



Jeff Champion *Pyrrhus of Epirus* Pen & Sword £19.00 hardcover pp176

We are all familiar with the concept of a 'Pyrrhic victory', a success so costly as to be almost counter-productive. How many of us know anything about of the man who gave us the phrase, Pyrrhus of Epirus (in north-west Greece).

The author, an Australian classics graduate, is fully in command of all the ancient sources, and carefully evaluates all the points of controversy in a thoroughly rational and convincing manner.

He steers us through the welter of bloody strife when the Successor lords to Alexander the Great's empire fall upon each other almost before Alexander's body was cold! The royal house of Epirus was joined by marriage to Macedonia. Pyrrhus was in exile by the age of three, and was briefly king around his seventeenth birthday. Driven out by a revolt, he learned his soldiering under the great Successor lords, Antigonos and Demetrius.

Then he waged war against Demetrius, adding greatly to his personal renown. Finally established as king of Epirus, he accepted an invitation from the citizens of Taranto to lead their armies against the Romans. His victories over Rome at Heraclea and Asculum were ruinously expensive and he had to leave Italy.

So off he goes to help the Greeks drive the Carthaginians from Sicily. His behaviour towards his Greek allies lurched towards the tyrannical and the Greeks threw him out! His Italian allies wanted him back to fight Rome but a Carthaginian fleet destroyed his navy. Having got ashore, he could still meet an enemy champion and kill him in individual combat. This time it was the Romans who won a 'Pyrrhic' victory over Pyrrhus.

He returned to Greece and, being quite broke, waged war on Macedonia but was fought to a standstill by the Spartans. His son was killed in the fighting and he took such a bloody revenge that the Greeks allowed him to march away unmolested.

He met his death in battle for control of Macedonia, felled by a tile hurled by an Argive mother defending her son from Pyrrhus' personal attack. Falling, stunned, he was grabbed by a Macedon soldier and beheaded. His enemy, Antigonos, mourned his passing.

What an extraordinary man! A skilled professional soldier, personally courageous, in the mould of Alexander the Great, and a restless tyrant who just never knew when to stop.

John Lee