



A Reply to “A Defensive Offense: Infantry Tactics of the Early Byzantine Army” by Grant Harward

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Overview

- ▶ Grant Harward is focusing upon the mistakes made by the Roman military and how the early Byzantines forces rectified this
- ▶ He presents two points that are the downfall of Roman legions with some limited explanation of the background
- ▶ Much of the piece focus on the weaponry and armour used by the Byzantines as well as the new tactics they implemented from the Roman failures

Scholar's position and Evidence

- ▶ Harward is assessing the early byzantine (527-582 CE) army and their tactics
- ▶ Cannae (216 BCE), Carrhae (53 BCE), Teutoberg Forest (9 CE), Adrianople (378 CE) are the battles Harward mentions to make his points
- ▶ Point 1 – Roman commanders threw away lives and committed troops too early in hope to overwhelm with large infantry blocks
- ▶ Point 2 – Rome possessed a weak cavalry
- ▶ The main evidence he uses is from “The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus” pages 609-613 by Ammianus Marcellinus
- ▶ Quotations are the main backup for his points, but he fails to explain why these points are the problem

The Battle of Cannae

- ▶ The point made is that commanders were uncaring of lives and used weight of soldiers to overwhelm the enemy
- ▶ In 216 BCE the Romans and Hannibal fought at Cannae
- ▶ 80,000 troops and 6,000 cavalry vs 40,000 troops and 10,000 cavalry
- ▶ Using the weather, a feigned desertion to stab the Romans in the back, feigned retreats, and an ambush, Hannibal encircled and slaughtered the Romans
- ▶ Hoped to overwhelm Hannibal with infantry but this tactic worked at Trebia in 218 BCE
- ▶ Superior tactics and timing won the battle for Hannibal, not the tossing away of Roman lives

The Battle of Cannae

- ▶ The other point is that Rome had a very weak cavalry - Mostly correct though very situational
- ▶ Cannae saw 6,000 Roman vs 10,000 Hannibal cavalry
- ▶ Split into two flanks creating a larger force gap
- ▶ Hannibal had better trained cavalry units and put a larger cavalry force against a single flank
- ▶ The main problem was more so the infantry was bunched together instead of in wider line
- ▶ A better trained or more numerous Roman Cavalry would be useful but not a clear victor

The Battle of Carrhae

- ▶ In 53 BCE, Marcus Licinius Crassus of the First Triumvirate attempted to war against the Parthians
- ▶ The Legions were not used to fighting in heat or open terrain
- ▶ 1,000 Cataphracts (armoured Camel riders) and 9,000 Parthian mounted archers vs between 32,000 to 43,000 troops on the roman side
- ▶ Changed formation from long thin line to squares of 12 cohorts (5,700 infantry per block)
- ▶ 9,000 trained Parthian archers on open ground against a target unable to effectively counter or defend

The Battle of Carrhae

- ▶ Roman cavalry was outnumbered 2.5:1 by the Parthians who could shoot backwards
- ▶ If the cavalry was better trained and larger, many would still die in pursuit of the Parthians
- ▶ Offered passage through the hills of Armenia with 40-50,000 extra troops by King Artavasdes II but refused
- ▶ Betrayed by Ariamnes who persuaded Crassus to travel the dessert before deserting him
- ▶ Only 13,000 survivors with 20,000 dead and 10,000 captured from a max force of 43,000
- ▶ Crassus himself is the problem making the wrong decision and not weight of infantry or a weak cavalry

Overall and Further exploration

- ▶ Harward puts forward two main points and four battle that he does not further explain
- ▶ Appian, Plutarch, and Polybius provide enough detail to conclude other factors were of greater effect to the Romans
- ▶ Much of the article is focused on the Byzantines military tactics and arms
- ▶ To fully explore the article, more time is necessary
- ▶ The battles of Adrianople (378 CE) and Teutoberg Forest (9 CE) require time to explore deeply
- ▶ Quick reading appears to further disprove Harward's points
- ▶ The full text of Ammianus Marcellinus on Adrianople raises doubts on his claim immediately
- ▶ The article itself is mostly fine, the premise leading to it is wrong

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