

WARFARE, RITUAL, AND SYMBOL  
IN BIBLICAL AND MODERN CONTEXTS

*SBL*

Society of Biblical Literature



Ancient Israel and Its Literature

Thomas C. Römer, General Editor

*Editorial Board:*

Suzanne Boorer

Mark G. Brett

Marc Brettler

Cynthia Edenburg

Victor H. Matthews

Gale A. Yee

Number 18

WARFARE, RITUAL, AND SYMBOL  
IN BIBLICAL AND MODERN CONTEXTS

*Edited by*

Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright

Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

Copyright © 2014 by the Society of Biblical Literature

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by means of any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to the Rights and Permissions Office, Society of Biblical Literature, 825 Houston Mill Road, Atlanta, GA 30329 USA.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Warfare, ritual, and symbol in biblical and modern contexts / edited by Brad Kelle, Frank R. Ames, and Jacob L. Wright.

p. cm. — (Society of Biblical Literature ancient Israel and its literature ; 18)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts is a collection of fifteen essays about rituals of war and their function. Comparative and interdisciplinary approaches are applied to texts in the Hebrew Bible, which are read in light of ancient Near Eastern literature, artifacts, and iconography and contemporary ritual and social theory. Introductory and concluding essays evaluate each contribution, locate contributions in the history of scholarship, and propose promising directions for further research. A majority of the essays were presented in 2010–2012 sessions of the SBL's Warfare in Ancient Israel Section"— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-58983-958-8 (paper binding : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-58983-959-5 (electronic format) — ISBN 978-1-58983-960-1 (hardcover binding : alk. paper)

1. War—Biblical teaching. 2. Bible. Old Testament—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. Middle Eastern literature—History and criticism. I. Kelle, Brad E., 1973–, editor. II. Ames, Frank Ritchel, editor. III. Wright, Jacob L., editor.

BS1199.W2W37 2014

221.8'355—dc23

2014002894

Printed on acid-free, recycled paper conforming to  
ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R1997) and ISO 9706:1994  
standards for paper permanence.



## CONTENTS

Abbreviations .....vii

### Introduction

Jacob L. Wright ..... 1

#### PART 1: SOCIAL DETERMINATION OF RITUALS AND SYMBOLS

### Theorizing Circumstantially Dependent Rites in and out of War Contexts

Saul M. Olyan ..... 15

### Monumental Inscriptions and the Ritual Representation of War

Nathaniel B. Levtow ..... 25

#### PART 2: RITUALS AND SYMBOLS OF ESCALATION, PREPARATION, AND AGGRESSION

### Joshua's Encounter with the Commander of Yhwh's Army (Josh 5:13–15): Literary Construction or Reflection of a Royal Ritual?

Thomas Römer ..... 49

### "A Sword for Yhwh and for Gideon!": The Representation of War in Judges 7:16–22

Kelly J. Murphy ..... 65

### The Red-Stained Warrior in Ancient Israel

Frank Ritche Ames ..... 83

“I Will Strike You Down and Cut off Your Head” (1 Sam 17:46): Trash Talking, Derogatory Rhetoric, and Psychological Warfare in Ancient Israel David T. Lamb .....	111
“Some Trust in Horses”: Horses as Symbols of Power in Rhetoric and Reality Deborah O’Daniel Cantrell.....	131
War Rituals in the Old Testament: Prophets, Kings, and the Ritual Preparation for War Rüdiger Schmitt.....	149
PART 3: RITUALS AND SYMBOLS OF PERPETUATION, DE-ESCALATION, AND COMMEMORATION	
Warfare Song as Warrior Ritual Mark S. Smith .....	165
A Messy Business: Ritual Violence after the War Susan Niditch.....	187
Postwar Rituals of Return and Reintegration Brad E. Kelle.....	205
Does Yhwh Get His Hands Dirty? Reading Isaiah 63:1-6 in Light of Depictions of Divine Postbattle Purification Jason A. Riley.....	243
RESPONSE	
Forging a Twenty-First-Century Approach to the Study of Israelite Warfare T. M. Lemos.....	271
Contributors.....	287
Index of Ancient Sources.....	289
Index of Modern Authors.....	301

## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syren-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
AS	<i>Assyriological Studies</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BaM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907.
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia

