G. Wrightston. ***The Battles of Antiochus the Great: The Failure of Combined Arms at Magnesia that Handed the World to Rome***. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2022. 184 pages. ISBN: 978-1526793461.

This is Graham Wrightson's second monograph, following his *Combined Arms Warfare in Ancient Greece* (2019). That book devoted just a few of its last pages to the Hellenistic period, so an expansion is fitting. The book operates as a non-specialist case study explaining his combined arms thesis in the heyday of pike phalanxes, war elephants, and cataphract cavalry, through the career of a Seleucid warrior king who possessed all three. Wrightson's thesis is that Antiochus the Great's failure to employ combined arms properly at Magnesia explains his defeat at that battle and allowed the Roman Republic "to achieve dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean" (*xi*). This positions the book to intervene in arguments about the reasons for Rome's hegemony, the reasons for the outcomes of battles between Roman and Hellenistic armies, and ancient military command.

The book is a quick read, with numerous illustrations and an insert most interesting for its photographs of Wrightson's phalangite experiments with students at South Dakota State University. Most of the text proceeds chronologically. The introduction offers a short course on Wrightson's theory of combined arms, followed by a study of Antiochus' army (ch. 1) and his campaigns and land battles at Raphia (ch. 2), Panion (ch. 3), and against the Romans at Thermopylae (ch. 4). His critique of the Polybian comparison of legion and phalanx will be of interest (ch. 5). Then follows the naval campaign against the Romans (ch. 6), then chapters on the battle with Roman legions at Magnesia in late 190 BC (ch. 7-8). The earlier chapters examine where Antiochus III Megas ("the Great") used combined arms well or poorly, leading to the climax at Magnesia.

Wrightson's theory of combined arms comes down to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different panoplies used in Hellenistic armies. He defines combined arms as "utilizing all varied types of unit together in combination so that different units or types of unit can benefit from the support of others" to deploy their strengths and screen their vulnerabilities (*xvii*). Wrightson's strengths-and-weaknesses description of combined arms is as intuitive as rock, paper, scissors. Wrightson offers two tables detailing thirteen categories of ancient soldier–six infantry, four cavalry, plus elephants, chariots, and camel archers–summarized by armor, armament, battle roles, strengths, weaknesses, and position in the battle line (*xix-xxii*). The tables remind me of tabletop gaming rules. While generally accurate, there are historical exceptions for nearly all, and they lack accommodation for variable morale, cohesion, stamina, skill, or training between contingents that otherwise fit in the same type. For example, *thureophoroi* are heavy infantry in the battle line in Molon's army (14), but their heavier cousins the

thorakitai are part of the light infantry when forcing the passes of Media (33), and the Seleucid army's famed *argyraspides* are discussed in just two sentences (34).

Combined arms theory is modern, first developed in the post-Napoleonic period by officers like Carl von Decker and Henri de Giustiniani. This raises some difficulties if we are not only employing modern theory to extend our comprehension of ancient events, but also seeking to evaluate, as Wrightson often does, what an ancient commander should have done. There is little attention to the intellectual culture of Hellenistic military command, which might answer what Antiochus himself imagined was the best use of his varied forces. Similarly, Wrightson's combined arms theory is light on the synchronization and simultaneity that lie at the heart of effective combined arms. Wrightson's "integrated warfare," advanced combined arms (*xii*), instead describes a general's optimal use of every type of unit in an army highly trained to carry out the general's complicated orders.

Wrightson opines, in the conclusion of the book, "combined arms should have brought Antiochus victory" at Magnesia; instead "one single miscalculation concerning one single unit"—the scythed chariots—lost everything (135). This observation highlights the difficulty with his centralized theory. Earlier Wrightson wrote that Antiochus' main mistakes at Magnesia were "not refusing his left wing and not returning from pursuit in time to aid the phalanx in the centre" (*xxvii*). Later he argues Antiochus should have attacked on the left wing and attempted a double envelopment (13). Command and control are notoriously complicated, and a combined arms philosophy does not mean there is one right way to fight every battle. Rather, each of the thousand interactions comprising the engagement seek to impose unanswerable dilemmas and eventual defeat on the foe. Somewhere Wrightson's study of combined arms has led him to overstate the scriptedness of Hellenistic warfare: "in all Alexander's battles he used the same tactics" (xxviii) and "all the generals and officers of Alexander the Great and his Successors fought the battles in the same way" (23). Yet Wrightson's own varied analyses demonstrate the flexibility that is a core trait of a combined arms-capable army. Moving away from Great Captains tendencies could significantly improve the utility of the combined arms approach to ancient warfare.

