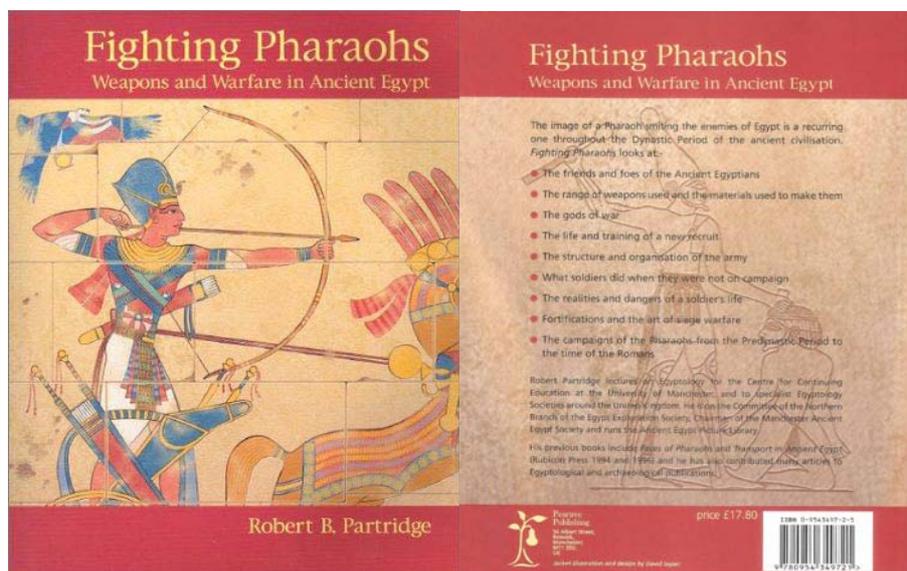


Partridge, R.B. 2003. Fighting pharaohs. Weapons and warfare in ancient Egypt. – Manchester, Peartree Publishing

Book review by M. Signore



Books on military resources of the ancient cultures are not so easy to find, therefore this one came almost as a surprise to me, especially for the broad field of subject it investigates. The first impression of this book is good, although since the first pages it is clear that Partridge did not write a technical book, but a popular one. The structure of the book is clear enough to be perused by anyone, from the casual reader to the person looking for technical data, yet the latter will be disappointed while the former will be delighted from the mass of pictures and accounts that are in this book. Partridge's style is clear and somewhat concise, often quoting Egyptian or other contemporary (but translated) texts; yet sometimes the absence of details and direct literature references is a bit disappointing for the weapon archaeologist, while the book will do for most of the other readers. This is a good thing for a popular text, although I would have liked some more detail.

"Fighting Pharaohs" opens with a catalogue of the historical enemies of Egypt. This chapter is perhaps the less satisfying, because only a passing mention is made for most of them, while it would have been interesting to read about these enemies in more detail. Most of all, a small list of sources would have been very welcome. On the contrary, the chapter is interesting for the reader that is not interested in the history of weapons and tactics but more in the general picture of the period. There is an abundance of pictures, even though in black and white only, but nonetheless, 15 pages devoted to *all* 'enemies of Egypt' are too few in my opinion.

The second chapter is the one that interests me most, the weapons and equipment. Ranging for roughly 50 pages, this chapter presents the materials used in equipment construction as well as the weapons. While there is the usual wealth of pictures (which, as the old saying states, are worth more than a thousand words) and the weapons are well-catalogued, the lack of Egyptian names for the equipment is a thing that will disappoint the specialists (and honestly will gain the gratitude of the casual reader). Again this chapter is too popular and becomes too detailed on the chariots, describing in detail the decorations on the chariots of Yuya and Thutmose IV while lacking in details for some other parts such as weapons themselves.

The third chapter relates the 'Gods of War'. It is a very small chapter (5 pages only) and briefly mentions each of the main gods (interestingly enough including Bes and the Aten as aspects of war gods); the following chapters constitute almost the whole lot of the book, being both the most interesting and most consistent ones.

The fourth chapter is about the life in the army. Here Partridge gives us more details about life, drills, dangers, wounds, marching and equipment of the Egyptian soldier, as well as a summary of the army organization. As usual, the text is easy to read and captures the reader enough; the usual wealth of pictures is provided to explain some concepts better, although sometimes the pictures are not cited in the text. As I mentioned before this is the first truly interesting chapter in the book. The information here is presented in an easy way to read and yet well-ordered in subchapters so that theoretically one can look for a particular aspect of the military life and look for it.

The following chapter I have found most interesting because it describes sieges and siege work in good detail and with some quotations from both texts and paintings from Egypt. The chapter is well-written although even here a lack of technical aspects has been a bit disappointing.

Finally, there is the largest chapter that takes up more than half of this book. It is an account of any historical conflict during the Egyptian history. The good part is that every section is devoted to a dynasty and every dynasty is listed with the known pharaohs and/or kings. The bad point is that there is no military detail for the campaigns, even for those battles that are very well-known (like Megiddo or Qadesh). But the chapter is written, as the whole book, with the aim of providing general information in the history of Egypt.

The bibliography collected at the end of the volume is also interesting, although again a list of sources at least for each chapter would have been welcome. My final consideration is that this book gave me divergent impressions. For one part, the work is quite good and extremely interesting for the reader interested in general history or curious about ancient Egypt. The text is very well-written, the pictures are numerous and, except for some, are clearly defined and informative. From this point of view this Partridge book is a good thing to keep in a general library. But from the technical point of view the book is found wanting. Too much attention is devoted to artistic evidence and half of the book dedicated to write again about Egyptian history is a bit disappointing for the weapon archaeologist or the aficionado of military history. The lack of Egyptian terms for weapons, armours, items and even in some cases for ancient people is questionable. Overall "Fighting Pharaohs" is a clearly divulgated book and in this it hits its mark, but the technicians and scholars will find it lacking.

As a final opinion I can tell this: if you are in need of a technical book about Egyptian warfare and are unconcerned about arts, then I suggest other books (like Shaw or the very good Italian book by G. Cavillier, or even the monographies published in the Osprey series). But if you are not in need of military terms and a technical book about archaeology of weapons, then this book by Partridge is a very good introduction to military uses and campaigns in Egypt and to the Egyptian history as well. A good reference book all in all.

Partridge, R.B. 2003. *Fighting pharaohs. Weapons and warfare in ancient Egypt.* – Manchester, Peartree Publishing. 352 pp. ISBN 0-9543497-2-5. Price £ 17.80 (paperback).