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Jasper Oorthuys

Pontius Pilate’s Bodyguard
Just received the first issue of my subscription to Ancient Warfare. The magazine meets all my expectations and I found the articles to be informative and well illustrated. Congratulations. Just a small note regarding Graham Sumner’s fine article on Pontius Pilate’s Bodyguard, page 44. The two coins illustrated are not “of Pilate”. The one on the left is a denarius (silver) coin struck by Augustus, probably in 2BC-AD 4, to honour his two grandsons and heirs, Gaius and Lucius, who unfortunately both later died at early ages. The two figures represent them and they are given the Latin title Princip(es) Iuvent(utis), the abbreviation for ‘Princes of the Youth,’ the standard title for heirs to the crown. A Lituus, the augurer’s crooked staff, like a bishop’s crozier, appears on the coin to indicate that one or both were appointed to the college of priests who functioned as augurs. Pontius Pilate did strike a small bronze coin, called a lepton, in Iudaea, which featured the Lituus as a central design but the drawing of the coin on the right does not look like it. The Lituus had more of a curve in the shaft and there is a bold Greek inscription around it giving the name of the emperor Tiberius. The Lituus is not a Jewish religious implement but is Roman and, as such, may have been a provocation to the Jews. The Pilate lepton can be seen in several references such as Ancient Jewish Coins by Y. Mehorer, no. 23 or the Roman Provincial Coinage (RPC), no. 4968, or Guide to Biblical Coins by Hendin, no. 114. I think anytime coins appear in articles they should be given references so readers may follow up on the research. All these are merely quibbles and in no way detract from Mr. Sumner’s excellent article. I look forward to the next issue of Ancient Warfare.

Marvin Tameanko

Alexandrian tombstones
Congratulations on Issue 1, which delighted me from cover to cover! However, I would like to pick up on what I believe to be a small error in the article, ‘Alexandria’s Colourful Tombstones’ (and congratulations to the author, Ruben Post, on a most interesting article). Ruben refers to a passage in Polybius where Ptolemy gave the Acheans 6000 bronze peltasts shields, and goes on to describe these as “common Hellenistic light soldiers”. This, as far as I know, is wrong because peltasts as a light troop type had disappeared from Graeco-Macedonian armies long before. The peltast in Polybius’ day was a phalangite. ‘Peltast’ literally means ‘pelta-carrier’ and the only troop type in late Hellenistic armies who carried a pelta were the phalanx. E.g. Livy speaks of them as a sarissa armed phalanx, as does Plutarch. This has been well-known for some time, see for example Duncan Head’s book Armies of the Macedonian and Punic Wars (1982) or Luke Ueda-Sarson’s on-line hellenistic infantry articles. I hope Ruben will forgive a small nit-pick of an otherwise excellent article, but it is important to appreciate the difference in usage of the word ‘peltast’ in Thucydides time (light skirmishing infantry) and Polybius’ time (heavy phalangite - but who may have had a secondary function, like Alexander’s phalangites).

Paul McDonnell-Staff

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