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Book Review: Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory

Abstract
Here, a book review of *Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory* (2005) is presented. The volume, containing 19 case studies, is considered in the context of the growing body of work examining violence and inequality in the archaeological record. Each case study is summarized and the overall tone, impact and relevance of the volume is discussed.

Keywords
Violence, Warfare, Slavery, Prehistory

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Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory
Mike Parker Pearson and I.J.N. Thorpe (eds.). BAR International Series 1374, Archaeopress, Oxford; 2005. ii+233 pp. ISBN 1841718165. £35.00

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This impressive assemblage of nineteen papers examines warfare, and more generally issues of conflict and slavery in archaeology and anthropology from a wide-range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Published in 2005, as volume 1374 in the British Archaeological Reports (BAR) international series, it represents the proceedings of a meeting of the Prehistory Society at Sheffield University held in February of 2001. It is composed of a range of papers given by cultural anthropologists, archaeologists, bioarchaeologists, provides an excellent overview of various research questions and theoretical approaches to documenting and contextualizing conflict in the past.

Warfare, Violence and Slavery in Prehistory refreshingly brings together a range of various, sometimes conflicting perspectives on the causes, impact and meaning of war and slavery in the past. The authors emphasize that violence is always a complex, culturally contextual and thus requires such a range of perspectives. In chapter one, this is precisely the approach outlined by Thorpe who provides us with a review of many, if not all, of the explanations of the origins of warfare that have arisen in anthropological literature up until the publication of this volume. Thorpe summarizes the state of such scholarship, outlining ecological models, evolutionary models, cultural models as well as models reminiscent of more recent scholarship on warfare from the perspective of practice theory (Nielsen & Walker 2009). The conclusion, that "the variation revealed between regions, areas and sites is significant in assessing the value of general theories [of the origins of conflict], and a generalized approach masks crucial cultural variability" (p.11), sets the tone for a volume that is rich in scholarship contextualizing violence within larger cultural and ecological frameworks.

In chapter 2, Pearson provides an additional introduction to the subject of the volume. In this chapter, Pearson demonstrates that scholarship on warfare has changed over time with theories coming in and out of favor in accordance with the greater politics in which scholars were working. He emphasizes that we must consider intentionality, decision-making and human agency as we study violence (p.23), a call that while echoed throughout the book has not been widely embraced in the extant literature – even to an extent today. Given that the volume is organized around the themes of violence, warfare and slavery, I will review the remaining chapters in order of these themes as well.

Violence

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the book, biological anthropologists approach the identification and interpretation of violence in various ways. Nystrom (chapter 4) summarizes scholarship on aggression among nonhuman primates as well as how this work is relevant to archaeological studies of violence amongst humans. By showing that nonhuman primate models may function as useful ways to assess how aggression has evolved as "one of several options available to resolve…conflict" (p.39) Nystrom demonstrates the importance of moving beyond a biologically deterministic paradigm. In the next Chapter, Robert Layton uses the infamous case of Chagnon

and research on warfare among the Yanamamö to discuss sociobiological perspectives on violence. What I found most helpful about the chapter was its ability to clarify the controversy surrounding research on violence among the Yanomamö. Layton provides a fair and well-researched overview of the various accusations made against researchers, such as Chagnon, and moves beyond a binary of guilt and innocence to consider what the event can teach anthropologists interested in violence today. Such an approach is helpful in light of continuing discussions of ethics as it pertains to anthropological research. Finally, in Chapter 6, Knüsel provides an excellent overview of the skeletal evidence of direct violence in the past. He reviews the methods and constraints of skeletal analyses of trauma, the importance of considering these injuries in context of other factors such as Taphonomy and method of burial and offers that sometimes skeletal analyses may be able to elucidate cases of symbolic violence such as sacrifice and execution. His chapter challenges osteologists to contextually frame data and attempt to seek out complex behavior from bodies and in this way moves beyond being simply methodological. Here, we can see the way in which this entire volume excels at providing researchers examples of how to bridge theory with archaeological data.

Warfare

In this section, 12 case studies of violence in various regions of Europe are presented. These range in temporal scope as well as in their scale with some chapters focusing on specific archaeological sites and others being regional syntheses. In Chapter 6, Orschiedt provides a summary of research at Oftnet cave, a well-known Mesolithic site containing a number of skulls exhibiting trauma indicative of a likely ritual form of violence. While the chapter provides a useful summary of the past work on the cave and a synthesis of new data on weapons excavated in the region, it is less thorough in its analysis of the skeletal trauma than some earlier work (e.g. Frayer 1997).

Chapter 7 presents a study of rock art by Nash that seeks to assess social identity as depicted in warrior figures found at a range of sites throughout the Spanish Levant. Nash argues that depictions of warriors in art may provide some insight into the identity of warriors in the past as well as hierarchy among warriors. The authors excellent regional summary of warrior images suggests both rank existed among past warriors as well as that the difference in headdress may suggest depictions of warring, neighboring groups.