BInS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BO	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BRS	The Biblical Resources Series
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	Oppenheim, A. Leo, et al., eds. <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956–2010.
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CKLS	Chuen King Lecture Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2003.
CTH	Laroche, Emmanuel. <i>Catalogue des textes hittites</i> . Paris: Klincksieck, 1971
CTN	Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud
CTU	<i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1995.
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
Dtr	Deuteronomistic
ER	<i>The Encyclopedia of Religion</i> . Edited by Mircea Eliade. 16 vols. New York: Collier Macmillan, 1987.
ERE	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i> . Edited by J. Hastings. 13 vols. New York: Scribner, 1908–1927. Reprint, 7 vols., 1951.
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
ETCSL	Black, Jeremy, et al., <i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i> . Oxford: University of Oxford, Faculty of Oriental Studies, 1998–2006.
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible



- GKC* Gesenius, Friedrich W., E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980.
- HALOT* Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
- HAR* *Hebrew Annual Review*
- HAT* Handbuch zum Alten Testament
- HB* Hebrew Bible
- HR* *History of Religions*
- HSM* Harvard Semitic Monographs
- HTKAT* Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
- HTR* *Harvard Theological Review*
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- ICC* International Critical Commentary
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- Int* *Interpretation*
- JAAR* *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
- JANES* *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
- JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JBQ* *Jewish Bible Quarterly*
- JBS* Jerusalem Bible Studies
- JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JNSL* *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
- JR* *Journal of Religion*
- JRitSt* *Journal of Ritual Studies*
- JSOT* *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
- JSOTSup* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
- JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies*
- KAI* *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.
- KTU* *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. 2nd enlarged ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani*,

	<i>and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1995 (= <i>CTU</i> ).
LÄ	<i>Lexicon der Ägyptologie</i> . Edited by W. Helck, E. Otto, and W. Westendorf. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972.
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Study
LUT	Luther
LXX	Septuagint
MdB	Le Monde de la Bible
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
ÖBS	Österreichische biblische Studien
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> (NS)
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
Proof	<i>Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History</i>
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
QD	Quaestiones Disputate
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RGG <sup>4</sup>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . 4th ed. Edited by H. D. Betz, Don S. Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel. 9 vols. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007.
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods

RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SB	Standard Babylonian
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SBV	Standard Babylonian Version
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by David E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZABR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>



## INTRODUCTION

*Jacob L. Wright*

*Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* is a collection of twelve essays (and a response essay) about war-related rituals and symbols and their functions in textual, historical, and social contexts. Most of the essays feature comparative and interdisciplinary approaches applied to texts in the Hebrew Bible, which are read in light of ancient Near Eastern literature, artifacts, and iconography, as well as contemporary ritual and social theory. The editors hope this volume will make a timely contribution to a growing concentration on the ways social theory and ritual studies can contribute to the interpretation of biblical texts and ancient social realities, especially those related to warfare.

Because of the collection's interdisciplinary character—including essays that treat theoretical aspects of ritual and society as well as exegetical and historical matters—it will be of interest to a wide range of scholars whose research areas include archaeological, sociological, anthropological, ritual, and literary dimensions, especially in war-related texts and contexts. The mixture of theoretical examinations with particular historical and exegetical treatments will provide biblical scholars with new perspectives on Israelite warfare and its related rituals and symbols and will also be of interest to scholars working outside of biblical scholarship in fields related to military studies and social theory.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. This volume follows the interdisciplinary success of the most recent publication to come from the SBL Warfare in Ancient Israel Section. *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright; SBLAIL 10 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011]) was recently selected as one of ten books on religion from 2011 for an award by the American Association of University Presses and was recommended for public and secondary school libraries. The award was in the category of works

Wars and warfare shaped the historical development and religious traditions of ancient Israel. They serve as leitmotifs in the narrative, poetic, and prophetic literatures of the Hebrew Bible. And they remain topics of interest and importance in biblical scholarship. Useful monographs and multiauthor works have been published on Israel's epic conflicts and historic battles, on its military tactics and strategic technologies, on its armies and heroic warriors, on comparative literature and ancient Near Eastern contexts, and on ideologies and ethics of war. But many questions remain, including questions about symbolism and rituals:

- (1) What constitutes a symbol in war?
- (2) What rituals were performed, and why?
- (3) How did symbols and rituals function in and between wars and battles?
- (4) What differing effects did they have on insiders and outsiders?
- (5) In what ways did symbols and rituals function as instruments of war, the formation of states, and social reintegration?
- (6) What role did they play in the production and use of texts?

