

Du Plessis, J.C. 2022. *The Seleucid Army of Antiochus the Great: Weapons, Armour and Tactics*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword. Pp. 360. ISBN 978-1-3990-9180-0. £25.00; ZAR541.62.

The overwhelming majority of the monographs published by Pen & Sword are derivative, contributing no original thought to the subject under discussion, and are not worth either reading or citing in any subsequent academic publication. The work that I have been asked to review, the published doctoral dissertation of the author, is a refreshing exception, and at a price of £25.00 (currently on offer for £12.50), it is affordable, which is at least one advantage of Pen & Sword Books. The enthusiasm of the author for his chosen subject is evident throughout the work. The author is a re-enactor, and the work is liberally illustrated with photographs, of varying relevance, illustrating the ways in which weapons might or could have been used.

I can highly recommend this work, which advances new speculations about old problems, cites an almost complete bibliography concerning the Seleucid army, and is almost without shortcomings. I would be failing in my duty as a reviewer, however, if I confined myself to panegyrics. Instead, as well as the new and viable interpretations of the evidence advanced by Du Plessis, I shall concentrate my review on points the author has missed, or, in my opinion, judged wrongly. I hope that the reader will forgive me for mentioning several of my own works in the course of this review.

The book is divided into four parts. First comes a treatment of the 'Regular Army': two chapters on the Macedonian phalanx and one on the cavalry. Second comes a breakdown of the auxiliary forces available to the Seleucids at the two battles for which we have a clear description of the army during the reign of Antiochus the Great: Raphia and Magnesia. Appended to this part are two chapters (6 and 7) on the increased abilities afforded to javelin-men using the throwing-strap, and the damage inflicted on the human body by sling bullets. Both these chapters are heavily reliant on the results obtained from experimental archaeology. Part III deals with 'Terror Weapons': elephants and scythed chariots, and Part IV deals with seven case studies of battles reasonably well known from the sources, in which the army of Antiochus III was involved: hence the title. The book thus, almost inevitably given the scarcity of the

sources, follows the format adopted by Bar-Kochva in his 1976 publication.¹

In the work under review Du Plessis not only follows the organization of Bar-Kochva but has also adopted some of the key interpretative concepts lying behind the latter's work: for example, the way in which the phalanx was raised. Thus (pp. 53-4, cf. 99, 113) 'The phalanx consisted of citizen soldiers who were recruited from the various military settlements of the Empire and were mustered for campaigns. The men of the phalanx were not soldiers by profession and served in the Seleucid army in return for land grants.' Bar-Kochva believed that the Seleucid phalanx was formed from males settled on *klēroi*, inalienable plots organized in certain country villages, in return for the liability for military service, which was an obligation that was passed on through the male line. This 'cleruchic settlement' pattern held sway in Ptolemaic Egypt, but whether it was adopted by any other of the Successor Kingdoms is a much-debated point.

In a recent lengthy article, which only appeared after Du Plessis' book, I have demonstrated that in the only relevant evidence on *klēroi* available for the Seleucid Empire, namely the parchments from Dura-Europos (a city rather than a village), it seems that *klēroi* could be sold, either completely or partially, and inherited by women.² This consideration alone debars the existence of the 'cleruchic settlement' pattern in the Seleucid Kingdom. I further argued that the Seleucid phalanx was composed of ethnic Macedonians settled in cities, mainly in North Syria, but in Mesopotamia as well, and possibly in Asia Minor. I am not the first to voice this opinion. Eminent scholars writing in the first half of the 20th century before Bar-Kochva, such as Rostovtzeff, Bengtson, Bikerman, and Robert, doubted that a system of inherited military service in return for the allocation of a *klēros* could be proved to have existed within the Seleucid kingdom. Theirs was, it seems, a minority voice, completely stifled by the adherents of the 'inherited cleruchic obligation' pattern. Even Bar-Kochva, in his later works, began to doubt the orthodoxy he had helped establish.

The descendants of these Macedonians, I further argued, did not perform military service because they had inherited *klēroi*, but as an obligation of their inherited Macedonian ethnic status to their Macedonian king. Such a pool of Macedonian manpower was, obviously,

¹ B. Bar-Kochva, 1976. *The Seleucid Army: Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*. Cambridge.