Chapter 8, by Andreas Hårde, explores the causes and consequences of conflict among the Nitra group, an early Bronze Age society along the Nitra River in southwestern Slovakia. What is most unique about the chapter is that it couches skeletal data, mortuary data and information about weapons found in the region in larger data about settlement structure and regional economic changes to suggest that warfare in the Nitra group is a strategy that had far-reaching regional impacts on trade and society in the region. Hårde argues that warfare, fostered by elites, would have allowed for the importing of prestigious goods and weapons that not only impacted the economy but reinforced social hierarchies. The chapter demonstrates archaeology's ability to explore long trajectories in which violence plays an integral role in culture change, regional economics and the emergence of political centers in prehistory. Sanchez-Moreno continues to do this in Chapter 9, following up Hårde's case-study with a chapter on warfare and economic change in western Iberia. Here, cattle not goods are the *modus operandi* for conflict in the region. Sanchez-Moreno does an excellent job of demonstrating how conflict was one strategy for acquiring prestige, goods and property in protohistoric Iberia and further shows how war is never isolated from other social institutions.

Lynne Bevan's analysis of rock art in Northern Italy, in chapter 10, explores how warfare and the construction of masculinity are linked for the Camuni who created art throughout the Camonica valley in Northern Italy. Bevan argues that rock art was used to record myths, legends and to express male identity during the Ice Age. She demonstrates the ways in which masculinity and warfare linked men to particular societies and regions through this art. Given the fluorescence of interest in memory and memory work in archaeology (e.g. Mills & Walker 2008), this chapter continues to remain timely.

Chapter 11 chronicles the study of a small burial assemblage of Middle Bronze Age men who Osgood argues were likely a raiding party that were victims of combat left in a ditch. He uses the case study as a window to discuss violence in the time period and shows how even a small assemblage of skeletal remains in context can provide much insight into conflict as it forms part of the cultural regime of a time.

In Chapter 12 David Fontijn examines weaponry from the Dutch Bronze Age to add to studies of violence and warfare that had been ongoing in the region. Fontijn shows that an increase in weaponry does not necessarily indicate an increase in warfare. He demonstrates that archaeological evidence of weaponry cannot be directly related to warfare but that we must consider the ideological and ritual dimensions of any artifact.

Craig, Knüsel & Carr overview taphonomic indicators of violence in Chapter 14 and suggest that Danesbury, the site from which most of their data emerges, demonstrates that Iron Age Britain was a time in which mass killing, the display of dismembered dead and warfare were common occurrences dressed in and colored by other cultural beliefs and religious ideology.

Chapter 15, by Aranda Jimenez & Sanchez Romero, returns to Iberia to examine warfare through time in late prehistory. This time, the authors bring us to Southeastern Iberia to examine warfare as it changes in the archaeological record through time. They suggest the emergence of large defensible settlements, paired with increasing social stratification in burials suggests the emergence of warriors and formalized warfare in the region.

In chapter 16, we remain in Iberia where Jose Freire assesses ideologies about warfare in the region. Freire shows how war was used by shifting social groups as chieftaincies collapsed in light of the appearance of brief confederations in the region.

Chapter 17 by Bishop & Knüsel offers a large scale paleodemographic investigation of warfare in Prehistory that spans Europe and North America. Analysis of a wide range of data demonstrates that warfare differed significantly in its impact on populations through prehistory with warfare changing in who it targeted and how it occurred through time. By dividing sites into four broad categories, the authors convincingly show that warfare had a much more central role in both demographic patterns in prehistory but also in social change – an aspect that is often underplayed in considering warfare in violence.

Chapter 18, by Carman & Carman, analyze the broader topic of warfare as an object of anthropological inquiry. The authors review current theoretical stances in the field and conclude much like the Chapter 1 and 2 that "it seems…far better to approach the study of war in past cultures – so far as possible – in its own terms" (p. 223). Overall, these seven chapters illustrate the ways in which violence is productive and serves a purpose in solving social problems in the ancient world. Through the use of multiple lines of evidence considered in context, each author provides nuanced ways to think about warriors and the wars the engaged in.

Slavery

In Chapter 13, Miranda Aldhouse Green, begins the portion of the volume in which discussions of slavery are largely housed. Here, she discusses ritual bondage and slavery in the pre-Roman Iron Age and early Roman periods in Northern Europe. She demonstrates that slavery and violence, particularly restraint such as she documents, is always performative and part of the larger "grammar of treatment" (pg. 159) in which slaves were harmed, abused and humiliated. Green ties this ritual behavior to the greater cosmology of the region in which sacrifice and the killing of slaves in bogs was tied to anthropophagy, social hierarchy and the treatment of the disabled.

In the final chapter of the volume, Tim Taylor suggests that we move beyond trying to prove evidence of conflict and slavery in the past to instead seek to classify it more closely, assume that slavery was likely more present than otherwise thought and consider what slavery meant and resulted in for past peoples.

Overall, this volume provides an excellent overview of the anthropology of violence, warfare and slavery in prehistory. Through the case-studies, reviews and theory presented here, scholars and upper-division undergraduates and graduate students can gain a thorough grasp of the state of violence as an area of study in anthropology. Though it is now five years old, much of the theory presented in these nineteen chapters is still relevant to work being done to study conflict, both in context and from a more emic perspective. Overall, the volume is a highly informative and well-assembled introduction to violence throughout prehistoric Europe and should be looked to as scholars seek to explore violence in the past.

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