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Paradigms and Pitfalls of Approach to Warfare in the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by David B. Honey

Early in 1990 Stephen Ricks announced the arrival of the latest production of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.), Warfare in the Book of Mormon, as one that would adopt the approach of “contextualization”—“understanding the text better through understanding better the milieu from which it came.”1 With this characterization Ricks accurately underscored the strength of this volume in its collective concern to examine—exegetically, not apologetically—the ideology and practice of warfare as narrated in the Book of Mormon from a variety of paradigms, ancient and modern, practical and theoretical. The light this book casts on Book of Mormon teachings on the morality and immorality of warfare, apart from the cold technicalities of the conduct of war and the tragedies of its aftermath, is both timely and insightful. Indeed, in my judgment this work is one of the best productions of F.A.R.M.S., which seems to be progressively developing into the modern Mormon equivalent of the Renaissance publishing house of Stephanus. The editors are to be congratulated for bringing together such a wide-ranging collection of essays and studies, most of which were originally presented at the Symposium on Warfare in the Book of Mormon, March 24-25, 1989, at Brigham Young University under the auspices of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

It would probably surprise most moderns to realize just to what extent warfare was the normal condition of everyday life in the ancient world, how casually its casualties were accepted, and how closely tied to religion it was. The latter was especially true for ancient Israel. For instance, even the name Israel was itself a martial image: “Israel means El fights, and Yahweh was the

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fighting El after whom the people named itself. The war camp was the cradle of the nation, it was also the oldest sanctuary.2
Given that millennia of time and mind-sets of vastly different orientations separate ancient and modern outlooks, it is imperative in studying ancient warfare that we attempt to transcend our modern world view with its built-in assumptions and assumed biases—not to mention the emotional implications of unprecedented innovations of warfare like the Geneva Conventions, the surgical strike, or the friendly casualty—in approaching the concept of warfare from the perspective of the past. Warfare in the Book of Mormon is no exception to this methodological rule.

This is what the first three chapters attempt to do. They set the historiographic stage of the Book of Mormon for further discussion by first placing its warfare accounts in the context of the purpose of the sacred scripture. These introductory annexes by John Welch, R. Douglas Phillips, and R. Dilworth Rust stress the idea that since so much of the Book of Mormon concerns military matters and since the prophet-historians who wrote the book often as not participated actively in warfare, an understanding of the military chapters is basic, and indeed crucial, to an understanding of the whole work. Welch’s “Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 3-24) is particularly comprehensive in clarifying the importance of military matters for understanding, appreciating, and applying the lessons of the Book of Mormon. Characteristic of his careful scholarship, Welch provides an extensive table of suggested names for the major wars or campaigns included in the Nephite portion of the record (pp. 6-15). For each war, brief entries under the rubrics of Sources, Dates, Location, Causes, Tactics, and Results present convenient epitomes of the fifteen major wars or campaigns so included. This clear-cut categorization of wars will, it is to be hoped, allow for more informed, in-depth research as the use of standardized

terminology facilitates later scholarly treatment.3 Welch has already made use of this tabularized data by drawing some intriguing, if tentative, conclusions from the patterns evident in the data.

The most important contribution of these introductory essays is the persuasive plea to let the message of Book of Mormon warfare speak for itself directly to us without sifting it through the distorting filters of our own modern cultural assumptions, as mentioned above. As examples of moral lessons to be drawn from the military chapters, R. Dilworth Rust, in “Purpose of the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 29-32), reminds us that the book, “while it does not tell us much about matters such as kinds of warriors and battle lines,. . . . does give us, in considerable detail, accounts of the exercise of faith. . . . It shows inspired stratagems, the Lord’s protection, and the great warrior-prophet’s direction” (p. 30). John Welch tries to forestall one fatal weakness of much modern scholarship on warfare in the Old and New Testaments by concluding the following:

For many readers, encountering so much war in so sublime and sacred a volume is something of a culture shock. But this is our problem, not the book’s. On this issue, if we put aside our cultural predilections and attempt to understand the Book of Mormon as a Nephite or a Lamanite might have understood it, then these events play much different, more religious roles in the book, and they become spiritually more meaningful to us. . . . We need to listen to what the Book of Mormon is saying—not to project onto it what we want it to say. The Ammonites’ version of pacifism was surely not the same as those of modern-day conscientious objectors. Moroni’s version of a just war was not the same as that of today’s Kremlin or Pentagon.4 (pp. 20-21)

3 Unfortunately, in John Sorenson’s tabulation of Nephite wars in the Appendix to his contribution “Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica” (pp. 462-74), he adopts a different categorizational system; it would have been helpful, and a good methodological example, had at least parts of Welch’s system been integrated into Sorenson’s more detailed system.