² N.V. Sekunda, 2024. 'Macedonian military service in the Seleukid kingdom'. In A. Coşkun and B. Edidin Scolnic (edd.), *The Seleucids at War: Recruitment, Composition, and Organization*. Seleucid Perspectives Vol. 2, 49-102. Stuttgart.

already available to the Antigonids, but the Seleucid, and later the Attalid, kingdoms both formed pools of ethnic Macedonian subjects which they could call to arms. Such a pool of manpower was unavailable to the Ptolemies. They had to rely on a recruitment base formed from former prisoners of war, largely not of Macedonian ethnic status, settled on *klēroi* about the Egyptian countryside in return for military service which was inherited by their male offspring. Division of opinion over this question is profound, and Du Plessis open-handedly reports that ‘even the ethnicity of the Greco-Macedonian military settlers is questioned by some modern scholars’ (p. xvii n. 15) but on the other hand reports my own views on ethnic Macedonians being the basis of the Seleucid phalanx.

Similarly, Du Plessis (pp. 48-51, 261) repeats the view of Bar-Kochva (pp. 59-60) that the *argyraspides*, the elite of the Seleucid phalanx, ‘were the personal foot guard of the king . . . they were full time soldiers who were stationed at court and the very best infantry gathered from across the empire’. I have suggested (*op. cit.* p. 56) that, as was the case in Antigonid Macedonia, there was no standing army but for mercenary garrisons stationed in key locations throughout the Seleucid Empire, and that the ethnic Macedonians who made up the ‘national army’, after receiving ephebic training, were only mobilized in time of war. In the process of mobilization, after the selection of the ‘citizen cavalry’, the elite infantry formation – in the case of the Seleucid Kingdom the *argyraspides*, in the case of Antigonid Macedonia ‘the *agēma* and the other *peltastai*’ – was chosen from among the older and wealthier members of the citizen body. As was the case in Antigonid Macedonia the elite infantry formation, the *argyraspides*, would have fought with bronze *peltai*, rather than with larger shields of the Macedonian type. In fact, as was first pointed out by Edson in 1958, the Seleucid Kingdom was a recreation of the Macedonian Kingdom in Asia and replicated its institutions.³ The evidence concerning the Seleucid *argyraspides* has been more recently gathered and discussed by Coşkun.⁴

Caetrati is the word used by Livy, clearly stated at 31.36.1, for the Antigonid *peltastai*, who were ‘armed in the Macedonian fashion’ with bronze *peltai*. This holds good for all references to Hellenistic *peltastai*. Thus, I cannot accept the opinion expressed by Du Plessis (pp. 176-7) that

³ C. Edson, 1958. ‘*Imperium Macedonicum*: the Seleucid Empire and the literary sources’. *Classical Philology* 53.3:153-170.

⁴ A. Coşkun, 2024. ‘Macedonians, silvershields, and the phalanx under Antiochos III Megas and Antiochos IV Epiphanes’. In A. Coşkun and B.E. Scolnic (edd.), *The Seleucids at War. Recruitment, Composition, and Organization (Seleucid Perspectives – Vol. 2)*, 129-156. Stuttgart.

when Livy (37.40.13) mentions Pisidian, Pamphylian and Lycian *caetrati* at Magnesia, fought in 180 BC, he is using the term in its 'original usage of the term in the classical period, denoting a light skirmishing unit armed with shield and javelins, rather than a *sarissaphoroi* (*sic*) unit'. Incidentally, the stele of Saettas, son of Trokondas, a Pisidian from Termessos, which I have argued dates to 147-145 BC, shows an individual armed with a bronze *peltē*, presumably belonging to a unit of *peltastai* of this type.⁵

