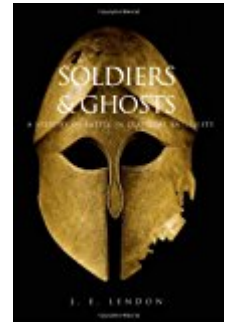


J. E. Lendon. *Soldiers & Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. xii+ 468 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-10663-3.



Reviewed by James Bloom

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The high tide of traditional military studies of antiquity could be said to have been reached with the works of Hans Delbruck, Theodore A. Dodge, William Tarn, and Oliver L. Spaulding, in the 1890s through the early 1900s. By the 1950s, these works demanded revision in order to take account of recent archaeological and epigraphical research. Also they reflect the narrow focus of staff college lecture treatment, stressing bare diagrams (geometry, topography and geography) while ignoring cultural context, though Delbruck and Tarn made some strides in this direction. Ancient warfare, with its dearth of reliable written accounts couched in quixotic modes of thought and expression, is the epoch least compatible with the schematic combat tutorial developed to derive lessons for modern fighting forces.

General surveys of combat in the ancient period have enjoyed a modest renaissance of sorts. The more erudite treatments tend to use a compartmentalized thematic approach, with chapters focusing on discrete aspects, such as weapons, uniforms and accessories, leadership, and signaling, or they concentrate on restricted military so-

cieties, armies or periods. This methodology often loses sight of the big picture found in a sequential history of battles and wars--the format favored by the early scholars. On the other hand, the traditional narrative type of military chronicle, worthwhile for its breadth of case history, has been discredited, or at least superseded, as lacking the broader context of the attitudes of the commanders and soldiers who implemented the battlefield maneuvers. Gabriel and Boose's *Great Battles of Antiquity*, while a comprehensive presentation of ancient armies and campaigns, is couched in the staff college lecture style that tends to overlook the cultural mindset of the generals and their troops as well as that of the ancient authors who recorded them. Lendon admirably combines the merits of both approaches, without sacrificing depth or breadth of coverage.

Similarly to Garlan's *War in the Ancient World*, Lendon situates battle firmly within its political, social, and economic environment. In providing a broad historical framework for the development of military practice and attitudes toward war, Lendon, like Garlan, considers the motives

impelling Greeks and Roman political leaders to wage war, which sectors of society did most of the fighting, what fighting methods were used, and how land and sea battle styles denoted social peculiarities. For example, Lendon distinguishes between the relatively technologically advanced techniques of sea fighting, excepting where embarked marines were the dominant factor, and land battles where the Iliadic models held sway. Though Garland's study was not a comprehensive account, it presented a stimulating, albeit spotty, introduction to issues of slavery, class, and military law and custom—the noted thematic scheme. Lendon's methodology, on the other hand, offers the best of both worlds. He focuses on his overriding ethnic/cultural argument, that "however primitive or sleekly modern the machinery of war, the idiosyncratic beliefs of the men of every time and place play their role in how war is fought," (the "ghosts" of the title) while at the same time presenting sufficient details of representative operations to please the adherents of narrative campaign history. Lendon's dominant theme is the grip of the past on military innovation, which in the case of the ancients is an idealized, romanticized past that may or may not have anything to do with their actual antecedents. The book is replete with insights, amply illustrated by examples. From the perspective of his enlightening ideological and motivational paradigms, Lendon conducts a useful review of the standard great campaigns of antiquity: Peloponnesian and Persian Wars, Alexander's campaigns, wars of the Diodachi, Punic Wars, Julius Caesar in Gaul and the Civil War, and Trajan's campaigns, along with much in between as well as a few conflicts that are relatively untouched in military histories. His survey of the litany of "great battles of antiquity" is infused with his own novel and challenging interpretations and insights.

Because he packs so much information and ideas into his narrative, it is difficult to summarize the work in a brief review essay. I will try to

give some highlights that struck me as typical in order to give a flavor of the work.

Running like a red thread throughout the book is the relatively (to our era) glacial pace of technological change and the factors inhibiting such change as well as, to a lesser extent, the expected tactical evolution to accompany such innovations. He shows how epic ideals induced anomalous throwbacks to primordial methods in later epochs. With respect to the Greeks, it was Homeric epic, specifically the heroic tradition of the Iliad, wherein individual combats between champions, and the competitiveness between individuals and units, are powerful influences.