The present volume is prompted by a collective interest to answer these and other questions pertaining to symbol and ritual as strategic elements in ancient Israelite warfare and as referents and components in the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible. A majority of the essays were presented in 2010–12 sessions of the SBL Warfare in Ancient Israel Section. Both established and emerging scholars have contributed essays, which together showcase depth and breadth of the critical inquiry, along with the application of comparative and interdisciplinary approaches and social theory. The essays address questions about ritual behavior and symbolism in ancient Israelite warfare and related biblical texts and make six contributions to biblical scholarship in this area:

- (1) They propose definitions of ritual and symbol for future warfare research.

---

“with a wide appeal and/or an expectation of lasting importance, [which] may also be of scholarly technical data on subjects of widespread, current interest.”

- (2) They set forth typologies of war-related rituals, their settings, and functions.
- (3) They identify previously unrecognized rituals and symbolism in ancient Israelite warfare and related biblical texts.
- (4) They compare emic and etic perspectives on the rites and symbols of war.
- (5) They describe how symbolic acts and objects convey power, perpetuate violence, reintegrate combatants into communities, produce and are products of texts, and function as social agents and psychological weapons of war.
- (6) They offer new insight into the provenance, structure, imagery, and interpretation of a variety of war-related texts in the Hebrew Bible.

The essays offer a further contribution as they approach the above topics. The articles extend the study of war-related rituals and symbols beyond the context of ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible. Several explore connections between these elements and contemporary rituals and practices within modern militaries and societies. Others engage scholarship on rituals and symbols that appears in contemporary psychology, military studies, and clinical literature. The diverse perspectives, theoretical proposals, and specific case studies that emerge from these intersections provide new resources for biblical scholarship's ongoing consideration of the various dimensions and significance of warfare, ritual, and symbol, as well as the possible contributions such Israelite rituals and symbols might make to the study of modern realities related to warfare's execution and effects.

The essays fall along three coordinates: (1) Social Determination of Rituals and Symbols; (2) Rituals and Symbols of Escalation, Preparation, and Aggression; and (3) Rituals and Symbols of Perpetuation, De-escalation, and Commemoration.

The first group of essays explores how the meanings and functions of war-related rituals and symbols are textually, socially, and culturally determined in and by different contexts. Saul Olyan's opening piece examines a range of rites in biblical texts whose meaning depends on the circumstances depicted. These "circumstantially dependent rites" differ, on the one hand, from ritual actions that are injurious to a victim under any and all circumstances (for example, blinding; public genital exposure), and on the other hand, from ritual actions that always produce some kind of benefit to both agent and patient (for example, honorable burial of the dead;

clothing the naked). In contrast, the rites treated by Olyan can harm or humiliate an enemy, or they can create enmity or provoke military conflict—all depending upon circumstances. These include shaving and other forms of hair manipulation; disinterment and movement of the remains of the dead; the burning of corpses or bones; and circumcision. The question that guides Olyan's investigation is: What makes circumstantially dependent rites distinctive? The approach to the problem is exemplary in the care and precision with which its author treats all the evidence. The answers provided include identity of the agent, intent, and the potential role played by coercion. Circumstantially dependent rites can have either a winner and a loser or two beneficiaries. But the agent always profits in some way.

Nathaniel Levtow examines the ritual dimensions of Mesopotamian and biblical conquest “monuments.” He discusses how Mesopotamian royal monumental victory inscriptions legitimize and perpetuate conquest and hegemony through their patterned inscriptions and ritual manipulation. Levtow calls attention to the ritual environments of monumental inscriptions and the ways they fulfill ritual roles in times of both war and peace. The ritual contexts of ancient Near Eastern monumental inscriptions are attested by three overlapping sets of evidence: (1) narrative accounts that depict monumental inscriptions engaged in ritual roles and settings; (2) ritual archaeological contexts in which monumental inscriptions have been excavated; and (3) monumental inscriptions that specify their ritual manipulation. For example, some of the earliest narratives of war, from the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia, depict the ritual violation of boundary stones as a *casus belli*. Just as monumental inscriptions could be strategically erected and manipulated, they could also be removed and ritually violated. The archaeological evidence indicates that the stone monuments were erected near sanctuaries and city gates, as well as mountain passes—all ritually significant spaces. And in some cases there is evidence for the ritualized inscription and erection of the monuments.

In light of the available evidence, Levtow treats (1) the inscribed content of the monuments, (2) their social location, and (3) their social roles (namely, as the recipients of rituals and as the targets of attack). All the comparanda he collates elucidate both archaeological evidence from Israel (for example, the Tel Dan inscription) and biblical texts (for example, the Ebal traditions in Deuteronomy and Joshua). Levtow finally extends the discussion to cover weapons and “ritualized instruments of war.” His wide-ranging conclusion will prove particularly useful to many who examine warfare in relation to ritual and symbol.