At the outset of the Fourth Syrian War, in his breakdown of Seleucid forces, Polybius (5.79.3) mentions in the first place 'Daae, Carmanians, and Cilicians, light-armed troops (*euzōnoi*) about five thousand in number organized and under the command of Byttacus the Macedonian', followed by the *argyraspides* and then by the main body of the Macedonian phalanx. Later, in his description of the Seleucid line at the battle of Raphia, Polybius (5.82.10) mentions 'those armed in the Macedonian fashion, those under Byttacus the Macedonian five thousand'. Whilst I agree with Du Plessis (pp. 133-5) that there can be little doubt that Polybius is describing the same body of troops, it is unnecessary to suggest that at the beginning of the campaign they operated as light infantry skirmishers, but Antiochus 'shocked at the size of the Ptolemaic phalanx, in a desperate attempt to strengthen and enlarge his own phalanx, rearmed these 5000 troops in the Macedonian manner'. I hold that Hellenistic *peltastai* could be described as *euzōnoi*, given that their equipment was lighter than that of the main body of the phalanx. They served as *peltastai* throughout the whole campaign.

Du Plessis is particularly competent in dealing with the equipment used by the infantry of the phalanx, displaying a familiarity with the measurements in use at that time. The incorrect identification of a parade spear furnished with massive bronze head and butt spike found in a cist-grave at Vergina as a *sarisa* by Andronicos,⁶ has resulted in a major sub-branch of ill-informed '*sarisa* studies' taking the identification of Andronicos at face value. Du Plessis has not succumbed to its blandishments. Accepting my doubts (p. 9), Du Plessis goes on (pp. 12-15) to question the proposition that the *sarisa* was fitted with any butt-spike at all, affirming (p. 13) that if 'the pikes of the early modern era did not require a counterweight, there is no reason for the *sarissa* to have had one'. This is a question I intend to address myself in the not-too-distant

⁵ N.V. Sekunda and A. McBride, 1995. *Seleucid and Ptolemaic Reformed Armies 168-145 BC. Volume 2: The Ptolemaic Army under Ptolemy VI Philometor*. Stockport. See no. 6, pp. 26-7, fig. 70, cf. pl. 11c.

⁶ M. Andronicos, 1970. 'Sarissa'. *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique* 94 : 91-107. See my critique in N.V. Sekunda, 2013. *The Antigonid Army*. Gdańsk. 52-54.

future. Fighting in so tightly packed a formation as the Macedonian phalanx, a butt-spike would be more of a hindrance than a help. His Chapter 2, entitled 'The Synaspismos and its Possibility in the Macedonian-Style Phalanx' (pp. 55-70), is self-explanatory. Despite the doubts expressed by moderns, Du Plessis laudably concludes that it is indeed possible to form the *synaspismos* formation of one cubit described in the ancient sources.

Little has escaped Du Plessis' mastery of the secondary literature dealing with his chosen topic. However, some relevant articles from my own pen are not mentioned, specifically in his discussion of 'Neocretans' (p. 117),⁷ as in his discussion of Mysians, in particular of the Mysian troops under the command of Apollonios the 'Mysiarchos' (pp. 166-7).⁸ Based on the literary and representational evidence Du Plessis (p. 121) suggests that the Cretans used both shield and bow simultaneously. This concurs with my opinion articulated in an earlier analysis of the stele of Chaironides from Demetrias,⁹ an article which is not referenced by Du Plessis. One of the most successful illustrations of contemporary experimental archaeology in the work is Figure 33 (p. 121) which gives one a good idea how a Cretan archer could have protected himself with his bronze shield, while still continuing to use his bow, although the shield appears to be larger than those normally carried by Cretan archers, such as the one belonging to Chaironides. Presumably the suggestion that the main purpose of the quiver cap was to prevent the arrows from falling out whilst running (pp. 124-5) is based on personal experience.

Du Plessis handles the evidence concerning the *thureos* and *thureophoroi* extremely competently. He is not dogmatic on how the *thureos* was introduced into Greek warfare, whether through the Celtic invasions of the central and southern Balkans in the 270s, or through the experiences of the army of Pyrrhus in Italy (pp. 128-9), after which the *thureos* was widely adopted throughout the Greek world. At this point it would have been useful to refer to the important article written by John

⁷ N.V. Sekunda, 2011. 'Neocretans'. In J. Ch. Couvehes, S. Crouzet, and S. Péré-Noguès (edd.), *Pratiques et identités culturelles des armées hellénistiques du monde méditerranéen* (=Hellenistic Warfare 3, *Scripta Antiqua* 38, Éditions Ausonius). Bordeaux. 75-85.

