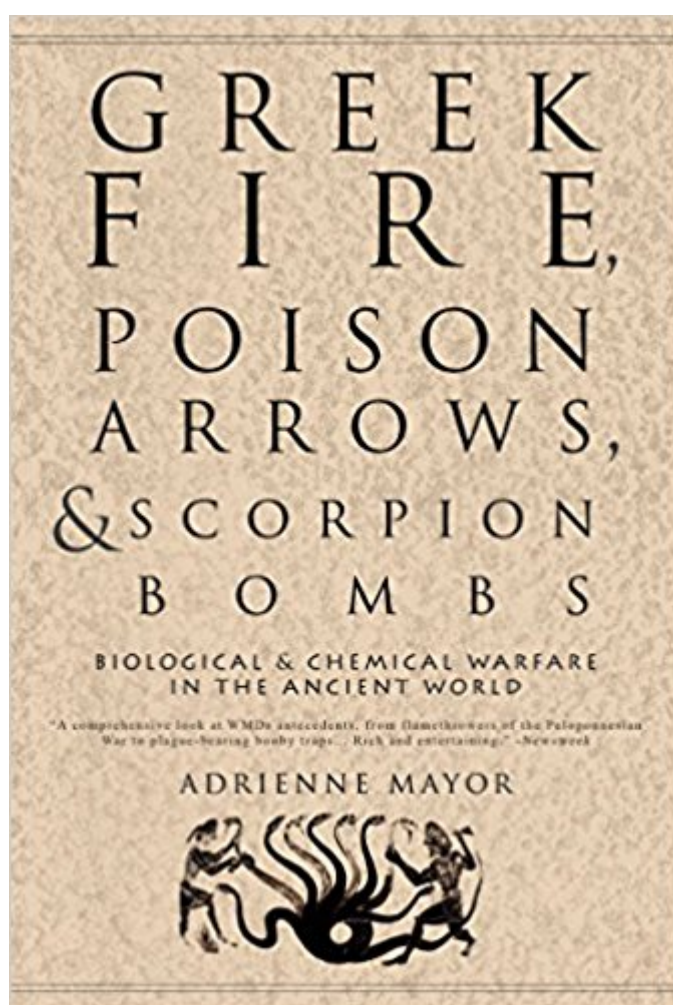


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Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, And Scorpion Bombs: Biological & Chemical Warfare In The Ancient World



Synopsis

"A comprehensive look at WMD's antecedents, from flamethrowers of the Peloponnesian War to plague-bearing booby traps.... Rich and entertaining." -Newsweek Featuring a new introduction by the author. Flamethrowers, poison gases, incendiary bombs, the large-scale spreading of disease... are these terrifying agents and implements of warfare modern inventions? Not by a long shot. Weapons of biological and chemical warfare have been in use for thousands of years, and Greek Fire, Poison Arrows & Scorpion Bombs, Adrienne Mayor's fascinating exploration of the origins of biological and unethical warfare draws extraordinary connections between the mythical worlds of Hercules and the Trojan War, the accounts of Herodotus and Thucydides, and modern methods of war and terrorism. Greek Fire, Poison Arrows & Scorpion Bombs will catapult readers into the dark and fascinating realm of ancient war and mythic treachery-and their devastating consequences.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: The Overlook Press; 1 edition (December 30, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1590201779

ISBN-13: 978-1590201770

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #602,688 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #98 in Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Biological & Chemical #712 in Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Conventional #728 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Greece

Customer Reviews

"Illuminating... Adrienne Mayor marshals not just myth, but also the writing of ancient authors and evidence from archaeological digs to show that biological and chemical weapons saw action in battles long before the modern era." -The New York Times "A sound and very imaginative account.... Mayor's historical research has made a significant contribution toward filling in the gaps of knowledge concerning weaponry in the classical age." -Newsday "Mayor recounts in lively, sometimes darkly comic detail, the diabolical stratagems devised by devious warriors for tactical ends." -Discover

Adrienne Mayor, a Research Scholar in Classics and History of Science at Stanford University, specialises in ancient natural science, classical legends, and ancient military history. The author of "Poison King", Mayor is a frequent contributor to "Archaeology", "MHQ" and "Folklore", and is often interviewed by NPR, BBC, "New York Times", "USA Today" and The History Channel. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Excellent history of the use of ancient bio-chemical weapons which belies the fact that the ancients fought only in a fair manner. Tho the rules of engagement in antiquity stated that battles must be "fairly fought", the use of biologic and chemical weapons often dipped in poison (from serpents and human remains or excrement) was not uncommon, tho considered not "manly". Also shooting arrows from afar as opposed to combat face to face was frowned upon, even tho it was widely used (often by mercenaries) It would appear from mythology that those Greeks who used biochemical warfare were then made to suffer from it themselves, proving that the Gods really did frown upon that usage. Armies in ancient times used not only personal types of bio weapons, but also made great use of poisoning water supplies to effect victory. I came across this book's title in the back of a novel by the American author of thrillers, Brad Thor, who used it in reference for background for his novel. Thanks to Brad Thor for this and the other great book to which he made reference in the same novel, Hannibal Crosses the Alps, another wonderful history and analysis of an event in antiquity. I highly recommend this book for the history and veracity on this topic---well annotated and illustrated w/ancient Greek pottery of the periods in discussion.