4 The problem of reading modern cultural values back into the study of warfare in the Old and New Testaments is addressed in the
R. Douglas Phillips, in "Why Is So Much of the Book of Mormon Given Over to Military Accounts" (pp. 25-28), tries as well to place the Book of Mormon in an ancient, not modern, context by stressing that editor Mormon had "a peculiarly theological or religious concept of history according to which war was not a purely secular phenomenon but an instrument of divine purpose" (p. 25). Phillips adduces the example of Thucydides as a prominent historian who had first functioned as a general and whose career thus paralleled that of Mormon. Because this article originally appeared in the January 1978 issue of the Ensign in the column "I Have a Question," its original format did not allow even a minimum of citation of authorities; nor has it been updated in this regard when reprinted here. The absence of supporting citations to confirm Phillips's central thesis is rather unfortunate because it tends to make the Book of Mormon appear unique. This is far from the case. Just to cite one authority, "In much ancient historiography battle descriptions form the high point of the author's effort to characterize the forces of history."\(^5\) Therefore, if an ancient author attributed the moving force of history to divine will or intervention, battle narratives, "originally the essence of history,"\(^6\) inherently touched on religious thought and practice. But if the religious underpinnings of military motivation are overlooked, it makes for unrealistic, even inaccurate, history.\(^7\)


\(^{5}\) Henry R. Immerwahr, Form and Thought in Herodotus, American Philological Association, Monograph 23 (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 16.


\(^{7}\) W. Kendrick Pritchett, The Greek State at War, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971-90), 3:1-2, reviews the early debate in the journals between the defenders of the famous classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Hans Delbrück, the military historian.
The importance of Phillips' essay, then, lies in reminding readers (albeit ex cathedra) that the military narratives in the Book of Mormon perform an honorable yet common historiographical function that has widespread antecedents and parallels in the ancient world, and that these military chapters have a direct application to religious thought and practice.

Part 1, "Legal and Sacred Aspects of War," contains four entries ranging from short, representational essays to lengthy, comprehensive surveys. John Welch's "Law and War in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 46-103), is an imposing survey that sits Isaiah-like in the forefront of the book, challenging easy reading. But also Isaiah-like, it repays the persistent reader with intriguing insights and possibilities into many aspects of Nephite and Lamanite civilization that transcend the confines of legal or military spheres. We learn of the manifold legal aspects of warfare, divided and subdivided into various categories such as "Law and the Conduct of War" or "The Use of Military Force in Law Enforcement," and other categories that would not occur to the non-lawyer but which are equally interesting and relevant.

Welch's study is an excellent example of the benefits to be derived from approaching the Book of Mormon from the paradigm of ancient Near Eastern, especially Jewish, law. At least once, however, Jewish legal theory seems to have misled Welch as to the unpleasantness of historical fact. On p. 74 he describes the humanitarian aspects of Jewish warfare, citing valid scriptural and rabbinical sources. But in actual practice, or at least in the majority of historical cases, ancient Israelite warfare was particularly brutal. One supporting authority for this view is Hobbs, A Time for War, who writes: "Contrary to the practice of some oriental armies which were advised to let the enemy leave the field with honour, biblical battles were a game of killing. . . . The Old Testament . . . records with a distinct

The debate was occasioned by Delbrück's criticisms of Wilamowitz's approach to military history: one that was careful to credit the religious element in Greek warfare. Delbrück opted instead for an "objective" treatment that ignored religion altogether. Delbrück's monumental study, History of the Art of War, 4 vols., recently republished in an English translation, should itself be used with caution in light of Pritchett's own strictures against the weakness of a methodology that ignores the religious motivation behind military acts. For another caveat against certain features of Delbrück's approach, see Victor Hanson, The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece (New York: Knopf, 1989), 22-23.
lack of passion the slaughter of thousands of nameless and unsung soldiers on both sides of the conflict." The picture drawn by Welch of the restraint exercised by invading Lamanite armies is therefore probably an overgeneralization about a people characterized elsewhere in the Book of Mormon as being "blood-thirsty" and "without compassion."

When this legal approach is combined with another, perhaps the paradigm of philology, the results are surprisingly creative. For instance, a close reading of the Book of Mormon usage of the term "young men" suggests Nephiite parallels with the Hebrew terms bāḥūr and nāʿūr. Then, by attacking this philological foothold in the text with weaponry from the comparative approach, an important insight is gained on Nephite society: the term "young man," it is reasonable to conclude, refers to "a man who had attained the age of twenty and who was responsible to render military service" (p. 66). Seen in the context of what is known of Jewish society and expectations of military service, the Book of Mormon references, as brief as they are, hence take on important significance.

Another application of the philological approach is Terrence L. Szink, "An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 35-45). This paper annotates the oath of allegiance and the motif of the rent coat incorporated in Alma 46 by adducing Hittite, Mesopotamian, and Hebrew parallels. Stephen Ricks, in his "'Holy War': The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East" (pp. 103-117), himself uses a philological tool in also addressing the meaning of the Book of Mormon term "young men," and extends the definition, as does John Welch, to include Helaman's famous "stripling warriors." There is some overlapping with Welch's work, but the addition of new details is worth it.

