War and Peace in the Ancient World

Edited by
Kurt A. Raaflaub
War and Peace in the Ancient World
The Ancient World: Comparative Histories
Series Editor: Kurt A. Raaflaub

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The Ancient World: Comparative Histories

The application of the comparative approach to the ancient world at large has been rare. The new series inaugurated with the present volume intends to fill this gap. It will pursue important social, political, religious, economic, and intellectual issues through a wide range of ancient societies. “Ancient” will here be understood broadly, encompassing not only societies that are “ancient” within the traditional chronological framework of c. 3000 BCE to c. 600 CE in East, South, and West Asia, the Mediterranean, and Europe, but also later ones that are structurally “ancient” or “early,” such as those in premodern Japan or in Meso- and South America before the Spanish conquest.

By engaging in comparative studies of the ancient world on a truly global scale, this series will throw light not only on common patterns and marked differences but also illustrate the remarkable variety of responses humankind developed to meet common challenges. Focusing, as it does, on periods that are far removed from our own time and in which modern identities are less immediately engaged, the series will contribute to enhancing our understanding and appreciation of differences among cultures of various traditions and backgrounds. Not least, it will thus illuminate the continuing relevance of the study of the ancient world in helping us to cope with problems of our own multicultural world.

Topics to be dealt with in future volumes include the role of private religion and family cults; geography, ethnography, and perspectives of the world; recording the past and writing history; and the preservation and transformation of the past in oral poetic traditions.

Kurt A. Raaflaub
Notes on Contributors

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Region (1983); Condesuyo: The Political Division of Territory under Inca and Spanish Rule (1991), and the award-winning Reading Inca History (2000).

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1
Introduction: Searching for Peace in the Ancient World
Kurt A. Raaflaub

This volume contains the revised proceedings of a lecture series and colloquium on “War, Peace, and Reconciliation in the Ancient World” that the Program in Ancient Studies organized at Brown University in 2002–3. The papers presented at these events covered nine early civilizations from China via India and West Asia to the Mediterranean and Mesoamerica. They offered illuminating glimpses into a rarely treated topic. Other contributors joined our enterprise later on. I am most grateful to all of them and to many others whose help was indispensable in organizing the events and preparing the publication.

This introduction intends, on the one hand, to sketch the background of endemic war, violence, and brutality, against which we must assess thoughts about peace and efforts to preserve or re-establish peace in the ancient world, and, on the other hand, to survey some of the common traits that are visible in several ancient cultures.

“Ancient” is here understood in a broad sense, including some societies that are structurally “early” but transcend the commonly accepted chronological boundaries of antiquity (wherever one chooses to place those). “Peace” is an equally imprecise, or perhaps rather a polyvalent notion. It is here understood primarily in contrast to war (hence the volume’s title), but it is clear that this contrast covers only part of the term’s range of meanings. In some ancient cultures, indeed, other meanings were more important. Several contributors (Salomon, Konstan, and Barton, among others) discuss these issues as well as relevant terminology. To give just two examples, the ancient Egyptians were primarily interested in peace as a domestic issue, visible in the integrity of the country and the absence of internal strife; compared with this ideal, peace with the outside world was less significant. Accordingly, the condition of perpetual peace offered to pharaohs by the gods referred to the domestic sphere, and even in the treaty with the Hittites (Bell, this vol.), the result of peace was expressed in the statement that the two countries had become one (Helck 1977). By contrast,
the concept of peace that became pervasive in ancient Indian culture was internal and referred to peace of mind and spirit (Salomon, this vol.).

Experts on war in the ancient world are numerous, those on peace hard to find; the bibliographies differ accordingly. Moreover, in books on peace in the ancient world, “ancient” is usually limited to the Greeks and Romans. This volume, to my knowledge, is one of only two that examine the issue of peace on a global scale.

Prologue

The dramatic date of the Chinese film “Hero” (Yingxiong) is the end of the Warring State Period (403–221 BCE), in which the last seven kingdoms fought ruthlessly for supremacy, causing massive slaughter and suffering for the population. In the film, the king of Qin, determined to conquer all of known China, has defeated most of his enemies. Over the years, however, he has been the target of many assassins. Three of these are still alive, Broken Sword, Flying Snow, and Sky. To anyone who defeats these three, the king promises great rewards: power, riches, and a private audience with the king himself. For 10 years no one comes close to claiming the prize. Then an enigmatic person, Nameless, appears in the palace, bearing the legendary weapons of the slain assassins. His story is extraordinary: for 10 years he studied the arts of the sword, before defeating the mighty Sky in a furious fight and destroying the famed duo of Snow and Broken Sword, using a weapon far more devastating than his sword – their love for each other.

