



The Tactics of Aelian

Christopher Matthew

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Aelian's work on tactics is a hugely significant piece of ancient military literature, yet the last new edition in English was published in 1814. Although writing (in his native Greek) in the second century AD, Aelian drew heavily on earlier works, such as Asclepiodotus, to put together a comprehensive manual of warfare in the Hellenistic period (late 3rd to early 1st centuries BC). His *Tactica* thus examines all facets of warfare in the period of Alexander the Great's successors, including the arms and armor of cavalry and infantry, formations, commands and signals. Aelian also provides a discussion of the Roman army of the period.

As well as being an invaluable source for modern historians studying the Hellenistic period, the book was very influential on military theory long after Aelian's death. Arrian's work on tactics may merely be a revision of Aelian's; the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI used excerpts in his own treatise and an Arabic translation made around 1350 was used to train Muslim armies. Most significantly it became one of the primary training aids for the pike and musket armies of the 16 and 17th century Europe. A substantial edition published in London in 1616 contained a full direct translation as well as comprehensive notes and a treatise on how to apply Aelian's work to the training of English pike formations in the Macedonian manner. It was well used to train the foot regiments that fought the English Civil War. This unique longevity makes it of interest to anyone interested in warfare from the Hellenistic period right up to the English Civil War.

Christopher Matthew's new edition is based on the 1616 edition but written in modern English with new renditions of all its accompanying figures. It has the original 1616 notes as well as comprehensive new notes and cross references to the other ancient manuals (such as Arrian and Leo) that drew upon it. It is without a doubt the most up to date version available in any language of this significant work that was influenced tactical thought for 1,500 years.

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