But the main burden of Ricks' study and his fundamental approach is not philological but contextual: to place Book of Mormon warfare within the context of the "sacral ideology" of the Near East and Israel. The comparisons are apt and drawn

8 Hobbs, A Time for War, 98-99.
9 The development over the last several centuries of laws to govern the conduct of a "humane" (not necessarily a "just") war—a strictly modern concern—is traced by Geoffrey Best, Humanity in Warfare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
10 By focusing on the sacred ideology that underpinned the practice of warfare in ancient Israel and the Near East, Ricks neatly sidesteps the
from a broad range of cultures and eras. Indeed, one major contribution of this study is to adduce ancient Near Eastern parallels with the Bible, something that has rarely been attempted. It is hence an important contribution to the separate field of biblical studies, and is a religious counterbalance to the view that divine intervention in biblical warfare was often magical and hence only mechanical. Ricks further contrasts, under individual rubrics, wars of annihilation and wars of destruction, again by adducing further examples from ancient literature. One very minor observation is that, while the grisly piles of corpses and bones in Alma 16 certainly have similarities with later practices of the medieval Mongols or from World War II, rightly compared with Book of Mormon practice, I wonder if the ancient habit of erecting a battle trophy, the *tropaion*, may not elucidate at least part of the rationale for heaping up the dead in the Book of Mormon. At any rate, thanks to Ricks,

difficulties of definition inherent in the term “Holy War”—a term not found in the Bible. His decision to concentrate on describing the ancient phenomenon, rather than to introduce first the various scholarly attempts at categorizing the phenomenon, was a wise one given the pioneering nature of his piece and its place in a general volume on Book of Mormon warfare.

11 In a recent overview of the development of the theory of “Holy War” in Israel, Gwilym Jones, “‘Holy War’ or ‘Yahweh War’?” 300-302, felt compelled to conduct such a preliminary survey himself (“The Concept of Holy War”). His survey, while citing a number of relevant texts, discusses only a few of them.


13 Pritchett, “The Battlefield Trophy,” in The Greek State at War, 2:246-75, discusses the ritual and social function of this practice. Although the Greek *tropaion* was usually erected out of captured armament hung on a tree, other ancient peoples used decapitated heads instead (2:249, 275 n. 83). For visual representations of the *tropaion*, see J. K. Anderson, Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), plates 1 and 11. The Greeks also regarded the tumulus of corpses of slain comrades as a “heroon” (temple or chapel of a hero, 2:270). The Chinese specifically heaped up the dead as symbolic *ching-kuan*, or “grand monuments,” of victory. They appear as early as 444
scholars now have available selected examples from the Book of Mormon that, in the immediacy and clarity they present on the concept of divinely directed warfare, would complement any future study in biblical or Near Eastern fields.

A reverse tack to the tenor of the other contributions in Part 1 is taken by John A. Tvedtnes, "The Sons of Mosiah: Emissaries of Peace" (pp. 118-23). His representational notes on the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites stress not the religious motivations of warfare but instead the military significance of this overtly religious act.

Part 2, "Military Policies and Leaders," consists of seven contributions, again ranging in length and depth of coverage. If the main focus of the contextualization approach of Part 1 is Near Eastern parallels, the main focus of Part 2 is Mesoamerican precedents and survivals. But first, two essays by Hugh Nibley and Daniel Peterson attempt to place warfare in the Book of Mormon within the context of military theory.

Nibley’s "Warfare and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 127-45) takes many of the martial maxims from Vom Kriege, by the great nineteenth-century strategist Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), and illustrates them—with characteristic literary grace and ironic wit—with events from the Book of Mormon. The Nephites and Lamanites, by virtue of Nibley’s insights, seem to have committed most of the general military do’s and don’ts as isolated by Clausewitz; the military narratives of the Book of Mormon hence ring true in the context of military historiography. Of course, one may quibble with the validity of some of Clausewitz’s maxims in light of the development of military thought, but not with the appropriateness of Nibley’s selections.

Nibley’s choice of Clausewitz for comparison with Book of Mormon warfare, because of his overall influence on modern military historiography, is certainly justifiable. But a closer connection could have been made between military theory that was current when Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and

B.C. (Tso chuan, 23.20, 22a); their use soon spread throughout the Sinic sphere. For instance, the Korean kingdom of Koguryŏ erected a tropaion out of the bones of the Chinese casualties of Sui Yang-ti’s Korean campaigns of A.D. 612-614 (T’ang shu, 3.41). See Mark E. Lewis, Sanctioned Violence in Early China (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 25-26, for the military function and ritual implications of the tropaion among the early Chinese.
the practice of warfare in the book, for Clausewitz had no influence on early U.S. military thinking. The first English translation of his great work appeared in England in 1873; only during World War II was an American edition published. Therefore, in light of the fact that early U.S. military doctrine was taken almost exclusively from French, not Prussian, theorists, a better candidate for comparison with Book of Mormon warfare is probably Clausewitz’s contemporary Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869). His military maxims and historical analyses, as embodied in such works as Traité des grandes opérations militaires, 5 vol. (1805), and Principes de la stratégie, 3 vols. (1818), lay behind both General Winfield Scott’s Infantry Tactics of 1835 and West Point Professor Dennis Har Mahan’s A Complete Treatise on Field Fortifications of 1836. The tie-in between between Nephite tactics and the theories prevalent in Joseph Smith’s time, taught before the publication of the Book of Mormon or of the American manuals themselves, would have been intriguing to investigate.15 Without this connection, Nibley may as well have chosen any competent manual of military tactics, or even an oriental classic such as the Sun-tzu ping-fa or the Honchō bugei shōden.