The king, however, replies with a different story: of a conspiracy between the four, in which Nameless’ victories were faked to enable him to come close to the king and kill him. Nameless indeed has a chance to achieve his goal. The king, exposed to his sword, tells him of his true aspiration: to conquer the warring states in order to overcome war and violence once and for all, to create a unified empire, and to establish lasting peace. Overcome by this vision, Nameless draws back his sword and walks out of the great hall, to die willingly under the arrows of the king’s bowmen.

This is a powerful and beautiful movie. Its message is exciting. It raises both hope and doubts: was there really an ancient ruler who pursued a true vision of peace – even if it could be realized only at the price of war and violence? Not unexpectedly, hopes prove illusionary. However we interpret the movie – a question that has raised intense debates – the first emperor – he who displayed his army in a now world-famous terracotta replica near his necropolis – was no visionary of peace. “Later Chinese historians did not celebrate the First Emperor as one of the greatest conquerors of all time …, but rather castigated him as a cruel, arbitrary, impetuous, suspicious, and superstitious megalomaniac.”

Peaceful Societies?

Still, it is worth asking whether the vision of a “peaceable kingdom” ever moved from utopia to historical reality. For a long time scholars thought that, unlike the Aztecs,
the Maya in Central America had essentially created a peaceful civilization, untainted by incessant warfare and human sacrifice. As David Webster writes (W&S 336),

To be sure, early Spanish expeditions were beset by large and effective Maya armies, and during the Contact period Maya fought incessantly among themselves. Such bellicosity was usually seen, however, as the unfortunate legacy of [outside intrusions]. Military imagery in Classic period art was ignored or explained away as portrayals of ritual conflict. Intellectual priest-bureaucrats rather than kings purportedly held sway over Classic Maya polities, exercising their theocratic benevolence from essentially vacant ceremonial centers. Huge temples, built by masses of devoted commoners, dominated a tranquil political landscape. Monuments portrayed gods, and associated dates and inscriptions conveyed religious and astronomical information.

Beginning in the 1950s, developments rapidly undermined this charming if unconvincing set of conceptions. First, some temples were shown to be burial monuments for important individuals. Shortly thereafter, breakthroughs in decipherment of Maya texts demonstrated the existence of dynasties of kings who recorded their deeds, including military exploits, in public inscriptions. Third, the rapid maturation of Maya archaeology revealed much new data about the character and chronology of Maya centers, polities, and populations that were impossible to reconcile with the traditional theocratic view ... [Warfare], along with its attendant rituals and sacrifices, is now recognized as perhaps the single largest theme of Late Classic texts and art.

Along with the great contributions of archaeology, texts played a decisive role in changing modern perceptions of Maya culture. Once the number of available inscriptions reached a critical mass, decipherment progressed and increasing numbers of texts could be read and interpreted with sufficient confidence, and so the picture changed dramatically. For example, a set of inscriptions discovered recently in Dos Pilas in northern Guatemala reveals

the largely unknown story of 60 years in the life of a Dos Pilas ruler ... It is at times a grisly account of flowing blood and piles of skulls after a battle was over and the vanquished were sacrificed ... Of particular importance ... the Dos Pilas glyphs support an emerging consensus that ... much of the Maya world in those years was apparently in an almost constant state of belligerence between Tikal and Calakmul and their respective blocs of allies.5

Such texts are confirmed by pictorial evidence. Images in reliefs and wall paintings display scenes of fighting, eminent warriors standing on the backs of naked defeated enemies or holding their cut-off heads in their hands, and eagles and pumas feasting on human hearts. The “Temple of the Skulls” in Chichen Itza, colorful paintings on ceramic vessels, and a long series of ceramic statuettes offer eloquent testimony.6 The “peaceable Maya” landed on the large pile of discarded historical myths.

