The volume under review contains a diverse collection of nine essays on warfare spanning the third through first millennia B.C.E., covering the area from Egypt to Anatolia to Mesopotamia, and regions in between. The editor’s stated aim for this work is “to help consolidate the studies on Ancient Near Eastern warfare.” Elsewhere in his introduction he notes that older studies of warfare from the earlier part of the 20th century tended to focus on military techniques and technology, to the exclusion of other topics, but that studies on broader aspects of ancient warfare (social, economic, cultural) have recently begun to emerge. So it seems that the intent here is to combine studies on the “new” and “old” approaches to ancient warfare.

J. C. M. Garcia, in “War in Old Kingdom Egypt (2686–2125 B.C.E.),” summarizes the relatively meager data related to his topic, from the origins of warfare in predynastic Egypt through the First Intermediate Period. Much of his essay surveys the administrative-logistic capabilities of the Old Kingdom and highlights the lack of specific military institutions at that time. Officials combined civilian and military roles. The same social structures that facilitated civilian projects supported military ones as well, creating expeditions perhaps as large as 20,000. Despite the ad hoc nature of the Old Kingdom military, its leadership was very sophisticated, as evidenced by a “consistent defensive strategy.” He argues that the Egyptians dismantled these kingdoms, effectively balkanizing Canaan into the series of vassal city-states known from the Amarna archive. The earliest 18th Dynasty pharaohs were only able to bring the southernmost coastal plain under Egyptian control. It took the unique victory by Thutmose III at the battle of Megiddo, and the following siege, to cripple most Canaanite forces, which then allowed the speedy conquest of the majority of the cities of the coast and valleys. He notes the presence of Late Bronze fortifications at a number of highland and Transjordanian sites as evidence of the limits of effective Egyptian reach. He believes that the decline in fortifications in Canaan was not part of a deliberate Egyptian policy, but the outcome of Egyptian deconstructions deriving from sieges, disrepair, and lack of maintenance as a result of decreasing resources, and as needed to expand housing into the areas of the old ramparts.

T. R. Bryce’s “The Hittites at War” is a bit mixed. Parts of it involve summaries of the various wars of the Hittite kings. Interspersed with these are sections on other topics such as the Military Command Structure; the Composition of the Hittite Army; Warfare and Diplomacy, Transportation of Booty; and Training, Discipline, and Leisure. Certainly there are a variety of sources on the larger political-military history of the Hittites, and Bryce might simply have referred readers to these and contributed more on specific aspects of military life, which are far less accessible to nonspecialists.

J.-P. Vita’s “The Power of a Pair of War Chariots in the Late Bronze Age: On Letters RS 20.33 (Ugarit, BE 17 33a (Nippur), and EA 197 (Damascus Region)” presents evidence that while the smallest typical chariot unit seems to have been ten vehicles, the smallest deployable number of chariots was a mere two. Vita does a fine job presenting his evidence. It would have been helpful to have had some thoughts explicating why two was the minimum. That is, what significant advantage did two chariots present over a single chariot or over three? How did two chariots act to support and reinforce each other?

In “Sutean Warfare in the Amarna Letters,” J. Vidal makes a number of valuable observations comparing pastoral modes of war with those sponsored by states. Thus, while Bedouin types may have had a variety of weapons, some of which, such as cast-bronze sickle swords, they likely acquired from urban polities, they did not have access to more sophisticated systems, such as chariots and composite bows, which required more elaborate production and maintenance services. Because of their technological and numerical inferiority, such groups relied on the remoteness of their terrain to engage in forms of “guerilla” warfare, such as ambushes. Suteans and Ḫabiru served as mercenaries for city-state rulers, though their obvious use as scouts familiar with local terrain is not specified.

The essay by J. Llop, “Barley from Ālu-ša-Sîn-rabi: Chronological Reflections on an Expedition in the Time of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197 B.C.),” focuses narrowly on the
chronological implications of four texts that mention the distribution of rations from a single city, while only tangentially touching on any military matters. While interesting, it does not tie in well with the volume’s theme.