Daniel Peterson, “The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors” (pp. 146-73), addresses the nature of the threat of the Gadianton band. Seen in the light of the writings of three modern theoreticians on guerrilla warfare with much practical experience, Mao Tsetung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara, the activities of the Gadianton robbers manifest a consistent and believable pattern of guerrilla warfare. A second essay of Peterson, “Notes on ‘Gadianton Masonry’ ” (pp. 174-224), makes an important point but is oddly out of place because its emphasis is on sociological, not military, aspects of the Gadiantons. And the “contextualization” approach used to treat them centers on the intellectual world of Joseph Smith, not the military milieu of Mormon. The piece was not presented in the warfare symposium but was included by the editors in this volume because of the important conclusion that it draws,

14 Jomini’s most famous opus, Précis de l’art de la guerre, appeared in 1838 after the publication of the Book of Mormon, but is a summary and expansion of ideas already contained in his earlier works.

15 The fact that early American military theory exclusively preached offensive warfare, a doctrine diametrically opposed to Nephite military practice, underscores the nature of the Book of Mormon as an ancient source, not dependent on contemporary thought for ideas or inspiration.
written with flair and insight: the Gadianton robbers have no relationship, either in history or in Joseph Smith’s mind, with the contemporary anti-Masonic sentiments of early nineteenth-century America.

The next entry, as well as the remaining ones of Part 2 (with one notable exception), uses the context of ancient Mesoamerica to discuss various aspects of Book of Mormon warfare. In “Secret Combinations, Warfare, and Captive Sacrifice in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 225-36), author Bruce W. Warren treats an institution thematically related to the Gadianton robbers in seeking to set the secret combinations and the practice of imprisoning captured kings, documented in the book of Ether, within the little-understood context of ancient Mesoamerican secret societies. His conclusion is that “some of the items the Mayan materials discuss may be manifestations in later forms of historical, religious, and ritual events described in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 226-27). Given the paucity of evidence, I would only concur with this conclusion if the wording were changed to read “Some of the items . . . may be manifestations in later forms of the types of historical, religious, and ritual events described in the Book of Mormon.”

Matthew M. F. Hilton and Neil J. Flinders, “The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma” (pp. 237-65), is a curious example of the admirably rigorous application of an unfortunately unclear framework. The overly adequate documentation in note 1, a mere “sampling” of possible sources that prove a problem exists, does not counterbalance the undernourished documentation of note 3 (one source), the proffered solution. Yet this slender support is the foundation of the framework used throughout the article to analyze the military events in Alma, a framework of “the vertical versus the horizontal tradition” in ancient Judaism (p. 238). Since these terms are used frequently throughout the piece to characterize and categorize the moral tendencies of Nephite and Lamanite societies, one would expect that they be explained and the confines of the framework clarified and documented. Yet this is not done. The unfortunate result is to make these terms read as mere buzzwords that are used to excuse the lack of serious analysis. And since the majority of the few scholars cited to support this framework and related ones (the mantic versus the sophic, the supernatural versus the natural) are Latter-day Saint,
we are left to wonder if the framework really existed anciently with widespread examples in the literature or is merely a modern perspective generated from the Latter-day Saint world view. Since none of the events in the Book of Mormon or their underlying assumptions is set in any ancient context by the authors—Mesoamerican, Judaic, Greek, or the like—the validity and applicability of the framework remains unclear.

What does emerge from this essay is a representational survey of scriptural citations that are arranged under rubrics largely drawn from the behavioral sciences. Since the few technical and professional terms interspersed throughout the work are likewise undefined (and undocumented), we find little guidance on how to approach the mass of data so assiduously collected and arranged. A little effort at definition and documentation would let the reader get a handle on the data and let him know both the validity of the approach and the limits of its application.

The late A. Brent Merrill’s study, “Nephite Captains and Armies” (pp. 266-95), approaches warfare from the perspective of the development of Nephite and Lamanite armies and the evolution of the office of captain. He also surveys the successive occupants of the office of chief captain.

Major Merrill sets his conclusions within the framework of Mesoamerican,16 and to a lesser degree Near Eastern, cultures; but he was often led to his conclusions based on his experience with military practice and history. For instance, on p. 273 he concludes that because, “in the ancient Near East, only privileged leaders owned and used protective armor,” only leaders similarly outfitted could stand against each other. “This fact helps explain why a leader was frequently required to defy another leader in battle.” This observation leads to the further possibility that some sort of ritual combat was implied when leaders squared off, a practice that is often obscured by the close following of guards that commonly accompany either king or general in battle.17 John Welch already hinted at another

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16 For instance, Merrill sees behind Mormon’s statement at Mormon 1:2 a Toltec-Aztec parallel of early military training in telpochcalli, or military schools, which were, curiously enough, attached to temples (p. 286).

possible rationale on pp. 60-61: "Commonly, ancient wars were based on ‘animosities and arguments of leaders’ of nations, and hence premarital correspondences were typical and appropriate ‘to justify declarations of war and call down divine support.’ ” His legal approach to these official declarations of war has a parallel from the realm of ritualized rhetoric. This is the practice of “flyting,” the verbal duel in which heroes make boastful claims that they endeavor to realize on the battlefield—Achilles versus Hector, Beowulf versus Unferth, Charlemagne versus Baligant, et al.18 Welch specifically mentions the hand-to-hand combat between Alma and Amlici in his own section on “The Position of the Chief Captain in the Nephite Government,” which should be read in conjunction with Merrill’s study.