Another candidate for “peaceable kingdom honors” is the Indus Valley Civilization (ca. 3000–1600 BCE), contemporaneous with those emerging in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, highly developed, and interacting intensively with others. Jane McIntosh (2000: 177) defends the view that this culture was unusual in that it “seems to have been a land without conflict. There are no signs of violence and no depictions of soldiers or warfare in the Indus art.” Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who excavated
the two main sites (1966, 1968), thought he found
evidence for Indus militarism. The massive walls that surrounded the citadels …
were clearly defensive in Wheeler’s eyes. Many Indus artifacts could have been
weapons – arrowheads, spearheads, daggers – though to Wheeler’s credit he admitted
that all of them could equally have been used for other purposes like hunting … In
the years since Wheeler’s investigations, this evidence has all fallen away … [A]ll the
objects that could be weapons could equally be tools, such as knives for cutting food,
carving wood, or projectiles for hunting. There are no swords, no maces, battle-axes, or
catapults …, no other pieces of military equipment … Close consideration of the walls
around Indus cities has shown that they cannot have been constructed for defense against
people … Nothing suggests that the walls ever sustained military attacks or sieges …
They were a defense against the constant threat of flooding, although they were also
probably intended to impress. The gateways allowed some control over who passed in
or out of the settlements and may have been used in collecting customs tolls or taxes

McIntosh admits that “this picture of an idyllic Indus society – the first welfare state
and the land without an enemy – seems too good to be true” (181). She justifies it by
assuming that the agricultural resources in a very fertile region were abundant: there
was no need to fight about them.

This theory is borne out by the mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship between
settled communities and hunter-gatherers in the Indian subcontinent that existed in his-
torical times and endured into the 20th century … The distribution of resources within
the bounds of the Indus Civilization was certainly uneven. But … Indus society seems to
have been organized to minimize these discrepancies and to spread the advantage enjoyed
by each region to every other within the Indus realms. Trade and the internal distribution
mechanisms of the civilization ensured that most households in the urban settlements at
least had access to the full range of goods that were necessary for daily life, and to a
more-than-adequate supply of food … So when it comes down to it, whom would the
Indus people have needed to fight? (183).

McIntosh certainly raises important questions, not least concerning the origins of
warfare – a topic for anthropologists and military historians and beyond the scope of
this volume.7 Her interpretation of the Indus Valley Civilization, however, is contro-
versial. While admitting that the “most striking difference” between this civilization
and its Mesopotamian and Egyptian contemporaries is “the small amount of evidence
for military conflict,” Jonathan Kenoyer (1998: 15, cf. 42) remains cautious:

The absence of images depicting human conflict … cannot be taken to indicate a uto-
pian society in which everyone worked together without warfare. We have to assume that
there were periodic struggles for control and conflicts within a city as well as between
cities. These battles and political confrontations may have been illustrated in other ways
that are not preserved in the archaeological record. Painted cloth scrolls, carved wooden
reliefs and narrative sculptures made from reeds and unfired clay are commonly pro-
duced in traditional India to represent important myths and legends that usually include
battles (82).8

Future research will decide the issue. Meanwhile, the concept of “peaceful societies”
itself seems fraught with problems. In searching for such societies, Matthew Melko and
Richard Weigel (1981) define “peace,” among other criteria, by the absence of physical
conflict in a definable region for at least 100 years (1981: 2–7). This leads them to include among their “Cases of Peace,” for example, “Ptolemaic Peace (332–216 BC)” or “Roman Republican Peace (203–90 BC),” because during these periods no wars were fought in Egypt or Italy. Moreover, they often call the societies involved “peaceful.” Terms such as “pax Romana” (below) or “pax Achaemenidica” (Wiesehöfer, this vol.), however, commonly designate a condition of peace within a state that nevertheless was frequently involved in wars against outside enemies; such terms do not characterize the peoples who created and maintained such peaceful conditions. Although both Persians and Romans promoted an ideology of peace (below), they certainly were not “peaceful societies.” Empire builders almost by definition cannot be peaceful. In particular, between 203 and 90 BCE, when no wars were fought in Italy, Romans and Italians were involved almost constantly in wars in the eastern and western Mediterranean. The same is true for Ptolemaic Egypt in the early Hellenistic period. To call these “peaceful societies” is therefore patently wrong. Melko and Weigel (and Melko in his even more comprehensive effort to identify 52 peaceful societies throughout history [1973]) choose not to differentiate between “areas of peace” and “peaceful societies,” and they ignore crucial factors, such as mentalities, political cultures, and a society’s long-term conditioning for war (below). Conversely, it would be naive to call Japan a peaceful society because for most of its history it was not involved in external wars, when, as is well known, it enjoyed few periods without domestic wars (A. Gonthier, in LP 179–88; Farris, in W&S 47–70).

By including the additional criterion that a society not be involved in any external wars, David Fabbro’s quest for peaceful societies (1978) is more plausible but yields much less spectacular results: among the seven societies he identifies, none significant on the stage of world history, are the Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari desert, the Mbuti Pygmies of equatorial Africa, or the Copper Eskimos of Northern Canada. Similarly, discussion of peaceful societies at a 1986 conference on “The Anthropology of War” focused on the Buid, Semai, and Xinguano (Haas 1990: 13–16 and relevant chapters). Of course, even if the societies involved were historically insignificant (whatever that may mean) they may still yield important historical insights on our topic (Wiberg 1981).

