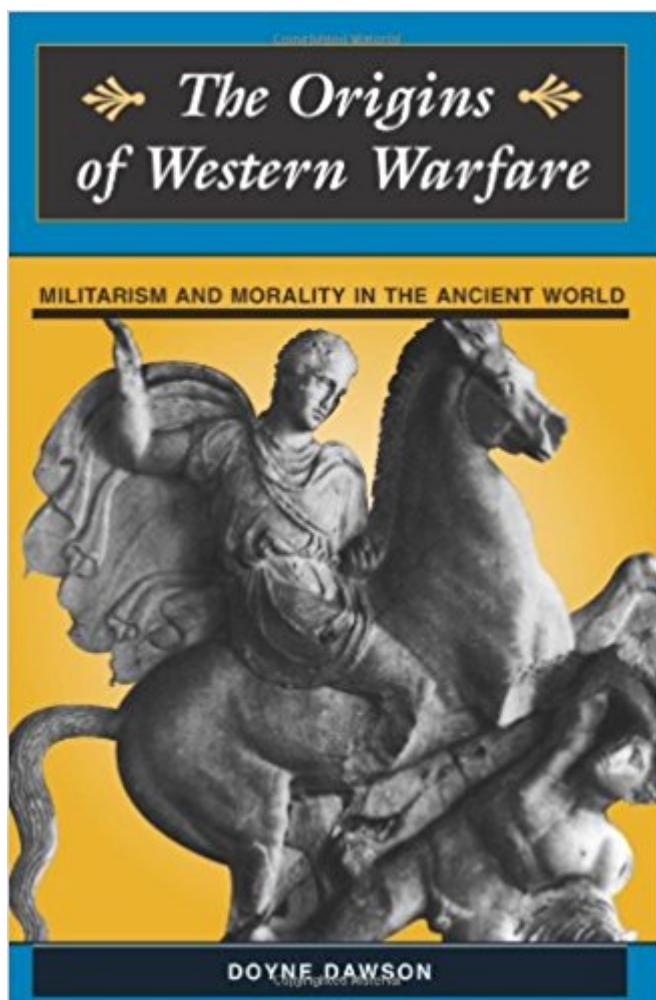


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The Origins Of Western Warfare: Militarism And Morality In The Ancient World (History And Warfare)



Synopsis

What is the source of the uniquely Western way of war, the persistent militarism that has made Europe the site of bloodshed throughout history and secured the dominance of the West over the rest of the world? The answer, Doyne Dawson persuasively argues in this groundbreaking new book, is to be found in the very bedrock of Western civilization: ancient Greece and Rome. The Origins of Western Warfare begins with an overview of primitive warfare, showing how the main motivations of prehistoric combat—revenge and honor—set the tone for Greek thinking about questions of war and morality. These ideas, especially as later developed by the Romans, ensured the emergence of a distinctive Western tradition of warfare: dynamic, aggressive, and devastatingly successful when turned against non-Western cultures. Dawson identifies key factors that led Western culture down this particular path. First, the Greeks argued that war could be justified as an instrument of human and divine justice, securing the social and cosmic order. Second, war was seen as a rational instrument of foreign policy. This, probably the most original contribution of the Greeks to military thought, was articulated as early as the fifth century b.c. Finally, Greek military thought was dominated by the principle of “civic militarism,” in which the ideal state is based upon self-governing citizens trained and armed for war. The Roman version of civic militarism became thoroughly imperial in spirit, and in general, the Romans successfully modified these Greek ideas to serve their expansionist policies. At the end of antiquity, these traditions were passed on to medieval Europe, forming the basis for the just war doctrines of the Church. Later, in early modern Europe, they were fully revived, systematized, and given a basis in natural law—to the benefit of absolute monarchs. For centuries this neoclassical synthesis served the needs of European elites, and echoes of it are still heard in contemporary justifications for war. Providing a careful reconsideration of what the classical sources tell us about Western thinking on fundamental questions of war and peace, The Origins of Western Warfare makes a lasting contribution to our understanding of one of the most persistent and troubling aspects of Western culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The roots of the Western way of war are plumbed with distinction by Dawson (*Cities of the Gods*) in this fascinating study. Dawson traces the development of the Western European ideas of warfare from primitive society (revenge and honor) through the ancient world, explains what aspects of these ideas were inherited by medieval and Renaissance Europe and examines how Western European thought has transformed this classical tradition. Drawing on an impressive array of classical writers (Aristotle, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Caesar, Livy, Tacitus and others), Dawson shows how Greece and Rome refined the idea of the just war, used war as a rational instrument of foreign policy and developed the idea of civic militarism. Christian Europe received these ideas and refined them even further. Early modern European thinkers like Machiavelli and Botero, the author demonstrates, helped transmit the idea of civic militarism to monarchies. This neoclassical synthesis fell apart in the 1700s, however, as ethical and strategic thought separated; a gulf divides them even today. Dawson's well-researched, clearly written account delineates an important but often misrepresented underpinning of the classical world. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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Doyne Dawson received his Ph.D. from Princeton University and is the author of *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*. He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina. Doyne Dawson received his Ph.D. from Princeton University and is the author of *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*. He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.

We used this book as part of a college military history course. The first few chapters were well received, but readers including the professor became somewhat disengaged with the middle and later chapters with the trend moving toward a more philosophical discourse and away from the earlier analytical style. Still, it is a worthwhile read if your interests are Greco-Roman warfare beliefs

and influence into the modern world. "The Antique Drums of War" or "The Pursuit of Power" might fit well with Dawson's text as complimentary reads.

An examination of, mainly, the Greek and Roman military traditions after a concise excursion through the evolution of warfare from prehistorical times up to the first millennium BC. Lucid discourse that illuminates many aspects of the classical world.

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