Aside from combined arms, another of the main draws of Wrightson's book is his exploration of the legion and phalanx in combat in Chapter 5, and Wrightson's claim that, compared to the Hellenistic kingdoms, "there was nothing inherently superior about the Roman way of war" (136-137). Instead, Macedonian-style armies lost to Romans due to "bad generalship" (100). Wrightson's obstacle here is Polybius' excursus on the subject. Much of the discussion is interesting, often reasonable, and several highlights draw upon Wrightson's classroom reenactments.

The critical piece to this argument is the integrity of the phalanx's extended front, or the problem of gaps, which must be put away if generalship shall be the chief culprit. The problem may be overstated: the gap at Cynoscephalae yawned between one formed

wing and a distant, unformed wing. The main battle with gap problems was Pydna. Wrightson points to Pyrrhus and other phalanx engagements for silence about gaps leading to defeats (90). But we lack detailed battle narratives for most engagements outside Polybius' coverage, and he forgets Polybius' testimony that Pyrrhus' army used *enallax* fighting the Romans (18.28.10). Wrightson instead proposes that pike phalanxes arrayed in multiple 8-rank lines, which provided "an option… for plugging gaps in the phalanx" (90) by maneuvering successive blocks of 8x8 phalangites into gaps as they appeared. This makes Polybius' remark about the legion's unique reserve array nonsensical (18.32.2). In defense, Wrightson produces the death of Ptolemaios the taxiarch and 120 notable Macedonians at Issos, asserting "Arrian's account only makes sense" if successive blocks could maneuver into the gap created by the Greek mercenaries (91). On the previous page Wrightson acknowledged that, if 4,000 Greeks escaped through the Macedonian lines, the gap may have been much larger than a reserve company could have filled. He handwaves that: "however, it was smaller" (90).

Wrightson's argument culminates in the declaration there is "no obvious tactical or equipment reason" why Roman legions might be "inherently superior" to a sarissa phalanx combined arms army (100). He notes as well that the Romans "could and did fight successfully without a combined arms army" (100). This is a surprising declaration, when at Magnesia Roman success depended less upon the legions than upon the efficient cooperation of light and heavy cavalries, missile, light, and medium infantry. There is no discussion of the legion itself, which in the early 2nd century was reaching the pinnacle of its development. In the book's conclusion, Wrightson admits "it took great tactical and strategic skill from generals and officers alike to properly utilize" Macedonian-style armies with their "tens of different unit styles" (137). A way of war dependent upon such tactical and strategic skill throughout the chain of command–to which we can add communication, *coup d'oeil*, and as Wrightson points out, excellent cavalry arms–is inherently disadvantaged against a way of war free of the same intrinsic liabilities.

Chapter 2 covers Antiochus' campaign against the usurper Molon and the massive battle of Raphia, where Antiochus squandered a successful cavalry charge in pursuit and did not join his infantry forces in an attack on the Ptolemaic line. Wrightson assumes there must have been a sarissa phalanx in Molon's army, unmentioned by Polybius, because it was "the standard for all armies of Macedonian heritage for more than 100 years" (14). Wrightson tends to read the ancient sources critically only when they have not confirmed one of his heuristics. So Wrightson uncritically recounts (15-21) Polybius' account of Ptolemaic reforms prior to the battle of Raphia, an account that has been discredited in many of its particulars, because it affirms the importance of training and experience. For Wrightson, "it was the experience of actual fighting in battle that schooled the phalanx", adding that "of all the Hellenistic battles, Raphia is the one that makes that most clear" (16). Yet there had not been a Ptolemaic phalanx combat in more than two decades, while the Seleucid phalangites were overwhelmingly more experienced in

battle. They lost. Finally, the Ptolemaic phalanx that cracked its opponents first was the "greatly inferior" Egyptian phalanx (16), not the Greco-Macedonian. Wrightson devotes just fourteen words to the largest phalanx-on-phalanx combat of the age (75,000 engaged) before speculating that an unmentioned flanking attack by cavalry decided the engagement (28).

The battle of Panion, covered in chapter 3, is very important for Wrightson as the "only occasion where Antiochus, or any later Hellenistic general, utilized to perfection in one single engagement" the combined arms tactics of Philip and Alexander, a feat which marks Antiochus as a "brilliant general" and "exonerates him" for his failures at Raphia and Magnesia (50). This reconstruction of a notoriously difficult battle–related mainly through Polybius' quotations and criticism of Zeno's account–seeks to incorporate a feigned retreat by the Seleucid phalanx and have the decisive maneuver delivered by Antiochus with his companions and hypaspists. None of these are in the evidence, so Wrightson's task is delicate. Wrightson's battlefield illustrations for Panion show elevation markers for two hills in the battlefield, yet these bear no relation to any topography in the vicinity of the Panium shrine, nor do the schematics show any sort of scale for the relative size of the armies and their respective contingents (39). The reconstruction hinges upon whether the right wing Ptolemaic cavalry can be both "put out of action" (*dyschresteisthai* has the sense of, to borrow modern military parlance, disruption or dislocation) by elephants and "remain unbroken" (*akeraios* has a strong sense of cohesion and effectiveness) until the end of the battle (42). This doubtful premise is necessary so that Antiochus III, his companions, and his hypaspists–concerning whose role in combat neither Zeno nor Polybius offered any statement–can sweep around the elephant charge, into space vacated by the "unbroken" Ptolemaic right wing cavalry, who are being chased off the field by Tarantines, to envelop the Ptolemaic phalanx (44).