D. Nadali’s “Assyrian Open Field Battles: An Attempt at Reconstruction and Analysis” is perhaps the most ambitious essay in the volume. Based primarily on reliefs, he offers interpretations on Assyrian battle tactics. There are various methodological issues not covered that are important preliminaries to such an undertaking. For example, what was an individual king’s intent in having a battle portrayed as it was? These reliefs were royal propaganda; they were not intended to be historically objective. How does this affect the way a battle was portrayed? Why were certain aspects of the battle depicted and not others? Were there stock visual motifs, just as there are literary motifs in Assyrian royal annals, which the sculptors were constrained to follow? How much of an issue was available wall space in depicting a battle? Shalmaneser III is depicted in more such battles than any other Assyrian king. Did he just prefer such depictions, or over time did Assyria’s enemies come to prefer not to fight the Assyrians in the open, and so such battles were less common? Another complicating factor is that the royal patrons of this art generally had no interest in depicting a fair fight, let alone a battle that might be in doubt. Thus, most pitched battle reliefs depict the enemy already broken, in flight, or attempting to surrender. Such depictions do not lend themselves to reconstructing the pre-rout stages of the action. It also seems that pride of place in most reliefs is given to the chariots and cavalry, with infantry depicted less often (though the depictions of Assurbanipal’s battles at the Ulai River and against the Arabs give prominent roles to the infantry). Were the mounted forces really the most important wing of the army when it came to achieving victory, or are they given such prominence because they constituted the social elite of the army, among whom the king counted himself? The author does his best to canvass non-siege scenes from Assyrian art, but the results are still meager (Sennacherib’s campaign in the marshes does not belong here).

Nadali also argues that by the seventh century, Assyrian chariots served as mounted infantry and were generally of less importance in battle than in previous periods. Certainly, as cavalry improved, they took over some of the old roles of chariots. Cavalry was able to operate in the hilly types of terrain not suited for chariots. However, three factors make any such pronouncement on the diminishing role of chariots problematic. First is the lack of reliefs from the reign of Esarhaddon. Second, no relief shows a chariot crew either dismounting or engaged in combat on foot. Finally, reliefs from the time of Assurbanipal do depict chariots in battle. Nadali presents an example from the battle against the Arabs, but chariots are also depicted at the Ulai River battle. One fragment shows a heavy four-crew chariot engaged in battle, and another relief shows such chariots present after the battle (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: pls. 300–301, 314). Horsemens are also relatively rare at Ulai—only five are represented. The emphasis is clearly on the infantry. Thus, at least in terrain that favored their use, chariots were still a significant force in late Iron Age warfare. An interesting aspect of Assyrian military practice that does emerge in the reliefs of Assurbanipal is the depiction of archers acting in close cooperation with spear-armed shield-bearers, a fore-runner to early Achaemenid Persian tactics. Nadali’s essay is the best-illustrated piece in the volume, but figures 1–5, representations from the Balawat Gates, and 16 of the Ulai River, are far too small to be really useful.

In “Mobilisation and Miltarisation in the Neo-Babylonian Empire,” J. MacGinnis offers some useful insights into how troops were raised in the time of Nebuchadnezzar II. He reconstructs the administrative nature of the empire from texts dealing with labor contributions for building projects, suggesting that it was a mix of high officials, Babylonian cities, tribal confederations, provinces, and vassal rulers, among others. Each of these sources would have also raised troops for the Babylonian army. He then discusses a number of specific sources of troops. For example, first are the temples. It appears that Babylonian temples, with their large estates, were required to supply archers to the national army. Similarly, recipients of fiefs were required to supply troops, such as archers, chariots, and perhaps cavalry. Did similar institutions exist in other parts of the ancient Near East for which ample administrative documentation is lacking? For example, did the Jerusalem temple provide troops for the use of the king (the Carites of 2 Kgs 11:4, 19?), or were Levantine states too small to have the kind of temple economies possible in the great empires? Did Judaeans grant land to specific retainers (and their families) in return for military service?

R. Da Riva’s “A Lion in the Cedar Forest: International Politics and Pictorial Self-Representation of Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC)” describes and analyzes the five reliefs and inscriptions carved by Nebuchadnezzar II in Lebanon. Four sites contain these monuments: Nahr el-Kalb, Brisa (two), Shir es-Sanam, and Wadi es-Sabab. He argues that they were placed in their specific contexts to organize and control space. They do this through emulation of earlier reliefs in the area, the strategic location of the reliefs, and the self-representation of the king through his royal attire. The essay is a useful contribution to understanding the nature of Neo-Babylonian rule in the Levant, but its focus on royal ideology is only loosely tied into the theme of the volume.

