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Christopher A. Matthew, *A Storm of Spears: Understanding the Greek Hoplite at War*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012. Pp. xxi, 314. ISBN 978-1-61200-119-7.

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In *A Storm of Spears*, Christopher Matthew (Australian Catholic Univ.) attempts to establish an empirical approach to ancient military history, calling into question the methods modern historians have applied to the study of hoplite (heavy infantry) soldiers and the phalanx. He offers “a series of progressive examinations with each one building on, and expanding upon, the findings of those preceding it” (xx), with the intent of better understanding how the hoplite used his primary weapon—the thrusting spear. By comparing artistic representations of the posture of hoplites in battle and testing them against modern re-enactments, he believes he has discovered a spear-wielding technique that earlier historians have overlooked: “all previous scholarship on hoplite warfare has been based upon a method of fighting utilizing ... two techniques for wielding the spear (hereafter referred to as the ‘low/overhead two-stance model’). However, this model is incomplete. The artistic record also contains pictorial references of a third combative posture: the ‘underarm’ technique. Despite the existence of this stance within the artistic record, the underarm stance has, until now, remained almost completely unexamined by modern historians researching ancient warfare” (16).

Matthew uses physical re-creation, reconstructive archaeology, and ballistics analysis to test the efficacy of the various proposed techniques of spear-wielding. Finally he compares the results of his re-enactments with the literary, artistic, and archaeological evidence, concluding that “hoplite warfare was conducted in a manner vastly different than is described in all previous scholarship” (xxi).

Within his framework, Matthew rebuts almost all previous historians’ views of hoplite warfare.¹ Persuasively showing that both the putative overhead and low-spear stances would have been inefficient or impractical, he further argues that the weapon wielded in most artistic representations of the overhead position is actually a javelin (ἄκων or ἄκόντιον) not a thrusting spear (δόρυ) (20). The angle of the weapon’s impact on hoplite armor is consistent with an underarm thrust, not the downward-curving trajectory of an overhead thrust (30). Matthew’s re-enactments with the various spear wielding positions show that, while the low thrust position was the least taxing on the arm muscles, the underarm thrust maximized endurance and accuracy (127-28). Better suited to the human anatomy, it generated more power against a lightly armored enemy.

During his time as an infantryman in the Australian army, Matthew endured extensive training drills and long ruck marches in desert heat. He believes this gives him a better sense of what ancient hoplites experienced in combat and how misleading the ancient texts can be. His physical modeling of different hoplite stances and spear-wielding/thrusting techniques disproves many myths about hoplite warfare found in ancient texts, which have been the subject of ongoing intense debate among scholars.² For instance, his recreations make it unlikely that a “kill shot” targeting an opponent’s neck area existed in hoplite warfare. Based on his replication of the hoplite panoply for a modern soldier performing physical exercises and his survey of ancient literary and material evidence, he concludes that the actual targeted areas were the shield, the chest, and parts of the head (112). Again, his unique approach yields vastly different results from those of other scholars.

1. Including those of Victor D. Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 2000), and A.M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U Pr, 1964).

2 See, e.g., the papers collected in Victor D. Hanson, ed., *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (NY: Routledge, 1991), and Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2013).

My only criticism of Matthew's work concerns not the quality of his research or methodology, but his style of presentation, which betrays the book's origin as a doctoral dissertation (Macquarie Univ. 2009). There is an over-abundance of calculations and data citations along with protracted explanations of methodology. For example, the sketch and calculation of the balance point for a broken spear included to prove that a hoplite soldier could not wield the *sauroter* (lizard-killer)³ end of a broken spear offensively as a weapon in a phalanx (155), while appropriate for the main text of a dissertation, could have been shifted here to an endnote without detracting from the book's principal argument. General readers will find the too lengthy explanations of physical evidence rather tedious. There is also a misleading "conclusion" in chapter 11 (of 14), summarizing the book's discussion of the individual hoplite soldier before Matthew delves into an analysis of the phalanx in his last three chapters. This fractures the book into two sections instead of acting as a cohesive transition. Still, these are minor stylistic criticisms of a well-argued corrective analysis of certain key features of hoplite warfare.

Christopher Matthew has made a significant contribution to the field of ancient military history. His book will force historians to re-evaluate the pertinent primary sources and their own reconstructions of the equipment and tactics employed on ancient Greek battlefields. *A Storm of Spears* is now must reading for all military historians, classicists, and serious students interested in a reconstructive archaeological approach to ancient infantry warfare.

3. This smaller spear point also served as a counterweight to improve the balance of the weapon.