The second group of essays explores rituals and symbols that relate to the escalation, preparation, and aggression involved in the initiation and execution of war. Thomas Römer's contribution gives an unusually rich backdrop to the account of an exchange between the Commander of Yhwh's army and Joshua on the eve of the conquest (Josh 5:13–15). Römer begins by showing that this account is not, as assumed by many scholars, missing its conclusion. He suggests that the passage describes what Joshua sees in a vision, comparing the scene to a seventh-century B.C.E. account of Ashurbanipal's vision before his campaign against the Elamites in the official account of that campaign. This discussion provides a point of departure for a broad survey of related prebattle mantic rituals. By means of this survey, which is invaluable in its own right, Römer shows how the sword figures in the Joshua account in a similar manner to prebattle rituals in which kings receive a weapon from a deity.

Kelly Murphy's essay also treats this theme of the sword of Yhwh as a symbol of war's aggression, examining an excerpt from the Gideon account in the book of Judges. Although the featured battle in Judg 7 depicts no hand-to-hand combat between the Israelites and Midianites, it faithfully portrays some realities and practices of ancient warfare, while also adding various literary symbols and additions in order to address the book's larger concern with issues of power. Through an examination of the composition history of the text, in particular the now decontextualized "sword of Yhwh," the essay argues that the passage functions to transform the hesitant Gideon of Judg 6:1–7:15 back into the "mighty warrior" of the oldest Gideon traditions. Yet even while Gideon appears as a "mighty warrior," the final editors of the story make it explicit that it is the deity, though working with and through his human agent, who is ultimately responsible for the victory against the Midianites. Murphy's redactional analysis shows how the defeat of the Midianites is ultimately more symbolically than militarily significant. Israel's fighters are the underdogs, and, if they prevail, it is because the deity is with them, just as promised in the prebattle oracular ritual. The narrative downplays Gideon's military prowess for which he was likely celebrated through the ages (at least among some clans).

Frank Ames looks at the color red as a symbol for the status of warriors in the preparation for and execution of battle. Weapons, garments, and bodies of ancient Israelite warriors were reddened by the blood of the adversaries who had been wounded or slain in battle. Ancient Israelite warriors may also have stained their bodies red before engaging in battle.

Ames evaluates the evidence for body staining and explains its likely functions in the context of war. He considers at length modern theories, ancient Near Eastern contexts, as well as biblical and comparative texts. As Ames shows in his nuanced reading, when the red stain is actually blood, it serves as an “index,” a sign that the warrior (both man and woman) has made a kill. When the stain is red dye, it serves as an “icon” representing blood, with its life-and-death valences. The observer should in both cases recognize the warrior’s lethal, irresistible power. Aside from being used perhaps as a color to mark rank and belonging, the color indicated ruddiness and physical health, as well as offering the warrior a tactical advantage by intimidating the observer.

A common prebattle activity in various cultures is derogatory rhetoric and taunting speech. David Lamb shows how “trash talking,” far from being an innovation of modern athletics, was a staple in ancient military contexts, the prerequisite *hors d'oeuvres*, to whet the appetite for battle. Examples of derogatory military rhetoric can be found in Egyptian sources being used by Thutmose III, Sethos I, and Ramesses II, and in the Hebrew Bible by Ahab, Elijah, Jezebel, Jehu, and David in his encounter with the Philistine giant. Lamb seeks to show how analysis of this type of psychological warfare in biblical literature elucidates some of the most colorful dialogue of the Hebrew Bible and provides an interpretive key to understanding the social dynamic behind these texts. Lamb’s work draws on Geoffrey David Miller’s categorizations of verbal feuding in the book of Judges, which include boasts, insults, parries, and responses to insults. Lamb situates his own research in a comparative context that includes both modern practices and evidence from the ancient world. This wider perspective draws attention to features and emphases in many biblical texts (the article focuses on narrative passages) that one might otherwise miss.

Deborah O’Daniel Cantrell’s article looks at how horses figure as symbols of power in biblical literature. The warhorse was the ultimate symbol of power and destruction in the ancient world because of its effectiveness as a lethal weapon. Due to its unsurpassed speed, the horse was also the definitive symbol of freedom and deliverance. From a military perspective, trained warhorses were essential to the survival of Israel and Judah during the monarchic period. The essay explores the rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible prophets and poets who recognized the awe and reverence inspired by warhorses, but viewed them as a dangerous threat to their political and religious agendas. Cantrell draws on firsthand knowledge of horses and

riding, and her contribution is informed by a remarkable wealth of information related to ancient warfare.

