

Warfare in the Ancient Near East



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Warfare in the Ancient Near East

Preparation, Enactment and Remembrance

Edited by

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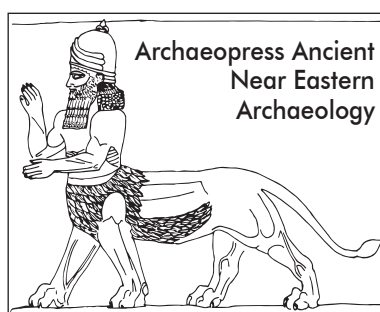
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Cover: A rider in the battle of Qadesh, depicted at the Luxor temple at Thebes (photo: Heidi Köpp-Junk)

Back cover: Lower Scene of the North End of Exterior West Wall of the Cour de la Cachette (Mark D. Janzen)



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Introduction

David B. Schreiner and Shane M. Thompson

War is a perpetually recurring reality, and it happens for a myriad of reasons. For example, wars could break out because certain groups compete for a particular resource or technology. Or, wars could start out because of deeply held ideological convictions. In some instances, wars start in light of territorial disagreements. And true to form, as this book is being produced, the reality of war is being played out in several global theaters. The Russia-Ukraine war that started in the immediate aftermath of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics continues to persist with only sporadic hopes of a ceasefire. Israel's war with Hamas started in October of 2023, and any cease-fire agreement has proven to be long in coming and tenuous at best. Then there is China's constant sabre-rattling over its disagreements with Taiwan alongside the Trump administration's recent actions in Venezuela and threats against Greenland. But most tragically, the psychological and civilian toll that war compiles continues to be put on full display.

Perhaps, therefore, the most ominous reality about war is the long shadow that it casts across survivors and cultures long after the final artillery shell explodes. War is so much more than singular engagements between hostile forces, although the effects of those engagements can become etched in the psyches and memories of those caught up in them. And we are more keenly aware of this than ever before. What was once glibly described as "shell shock" is now understood to be any number of post-traumatic disorders that can severely hinder someone's ability to be a fully functioning member of society. And we also know that ideological convictions can become radicalized if the mixture of pain, disenfranchisement, and experience reaches a certain level. In fact, all these realizations about the effects of war have settled upon our generation in a palpable way. Our understanding and awareness of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, two conflicts that have come to define our American generation, continues to be sharpened and clarified through perpetual investigation.

In light of all this, this project sought to do more than just talk about war in a punctiliar way, as if it was a singular event. Moreover, it wanted to acknowledge that fruitful discussions must move beyond any battle, technically speaking, or any strategy to win. It intends to shed light on the cycles of war. In other words, this project seeks to discuss the events that lead to war as well as the aftermath of war, including how war and battles are remembered in addition to the military engagements themselves. Moreover, this project endeavoured to engage the cycles of war through a cross-cultural lens. Egyptian, Judean, Assyrian, and Roman perspectives are all valuable, and each provide a useful line of inquiry in understanding this anthropological constant.

The most vital preparation for inevitable attack from enemy forces is the preparation of a city's defences. Enrico Foietta opens the volume with an examination of the defences of Hatra meant to repel the powerful Roman and Sassanian armies of the 2nd-3rd c. CE ("The Defences of Hatra. Fortifications, Weapons and Strategy against the Roman and Sassanian Armies during the 2nd and 3rd cent. CE"). Foietta offers a new chronology of the distinctive city defenses through an archaeological examination, also discussing their effectiveness during both Roman and Sassanian sieges of the city.

Francesco De Gaetano continues the discussion of defense systems, examining the features of the Egyptian defensive system that allowed control of Lower Nubia during the Middle Kingdom ("Egyptianising Luttwak? A New Look on the Military Organisation of the Middle Kingdom in Lower Nubia"). De Gaetano employs the theories of E. Luttwak to better understand the Nubian evidence, particularly the concepts of "the forward defense" and "the defense in-depth" in order to better define the strategy of the Pharaonic state in Nubia during the Middle Kingdom. This approach provides further evidence to discuss Middle Kingdom Egypt's strategies of Lower Nubian control, as well as strategies toward the neighboring kingdom of Kerma.

Preparations for war also include the development and adaptation of equipment, as evidenced by Heidi Köpp-Junk's discussion of the Egyptian chariot ("Chariots in Ancient Egypt - New Insights into a Supposedly Well-Known Phenomenon") - a new war device which appeared in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC and significantly changed warfare, primarily due to its speed. Köpp-Junk analyzes the textual, archaeological, and iconographic evidence for the Egyptian chariot, which also allows for discussion of its use outside of warfare context. These non-warfare uses allowed for quicker development and innovation for the chariot.