Another of Major Merrill’s insights on military practice based on economic and strategic considerations is the conclusion that the Nephites were prudent to maintain a grand strategy of defensive warfare: “Fortifications, which needed relatively few men to man, became force ‘multipliers,’ by means of which the Nephites could extend a combat front, and served as a base of maneuver for mobile field forces. This was an effective use of one principle of war, the economy of forces” (pp. 276-77). He does go on to conclude that when this principle was violated, the Nephites usually suffered defeat, referring the reader to Mormon 4:4. This contribution in the style of a Delbrück, ascribing to economic or strategic exigencies the implementation or effect of a policy, is an important aspect of warfare, and it is to Merrill’s credit that his study reveals the contours of many such policies and military institutions. But, with Pritchett, we must hasten to add that the religious reasons for implementing or maintaining a policy are too crucial to ignore.19 Since other entries in this

18 See the just published study of Ward Parks, Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), who examines the literary evidence and brings in insights from psychological and sociological perspectives such as playground antics or mob hysterics.

19 An instructive parallel with the Nephite practice of defensive warfare is the ancient Chinese Mohists, who preached the necessity of defensive warfare for small states and who developed the art of siege warfare to a high degree. Nevertheless, we misunderstand the Mohists as much as the Nephites if we do not consider their humanitarian philosophy as a major motivation alongside of the practical necessities for stressing defensive warfare: they utterly abhorred offensive warfare on moral grounds. On this point, see Robin R. E. Yates, “The Mohists on Warfare: Technology,
volume treat the religious implications of warfare, Major Merrill was justified in concentrating on his strengths in illuminating the strategic, economic, and purely military background. With this orientation in mind, his entire study is a valuable window on an important dimension of Book of Mormon warfare hitherto little understood.

In "Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes" (pp. 298-326), author John A. Tvedtnes posits some interesting, often intriguing possibilities, which are unfortunately asserted with too much certainty in light of the paucity of evidence. His main theses—that "military and political leadership among the Nephites and related people was often a responsibility inherited from one’s father" (p. 296) and that tribal affiliations were maintained until the destruction of the Nephites—seem to be supported in the main by the evidence, admittedly sketchy, from the Book of Mormon. This multidimensional view of Book of Mormon society as made up of competing tribes, as opposed to a monolithic dichotomy between good Nephites and evil Lamanites, is a salutary corrective and calls for interpretation that is more sensitive to social forces and familial loyalties. But when the author defines the tribe in


20 It should be pointed out that men from the same localities have long tended to fight together; in terms of morale and esprit d’corps this makes military sense as men were more willing to fight alongside of those who had as much stake in the conflict as themselves and were more willing to follow a leader whom they knew personally. It also made economic sense as communities often helped outfit their members. So caution should be exercised before drawing firm conclusions on the familial, kinship implications of a military organization.

21 One line of investigation for the study of tribes and tribal loyalty in the Book of Mormon is suggested by Rudolf Smend, Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation, tr. Max Rogers (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). He cautions that, in studying ancient Israel, a distinction should be maintained between political tribal confederacies and sacred amphictyonic confederacies centered on a common cult. Although the notion of an Israelite amphictyony analogous to the Greek model is no longer fashionable, the notion of a sacred confederacy is still valid. In the Book of Mormon, therefore, loyalty to the common cause engendered by religious commitment should always form the backdrop against which to examine social affiliations and familial loyalties.
terms of the modern Arab, and claims that their "social structure is akin to that of the ancient Israelites," we must assume that the author knows what he is talking about, for nowhere does he substantiate this claim, nor document his description of the Arab tribe.22 The result of this unease is to make us view his findings as plausible in their outlines, but not sufficiently delineated nor supported to contribute to the sociological literature on tribal structures in biblical or Book of Mormon fields.

Unpersuasive, however, is the section on "The Nephite Military Caste," where too much hinges on tenuous genealogical ties and arbitrary dating. Bold statements of the etymologies of Book of Mormon names, let alone sweeping conclusions based upon their supposed significance, result from incautious scholarship. Ellis H. Minns once warned that "founding any argument on personal names is singularly unsatisfactory. All history tells us that easily as nations change their language, they change their names more easily."23 One historian who has fought against this approach in the field of Central Asian history is Otto Maenchen-Helfen. With regard to the question of the supposed identity of the nomadic Hun with the Chinese nemesis, the Hsiung-nu, he stated that even if the names were linguistically related, names do travel:

The simple fact that the identity of the names, provided they are identical, does not prove the identity of language, economy, social institutions, religion, or art is all too often overlooked. Huns and Hsiung-nu may have borne the same name, and have been as different as the Walloons from the Welsh or the Venetians from the Wends.24