⁸ N.V. Sekunda, 2003. 'OGIS 248 und die Söldnerregimente des Heeres Antiochos IV. Epiphanes'. In W. Appel (ed.), *Collectanea Classica Thorunensia XIV. Studia Graeco-Latina Universitatis Nicolai Copernici*. Toruń. 145-149.

⁹ N.V. Sekunda, 2001. 'Antigonid iconography in a Cretan shield-device from Demetrias'. *Archeologia* (Warsaw) 52:19-22.

Ma on this subject,¹⁰ in which Ma demonstrates how the adoption of the *thureos* conveyed multiple benefits to the armies of the Greek *poleis* remaining independent in the Hellenistic period. Consequently, Du Plessis' suggestion (pp. 127-8) that the Greek mercenaries at Raphia used *thureoi* is probably correct. Similarly, 'A unit of *thureophoroi* which could both skirmish and fight hand-to-hand might have been an appropriate troop type for the elephant guard' (p. 222). Du Plessis is also very probably correct in his suggestion that (pp. 130-2) the *thorakites* are *thureophoroi* wearing cuirasses (pp. 130-3). As far as I am aware, this suggestion has not been made before. I had come to the same conclusion myself, but Du Plessis deserves credit as having been the first to express this opinion in print.

The author displays the same competence in dealing with the various types of cavalry spears used by the Seleucid army, differentiating between cavalry units described as *xystophoroi* and as *lonchophoroi* (pp. 73-76). This is a complex problem to deal with, but it seems that Du Plessis is correct in seeing the *xyston* as a relatively long fighting spear, whereas the *longchē* was a shortened dual-purpose spear that could be used for both throwing and fighting hand-to-hand'.

In his discussion of the Tralles (pp. 124, 164-5) Du Plessis states that they are an Illyrian people. This is much disputed. Livy in two places (27.32.4, 31.35.1), in passages that presumably go back to Polybius, repeats the information that they were an Illyrian tribe. They are also described as Illyrians in Stephanus. Other sources, however, state them to be Thracians. I have discussed the problem with reference to Tralles serving in the Attalid army,¹¹ where they were employed as light infantry trained to operate alongside cavalry, as Du Plessis also concludes.

One slightly irritating thing I found throughout the book is the incorrect spelling of *sarisa* as *sarissa*. As I have pointed out,¹² based on the entry for *sarisa* in the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddell & Scott, 'the word *sarisa* was commonly written by the ancient Greeks themselves with two *sigmas* in the middle from ignorance that the *i* was by nature long. The word is, therefore, correctly rendered as *sarisa*'. But Du Plessis can be forgiven for this, as the double *sigma* appears, incorrectly, in the most recent works of the most distinguished scholars. The same rule is binding for the toponym Larisa, which also appears here (p. 72) under the form Larissa. Whist I have descended to the level of nit-picking in Du Plessis'

¹⁰ J. Ma, 2000. 'Fighting *poleis* of the Hellenistic world'. In H. van Wees (ed.), *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*. Swansea. 337-376.

¹¹ N.V. Sekunda, 2020. 'Thracians in the Attalid army'. *Anabasis, Studia Classica et Orientalia* 11:166-7.

¹² N.V. Sekunda, 2013. *The Antigonid Army*. Gdańsk. 78.

otherwise exceptionally worthy work, another irritating usage are the inappropriate application of the terms 'bombard' and 'bombardment' (pp. 134, 142, 144, 162 x 2, 227) to missile-projecting weapons prior to the discovery of explosive propellant, as well as the reference (p. 268) to 'missile fire'. The neologism 'Pergamenese' instead of Pergamene (I personally prefer Attalid) appears repeatedly on p. 262. Some problems in preparing the thesis text for formal publication are visible. Typographic errors are rare but do occur. The work of Spence 2002, referred to on p. 312 n. 1, does not appear in the bibliography. Sections of text are repeated, for example on lead melting at 382° on pp. 168 and 196.

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