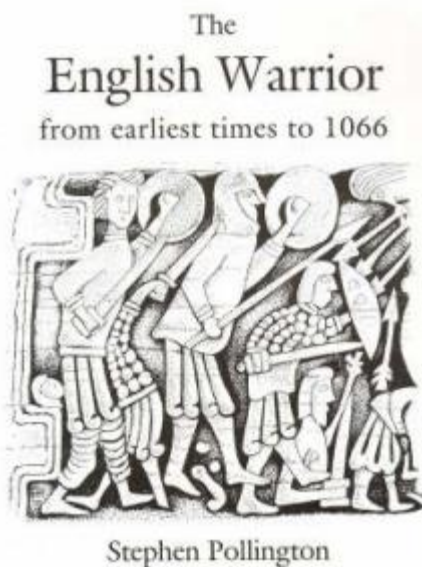


'The English Warrior: From Earliest Times to 1066'

By Stephen Pollington

Review by Rob Morgan

This is an old title now, published in 1996 by A-S Books, 267 pages in paperback and the ISBN 1-898281-10-6. Our library's just taken over one of the old extra-mural sites, and this came with the contents of that library. I'd never encountered the book before, and though I'd like to have seen it better illustrated (there are only 20 or so illustrations in the whole book), it is very interesting, and worth some consideration. It *might* crop up on one of the eBay sites, and if you are an early medieval wargamer, this is a book for you! ðEarliest times,ö incidentally, means more or less Beowulf and so, to me at least, this is a truly medieval title.



A remarkably well-written book, divided into three parts: the warrior, weaponry, and warfare. It completely covers the wars of the Anglo-Saxons, is fascinating and readable. The first section of the book deals with the complex status and elaborate rituals of the warrior, and even contains a brief section on shield-maidens, the women who fought with and against men. It is comprehensive, and the war bands, the Fyrd leadership and, amazingly, the life of warriors in exile are all dealt with. The section ends with the topic of later Anglo-Saxon military organization at the time of Hastings and Stamford Bridge.

The weaponry section which follows is intricate and informative, with sections on the development of the sword, and on the spear, the principal Saxon weapon. The axe, in several versions, is also dealt with, as is the defensive gear of the warrior ó shield, body defences and helmets ó and all well-written. The Sax, that odd, single-edged blade, naturally follows, and the bow, which, as Pollington suggests, was more widely used and more useful than most modern sources are prone to admit. He makes little mention of the sling however, but the few pole weapons known, the standards borne in battle and even the war-horn are included here.

In the final section, the book covers the ðnatureö of war in Saxon lands and across the borders, the strategy and tactics of forces and armies. He calls it

the experience of the field of battle. Here, the book ventures into the subject of wounds encountered in combat and their effects, which is most interesting, and the use of horses, always a contentious issue in Anglo-Saxon warfare, and wargames, I realize. He also mentions the use of wagons, not a thing I've ever encountered anywhere. The Anglo-Saxon wagon! Is there a model of one?

Pollington concludes with some consideration of early fortifications and what he calls "strongholds." From a wargamer's point of view, I thoroughly enjoyed the notes on "Hall Attack" (very Beowulf, eh?), which offered an interesting potential for a raid or skirmish wargame, I thought.

Overall, this is useful, and an interesting book.