At about $100, this slender volume is vastly overpriced, but this is not directly the editor’s fault (though a more judicious choice of a publisher would have obviated this situation). The price is especially troubling because of the number of small proofreading and bibliographic errors that the publisher should have caught, and the uneven quality of the editing of some contributors’ English.

Because of the volume’s very diversity of topics, it is likely that many scholars will find something of interest here, a real strength. The lack of a central unifying theme (e.g., warfare in the Late Bronze Age, or chariots), however, means that there is no dialogue between the individual essays. It is to be hoped that the future will bring additional
volumes elucidating warfare in the ancient Near East, perhaps something encyclopedic to replace Yadin’s (1963) now almost 50-year-old seminal volumes. Sadly, Blackwell’s Ancient World at War series, mentioned by the editor on p. 1 as a bright spot in the field, and which published the important volume by Spalinger (2005), was discontinued when Wiley’s absorbed Blackwell.

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REFERENCES


This volume, based upon the author’s doctoral dissertation at Yale University, charts changes in marriage gift-giving in Palestine and shows them to be related to general patterns of socioeconomic change that take place in the region between 1200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. Evidence collected in the present study suggests that bridewealth, a gift given from the groom to the bride’s household, served as the predominant, though not exclusive, marriage gift in Israel and Judah until the Babylonian exile. A shift then occurred, beginning in the post-exilic period, from bridewealth to dowry, a gift given by the bride’s household to the bride upon marriage. When this shift has been remarked upon, it has typically been attributed to the influence of other Near Eastern dowry-giving cultures. Drawing on the work of anthropologists, notably Jack Goody, Lemos shows that the shift from bridewealth to dowry was correlated rather with changes in social structure that began to take place in the Iron II period.

Although Lemos’s analysis is addressed to changes in one particular cultural practice, underlying its discussion are more general questions of how culture and cultural change should be conceptualized. Lemos’s study combines close philological and material cultural analysis with a nuanced conception of culture that produces a sophisticated critique of the ways in which marriage gift-giving and, more generally, cultural change tend to be understood in the study of biblical societies. Although primarily directed at a biblical studies audience, Lemos’s study should be of interest to readers interested in gender, marriage, and kinship in past Near Eastern societies and, more generally, cultural change.

The volume begins with a review of biblical and post-biblical evidence concerning marriage gift-giving, in chapters 1 and 2, followed by a discussion of anthropological work on marriage gift-giving practices, in chapter 3. In chapters 4 and 5, Lemos turns her attention to long-term changes in Palestinian social structure as evidenced in the material cultural record and, building on Goody’s analysis of this pattern in other cultures, explains the changes observed in marriage gift-giving practices reflected in biblical and post-biblical literature.

Lemos’s analysis successfully illustrates the potential of the social sciences to enrich biblical studies. Though fundamentally interdisciplinary, biblical studies does not always incorporate advances made in the disciplines with which it engages in its explanatory efforts. One symptom of this occasional lapse is the persistence of cultural diffusionist assumptions in biblical studies, a problem that Lemos addresses in her introduction. For example, the shift from bridewealth to dowry may still be attributed to foreign influence through the residue of cultural diffusionism, a movement in 19th-century anthropology that attributed cultural change to foreign influence within circles of culture. Lemos is correct to point out that anthropology has long since moved from cultural diffusionism, and through the example of marriage gifts she develops a more nuanced conception of cultural change that takes into account the embeddedness of culture in socioeconomic conditions.

Lemos’s review of the pre-exilic biblical evidence in chapter 1 is preceded by a discussion of the dating of biblical texts, a subject of considerable debate. The author focuses primarily on dating pentateuchal and deuteronomic literature, from which the bulk of the study’s evidence is drawn. Lemos finds some common ground concerning the general dating of the texts that she has collected—agreeable to most, though not all—and concludes ultimately that such general agreement, in conjunction with a generally agreed upon relative chronology, suffices to make her case for long-term cultural change.

Lemos’s analysis of biblical literature begins with legal material in which bridewealth (mōhar) is explicitly legislated, and then moves to narratives in which marriage gifts, both bridewealth and dowry, are mentioned explicitly or otherwise figure into the text. The analysis of narrative material starts with clear-cut cases of bridewealth and then addresses less clear-cut cases, examples that do not use the term mōhar, and pre-exilic examples of direct and indirect dowries. Bridewealth is the predominant, though not the only, type of marriage gift in these texts: Lemos identifies six “reasonably clear-cut” (p. 59) cases of bridewealth