No military action in the ancient Near East could be undertaken without preceding ritual acts and omens. Rüdiger Schmitt's essay draws on comparative evidence to analyze biblical accounts of war oracles, execration rituals, and related preparatory symbolic actions by prophets. Schmitt provides a typology of the different kinds of rituals, their socio-religious setting, and their military and political functions. He treats the iconographic evidence from Iron Age Israelite and Judean seals and shows how they relate to the textual evidence.

Schmitt's treatment reveals how ritual strategies were regarded as critical to secure military success. Due to their literary character, the biblical narratives about interventions of men of god and prophets in military campaigns do not directly reflect, according to Schmitt, ritual interventions by prophets that can be used to reconstruct war rituals. The texts are not historical accounts of military campaigns and cannot be used for the reconstruction of preexilic war ideologies and related ritual practices. Nevertheless, Schmitt maintains that these stories do reflect how prophets and men of god participated in military campaigns. He draws two conclusions: (1) the ritual practices of war preparation, in particular prophetic consultations and execration rituals, did not differ in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, and (2) these practices should be understood in the context of the closely related concepts of kingship and divinely authorized war in the ancient Near East.

The third group of essays explores the rituals and symbols related to perpetuation, de-escalation, and commemoration as war moves toward conclusion and becomes historical memory. Mark Smith researches early biblical poetry in this regard. By focusing on issues of dating, past scholarly discussions have failed to recognize a significant feature of early Israelite textual production beginning in the premonarchic period (Iron I), namely, that the texts focus to a great extent on war and warriors. Smith argues that warfare inspired the composition of several of these relatively early poems. Postbattle laments such as 2 Sam 1 may be understood as a ritualized behavior that served to create a community of shared mourners. The poem as a whole generated a communal identity for a "post-Saulide 'Israel.'" Smith speaks of David's lament as "a ritual instrument of public speech" that constitutes its audience as political subjects—that is, as "David's Israel."

According to Smith, the tradition of early heroic poetry was in no small way the domain of women, and it is arguable that a good deal of

early Israelite heroic poetry should be situated in the context of oral women's song. Thanks to the work of Eunice Poethig, Carol Meyers, Sarit Paz, Susan Ackerman, and others, we have a number of excellent studies on the role of women in postbattle ritual. Smith cites the imaginative act represented by the poem of Judg 5. By means of the first-person voice, the author of that poem uses the figure of Deborah to dramatize postbattle victory. Deborah is the model of communal memory, one who commemorates a primordial, foundational conflict. Her example inspires the composer in the choice of poetic elements. With respect to ritual, Smith states that "while perhaps not ritualistic in a traditional religious sense, [the poem] is arguably a sort of political ritual that uses pieces of the past for its audience to participate in and thus to be literally in-formed." Judges 5 takes older (Iron I) pieces of a heroic, but "arguably insufficiently political, past" and "prepares its audiences for royal governance across tribal lines." Thus Smith implies that the poem does not hold up Yhwh as Israel's one, true king, as many would interpret its message.

Susan Niditch begins her piece on ritual violence after war with a reference to the psychoanalyst Jonathan Shay. After the cessation of combat, normal life is expected to resume. But this is not the case. Shay observes in his book *Achilles in Vietnam*<sup>2</sup> the many ways in which the traumatic experience of war makes itself felt in the lives of soldiers long after they have departed from the battlefield. Shay brings classical texts to bear on his research; Niditch shows how a number of biblical texts deal with the "loose ends" after the battle, reflecting concerns with reciprocity (implicit in vows), guilt, and group identity. Some of these texts relate to *events* following war, and others to dealings with human *captives* and captured *objects*. The biblical authors explore the options of dealing with these objects and captives, ranging from elimination to absorption.

