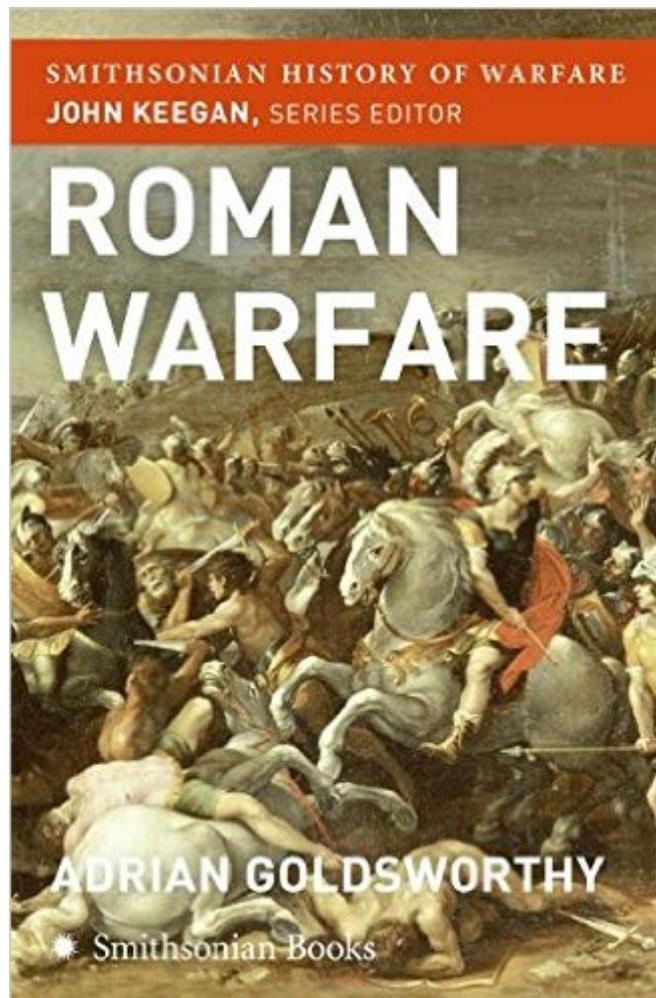


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Roman Warfare (Smithsonian History Of Warfare)



Synopsis

The Roman Army was the most advanced professional fighting force the world had ever seen. What distinguished the Roman Army from its opponents was the uncompromising, total destruction of its enemies. The Romans' ruthless approach to warfare eventually created an empire that included much of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa. This authoritative history narrates the dramatic rise and fall of the Roman Empire, a journey author Adrian Goldsworthy traces with colorful anecdote and rich illustration. From the origins of Rome and the conquest of Italy to the great era of world conquest and empire, the epic wars with Carthage and the Hellenistic world, periods of crisis and instability within the growing Roman Empire, the eventual collapse of the Roman Empire in the West and its resurgence in the East.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is not the definitive history of Rome's wars, but a well-constructed survey of how it prepared, equipped, manned and made war, using selected illustrative examples from each stage of development over the thousand-year period. Goldsworthy sets his task as tracing the development of warfare within the context of the evolution of the army and state: the nature of the army, why and with what objectives it fought a war, and the way in which it operated, taking into consideration the military institutions of the main enemies in each era. Matters such as arms, armor and equipment are handled succinctly by use of drawings and diagrams, which are especially good at depicting battle

tactics for the major encounters. The positions of troops are shown as if from an aerial view rather than the bare schematic bars and squares usually shown. Despite being touted as a general, introductory text, there is plenty to keep the knowledgeable reader interested as well. I found new insights in every chapter, which follow a chronological rather than topical arrangement. Being pitched at the general reader, as is required by Cassell's *History of Warfare* series, the book is heavily illustrated. This has its good and bad features. Mostly, the illustrations are taken from columns, gravemarkers, monuments and ruins of forts. They are usually provided with detailed captions to explain the significance of the features shown therein. My only complaint is that some of the pictures occupy a full-page or two-page spread where a smaller image would have sufficed. I expect this is due to the publisher's required text-to-illustration ratio. Here is an example of Goldsworthy's exposition, taken from his section on Caesar in Gaul.

Unlike other armies in antiquity, the Roman army evolved to be a formal institution with a distinctive military code, standard equipment, defined ranks and duties, as well as laws and procedures affecting the life and retirement of its soldiers. Although service was long (20 years/no family allowed) and discipline was strict (i.e. decimation), it was truly the first modern professional army with very specialized units ranging from doctors and cooks to sappers and siege engineers. Its men were led by leaders such as Lucullus, Pompey, and Caesar who took war as a precise implementation of massive and usually unrestricted force towards a defined political ends. Despite its defeats, the Roman army's training, efficiency and tenacity allowed it to overcome superior numbers of often disorganized tribal or despotic mercenary armies of Celtic tribes or Greeks even under higher attrition. It made Rome the master of the Mediterranean world and most of modern Europe for over 1500 years (counting the Byzantine.) Adrian Goldsworthy's book on Roman warfare is a decent text covering the evolution of the Roman army from the Early Republic to the Empire but is primarily illustrative. The text tries to study the evolution of the Roman army from the perspective of three disciplines: historical, political, and sociological. It generally covers its projection from the origins as aristocratic clans and retainers raiding cattle from nearby Veii to the Imperial war machine that would for so long ruthlessly crush any threat or resistance to its conquest. The problem with the text seems to be in what discipline it focuses on to explain a certain evolutionary aspect of the army: the juxtapositions are awkward and/or fail to reinforce the main purpose of the text in clarifying the evolution.

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