22 A recent survey of the literature on the tribal society of Israel reviewed works that support this thesis and works which would rather compare the Israelite institution with the Roman tribus, as well as works which posit new definitions. All of this literature surveyed, but not the survey itself, was available before the symposium on Warfare. See J. D. Martin, "Israel as a Tribal Society," in The World of Ancient Israel, 95-117. As with the paper of Hilton and Flinders, the trustworthiness of a model and its exact parameters must be set before the discussion begins if confusion is to be avoided.
24 "The Ethnic Name Hun," in Søren Egerod and Else Glahn, eds., Studia Serica Bernhard Karlsgren Dedicata (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959),
And I may point out that the title of the Mongolian Chinggis Khan is Turkish, while that of the Tibetan Dalai Lama is Mongolian. Neither adoption of a foreign name implies anything but the durability and popularity of particular titles. Therefore, to adopt this approach and claim that Moroni’s father Mormon was a descendant of the famous earlier Nephite general of the same name or that the chief captain contemporary with Alma named Zoram “may have descended from Zoram, the servant of Laban” (p. 320), all on the basis of identity of names, is really claiming nothing. But more depressingly, our confidence in the validity of Tvedtines’s important conclusions is constantly undermined by outrageous claims made for unimportant, peripheral matters. An instance of this is the supposition that the sword used by Ammon against Lamanite raiders was quite possibly the sword of Laban, since his father was the king and in possession of the state treasures, among them the sword of Laban. This aside adds nothing to the discussion, and only serves to distract the sensibly cautious reader. It and similar suppositions are better left confined to the decent obscurity of the endnotes, a practice followed by other


25 I am not denigrating the utility of linguistics itself. Tvedtines himself is an accomplished linguist, with several interesting and important contributions to the field such as “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon—a Preliminary Survey,” BYU Studies 11 (1970): 50-60, and “A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names,” Newspaper and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A. 141 (December 1977): 1-8. His qualifications as a linguist are therefore unimpeachable. I am merely questioning the advisability of using a linguistic approach to answer broad social questions, especially in the face of an insufficient data base.
contributors to this volume.26 With a firmer editorial hand, the narrative could have flowed unimpeded, with the more assertive claims softened by humble disclaimers of infallibility, and the more egregious flights of fancy—themselves already qualified by token "perhaps," "possibly be" or "plausible to assume"—expunged entirely. As it is, much imaginative, often insightful narrative remains, like the apocrypha, useful for the informed reader who, being grounded in the realities of the limitations of scholarship, prefers the safety net of proof or at least the safety line of plausibility before ascending the precarious trapeze of interpretation.

Part 3, "War and Its Preparations: Weapons, Armor, and Fortifications," essentially concludes the book. The focus of this section is on the realia of war—its physical implements and tools, and their use in ancient Near Eastern and Mesoamerican cultures. William Hamblin emerges as the chief contributor to this section as a series of articles, either alone or in collaboration with Brent Merrill, treats the major weapons used in warfare recorded in the Book of Mormon, all illustrated with hand-drawn figures of weapons and warriors and approached in the main through the discipline of archaeology.

"Swords in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 329-52) is one of these collaborative efforts. It prefices an analysis of all words and scriptural contexts in the Book of Mormon that mention the word sword by putting both the development and use of swords in the context of military theory and practice.27 The conclusion of this investigation is that the common sword in the Book of Mormon, apart from the sword of Laban and others modelled after it, was an edged weapon used for cutting, and that the Mesoamerican macuahuitl or macana, a war-club double edged with obsidian, is the most likely candidate for this sword.

26 For instance, Hamblin, "Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon," 399 n. 61, contains a very plausible interpretation that could have been incorporated into the main body of the text; nevertheless, probably because the endnote also indicates the weakness or other qualifying factors of the interpretation, it was felt to be too digressive to remain in the text.

27 A work which appeared too recent to be of service to this study but which cannot be neglected now is Peter Connolly et al., Swords and Hilt Weapons (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989). Its profuse illustrations are matched by scholarly analyses by various learned contributors.
In keeping with the introductory role of this essay at the head of this section, it is prefaced by theoretical musings on the impact of warfare and weapons on the development of society as specialization of weapons manufacture led to the need for specialists in society: "Societies thus tended to become increasingly militarized, specialized, and complex" (p. 330). This question is a very complex one in its own right, and deserved documentation for further reading even if it could not and should not be addressed further within the confines of a paper on swords. The fact that the same question is addressed by Hamblin in his concluding essay, this time in more depth, should have been indicated.

A related essay by the same collaborators is "Notes on the Cimeter (Scimitar) in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 360-64). They adopt the same archaeological approach with philological excursions and conclude that the most likely Mesoamerican candidate for the Book of Mormon scimitar is both "a curved ax-like weapon held by many of the figures in the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza" (p. 363) and the Jaguar claw mace.

On the same weapon Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Scimitars, Cimeters! We Have Scimitars! Do We Need Another Cimeter?" (pp. 352-59), challenges the view that the use of the word cimeter (commonly scimitar) in the Book of Mormon is anachronistic. Citing Near Eastern precedents and by closely reading 1 Samuel 17:45, Hoskisson concludes that Helaman 1:14 parallels the biblical passage and that the word should be considered no more anachronistic in the Book of Mormon than it is in the Bible.

Hamblin strikes out on his own with the next two studies. "The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 365-99) is a well-ordered, amply documented treatment of various aspects of this weapon in its ancient Near Eastern and Mesoamerican contexts. His study is a model of both caution and comprehensiveness in examining three types of evidence—literary and epigraphical, artistic, and archaeological—to counter the claims of critics of the Book of Mormon that the bow and arrow were not used in ancient America.28 An interesting

28 One claim of Hamblin seems misstated. On p. 382 he writes "Despite the clear use of the bow by the Israelites, there are no extant artistic representations of an Israelite using a bow." Unless he wanted to clearly distinguish Israelites from Judeans, Hamblin probably meant "There are no extant, indigenous representations by Israelites of an Israelite using a bow," for Judean archers are represented as defending the city of Lachish
appendix is a brief excursus, from the perspective of the aerodynamics of arrow flight, entitled “Why Did Nephi Make a New Arrow?” (pp. 392-93).

