

Early Iron Age Greek Warrior 1100-700BC

Osprey Warrior series No. 180 (2016)

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£11.99 / \$19.00

Review by Jonathan Aird

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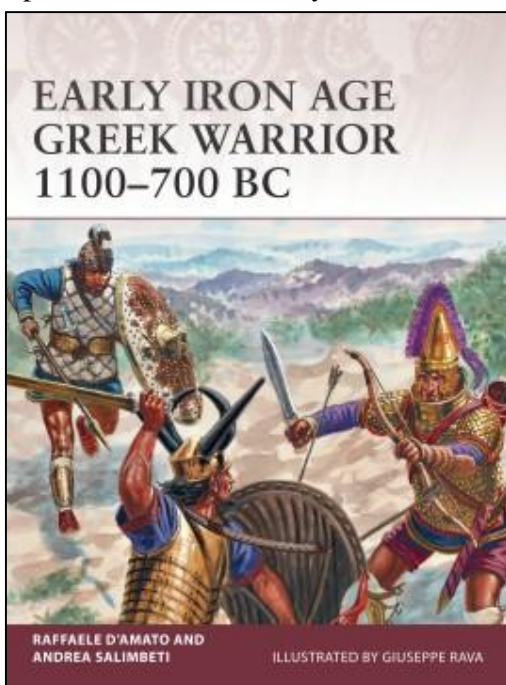
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There is something intrinsically fascinating about transition periods, and the change from bronze to iron is a particularly interesting one. Techniques of metal working already existed, but the new material offered possibilities far beyond those already available. The start of the Greek iron age also coincided with the fall of the palatial societies and the evolution of smaller political units through what is often referred to as the Greek Dark Ages. Take these two upheavals – one in society and one in technology – and there is scope for a fascinating



overview of the evolving military aspects of the time and in particular the change in the high status warrior's equipment and fighting methods. This is what this book should have been aiming at.

Unfortunately, what the authors have actually achieved is to make a fascinating topic rather dull and dusty. After briefly setting the scene for the period and discussing what little is known of military organisation, and noting that armies are now far smaller than those described for Greece's heroic bronze age, the main bulk of the book addresses the equipment of the Iron Age warrior. Starting with everyday dress, there is a lengthy discussion of cloaks and cloak fasteners – were cloaks were pinned, what form the pins took –

curved or straight, and whether grave good evidence suggests that some pins were worn purely as decoration perhaps even in the hair. The reader may wonder if this is too much about pins ó especially since they will struggle to find much evidence for them in the illustrations. By comparison on clothing -- Plate B shows two figures fighting, both of whom appear to be wearing shorts ó this isn't discussed in the text.

There are several pages on spear shapes and sword types from the period and from different geographical locations. Sadly, despite the lengthy text and many line illustrations, this is a very weak section of the volume. Extensive use is made of a classification system derived by A.M. Snodgrass ó and spear types are shown and equated to this system of classification. However, this is not overly useful to the general reader, especially when encountering text such as 'Iron spearheads of types D, E, P and especially J are well exemplified in several settlements í whilst Type Q seems to be more rare.' This would be more helpful if one knew what a type J, P or Q looked like ó there are no illustrations or descriptions of these. The same discussion by Snodgrass type of swords is even worse ó it also introduces alternative classification systems such as the Naue II style which can be subdivided into three, or perhaps four, different types. The more the descriptions of the classifications go on the less I felt I knew about the swords. There is one light moment ó perhaps unintentionally amusing ó when discussing swords and daggers: 'the difference between a sword and a dagger lies in the length.' Really? Although, even this is caveated with 'usually' ó which implies that some swords are as short as daggers, whilst some daggers are a bit longer than some swords. The discussions of armour ó particularly shields and helmet styles ó is somewhat less pedantic, and at least concentrates more on chronological and geographical usages of different styles. I did get to the end of this section and think 'so, I should have got hold of the Snodgrass book if I want to know about weapons and armour.'

The discussions on the warrior's beliefs and motivation ó as well as examples of combat from the time period ó are quite brief. By this point, I confess I'd lost faith in this book: there was what I think was a typographical error which stated that by the 8th century bronze dominated over iron use. This, I think, should be the other way around. Sadly, even the illustrations do not do much to save the book. One of the figures fighting in Plate B looks as if he has lost his horse ó the stance he is in is uncomfortable to take up whilst standing and seems highly impractical for fighting. Several figures in other plates are depicted as fully nude ó a risky clothing choice for the charioteer in Plate F ó or, even worse, Plate G has a warrior armoured on the upper body and nude from the waist down: I haven't tried this but I would imagine that the metal armour would chaff rather a lot! It just isn't credible to my mind ó perhaps if it were just padded cloth armour, but not metal.

In summary ó this book doesn't seem to quite know what it is about. Is it a handy reference to weapon classification systems for the archaeology student, or is it a guide for the modeller and wargamer? Whichever it is meant to be, I don't feel it really succeeds as either. This book would have benefitted from a heavier handed editor ó it's a rare example of a poor Osprey and, although it gives no pleasure to do so, I can't in all honesty find much to recommend it.