

September 2016

Book Review: Keppie, Lawrence. *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1984.

Christopher Sheline
American Public University System

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/saberandscroll>

 Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), and the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sheline, Christopher (2016) "Book Review: Keppie, Lawrence. *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1984.," *Saber and Scroll*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/saberandscroll/vol5/iss2/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ePress Journals at DigitalCommons@APUS. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Saber and Scroll* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@APUS. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@apus.edu.

Keppie, Lawrence. *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1984.

Book Review

Christopher Sheline

During the Mid-1980s, when the concept of world history was in its infancy, Lawrence Keppie made a stout contribution when he published *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*. World Historians seek to identify cross-cultural patterns. These patterns often clarify the processes of cultural development and integration. In its day, ancient Rome gained its power as a direct result of its evolving military might. During the writing of *The Making of the Roman Army*, Keppie combined historical and scientific analysis to identify Roman political, organizational, and military evolution. This shed light on how Rome influenced cross-cultural developments, as well as offered critical insight into the likely trends of established societies worldwide. Consequently, Keppie proved the necessary use of the military at the very foundation of society.

Keppie's specialization in the Roman Army began when he was laying the groundwork for his doctoral thesis *Colonization and Veteran Settlements in Italy 47-14 BC* (p. 11). Focusing on the transition between Republic and Empire, his thesis discussed the armies of Julius Caesar, the First and Second Triumvirate, and Augustus. He spent most of his career as a professor of Roman history and archaeology at the University of Glasgow, where he resided during the writing of *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*. In addition, Keppie was the senior curator of archaeology, history, and ethnography at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, which is home to a highly regarded and extensive collection of Roman artifacts. Keppie also gained considerable experience as an editor for *Britannia*, a primary publisher of Roman and British studies. During his extensive career, he wrote several books including *Understanding Roman Inscriptions*, *Scotland's Roman Remains*, and the *Roman Army in the Early Empire*. Keppie retired in 2003 as a leading authority on the Roman Army. This earned him the opportunity to maintain his influence as emeritus professor of Roman history and archaeology at the University of Glasgow.

The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire outlines the

growth of the Roman Army for its implications of global developmental patterns. Keppie stated, “The theme here is of the army’s growth, and of its developing institutions and traditions, all of which lie behind the familiar imperial army” (p. 11). He accomplished this by describing the original Roman Army as a militia guarding a village on the Tiber, and then detailed its path into the mid-first century AD when the Roman Army was a well-structured professional military power. Keppie covered how tactics and formations changed and developed under various leaders such as Marius, Julius Caesar, and Augustus. Thus, the discussion also included how a maniple compared to other famed formations, such as a phalanx. Much like his aforementioned doctoral thesis, Keppie put specific emphasis on the transition from Republic to Empire. This tumultuous period included the infamous assassination of Julius Caesar, the love affair between Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and the rise of Emperor Augustus. As such, in addition to the Roman army, the book suggests a measure of political evolution to this chaotic period in Roman history.

Using a scientific approach, Keppie leveraged archaeological evidence to build his historical arguments. For example, the first chapter begins with the discovery of oval shields, leather corslets with metal pectorals for chest protection, and conical bronze helmets (p. 14). This led to the conclusion that Rome had an army when it was still a village on the Tiber. Yet, it did not clarify whether that army had any formal organization or structure. Nevertheless, it did ascertain that the army was a necessity for the village to grow, which in turn supported the hypothesis that a civilized society is the by-product of warfare. This discovery added relevance to the book and the new discipline of world history alike. Keppie’s blending of science and history was consistent throughout the text, and proved to be a keen combination.

One thing to note about this book is that while Keppie described the Roman Army from birth to its fame and glory, he did so with minimal illustrations and notes. Those that were present derived from primary sources. In fact, Keppie stated, “In accordance with the criteria laid down for this series, I have kept notes to a minimum, citing for the most part only the basic ancient literary or epigraphic evidence” (p. 12). Despite these restrictions, Keppie still provided a thorough bibliography of either consulted or formally cited sources as well as detailed appendices. And as a result of the limited notes, the archaeological evidence became far more pronounced, as did its critical scientific and academic importance. Perhaps, this was the purpose of the restrictions bestowed upon Keppie.

When taken as a whole, *The Making of the Roman Army* represents a valuable, single volume representation of the Roman army that supports global

implications of developmental patterns. Archeological discoveries provided irrefutable evidence for Keppie's arguments. As a result, this book remains relevant to both Roman historians and the discipline of World History simultaneously. Thus, it is a "must read" for anyone seriously seeking a thorough understanding of military development and ethnography. Since the publishing of this book, World History has grown to include any number of focus areas such as technological advances, sociology, and even forms of art and architecture. In some instances, World History even replaced Western Civilization courses. Regarding the particular concepts of World History, Keppie's work undoubtedly showed the importance of understanding the development of political, military, and social institutions as well as how those developments might appear in other cultures worldwide.