Hamblin’s “Armor in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 400-424) is in character with its same methodical, thorough presentation of data, mainly from archaeology, including non-Mesoamerican civilizations. Of special interest are the six figures that illustrate medieval Western, early Sumerian, and ancient Mayan armor. Appended is a critical index to references in the Book of Mormon on armor. On p. 408 Hamblin observes that the Lamanites copied Nephite technology soon after their defeat by Moroni’s better armored troops in 74 B.C. and that “Thereafter all sides in warfare seem to have had essentially the same defensive equipment.” This is an effective illustration from ancient Mesoamerica of the principle of a symmetrical response to military innovation, and is one more example of the value the Book of Mormon can offer to general military historiography.

Two important studies by John L. Sorenson close out this section. It is fitting that he should be represented so prominently in this volume, since many of the tantalizing possibilities, intriguing insights, and bold conclusions of this collective volume found first utterance in his pioneering An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon. That his leads are not always acknowledged as such merely underscores their very

from Assyrian attackers in the famous relief of Lachish (Hobbs, A Time for War, 121-23); according to Hobbs the latest edition of the relief is in D. Ussishkin, The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1982).


30 See O’Connell, Of Arms and Men, 6-9, on the principles of symmetrical versus counter responses.

importance: they have already entered into the unconscious set of assumptions most Mormon scholars use to address Book of Mormon issues.32

The first study, "Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account Compared with Mesoamerican Fortifications" (pp. 425-44), overthrows the "prevailing expert view" that "Mesoamerica was largely free from military conflict" (p. 425). The author's mastery of the archaeological literature is evident in both text and table as he synthesizes the results of a growing body of technical reports. An inclusive appendix, "Book of Mormon Statements about Fortifications" (pp. 438-43), complements this study that is also indebted to the author's unpublished research.

More anthropological in nature is the second of Sorenson's studies, "Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica" (pp. 445-77). It traces temporal patterns of warfare evident in the Book of Mormon accounts to show that warfare then was conducted according to the seasonal round. Several natural factors emerge from this analysis: warfare had to take into account the availability of food supplies, and weather—the rainy versus the dry season, the heat—was an important element to plan around in any campaign. Sorenson next considers the timing of battles recorded in the accounts in relationship to the Nephite calendar. An important side result of this study is to show that after the birth of Christ the Nephites changed their new year's day from around the winter solstice to near the beginning of April. He concludes that warfare was planned to account for natural factors, and major actions occurred between the end of the tenth and the beginning of the fourth month, or end of harvest. He shows how the Nephite pattern fits quite closely the Mesoamerican pattern. An exhaustive appendix called "Annals of the Nephite Wars" (pp. 462-77) concludes this study, categorizing 85 major wars under the rubrics of Action, Text, Dates, and Events.

Sorenson's study is important for showing how closely tied to nature are the actions of men. The Nephites and Lamanites under consideration are revealed as men who occupy real time and who are subject to the vagaries of the natural

32 Occasionally, these assumptions are aired for the sake of the reader. For instance, William Hamblin states more than once sentiments such as "This study assumes that Mesoamerica [modern southern Mexico and Guatemala] is the land of the Book of Mormon, following John L. Sorenson's An Ancient American Setting ..." (47 n. 3; cf. 394 n. 9).
Agriculture was not only a logistical problem, its destruction was often the goal of war. Even though we are not yet at the point of being able consistently to isolate precise logistical or topographical factors upon which success in Book of Mormon battles turned, such as can be isolated for many campaigns of the ancient and modern eras, Sorenson's work makes a very promising start in this direction.

The work of summarizing the contributions to this volume and attempting a synthesis of its results falls to coeditor William Hamblin. In "The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies" (pp. 481-99), Hamblin's mastery of the history, theory, and practice of warfare is evident in his expert marshalling of evidence, selection of historical examples, explanation of military theory, and comprehensive

33 An overview of the importance of considering the factors of time and space and the length and duration of campaigns in the study of warfare is included in Israel Eph'al, "On Warfare and Military Control in Ancient Near Eastern Empires: Research Outline," in History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures, 88-106.

34 For the relationship between agriculture and warfare in ancient Greece, see Victor D. Hanson, Warfare and Agriculture in Classical Greece (Pisa: Giardini, 1983), and Hanson, "The Hoplite and His Phalanx: War in an Agricultural Society," in The Western Way of War, 27-39.

