MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY:
A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

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GENERAL WORKS AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The study of Roman military equipment has generated an enormous body
of literature, and the following lists of references serve only as a start-
ing point for the student coming to the subject for the first time. There
are corpora of publications on each of the specific items of equipment
and weaponry, such as helmets, armour, arrowheads and swords. These
consist in the main of reports of relevant archaeological finds, of efforts
at categorising these within established typologies, and of analyses of the
chronological and geographical development of these typologies. They
also include experimental reconstructions of specific items of military
equipment. Sub-sections following this one are devoted to each of the
main equipment types.

Chapters on military equipment in books on warfare and the military
in Late Antiquity, such as Elton (1996), provide a good overview. A series
of publications from conferences on military equipment which were initi-
ated by Mike Bishop in the 1980s (for instance, Bishop (1983); and Coulston
(1988)), followed by the 12 issues of the Journal of Roman Military Equip-
ment Studies from 1990, form the backbone of the more detailed research
on the subject, moving beyond the mere cataloguing and classification of
equipment types to explore broader thematic and methodological issues
arising from the evidence. Papers within these books analyse representa-
tional, archaeological and literary material, and for the first time take
seriously the contribution of reconstruction work, also known as experi-
mental archaeology. Bishop and Coulston’s Roman Military Equipment
from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome is the best subject synthesis to
date. Feugère’s Les armes des Romains, recently published in English, is
another key work.

These edited collections of papers and subject syntheses include chap-
ters on all of the weaponry and equipment types. For this reason, as
well as being included in the opening lists of general publications which
immediately follow this text, individual chapters, articles, or sections from
them will be cited where relevant in the weapon-specific sections which follow the general works. For example, James’ *Excavations at Dura-Europos 1928–1937 Final Report VII: the Arms and Armour and other Military Equipment* is included in the ‘General works’, ‘Archaeological reports’, *Shields* and *Archery Equipment* sections. It should be noted that this work deals with material deriving from a mid-3rd c. and not a late antique context. However, its relevance to Late Antiquity lies in the fact that it includes archaeological evidence for a number of key changes to Roman military equipment which took place between the 2nd and 4th c. A.D., including early examples of late antique trends, and of continued Early Roman fashions. Even though at heart a publication of the military equipment finds from Dura-Europos in Syria, James’ book does much more than merely cataloguing and describing these. It includes extensive discussions of the ways in which the material evidence demonstrates provincial and empire-wide trends in military fashions, and their development and evolution through the reciprocal interactions between the Roman and German, Partho-Sassanian and Danubian worlds.

The majority of archaeological evidence for Roman military equipment derives from the north-western frontier regions of the empire—especially modern Britain, Germany and Holland (for example, Allason-Jones and Bishop (1988); Martin-Kilcher (2003); and Van Driel-Murray (2000))—and, to a lesser extent, eastern Europe (Radman-Livaja (2010)). The lack of evidence from the Mediterranean provinces reflects the paucity of archaeological work carried out there, and also the different depositional practices in these regions from those of northern Europe. There is more evidence from the Early Roman period, up to and including the 3rd c., than from the Late Roman period from the 3rd to 5th c. (Coulston (1990) 139). Whereas the former includes finds from fortifications, settlements and battlefields, much of the Late Roman material derives from funerary contexts, as the Germanic custom of burying weapons with the dead influenced the border regions of the empire. The bog deposits from Denmark have also yielded extremely valuable finds of 3rd to 4th c. Roman armour, weaponry and equipment, among finds spanning the 1st to 5th c. A.D., in what seem to have been votive offerings by Germanic warriors in a wider context of inter-German warfare (Jorgensen *et al.* (2003); Van Driel-Murray (2000); and Prins (2000)).

For the Late Roman period, scholars rely heavily upon representational and literary evidence. The former includes the sculptural representation of Roman soldiers on public monuments, such as the Arch of Galerius in