IN THIS ISSUE: Fighting from the saddle – horses, camels, and elephants

THREE – ROMAN CAMEL UNITS // THE BATTLE OF THAPSUS // RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

SPECIALS – LOOKING AT THE PYDNA MONUMENT // PILA TACTICS // WHO WERE THE VEXILLARII?

ANCIENT WARFARE
VOL XI, ISSUE 5

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Horse cavalry has long played a role in warfare. But other, more exotic mounts were also used in the ancient world.

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SMELLY SENTINELS
A look at the units of camel cavalry used by the Romans to guard and patrol the frontiers in Syria and Arabia.

SET IN STONE
An analysis of the visual imagery on the Paullus monument and what it says about Hellenistic warfare.
Editorial
Picking themes for Ancient Warfare is not as easy as it seems. As you know, we used to take suggestions, allow you to vote online for your favourites, and then do our best to make those themes into reality the year after. Experience has shown that while that approach is fun for the reader and usually fun for the editor, it can also lead to themes that are difficult to bring to life. This is generally due to a lack of sources, a lack of quality images, or a dearth of expert authors.

The main disadvantage of having themes at all is obvious if you’ve been reading Ancient Warfare for many years: it leaves very little space for anything else. If you combine that fact with what I’ve said above, then it’s clear that some topics, which may be very worthy of an article or two, but not of an entire theme, may never get a chance. That issue has been exacerbated by the introduction of our new regular features: Grave Matters, Tekne Taktike, and Roman Army in Detail. I certainly like those, and I hope you do too, but it leaves me with even less space for special features. So in future I’ll be trying to keep themes on the shorter side and feature more unrelated articles. That should also make the magazine more attractive if the theme is not really ‘up your alley’.

Broad themes, not tied to a specific person or campaign don’t suffer from these problems as much (as you’ll see in this issue). They allow me to collect wide-ranging topics, some of which may have been covered a bit in the past. Cavalry was certainly important in the ancient world, and we’ve dedicated one theme to it already (issue VI.3), but horses are not the only possible means of transport on the ancient battlefield. I hope you’ll enjoy this issue.

Jasper Oorthuys
Editor, Ancient Warfare

Warriors duel on a tiny Bronze Age masterpiece

What was thought to be an unassuming sealstone researchers at the University of Cincinnati are now describing as “one of the finest works of prehistoric Greek art ever discovered.”

The “miniature masterpiece” portrays close combat between fighters at a moment of high drama. A semi-naked, long-haired warrior engages a formidable foe. His opponent is armed with a spear, carries a large shield and wears a high crested helmet. In the beautifully composed scene, the lightly armed fighter plunges his sword into the other man’s exposed neck. A vanquished opponent already lies sprawled lifeless at his feet.

The exquisite engraving appears on a seal stone of agate. It was found in the treasure-laden tomb of the so-called ‘Griffin Warrior’, which was hailed as “the most spectacular archaeological discovery in Greece in more than half a century” when it was uncovered in an olive grove near the ancient city of Pylos in 2015.

The grave was found undisturbed and intact. Study of the site has revealed not only the well-preserved remains of what is believed to have been a powerful Mycenaean warrior or priest buried around 1500 BC, but also a trove of Aegean Greek Bronze Age period finds.

The arms and equipment of the figures depicted on the so-called Pylos Combat Agate evoke scenes of one-to-one combat described in Homer’s Iliad.

Originally encrusted with limestone, the sealstone was discovered lying face-down near the right arm of the Griffin Warrior. When cleaned, the meticulously carved combat scene was fully revealed, etched on a piece of hard stone measuring just 3.6 centimeters (just over 1.4 inches) in length. What makes the piece remarkable is that many of the scene’s details, such as the intricate ornamentation of the weapons and clothing, become clear only when viewed using photomicroscopy techniques because of the small size of the piece and the pronounced veining in the stone.

– Lindsay Powell

The true colours of the Combat Agate after cleaning.
© Courtesy of The Department of Classics
University of Cincinnati.
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Finds may identify First Punic War naval battle

Archaeologists believe they have found the site of the Battle of the Egadi Islands, the pivotal struggle of the first war between Rome and Carthage (264-241 BC).

Working off the northwestern coast of Sicily between the Aegadian Islands of Levanzo and Marettimo during the 2017 season, archaeologists of the Soprintendenza del Mare in collaboration with the Altofondalisti divers of the GUE (Global Underwater Explorers) found an extraordinary array of ancient artefacts lying on the seabed. Among them were two bronze rams (rostra) of ancient warships and ten bronze helmets from the marines who fought on board them.

Attached to the front of the ship at sea level, the rostrum was the device which weaponized the ancient vessel. A commander would attempt to ram the opponent’s ship with his own, breaking the adversary’s wooden hull, disabling or sinking it. One rostrum, ‘Egadi-12’, is richly decorated on both sides with birds’ heads and has a Punic inscription. A second rostrum, ‘Egadi-13’, is plainer but also bears an inscription. Once the work of conserving the large cast pieces is completed it will be possible to attempt to translate the messages.

Particularly striking was a Montefortino-style helmet. Thirteen have so far been recovered from the seafloor, but this one is unique on account of its decoration. At the pinnacle of the domed protective headgear, the helmet features a lion decoration. The armourer cleverly used the crest holder as the head of the crouching lion. Its front paws stretch out part way over the front of the helmet, while the hind legs and tail straddle the back. Decorated Montefortino helmets are extremely rare and this specimen may possibly have belonged to an officer of a Roman warship.

Ancient battle sites are notoriously difficult to identify with certainty. The military nature and style of the finds uncovered during this and previous digs may point to this being the location where the Romans and Carthaginians clashed on 10 March 241 BC. On that day, the fleet of Roman consul C. Lutatius Catulus battled Hanno’s and won. According to Diodorus Siculus, “the Carthaginians lost 117 ships, 20 of them with all men aboard, while the Romans lost 80 ships, 30 of them completely, while 50 were partially destroyed” (Library of History 24.11).

– Lindsay Powell

Have you read?
THE CLASSICAL ART OF COMMAND. EIGHT GREEK GENERALS WHO SHAPED THE HISTORY OF WARFARE
by Joseph Roisman (Oxford 2017)

Author and editor of numerous articles and books on ancient Greek history – on Alexander the Great, ancient Macedonia, and Greek rhetoric among other central topics – Professor Roisman (Colby College) returns here to the subject of his 1993 monograph on general Demosthenes and to seven other military movers and shakers who made their various marks between 480 and 362 BC. The choice of individual commanders is impeccable as far as it goes: Leonidas and Lysander of Sparta; Themistocles, Pericles and Demosthenes of Athens; Dionysius I of Syracuse; and Epaminondas and Pelopidas of Thebes. But readers may be disappointed not to find included a chapter on Alexander.

– Paul Cartledge, Professor emeritus of Greek culture, University of Cambridge

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