Gabriele Viola turns the focus to the enactment of war, with an examination of Trajan's activity in Mesopotamia ("Shock and Awe: A Multi-Scalar Historical Approach to Trajan's Military Campaign in Mesopotamia"). Incorporating a discussion of the preparations for the Parthian War with a particular focus on diplomacy and administration with the provinces, Viola is able to offer new insights into Trajan's execution of a military campaign in Mesopotamia through theoretical, textual, and archaeological insights.

Daniela Härtel then examines the concept of killing in an ancient Egyptian warfare context ("Gesellschaftliches Tötungsverbot und Töten im Krieg im Alten Ägypten"). Noting the difference between an internal prohibition on killing and a commandment to kill in military conflicts with an external force, Härtel argues that the inhibition to kill must be overcome in order to enable killing in war as the underlying reason for social justification strategies. This distinction is clearly made in ancient Egypt, creating an issue for the pharaoh who simultaneously boasts of killing while silencing the soldiers' talk about killing in war.

Terminological considerations are also examined in Ella Karev's examination of captives ("Prisoners of War or Deportees? (Re-)Defining Wartime Captivity in Middle and New Kingdom Egypt"). Karev specifically places the Egyptian term, *skr-nh*, with consideration of the modern weight of the term "prisoner of war." Placing the term in the context of its ancient evidence, Karev suggests that "deportee" is a more suitable translation, opening up new avenues of examination on the study of wartime captives.

James K. Oakley begins the transition into post-war activities, with his discussion of war and time in Egyptian texts and inscriptions ("How to Restart a War: Post-War Cycles of Violence in Ancient Egyptian Military Texts"). Bringing the Egyptian concepts of *nḥḥ* and *dt*, denoting two aspects of eternity that roughly correspond to cyclical and linear temporality, into conversation with warfare, Oakley notes that the reversal in geopolitical status of Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Roman period led to significant changes in the ways that war could end.

Laura Battini turns the focus of the volume to the remembrance of war in her examination of the representation of Assyrian historical events in the textual and iconographic record ("The Memory of War: Rewriting History in the Assyrian Period"). Battini examines the prevalent representations of rewritten history that transforms and molds the collective memories of these events. The likely impetus for these creations was to prevent internal rebellion through fear. Notably, these representations vary depending on their locations, with evidence from the heartland more violent than that from the periphery.

Jinyan Wang continues the discussion of Neo-Assyrian royal representations of warfare, bringing the later Neo-Babylonian inscriptions and iconography into the discussion ("Warrior versus Savior: Royal Rhetorics of War in the First Millennium BCE"). Comparison of the two shows significant differences, with Neo-Babylonian evidence portraying the king as a savior whose ego should not be inflated due to victory on the battlefield. This likely stems from differing political situations faced by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian rulers.

Considering the changes made throughout time to historical records, David B. Schreiner examines the biographical site of memory preserved in the presentation of Hezekiah throughout the biblical tradition ("Between Hero and Villain: Remembering Hezekiah as a Site of Memory in Conjunction with Sennacherib's Third Military Campaign"). Despite the constant glorification of Hezekiah's actions, examination of these texts depicts a more complex situation. While Hezekiah did indeed fight against the mighty Neo-Assyrian army, the memory suggests both a complex event and individual.

The iconographic depictions of Pharaoh Merneptah preserved on the exterior west wall and interior east wall of the Cour de la Cachette at Karnak examined by Mark D. Janzen brings together discussions of text and iconography ("The Wars of Pharaoh Merneptah and His Celebratory Program at Karnak Temple"). Janzen compares these inscriptions and iconographic representations to the "Israel Stela," in order to characterize Merneptah's overall iconography agenda. By doing so, Janzen argues that Merneptah and his artisans altered their typical representations of military accomplishments due to spatial limitations at Karnak, while still maintaining a consistent ideology with other military scenes commissioned during his reign.

Shane M. Thompson concludes the volume by turning the remembrance of warfare in a new direction, examining the lasting trauma experienced by those who participated in military conflict ("Remembering the Violence: Reflections on The Psychological Trauma of War in Biblical Narrative"). Employing modern research on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Thompson argues that, while PTSD is not explicitly referenced by name in our ancient sources, textual evidence does suggest a knowledge of warfare trauma. Through comparison with Mesopotamian scientific texts,

Thompson examines the biblical narrative of Saul, demonstrating that many aspects of his story align with modern conceptions of PTSD, reflecting a knowledge of PTSD in the ancient Near East.

Thus, the broad scope of this volume demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of warfare which was an ever-present concept in the ancient Near East. Ranging from defensive preparations in the construction of cities, to the undertaking of military campaigns, to the celebration of military victories, warfare contains many aspects ripe for investigation.