

Societies at War – Introduction

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War and war-related issues have attracted an increasing attention within modern historical and archaeological research, not least in response to recent global political events. Another reason for this growing interest is probably a general trend towards Modern Military History that – especially since the late 1990s and 2000s – has drawn academic attention to war-related issues through all cultures and epochs. This is true for Classical Studies with their emphasis on the Greek and Roman world as well as for those historical disciplines that focus on the history and culture of ancient Central Asia. In the classical studies, this interest in war manifests itself in special studies, but also in the presentation of relevant overview descriptions.¹ The latter are joined by anthologies which address the subject of war and are decidedly committed to modern military history. One example of this is a volume published in the year 2014 that brought together results of a research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology with those of other specialists in the field, in particular concentrating on the effects of war on civilians.² Furthermore, the “52^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale – International Congress of Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology” whose proceedings were published in 2014 was dedicated to the topic war and peace.³

It seems particularly promising to consider war no longer a continuation of politics by other means, following Carl von Clausewitz, but rather a phenomenon that was an essential part of the culture of ancient societies

¹ Mann 2013; Eich 2015; Madreiter 2015.

² Nadali – Vidal 2014. Further visible evidence for the growing interest in the topic of war and related social phenomena is the research project “Kriegsfolgen: Römische Niederlagen. Niederlagen und Verluste als Phänomene einer erweiterten Militärgeschichte”, led by Prof. Dr. Oliver Stoll from the University of Passau, Meier – Stoll 2016.

³ Neumann et al. 2014.

as well as of every-day-life in the ancient world. Against this background, it appears reasonable to abandon the dichotomy between the ‘Greco-Roman World’ and the ‘Ancient Near East’ and to enter new scientific territory by means of a comparative analysis. Therefore, in the context of the International Conference “Societies at War” in November 2016, representatives of classical studies and the disciplines dealing with the history of the Ancient Near East were invited to lecture on certain topics within the respective panel. The potential of this approach is the promotion of an intellectual interchange between the participating fields of expertise. We want to explore the chances and boundaries of a methodical, regional and cultural analysis of different textual and material sources as well as a monocultural examination, and we aim to traverse disciplines, strengthen international cooperation, identify research gaps and discuss new research perspectives.

We are proud to present the proceedings of this conference in the present volume, though it cannot claim to include all papers presented. In fact, only two thirds of all presentations made it into this volume due to a variety of reasons. Still, it was decided to stick to the original panels but alter the original concept in such a way as to forgo the response papers and only have one or both panel chairs author an introduction outlining the core issues of the panel in its original composition. Thus, for example, the lectures in the panel “War and Ritual” deal with the religious aspects of ancient warfare, such as rituals at the beginning of a war, the significance of omens, or the religious charging when ethical boundaries were crossed. The panel “War and Legitimacy” is dedicated to the examination of strategies for legitimising not only the conduct of war, but also the extent to which war served to secure the political position of rulers or leaders and elites in a body politic. The panel “War and Numbers” discusses how numbers were utilized in different societies of the ancient world and across all kinds of historical sources for presenting war to a broad audience, for example, to which extent the official representation of troop strengths and numbers of killed soldiers might have influenced the narrative traditions. The panel “War and Civilians” deals with sad topicality with non-combatants in the classical world and Ancient Near East that became victims of actual warfare operations or their post-war consequences. The panel focuses on deportation, flight, mass killings, enslavement, looting, war crimes and the wilful impairment of livelihood such as the destruction of plantations.

Our hope is that, in the long run, this volume can make a contribution to place the diverse relationships and connections between the Middle East

and the Mediterranean world more centre-stage. This is to ensure not only an intense scientific discussion between individual disciplines, but also to build awareness of similarities and differences in the various societies as a foundation for future comparative studies on war as a complex and socially highly relevant topic area.

Throughout this volume ancient sources and corpora are abbreviated according to the following criteria: Brill's New Pauly for classical Greek and Latin literature and corpora, the Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets⁴ for papyri and ostraca, and the Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie (RIA) for ancient Near Eastern source material. For sources not included in these scholarly works the contributors have chosen designations as clear as possible.

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⁴ <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist.html>

