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# Reviews

**Review: Fernando López Sánchez, Marisa Bueno and David Martínez Chico (Eds.), *Coins, Riches, and Lands. Paying for Military Manpower in Antiquity and Early Medieval times*, Oxford & Philadelphia, Oxbow Books, 2025, 265 p. ISBN 978–1–78925–990–2 (Hardcover Edition) // 978–1–78925–991–9 (Digital Edition).**

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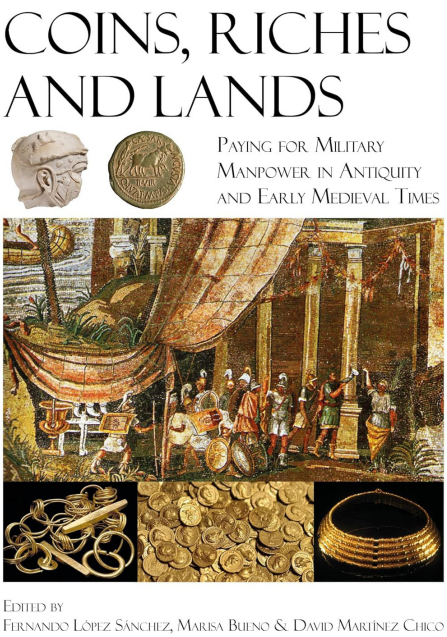


Along with logistics and demographics, another key element for the long-term sustainability of armies has always been their means of funding or more specifically, the ability of states and empires to maintain a financial system capable of supporting the significant economic demands of mobilizing an armed force. Although this topic has always been of interest to historiography focused on the military world, the attention has largely centered on specific aspects such as the payment of wages during service, spoils, and extraordinary donations, the challenging issue of rewards for veterans at the end of their service or the disbandment of troops[42]. The work reviewed here, edited by Fernando López, Marisa Bueno, and David Martínez, offers a profound and critical analysis of the funding and sustaining of the armies by states. It focuses not only on the recurring and well-known issue of monetary systems and cash-based financing (which was inoperative before the 6th–5th centuries BCE) but also on other affected resources such as land, trade goods, and mining operations. In essence, it seeks to uncover how armed forces were paid and financed all through their deployment. Furthermore, the book provides a comprehensive and data-rich overview covering an extensive chronological span: from Classical Greece to Late Antiquity and the early stages of the early Middle Ages. This broad scope also extends geographically. While the primary focus is on the Mediterranean basin, notable references and studies are also devoted to Central and Northern Europe, offering enlightening insights. Equally noteworthy is the distinguished roster of contributors to the book, who are leading authors and renowned researchers in their respective fields.

The work is divided into three main sections: the financing of armies during the era of Classical Greece and the Hellenistic world. The payment systems and service of legionaries during the Roman Empire. And mercenaries in the armies of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (these last two sections together feature the largest number of contributions).

Starting with the section dedicated to Classical Greece and the Hellenistic world, Professor Kenneth W. Harl (Tulane University) focuses on a specific chapter of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE): the financing of Sparta's navy. Through a thorough review of the sources, Professor Harl demonstrates Sparta's remarkable ability to sustain its fleet over the long term. He concludes that the limits of Spartan hegemony should be reevaluated

[42] BREEZE & DOBSON 1993; CAMPBELL 2002; ERDKAMP 2007; WATSON 1985; WEBSTER 1998.

considering these quantitative data rather than being interpreted ideologically through notions of "decline" or "crisis". To strengthen his argument, he draws a compelling comparison with Rome during the First Punic War (264–241 BCE) (pp. 3–12). Dr. Daniel Gómez Castro examines an event that occurred a few years after the end of the Peloponnesian War: Sparta's campaign against the region of Elis (402–400 BCE). In his contribution, the author seeks to establish the geopolitical —but above all— economic reasons that led Sparta to recruit soldiers from among the Achaeans and Arcadians (pp. 13–18). John Serrati (Ottawa University) addresses the *klerouchia* system of Ptolemaic Egypt, a system of land payments established as rewards for mercenaries and soldiers who had served in the army. This system aimed to create a loyal group within Egyptian territory that could also be mobilized in times of need. Based on new papyrological evidence, Professor Serrati argues that this system failed from the outset, as early as the reign of Ptolemy II because the connection between landholders and military service was never formally institutionalized. From a broader long-term perspective, Professor Serrati identifies the *klerouchia* system as the root of an internal governance problem in Egypt, as it led to the creation of a wealthy landholding elite that lacked oversight and control. Paradoxically, this weakened the military capacities of the kingdom (pp. 19–28). Finally, Professor Nicholas Sekunda (Gdańsk University) provides a detailed study of the Macedonian army's financing during the Third Macedonian War against Rome. Following a brief review of Philip V's diplomatic policies and mercenary recruitment, the study delves into the financial plans of Perseus, inherited from Philip V, and the challenges they faced, paying particular attention to the case of the Bastarnae (pp. 29–41).

