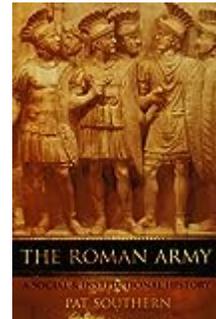




Pat Southern. *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History.* Oxford University Press, 2007. x + 383 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-532878-3.



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Marching along with the Romans.

In many books, the introduction is a place to put the acknowledgements. The introduction to this book is one that is actually meant to be read; after giving a brief overview of the author's aims, this section focuses primarily on the source materials for the Roman army that are available for scholars today. Archaeology, written records including papyri and narrative histories, law codes, epigraphy, and sculpture are all rapidly covered. This is an ambitious overview covering the categories of evidence, but it is important since it illustrates the limitations of our knowledge concerning the Roman army. Southern does not shy away from the controversies and complexities, but detailed explanations are lacking, though she does provide an ample bibliography at the end of the chapter.

In the second chapter, Southern spends just under fifty pages giving an overview of Roman political history. In most cases, the events are detailed and listed, but the *how* and the *why* are often reduced to single-line sentences. This chapter stresses the gradual transformation from a republican form of government to an imperial

one, the ties between the republic and the army, and finally, the ties between the emperors and the army.

The third chapter examines the history and organization of the Roman army. This chapter is rich in information, ranging from the army's legendary history to accounts by Livy and Polybius, to the organization of the army, units, salary, and the ranks. While this sounds like a diverse set of topics, there is a logical progression to the subchapters.

Southern makes one simple point repeatedly throughout the third chapter, and it is an important one given the distortions in many popular histories of Rome. While the written records concerning the Roman Empire and army are impressive, there is a lot we do not know from these records. Our ignorance concerns some fairly basic issues. For instance, how big was a legion? Estimates for the functioning size of a legion range from 5,000 to 6,000 individuals during the republic and early empire, down to circa 1,000 after Diocletian's reforms. How were logistics managed? How much was each in-

dividual soldier expected to carry? How much food did the army produce around its forts, and how much came from the local area? How far were the Romans willing to transport food to supply the army? The exact definition of key terms like *territorium* and *prata* is open to debate. How we define these terms affects our understanding of how the army was supplied.

Chapter 4 attempts to deal with Roman military culture. Culture is used in a colloquial and not a strict anthropological sense here; more appropriate terms would be Roman military society or Roman military organization. Like national military units today, the Roman army had its own distinctive garments, its own rules and regulations, and often lived apart from most town and city dwellers. Despite this, it was the Roman army that spread Roman society and culture throughout the empire. Not only did it impose Roman rule and order on the provinces, when veterans left the army, they usually received an allotment of land in one of the many colonies throughout the empire. The settling of retired soldiers was another way the provinces were Romanized.

The Roman Army at War looks at how the Romans waged war. This chapter covers such topics as doctrine, strategy, tactics, command and control, forts, and the frontier. These are all topics on which our evidence is incomplete. Southern provides a nice survey of what we know and what we do not on these topics. She also has a good summary of the debates on whether there was a master strategy for the Roman Empire. While not explicitly taking a side in the debate, she does provide an ample set of references for the reader to seek out.

Chapter 6 looks at Roman weapons and tools of war. In addition to discussing weapons like the *pilum*, *spatha*, and *gladius*, it deals with Roman artillery, logistics, maps, intelligence, and medicine. Overall, this is an informative and nicely referenced survey.

Reading chapters 5 and 6 it becomes clear that while we often have a static view of the Roman army, it was actually quite adaptable and continually changing. While it suffered defeats at times from the second century BCE through the third century CE, it was flexible enough to learn from its mistakes and change tactics and operations. Both the republic and the empire also had the wherewithal to bear a conflict until they triumphed.

In chapter 7 Southern gives a useful summary of the book she co-authored with Karen Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (1996). In this chapter, she summarizes the changes

that occurred in the army between the third and sixth centuries CE. While most of the major changes seem to have occurred in the fifth century, she again notes that this is an example of where there is a paucity of written sources. One of the major changes involved splitting the army into mobile field armies and stationary frontier troops. It is clear that part of this process started with Diocletian's reforms of the army, but we are uncertain of the extent of those reforms. Another change occurred in the attitude of the empire—the empire assumed a defensive stance and used the army in a defensive fashion. This caused a change in fortification design.

The penultimate chapter in the book gives short biographies of Roman generals and descriptions of famous battles. In terms of personages and battles, there is an emphasis on the late republic and early empire. For a specialist, this may be the least satisfying chapter, but it is required if one plans to use this text in teaching an introductory course. The chapter bibliography could, for instance, be used as a launching point for further intensive study of the generals and the campaigns.

The closing chapter gives an overview of directions and developments in the study of the Roman army. In part, this chapter serves as a summary of the questions brought up in previous chapters. Considering directions for future work, Southern points out the need for dual edition texts modeled after the Loeb Classical Library series, and more organized and directed archaeological research.

My only real complaint about this book is that, aside from the chapter on the late Roman army, there are no cohesive summaries providing a description of the Roman army at any point in time. It would be useful to have a few overview sections structured along the lines of: in the first century CE, a legion consisted of X men, led by a *legatus legionis*. Each soldier was equipped with a ... To get a view like that, one has to winnow through the various sections and chapters of the book. However, this is a minor complaint, and does little to detract from the overall quality and usefulness of the volume.

The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History gets a hearty recommendation from this reviewer. It could serve as an ancillary text on general courses on the Roman republic and empire. Alternatively, teamed up with a collection of sources (for example J. Brian Campbell's *The Roman Army, 31 BC-AD 337: A Sourcebook* [1994]), it could serve as a primary text for courses on ancient or classical warfare.

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