35 Hamblin cites John Masson Smith, Jr., in this regard. His "Ayn Jalut: Mamluk Success or Mongol Failure?" Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 44 (1984): 307-45, shows that the Mongols withdrew from the campaign against the Mamluks, "the turning point in the tide of Mongol conquest," not because they were defeated but because of the following mundane considerations:

The Mongols in Syria carefully took into account both the resources of the country and . . . the military capabilities of their enemies. But despite their care, the Mongols could not—as long as they relied on the horses and methods of nomadism—reconcile the conflicting demands of logistic dispersal and movement with strategic concentration and tactical positioning. Any forces that were small enough to be concentrated amid adequate pasture and water were not large enough to take on the Mamluks. (p. 344)

This conclusion was only reached after a careful consideration of the topographical features of Syria and by calculating the daily nutritional requirements of the hardy but still mortal Mongolian pony.
documentation. He skillfully splices various strands of history, culture, and thought scattered throughout the volume with his own original insights and interpretations and weaves them into a tightly-argued text that stands on its own as an important statement of the relevance and importance of warfare in Book of Mormon studies. This allows the volume to conclude on a high rhetorical point and to serve as a motivating springboard for further research.

Just as important as his work of summary and synthesis are his suggested avenues for further research. For instance, he stresses the importance of logistics, citing the work of Engels on Alexander the Great and John Smith on the Mongols. He also nominates demography and patterns of recruitment as topics worthy of further study. A nod to the social and economic costs of warfare leads us to consider the personal cost in terms of the psychological effects of the terror of battle and its physical strain à la Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, who focuses not on strategy, tactics, weapons, logistics, or casualties but on the total emotional and physical impact all these factors had on the misery of the infantryman in his phalanx at the moment of battle.

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Along this line, the Book of Mormon is in a unique position to offer comparative perspective on the spiritual cost of battle. The influence Lamanite cultural and social values had on the conduct of their war—apart from moral or religious values—should be investigated in light of specific findings on the impact the Celtic heritage of the Southerner had on his actions in the Civil War. The rhetorical function of war in the structure of narrative is another possible line of research that should be mentioned.

All of these are possibilities for further investigation indicated by Hamblin, hinted at by his summary, or inspired by the volume itself. Other aspects of warfare drawn from the paradigms of other cultures and concepts of military theory are, of course, relevant for further research; the book does not claim to have exhausted its coverage. And one particular need is a separate study gathering the different ways the Book of Mormon contributes to understanding the history, theory, practice, and

38 Grady McWhitney and Perry D. Jamieson, Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), conclude that the influence of the Celtic heroic ethos as transmitted by the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and Cornish strains of the South, different from the staid English stock of the North, was manifested in a Southern military strategy of offensive warfare characterized by the "courageous dash and reckless abandon" of officers and men: "Casualty lists reveal that the Confederates destroyed themselves by making bold and repeated attacks. They took the tactical offensive in 91 percent of the battles in which they suffered their greatest percentage losses. . . . Reckless charges accounted for most Confederate casualties" (9-11). This same heritage blinded them from learning from their defeats until too late.

39 One important Near Eastern precedent that thus far has escaped notice is the transformation wrought in military organization and practice by a change in governmental structure. The change among the Nephites from kingship to judgeship mentioned by Merrill (p. 278) and Welch (p. 53) finds a striking reverse process among the ancient Israelites that changed both the practice and, unfortunately, the morality of warfare. The model adopted by Hobbs in his treatment of this theme is the "centralized bureaucratic empire"—"this new system represents a decisive shift in the manipulation of power in Israel. Power is now centralized" (A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament, 54). The king in the ancient Near East was more a warrior than a paternal figure. This understanding of the structure of power is directly relevant to the Nephite condition, for under the reign of the judges, unless the people were righteous and rallied around this authority and made it as strong as the kings had been, competing factions weakened this power and of course made military defense a difficult task.
especially the morality of warfare, hinted at throughout the volume.40

But the most important result we can reach by reading this work is not a specific area for more research, avoiding some of the pitfalls indicated in this review, or the learning of new facets of Book of Mormon life uncovered by the creative application of new paradigms, also indicated herein. Rather, it is that people in the Book of Mormon were frequently faced with warfare in life-and-death situations. But the hard choices of defense from aggression and physical survival had a spiritual dimension that governed the morality of implementing specific strategies and tactics. Book of Mormon warfare, although sometimes avoidable and always abhorrent, had a direct connection to both religious institutions and principles and was often righteously conducted under the direction of prophets and inspired leaders. The fact that the opposite was also true, that conspiring men involved their people in unrighteous wars of dominion, should lead us to face unflinchingly our own hard choices of physical survival and spiritual growth in a world grown weary of battle and unsure of its morality. The fact that “the rate of weapons development accelerated remarkably since approximately 1830” should tell us something of the importance of the message of the book that appeared in that same year.41 To discern the morality of our own conflicts and then to act according to religious principles in knowing when to fight with faith or when to have courage in avoiding combat, both exemplified in the Book of Mormon, then, is one of its most important lessons on warfare for our age.

40 For instance, on p. 72 Welch stresses the biblical teaching of ritual and sexual purity for success in battle. This concept, strengthened by the very clear examples from the Book of Mormon, is in striking contrast to the norm of military behavior on campaign or on leave in foreign lands.

41 O’Connell, Of Arms and Men, 9. Of less significance but of equal interest is the consideration that the first full-fledged codification of U.S. military tactics also appeared in 1830: U.S. War Department, Abstracts of Infantry Tactics; Including Exercises and Manoeuvres of Light Infantry and Riflemen; for the Use of the Militia of the United States (Boston, 1830). The board of officers who produced this manual was headed by the famous tactician General Winfield Scott, whose more famous manual appeared in 1835.