The next thematic section focuses on the Roman Empire. It begins with the contribution of Professor Sabino Perea Yébenes (National University of Distance Education), centered on Roman Egypt during the 1st–2nd centuries CE. Using epigraphic evidence, the author provides a detailed in-depth examination of the army's role in the administration of mines and quarries, as in overseeing various public engineering projects. This study highlights the army's integration into provincial governance, with special attention to its significant presence in the strategically vital province of Egypt. Notably, the work includes a helpful appendix containing the inscriptions and their images discussed (pp. 45–55). Dr. Cristian Găzdac (Babeș-Bolyai University) analyzes a small hoard of coins and military equipment recently discovered in the capital of the Roman province of Dacia. The context and chronology of the finding (just before 106 CE) offer a unique glimpse into the monetary values commonly circulated among soldiers. The analysis reveals an abundance of lower denominations in bronze and copper, dated from 5 to 100 years prior, with Julio-Claudian sesterces notably absent (pp. 57–65). Professor Michele Asolati (University of Padua) explores the reasons behind the increased production of coinage by the eastern mints in Syria during the reign of Trajan, including some unique issues in orichalcum, though most were silver. After a detailed analysis, Professor Asolati posits that while military purposes, as traditionally assumed, might have driven this amplification, it could also represent an operation to inject liquidity into the market via commercial trade. This hypothesis is particularly compelling given the widespread distribution of these coins, especially in the European part of the Empire. His work offers a fascinating perspective on how the Empire's monetary policy might have functioned to regulate market liquidity (pp. 67–90) (It should be noted that this contribution is written in Italian).

Next, we will address the two works authored by Dr. David Martínez Chico (Valencia University) and Dr. Alberto González García. In the first work, the authors recover from obscurity a small hoard of Roman aurei discovered near the ancient city of Dura-Europos sold on the black market during the Syrian civil war (2011-). This is the first and only hoard of this kind found in Syria. Based on its dating (162–163 CE), which coincides with the Roman occupation of the city (165 CE), the authors conclude that the aurei likely formed part of the soldiers' pay (pp. 91–105). This evidence should be compared with the findings of Cristian Găzdac in Dacia, which are approximately 60 years older. The second work by these two authors examines the causes behind several decrees prohibiting the export of certain goods to members of the late Roman army (350–450 CE), particularly the *Barbaricum*. According to their research, these measures were driven by corrupt issues within the army. Veterans and military personnel, by taking advantage of their positions, engaged in smuggling for personal profit. Items such as weapons, oil, wine, and *garum*—supplied by the state to provide its forces—were illicitly diverted to "barbarian" territories. The study also focuses on the events surrounding the Battle of Adrianople (pp. 133–148).

The final three works that conclude this second section are as follows. First, Dr. Roger Bland (British Museum) focuses on the coinage issued during the reign of Emperor Gordian III (238–244 CE), seeking to determine whether these were minted for military purposes, specifically to finance the Persian expedition of 242–244. After a detailed analysis, Dr. Bland concludes that while the war was indeed a factor behind the increased coinage, the presence of issues in local denominations suggests additional motivations. Perhaps, as the other contributors of this volume propose, there was a need to stimulate the markets (pp. 99–105). Next, Dr. David Serrano Ordozgoiti (Autonomous University of Madrid) dedicates his work to a detailed study of imperial propaganda observable in the coinage issued by the mint of *Lugdunum* during the reigns of Emperors Gallienus and Postumus (253–269 CE). The study highlights the presence of deities and allegories closely linked to war (pp. 107–121). Finally, Dr. David Woods (University College Cork) revisits the work of Ammianus Marcellinus to clarify the reasons behind the 4th-century CE phenomenon of recalling high-ranking retired military officers to active service. Woods examines the consequences of this practice, which may have been one of the factors contributing to the weakening of legionary command (pp. 123–131).

