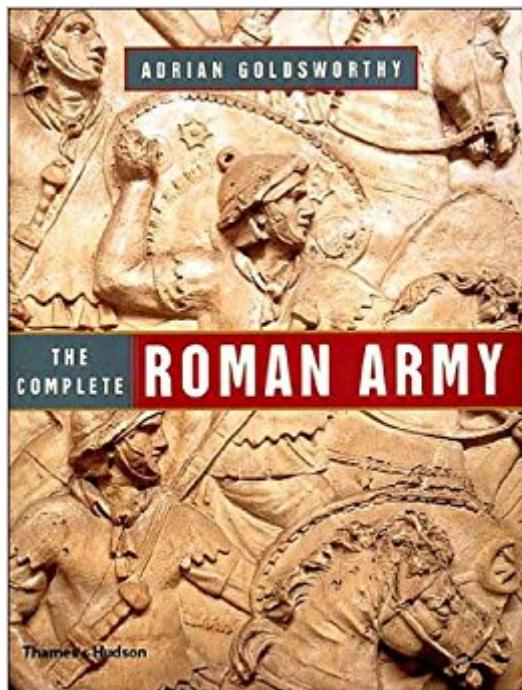


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The Complete Roman Army



Synopsis

This is the best book on the Roman army around at the moment and it has everything: battle plans, recreations of army fortifications, reconstruction drawings of equipment and armour, biographies of commanders, plans of camps, maps, photographs of key pieces of archaeological evidence, literary extracts, and much more besides. Adrian Goldsworthy presents a 'complete' analysis of the Roman army taken in three easy-to-manage chronological phases. Beginning with the citizen's militia of the middle Republic in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, he examines how and why this army changed, becoming the first professional army between the 1st century BC and 3rd century AD. He discusses how this army dealt with new conditions and new enemies, increasingly fighting far from the homeland. By the end of the 3rd century AD the Roman army faced even greater external threats and persistent civil wars which led to further transformations. Key battles are explored, tactics discussed, the lives of the soldiers, their equipment, diet, pay and conditions, their careers and experiences are revealed, bringing the literary and archaeological evidence to life. The sheer breadth of this book, its ability to combine general history with detail, and its range of illustrations, makes it unbeatable.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My first impression on receiving this book was that at 214 pages it was far too short to be considered a "complete" history of the Roman Army. However, Dr. Adrian Goldsworthy is one of the finest Roman-era historians writing today and he packs a considerable amount of detail into this slim

volume. Although the volume is primarily a synthesis of other existing works, Goldsworthy has taken the best materials - including recent archaeological research from Kalkriese in Germany - to provide a very balanced portrait of this subject. Furthermore, *The Complete Roman Army* has a very high graphic quality, with beautiful color photographs of uniforms, reconstructed and ruined fortifications, weapons and locations. Indeed, this book is easily the best one-volume work available on the Roman Army today. The Complete Roman Army consists of five major sections: the Republican Army (25 pages), the professional army (29 pages), the life of a Roman soldier (87 pages), the army at war (35 pages) and the army of late antiquity (14 pages). Goldsworthy covers numerous topics, including recruitment, daily routines, rewards and punishments, religion, retirement, equipment, rank structure and off-duty behavior. In essence, this represents a "handbook" on the Roman army. The author also includes order of battle data on the Roman Army, maps of garrison locations, layouts of camps and sidebars on major battles like Pharsalus and the defeat of Boudicca. Although some readers might wish greater detail than Goldsworthy can provide on some subjects, the author's extensive bibliography does point to other sources for expanded information. All in all, Goldsworthy's synthesis and condensation of so much information into such a small space is impressive. Goldsworthy's discussion of Roman battle tactics follows in the tracks of his earlier works on the subject and I do find some gaps in his otherwise superb analysis. Goldsworthy never really explains how the Romans were so often victorious in the close battle; in previous books, Goldsworthy suggested that it was a handful of "extra-aggressive" soldiers who "broke into the enemy line" but in this book he leaves it more vague. While Goldsworthy notes the importance of the reserve in a Roman army, he doesn't discuss how it was used to win battles. Furthermore, he uses literary evidence from Caesar's commentaries to suggest that Roman soldiers charged at their enemies, hurling their pilum at 10-15 meters and then crashed into their line. The idea that a soldier could run with armor and scutum, throw a javelin, then draw his sword while maintaining linear order with the soldiers on his right and left in the space of perhaps 6-10 seconds is absurd. Indeed, the idea of running with a large rectangular shield like the scutum seems pretty absurd. Given the Roman emphasis on tight discipline and the need to use the shields to cover the front rank, I think it far more likely that Roman infantry advanced methodically. In the final section, Goldsworthy spends little effort discussing the role of the army in Rome's decline and fall. While the author does mention the army's role in causing political instability in the empire and the difficulty its smaller units had in defeating Barbarian invasions, he dismisses the "Barbarization" theory and delves no further into examining the decline. Yet it is clear from the sources and evidence we have available that the Roman Army did decline in quality toward the end and that it was up against tougher opposition

(Goldsworthy never mentions the Goths, Ostrogoths, Vandals or Huns). The Roman military system was based on a high level of tactical organization, skill and discipline - all of which apparently declined over time and contributed to their eventual defeat.

For serious scholars and interested amateur historians alike, this is the one "must have" survey book on the Roman Army. Goldsworthy provides a comprehensive, insightful survey in this lavishly illustrated book. Using the best of recent historical research on the Roman Army, Goldsworthy presents the material in a comprehensive and easily accessible style. Starting with his summary of available historical sources, he provides fresh analysis of what contemporary historians know, don't know, and what remains conjecture regarding the Roman Army. The core of the book deals with evolution of the Roman Army during the main thematic periods; the Republican Army, the Professional Army of the first and second centuries A.D., and finally the Army of Late Antiquity. There are also two sections dealing the Army at War and the Life of the Roman Soldier. The book ends with a very useful bibliography. This book is the benchmark for surveys of the Roman Army and is likely to remain so for a long time. Do not hesitate to buy this book, it is well worth it!

I don't usually like books with heavy glossy pages because many publishers use that device to throw together a book that is heavy on photos and short on content. This is NOT the case here. Dr. Adrian Goldsworthy put together a great book, heavy on detail, well written and organized into a small package. He devotes more effort into discussing the practical and operational evolution of the army than he does with the politics of the army. If you want to understand the political evolution of the army, this work will leave you short. But then again, that's not what the book is about. As the Empire collapsed at its "ending", the tactics of its enemies had improved while the Roman Army hadn't evolved fast enough to meet the threat effectively. It would have been nice if Dr. Goldsworthy had taken some time to discuss this at greater length. But the book still gets 5 stars from me.

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