To seal his reconstruction, Wrightson switches Zeno's order of events to support his role for Antiochus, placing Zeno's "hottest part of the battle" (Polyb. 16.19.11) in the context of Antiochus' charge, not the return of the younger Antiochus' cataphracts from their pursuit of the Ptolemaic left. Wrightson positions that passage–"when [Scopas] saw the younger Antiochus returning" (16.19.10)–as taking place after the Ptolemaic army was "surrounded already by elephants and cavalry from Antiochus' victorious left wing" (44). Wrightson claims "Polybius unknowingly confirms" his reconstruction because Scopas couldn't possibly have waited to call the retreat until cataphracts were about to charge the rear of his phalanx. He reasons: "Once surrounded, there would be no way to win and no way to survive. That Scopas escaped with a large chunk of his army suggests that an avenue of retreat was available" (44). But applying some rational decision heuristic to any military commander in the chaos of an engagement is irresponsible.[1] We

[1] Furthermore, all we are told is that Scopas escaped to Sidon with 10,000 men. This "large chunk" may have been less than twenty percent of the Ptolemaic army engaged.

do not know with certainty where Scopas was in command, but since Ptolemaios son of Aeropos was on the left wing, Scopas most likely commanded the right wing cavalry. He may not have been in particularly close contact with the phalangite phalanx. He may have needed the dust cloud from the returning cavalry to realize the danger they faced. Finally, our ancient sources, literary and papyrological, tell us Panion was a catastrophe for the Ptolemaic army. For someone who calls "other historians" interpretations of the battle "foolhardy" without citing them or engaging in particulars (45), the special pleading is unsuitable.

In chapters 7 and 8 Wrightson attributes the Seleucid defeat at Magnesia to a failure to employ combined arms effectively. He spends some pages reviewing and rearranging the Seleucid array at Magnesia before narrating the battle. On the Roman side he accepts Livy uncritically, to the point of repeating Livy's misnaming of Trallians and Cretans as "missile cavalry" (121) and "horse archers" (122). On the right wing, Wrightson moves sixteen elephants to the extreme right wing, claiming to be following Livy, who instead put them "behind the [*agema* cavalry] in support" (37.40.7), only to move them in front of the cataphracts a page later (123). In general, Wrightson suggests Antiochus' varied auxiliaries arrayed in advance of his best troops, rather than in one extended battle line. He dismisses the *enallax* phalanx at Magnesia. He argues the elephants were actually part of the advance line, then withdrew through gaps to the rear of the phalanx (127), a feat he considered unimaginable at Panion (45).

Wrightson describes the fighting at Magnesia on pages 130-131, with analysis on 132-135. Wrightson blames Antiochus for starting the battle with a chariot charge, citing Livy. But Livy's narrative is unclear whether they ever launched their charge before Eumenes' bold onset set them amok (37.41.9). It is equally likely Antiochus' right wing advanced first, as in so many of his other battles. Antiochus' fight against the Roman left wing provided a missed opportunity for meditations on combined arms against the legion, while the mechanics of elephant, light infantry, phalanx, and Galatian infantry combined arms as the Romans encircled the center are likewise fascinating, but undiscussed.

Graham Wrightson's book is from Pen & Sword. I published a book with Pen & Sword. The printing quality compares decently with many academic presses. The price point is a particular advantage. Just compare Wrightson's first book and this one at one-fifth the price. The press is primarily a wargaming and military history enthusiast press, but it has produced some excellent, scholarly military histories over the years. Scholars should consider publishing with public-facing presses occasionally, but ought to uphold scholarly best practices. Wrightson's book does not always: it has just 75 notes, 30 of them in the introduction, and 45 entries in the bibliography, just 16 from the decade prior to publication. On pages 83, 90, 94, 100 Wrightson refers to scholarly arguments but cites nothing. On the other hand, the book is accessible and puts forward bold arguments, among which, thus far unmentioned, are commanders on horseback behind the regiment

(*xxvi*, 90), echeloned battle lines and refused flanks on every Hellenistic battlefield (*xxv*, 9, 25, 39, 81), and feigned retreats as a standard, common tactic (*xxvii*). I trust we will see further refinement and extension of the book's core argument, on combined arms warfare, in future work.

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