

The Production and Distribution of Roman Military Equipment

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Military Equipment Research Seminar

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N.B. Contributors marked (*) read their papers at the original seminar in March 1984

PREFACE

The first Roman military equipment research seminar, held in the spring of 1983, sought to define the interests of workers in this field.¹ Such was the enthusiasm of all the participants, that it was decided to meet again in 1984, but this time a specific theme was to be discussed: the production of military equipment. This volume contains many of the papers given at that second meeting, along with some additional relevant contributions.

Works of synthesis on military equipment have been comparatively few and far between, although those of MacMullen,² Robinson,³ and Oldenstein⁴ are exceptions (and the value of these is attested by the number of references to them in this volume). It is a curious fact that arms, the raison d'être of the Roman army, have largely been neglected in discussions of that institution, beyond their purely antiquarian interest. The fact is that the army needed weapons and had to procure them from somewhere. This meant that an industry (of whatever form) had to exist to supply the estimated 300,000 troops of the frontier forces. All this has, however, received scant interest from historians and archaeologists⁵.

Clearly, no one book can hope to provide the definitive answer to the question "how did the Roman army equip itself?", and it was never intended that the seminar would produce a single comprehensive answer, but a number of plausible solutions are proposed here. The structure of this book comprises three elements: first, a largely theoretical section considers production and distribution in three general papers which seek to define models for the operation of the system; second, specific types of object are discussed in relation to their manufacture; third, Jon Coulston's important examination of archery equipment demonstrates the need to relate wider questions of organisation and matériel to the fundamental matter of production and distribution.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank all of the contributors, including those who spoke at the seminar (namely Peter Connolly, Nicholas Fuentes, and Peter Price) but who have not included papers within this volume for various reasons. Foremost amongst these exclusions must be Simon James, who gave a paper based upon his (forthcoming) article on the fabricae of the later Roman army⁶ - essential reading for anyone interested in that period or in seeing the whole question of production in context. The Ermine Street Guard's participation and informed discussion was especially welcome. Prof. D.J. Mosely and Dr D.L. Kennedy of the Department of Ancient History and Classical

Archaeology at the University of Sheffield provided help and encouragement during the seminar itself and Dr Kennedy has been a useful source of advice during the preparation of this volume. Finally, I must thank my wife, Martha Andrews, who helped type the text.

The Roman military equipment seminars are an annual event that attract both scholars and amateurs. Further details of future meetings may be obtained from the editor.

NOTES

1. BISHOP, 1983.
2. MACMULLEN, 1960.
3. ROBINSON, 1975.
4. OLDENSTEIN, 1977.
5. But see now BREEZE, 1984, esp. 269-77.
6. JAMES, forthcoming.

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