Very interesting and enlightening book about ancient use of biological and chemical weapons and how they were developed, used and influenced the outcome of wars. The writing style is entertaining, enlightened and moves quickly. I would recommend this book for anyone interested in the history of warfare and the use of chemical and biologic agents to influence the outcome. This book makes it clear that these are tools of war that have been around for thousands of years.

Mayor's overview of the various biological and chemical weapons of the ancient world serves as a great introduction for the armchair historian to the various nasty ways people murdered each other in the days of yore.

This book offered insight into ancient warfare that most history books in school never talk about. I found this book to be a very quick read and not one of those really dry books you fall asleep to.

Aside from a new preface, the book is a reissue of the first edition (*Greek Fire, Poison Arrows & Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World*, 2003). Most of the historical examples come from the Greek world, the Roman empire and Asia Minor, yet the reader can also encounter other cases from the Middle East, China and India, although those related to this latter country are almost exclusively based on Kautilya's (4-3rd c. BCE) *The Arthashastra* (Penguin classics) ('Treatise on Statecraft') and on the accounts of Alexander the Great's experiences. Overarching Greek mythological themes include Hercules's Hydra-venom arrows and his gruesome death owing to a poisoned shirt, in similar vein to the gown received as a gift from the sorceress Medea and donned by the Corinthian princess Glauke; and the accidentally self-inflicted wound of Philoctetes on his way to the Trojan War. Among the historical personages and locations that come up frequently we find Alexander the Great, Mithridates VI of Pontus (d. 63 BCE), and Syracuse (Sicily). Topics discussed: poison arrows, especially those of the Scythians and the related toxin known as "scythicon" (drawing on sources from Herodotus, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Aelian; pp. 77-86); venomous plants used in warfare (hellebore species, aconite, nightshade); poisoning drinking water, toxic honey, contaminated wine, etc.; plagues as weapons of war, i.e., driving disease-ridden animals to enemy land or sending 'poison maidens' to their camp; the idea that certain temples in the ancient world were utilized for storing contagious pathogens (and their antidotes?); deployment of chemical incendiaries and protective measures against them; and much more. While certainly interesting, the inclusion of war dogs, elephants, camels, etc. (chapter 6) in a discussion about bio/chemical weapons is quite a bit of stretch for me. Corrigenda: + I don't think it's wise to call the respective territory of the Iberian Peninsula Spain and its inhabitants Spanish or Spaniards in the context of Carthaginian and Roman campaigns (pgs. 14, 72, 108, 155, 203, 225), but rather Iberians or, as the author does on one occasion (p. 155), "Celtiberians" or Ibero-Celts. + A. Mayor asserts that Hungarians catapulted beehives at the Turks in 1289 (p. 180). Hardly so... Ottoman Turks first set foot on the European continent in the 1350s. One of the first major battles in the Balkans was fought between a Serb-led multi-ethnic Christian army and the Muslims at Kosovo Polje in 1389. Endnotes (pp. 259-93); bibliography (pp. 296-305). The illustrations are carefully selected; an historical time line (pp. 11-17) and an incomplete index facilitate navigating in the book.

need it for school but great book

We went to a public lecture of hers at Stanford and the room was packed. She has done her research well, writes in a manner that is academic without being dry, and masterfully makes her case. Also get her book on "The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithradates."

Generally good, but it can get tedious at times. For the most part this is a fun little book. Some of it is rather good, especially the parts where modern scholars attempt to recreate some of the more bizarre weapons. How does one stuff a bunch of generally angry scorpions into a clay sphere after all? (Spoiler Alert: use cold.) Also of interest where the plants used to deleterious effect. Now for the bad news, sometimes there is a bit too much information given. Sometimes a weapon is too lovingly described and its use overexposed. Unlike some of her other efforts, this book tends to drag at times. Still it's a good companion book to Mayor's "The Poison King" It's interesting to get into the nitty-gritty of what was exactly being used at the time of the Mithridatic Wars and times before and after.

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