One set of passages that Niditch discusses relates to war vows, vows gone awry, or tensions involving the interpretation of war vows (Josh 7, Judg 11, and 1 Sam 15). They point back to unresolved issues stemming from ritual actions that preceded and framed the fighting. In each case, acts of controlled sacrificial violence mark the exit from a particular war. To resolve the conflicts created by the vows, the actors resort to various forms of controlled ritual violence: the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter; the

---

2. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

execution of Achan and Agag; the forcible taking of women for Benjamin. Another set of texts (Num 31:1–24; Deut 21:10–14) more overtly reflects an effort to transition from the violence of combat to the state of peace. But this transition too is achieved with violence. These texts reflect a conscious acknowledgment of the boundaries between wartime and peacetime. One might mention other texts that do the same, like 1 Kgs 2:5. But the texts discussed by Niditch do not simply acknowledge the boundary. They are concerned with the transition back to the normal conditions after war, and they seek this transition through symbolically charged ritual means, which include aspects of sacrifice, purification, and transformation.

Brad Kelle's essay shares the focus on postwar transitions for soldiers and communities. The essay's goal is to explore the possible indications of postwar rituals of return and reintegration within the Hebrew Bible. Kelle maps the Hebrew Bible texts that possibly present postwar rituals of return and reintegration and then considers them against the backdrop of other such rituals from the ancient Near East and elsewhere. In a subsequent, but more tentative and suggestive move, he concludes with an interdisciplinary engagement that explores some potential points of connection between these rituals and perspectives within contemporary warfare studies and psychology that may illuminate the symbolic functions of the rituals and why they take the shapes they do.

Kelle's essay is a model of the interdisciplinary approach to the study of war. It begins with two preliminary considerations. The first helpfully questions the preoccupation of past studies of war in the Bible with "holy war" or "Yhwh war." The second consideration relates to the nature of the evidence: what do we do when the biblical materials do not permit a comprehensive or even reliable picture of a phenomenon such as postwar rituals? The essay itself provides a very useful taxonomy of postbattle ritual activities, which include (1) purification of warriors, captives, and objects; (2) appropriation of booty; (3) construction of memorials and monuments; (4) celebration or procession; and (5) lament. It then concludes by engaging the emerging category of "moral injury" within psychology, military studies, and clinical literature in order to examine the possible symbolic functions of the biblical rituals, once again placing the subject within a thoroughly interdisciplinary context.

Jason Riley's essay directs a similar postwar ritual question to Israel's deity rather than Israel's warriors: "Does Yhwh get his hands dirty?" Did acts of killing or contact with blood defile the Israelite deity, as in the case of other ancient Near Eastern gods? Riley begins by cataloguing references

of divine defilement and purification, with references to human defilement (in wartime) included in the footnotes. What he shows is that the Sumerian and Assyrian mythological examples parallel the acts of ritual purification described in royal inscriptions. Thus, the ancient Near Eastern deities were not impervious to impurity. Just as they could be defiled, they required purification, particularly after battle. Riley then asks whether there are comparable cases for Yhwh in the Hebrew Bible. The deity is often depicted as one who is actively involved in battle, with him as the subject of violent deeds. Riley focuses especially on Isa 63:1–6 and argues that this piece of poetry describes Yhwh returning from battle with garments soaked in blood. There is no reference to ritual purification in this text though, which raises the question: Does the passage suggest that Yhwh became ritually impure from his actions on the battlefield? To answer that question, Riley takes us on a detailed examination of two lines, with a significant payoff pointing toward an ancient Israelite conception that Yhwh could undergo war-related defilement and purification.

This preview should suffice to whet the reader's appetite for the many good things to be found in the following essays. As with any such collection, this volume offers a limited and necessarily incomplete treatment of war-related rituals and symbols. Even so, it successfully unites two significant trends in contemporary scholarship: (1) study of the realities and representations of war in ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible, and (2) study of Israelite ritual and symbol, especially in dialogue with contemporary ritual theory. Still, the essays here constitute only an early move toward a comprehensive study of warfare, ritual, and symbol as they intersect in the biblical texts, making important contributions but also revealing often-unquestioned assumptions, overlooked dimensions, and possible new (or better) directions. In order to elucidate these elements and show how the essays might encourage further research, T. M. Lemos provides an evaluative and constructive response to the volume as a whole. Her concluding essay reflects attentively on some of the overarching themes, noteworthy findings, differing methodologies, as well as gaps in these articles. Most importantly, she gathers the essays' contributions and missing pieces in order to explore the possible form and content of a "twenty-first century approach" to the study of warfare. Whatever that form and content might be, perhaps this volume successfully makes the case that the future study of warfare in ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible must include sustained attention to the multiple dimensions of ritual and symbol as they appear in various textual, historical, and social contexts.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kelle, Brad E., Frank Ritche Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, eds. *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*. Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and Its Literature 10. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.
- Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner, 1995.