilience, is absolutely captivating to think about what this meant for individual people on a day-to-day basis. Definitely worth the read for any lover of ancient history. Brent McCulley (10/24/13)

Erik Graff says

Surprisingly, for what amounts to a lavishly illustrated coffee table book, this was pretty good. Although I've read a lot of Roman history I'd never read anything which actually outlined the changing structures, practices and roles of the Roman military--anything that I could understand in any case. This introductory text, however, did just that in a comprehensible manner. And while most of its illustrations were pretty space occupiers, some of them, particularly the maps and diagrammatic representations of major battles, were actually illuminating.

David Withun says

Not a bad read at all. I enjoyed the information on ancient Roman military history and warfare. The diagrams of various Roman battle formations and battles in Roman history were particularly helpful. The book was especially interesting for me, as a Soldier, to see where so many of the customs and traditions still used in many militaries today originated. Plus this has to be the coolest book I've ever been assigned to read for a class!

Writerlibrarian says

Well documented. Clear, concise with lots of photographs, drawings, maps of the battles. It's a comprehensive atlas not a traditional atlas. One of the very useful books, helpful in figuring out when and where I wanted my characters to have been. I'm still using it and will again next year.

Daniel Whitfield says

Excellent review of Roman Warfare by Dr. Goldsworthy. It goes into detail and provides a good chronological setup from the beginning of the Empire to the fall. If you're interested in the Roman Empire, this is a great place to start.

Diz says

This book covers the history of Roman warfare from the days of early Rome until the fall of the western empire. Rather than go into the details of many battles, it only highlights the major ones. Primarily this covers the basic strategy and fighting style of Roman armies throughout history. There are a few maps and battlefield illustrations that are interesting to look at, but surprisingly there are no illustrations of roman soldiers, other than images that appear on historical objects. Overall, I would say this is a great introduction to the topic for those who are just getting into it. However, if you want a more in depth exploration of military history, this may not be what you're looking for.

Adam Lofthouse says

Another great book from Adrian Goldsworthy. I didn't find this one quite as useful as The Complete Roman Army, but its still packed with facts and the illustrations are superb. There's some great detail on particular battles from the Republican era right through to the Late Antiquity. Want to know more about how Rome conducted wars? Simple, read this

M.J. says

"Roman Warfare" by Adrian Goldsworthy is everything the title suggests it would be—a history of the structure, tactics, and organization of the institution that made both the Roman Republic and its Imperial successor the great power of the Mediterranean. It recounts the evolution of the army from small raiding clans to highly-disciplined infantry force to the undisciplined cavalry near the collapse of the west.

The book is well-written and provides a wonderful introduction for someone with a little knowledge of the time period. The glossy pictures, notably those detailing the actions at some of the most famous battles (Cannae, Zama, Pharsalus...) make this an especially appealing text. Little is innovative, as it is largely a collection and distilling of the most famous classical sources, and the limitations on the book are the ones we have in studying the earlier periods in general: there remain many gaps and questions on specifics that can not be answered. Overall, the books presents what we do know in a very readable and enjoyable fashion.

Lorenz says

well-written easy read. I love the maps, pictures and illustrations. I would have wanted the book to feature more illustrations and detailed account of roman battles. I think they only featured about 4-7 battles.
