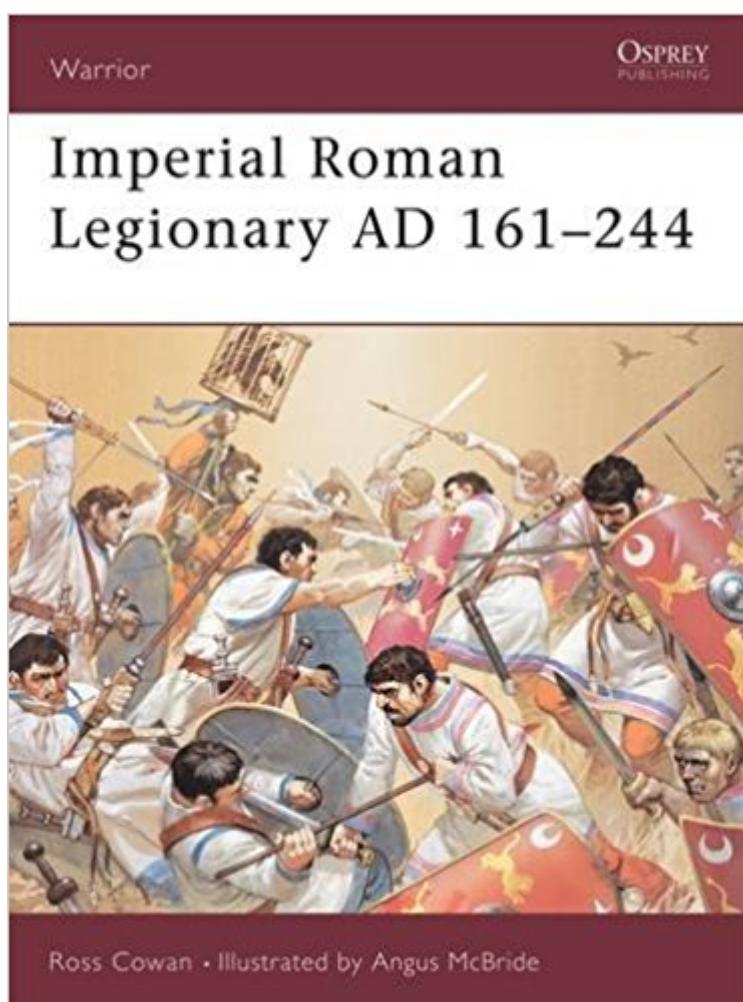


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# Warrior 72: Imperial Roman Legionary AD 161-284



## Synopsis

Between AD 161 and 244 the Roman legions were involved in wars and battles on a scale not seen since the late Republic. Legions were destroyed in battle, disbanded for mutiny and rebellion and formed to wage wars of conquest and defence. This volume explores the experience of the imperial legionary, concentrating on Legio II Parthica. Raised by the emperor Septimus Severus in AD 193/4, it was based at Albanum near Rome and as the emperor's personal legion, became one of the most important units in the empire.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Produced to the very high standard that Osprey books have become known for.

Insights into the real lives of history's fighting men, packed with full colour illustrations, highly detailed cutaways, exploded artwork of weaponry and armour, and action-packed battle scenes.

This book is one of the few books to cover the Roman legions during the period from Marcus Aurelius through the years of Military Anarchy, a period that gets little coverage but will be getting more now that this book is out. This is the period when the famous lorica segmentata of Trajan's column fame as well as the movie Gladiator disappeared from use as well as Roman troops eschewing the classing two-foot long gladius for the longer spatha. Military fashion took on a far

more "Barbaric" look as the Roman army came into contact with more barbarians and became more dependent upon said barbarians to fill the ranks. This could be said to be the transition from Rome to the barbarian armies that rules Europe for the next 500 years.

Ross Cowen goes great guns here, finally there is some real photos of late roman legionaries, not the hollywood rubbish. very detailed and as can be expected the colour photos help the novice reader see what the common legionary really looks like! The text from ross is fantastic and flows very well.

Books about specific periods in history are very informative and give you the information specific to AD161-284 in Roman history. I enjoyed it because I learned much more in this time period than I previously knew.

An excellent addition to the series.

Good author who knows his subject.