Lastly, the third section dedicated to the presence of mercenary and foreign contingents in the armies of Late Antiquity, begins with an intriguing article by Professor Aleksander Bursche (University of Warsaw). Bursche highlights the widespread presence of coins in Central Europe during the La Tène period, focusing particularly on aurei from the 3rd-century "Gallic Empire". His detailed study

concludes that, given the association of these coins with local warrior elites, they were likely payments for mercenary services rendered to these Gallic emperors and other 3rd-century rulers (pp. 151–162). Continuing within the Central European context, Bartosz Kontny (University of Warsaw) focuses on the Kuyavia archaeological site in Poland where recent finds have revealed a new collection of Roman military equipment (belts, sword scabbards, and cavalry gear), dating from the Antonine period to the 3rd–4th centuries and into the early 5th century. Kontny posits that while a commercial factor cannot be dismissed, these items are likely war spoils brought back by mercenaries who had fought for the Empire and returned to their native populations (pp. 163–196). This theme of mercenary return from Central and Northern European peoples is further explored by Professor Svante Fischer (Uppsala University), who examines Scandinavia specifically. Fischer's comprehensive study reveals that the return of Scandinavian soldiers to their homelands after serving in the Roman army often disrupted existing political relations but simultaneously spurred progress in other areas (pp. 211–218). Dr. Hugh Elton (Trent University) offers his interpretation of the Gothic rebellion led by Gainas (399–400 CE), analyzing the composition of his army and the reasons behind the negative portrayal in contemporary sources, which emphasized its "barbaric" nature. Elton suggests this characterization was more a matter of politics and propaganda than ethnic prejudice (pp. 197–202). Professors Jeroen W.P. Wijnendaele (Ghent University) and Guy Halsall (Durham University) address a historiographical gap concerning the migratory people of the 5th century, focusing on the Alans and the factors leading to their settlement in Gaul around 440 CE with the support of imperial authorities (pp. 203–209). Dr. Fernando López Sánchez (Complutense University of Madrid) explores the transition of monetary systems in the emerging Germanic kingdoms, particularly analyzing the so-called "pseudo-imperial" coinage. López Sánchez examines the propaganda and financial purposes these coins served (pp. 219–231). Illas Ali Torrico studies mercenaries and troops from non-Ostrogothic and non-Byzantine origins who participated in the Gothic War (535–553 CE), highlighting their diverse backgrounds and the special role of the *bucellarii*. He also reflects on the war's impact on the Byzantine Empire (or Eastern Roman Empire), which, according to Torrico, stalled the state's efforts to centralize its army amidst demographic and economic struggles (pp. 233–241). Finally, Professor Marisa Bueno Sánchez (Valladolid University) concludes the section with an article examining the payment systems used by the Umayyad Caliphate's army during the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (711–756 CE). Bueno Sánchez emphasizes the significant role of cash payments compared to other forms of remuneration such as land grants or tax-collection rights (pp. 243–256).

Finally, we would like to highlight that all the contributions are accompanied by excellent illustrations, maps, tables, and graphs, that complement and enhance the reading experience.

In summary, this is a work that, through multiple academic and disciplinary perspectives, addresses a crucial issue in the military development of Antiquity, and consequently, of its states: the state financing systems aimed at sustaining armies—whether composed of conscripted citizens, professional soldiers, or mercenaries from distant geographies. From our point of view, the first-rate contributions presented here complement and fill a historiographical gap in the study of ancient military history, which has so far focused more on aspects such as the pay and rewards of soldiers and veterans before and after their discharge. What was missing, however, was precisely the completion of the picture with an analysis of the methods employed by states to secure the economic resources that provided the liquidity necessary to maintain the vital instrument represented by armed forces. Therefore, this work can be considered indispensable for anyone seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of ancient armies.

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