According to Lendon, the heroic ethos of Homer still held sway when Philip and Alexander forged the Macedonian phalanx and the Macedonian array. Lendon admits that it is difficult to determine how much the Homeric model actually affected Philip and Alexander; later Greek authors may have simply retrofitted this influence. He acknowledges that "much of Greek military method and change had nothing to do with Homer, however many Iliadic passages might be adduced to endorse them" and the Homeric model might be criticized or improved upon" by later Greek tactical authors, such as Arrian, Asclepiodorus and Xenophon, who described Phillip and Alexander's fighting methods (p. 159). In fact, some scholars may question his insistence on the enduring influence of the Homeric paradigm. However, his illustrations are authoritative, varied and well thought out. For example, chapter 6, "Alexander at the Battle of Issus," is much more than just a description of the Battle of Issus. It summarizes Alexander's life from childhood to death while discussing the Battle of Issus within the framework of the aforementioned heroic/epic model. This is an excellent chapter describing more fully than most authors the Macedonian Army, its inception, development, and continuance as Alexander takes over and improves upon his father's early training. There is also a great

deal of detailed clarification of the ranks and rewards system of the army. This pithy chapter comprises one of the better descriptions of Alexander's military expertise. Although it is controversial as to how pervasive the Homeric ethos was with respect to Alexander, the author amply and judiciously supports his argument.

In another noteworthy illustration, Lendon speculates whether the dependence upon deception in Greek siegecraft, despite the common use of siege machinery by contemporary Middle Eastern armies, is attributable to the absence of such machinery in the sieges described in the epics. Again, the proposition will evoke disagreement, but any counterpoint will require the challenger to dispute Lendon's dense presentation in detail.

Similarly, Lendon declares, the Romans looked backwards to the Greeks as well as to their own ancient traditions. As for the Romans, I will briefly address Lendon's chapter on the Jewish War because it presents a good capsule summary of his judgment about the Roman combat ethos and it is a subject rarely addressed in military histories of the ancient world.

Throughout the Roman counterinsurgency campaign in Judaea, Lendon observes, there was tension between the brave acts by individual centurions and common soldiers and Roman masses advancing without orders on one hand, and the expectation of submission to authority and of obedience in the ranks on the other. But Titus, recognizing this breach of his standing orders, was loath to punish such audacity, except in instances where other troops are sacrificed in efforts to rescue failed sallies. By and large, it was the *auxilia*, the troops recruited among the Gauls, Britons, Spaniards, Syrians, and Judaeans non-Jews (the "wilder" fringes of the empire), who Vespasian and Titus depended upon to exercise the Roman moral code of *virtus* (daring, *Å*lan) whilst the citizen legionaries were expected to practice the contrasting quality of *disciplina* (essentially grueling, dreary unheroic activities such as building

ramps, undermining walls and ramparts; in short, combat engineering). This dichotomy was never so neat, as shown by the way in which the combat engineers exhibited gallantry and audacity in the accomplishment of their arduous tasks under a hail of enemy javelins, darts, arrows and burning oil. My own take on the use of the local auxiliaries was that they were essential to routing out pockets of Judaeans fighters employing the same mobile tactics that they had mastered. However, Lendon goes beyond this tactical justification and enhances my perception. The chapter comprises a wonderfully concise and insightful synopsis of this neglected campaign.

Lendon penetrates the obvious bias of our only surviving account of that war, by Flavius Josephus, to determine why Titus, in contrast with his father Vespasian, was willing, even eager, to fight with his own hands. Lendon takes pains to explain the significance of this apparent anomaly, a deviation from the three-centuries-old generalship tradition embodied by Caesar in Gaul, who would only come into harm's way to personally lead or rally his troops in a crisis. Although Titus' actions were atypical, the Roman war leaders in the later empire would revert to this "heroic age" ideal of the commander who plunges headlong into a melee or personally conducts raids and sallies rather than directing operations from the rear.

A detailed outline chronology keyed to the sequences described in the body of the text is quite helpful, as is the glossary of terms used throughout the narrative.

The 50 pages of endnotes demonstrate the depth of Lendon's research and, I was happy to find, are keyed to pages of the text, facilitating cross-reference. The ample bibliographic notes are similarly referenced to individual chapters and again, show the author's familiarity with ancient accounts and modern studies, as well as providing the reader with a guide to further reading.

The index is quite useful, thoroughly referencing personalities, places, events and concepts.

In conclusion, I found the book a marvelous survey of ancient warfare. Narrative, that is, chronologically sequential history of "the old school," is still best for doing the "story" part of history. However, it often misses significant ideas elucidated by the conceptual analysts: leadership, social class differences, motivation, finance, and weapons performance. Lendon does not sacrifice the breadth of coverage embodied in the narrative framework--he yet manages to cover all the important episodes and periods-- while presenting his arguments along thematic lines. He does so while demonstrating how ancient combat incorporated technological and tactical innovations incrementally even as they evoked ancient, even legendary, traditions to encourage heroic, fierce rivalry throughout all ranks and formations.

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