This essential Osprey Warrior title examines the Imperial Roman legionary from the ascension of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in AD 161, to the rise of Emperor Diocletianus and the end of the Third Century Crisis in AD 284. The author takes the history, organization, and experiences of the Second Parthica Legion, founded in AD 194, as the foundation for much of his text. He uses the Sassanid siege of Dura Europos c. AD 251, as well as various late Classical accounts of 3rd Century battles in the Middle East, for examples of the legionary in action. Since this book is something of a sequel to the previous legionary title by Cowan, it contains similar but even more concise information on the experiences of the soldier in the army, as well as the chain of command. Overall, Cowan paints the image of the 3rd Century Roman legionary as a soldier perhaps even better than his ancestors of Early Imperial Rome. It was perhaps more the stupidity of their leaders, and the general chaos of the mid 3rd Century that gives these soldiers their undue reputation for lack of quality. These troopers, lighter in arms than their ancestors and still fighting with javelin, long sword, and dagger, faced enemies ranging from seething Gothic hordes to cunning Parthian and Persian horsemen, and often emerged victorious. The eight full-color plates by Angus McBride are awesome, depicting troopers of various legions and posts in their typical clothing and armor. The main text and the plate commentary both look at the armor and clothing, but not with

overmuch detail. The author does not dig into the debate as to whether or not the 3rd Century legionary typically wore armor. According to the idea of the lightly-armed lanciarii skirmishers, it would appear that armor or lack thereof would depend on the individual soldier's place in the battle-order. The text draws from a variety of sources, from Classical to modern historians' work to legionary gravestones to weapon hoards from northern Europe, to paint a picture of the Roman legionaries from the mid 2nd Century to the late 3rd Century-some of ancient Rome's most skilled, versatile, experienced, and arrogant soldiers.

This is one of the better Osprey titles. Although it is probably not the "essential reading" that a somewhat over-enthusiastic reviewer has portrayed it to be, this is a book written by an author who clearly knows his topic sufficiently well to be able to summarize it without leaving any of the important pieces out. The author - Ross Cowan - finished his PhD thesis in 2002 precisely on this period (the title was "Aspects of the Severan Field Army") and published this Osprey title the year after. In particular, Ross Cowan's research focused on The Praetorians and the Legio II Parthica, the favourite and elite legion under Septimius Severus and his immediate successors. The other two main qualities of this book are to focus on a period which had traditionally been rather poorly covered: the third century crisis and, perhaps more accurately for this title, to show how the Roman Legionary and Roman Legions evolved and responded to this crisis. Two points were of particular interest to me. One was to show that the need for a central reserve force emerged already under the reign of Septimius Severus, and was further developed by Gallienus (but with a stronger emphasis on cavalry), and by some of his immediate successors (Aurelian and Probus) well before the Tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine. The second was to show that, contrary to what sometimes used to be asserted, this did not result in a demise of the Legionary but simply in a breaking up of the Legions into smaller components. Some of these would remain stationed in one or several forts on the frontiers whereas other components, which had probably started off as ad hoc detachments (*vexillatio*) for specific campaigns became the "new" Diocletianic legions of 800 to 1200 strong. The structure of this book is the traditional one (terms of service, changes in command and in army organisation, legionary equipment), but the author's grasp of the subject and the rather more limited timeframe makes it more valuable and allows for more information to be delivered. The section on the lanciarii was also very interesting. The piece on the siege of Doura Europos, and the Roman Army units that defended it against the Persians makes also for interesting reading for anyone that has read Sidebottom's *Fire in the East*. I found it a pity that we could not be treated to the full siege but I appreciate that the author had space limitations. Finally, the demise of Legio II

Parthica under Diocletian is also interesting, and somewhat unsurprising given their association with the Severans. I also very much liked the plates, which is also unsurprising since they were from the Angus McBride. The battle scene between Legio II Parthica and some of the Praetorians at Immae AD 218 was, however, a bit problematic for me. Contrary to another reviewer, I had no problem with the living eagle used as the legion's standard, although I felt perhaps a bit sorry for the poor bird which would have been somewhat stressed and powerless in the middle of the bloody struggle. I was, however, somewhat surprised to see both elite forces fighting it out in their tunics, without armour or helmets. While I do not doubt that this actually happened, as described by the author, I would have appreciated if he had explained this rather unusual episode to us in a bit more detail.

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