Ideologies of Peace

All large religious movements of antiquity grappled with visions of peace. That of ancient Judaism, as reflected in the Hebrew Bible, broke through only in rare instances and remained mostly obscured by the need of a small people, embattled in an area much contested by great powers, to fight for survival and rely on an ideology that supported this fight (H. Graf Reventlow, in K&F 110–22: Ravitzky 1996; Walzer 1996; Niditch, Krüger, this vol.). Early Christianity focused on another world and was soon confused by dogmatic infighting and its rise to a state religion (see Swift’s chapter). The Islamic “community of Believers” was initially tolerant of other monotheistic religions and ecumenical to a remarkable extent, but, preoccupied with empire building, civil wars,
and dogmatic splits, it soon turned monopolistic and intolerant (Donner’s chapter, see also Hashmi 1996; Tibi 1996).

As far as Buddhism is concerned, things seem to be more complex. According to some scholars, this religion was most explicit and uncompromising with regard to avoiding violence and causing pain to living creatures. For example, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi writes (1959: 121–22),

Among the greatest pacifists of all time was Gautama (or Buddha), the founder of the gentle religion of peace... He forbade killing, not only of men, but also of beasts. He demanded the suppression of all bellicose instincts, lust for power, greed and ambition. A Buddhist ruler or statesman who adhered strictly to his faith must be a pacifist. If the world had then become Buddhist, and if the Buddhists had followed the teachings of the founder of their faith, the world would now have been at peace for two and a half thousand years.

This may be an idealizing view, however. Other scholars emphasize continuing disagreement not only about the details of Buddha’s life but also about the contents of his teachings and the nature of the religious community he reportedly founded, and they hesitate to generalize, speaking of “Buddhisms” rather than Buddhism. Moreover, even if Buddhism at times was a powerful factor for peace, it tended to focus more on turning inward and achieving peace individually, omitted to address the problem of war explicitly, and was often unable to hold its ground against more aggressive and nationalist religions or interpretations of religion (see below and Salomon’s chapter).

Rather, the “crown” for unwavering commitment to peace in the sense of nonviolence should perhaps be awarded to the Jains (Sanskrit Jainas), a small but significant religious community found mainly in western India and dating back to the fifth or sixth century BCE and perhaps even earlier. More than any other religious community, the Jains taught and exemplified the principle of abhimsa (non-harming), trying to avoid violence even against the smallest living beings. Gandhi grew up in an area with a large Jain population, and his early acquaintance with the ideal of abhimsa must have contributed greatly to his later pursuit of complete nonviolence even in the struggle for Indian independence.9

Some ancient empires, however, did embrace an ideology of peace. An impressive example comes from a rock inscription of King Asoka (ca. 250 BCE), perhaps the greatest ruler and empire builder in early Indian history (Thapar 2002: 174–208). Overwhelmed by the massive scale of suffering caused by his conquests, the king devoted himself “to the zealous study of morality.” Hence he advised his descendants against new conquests; he urged them to be merciful if conquests could not be avoided, and to “regard the conquest by morality as the only true conquest.” Unfortunately, this text is unique; Asoka’s example was not followed by his successors (Salomon, this vol., and see below).

In China, before the creation of the first empire, warfare was endemic. Eventually efforts were made to control international relations, contain violence, and impose
stability through a system of elaborate rituals and covenants (Yates, this vol.). Con-
fucius and his successors played a significant role in promoting ways of maintaining
peace and harmony (below).

According to Achaemenid Persian royal ideology, the king, placed in power and
endowed with wisdom and special qualities by the supreme god Auramazda, is capable
of telling right from wrong and promoting justice, order, and peace. While those
who disobey imperial rule or revolt against it, following the path of “falsehood,”
are punished with the harshest measures, those who do obey and follow the path of
“truth” are rewarded by the king’s generosity and care and enjoy the blessings of
imperial peace. “Order, not chaos, peace, not tension, good conduct of the subjects
and royal generosity, not disloyalty and kingly misbehavior dominate the inscriptions
and imagery of the royal residences.” The *pax Achaemenidica* was thus based on an
imperial ideology that “stressed the reciprocity of royal care and loyalty of the subjects”;
within their far-flung empire, the kings pursued a deliberate “policy of reconciliation
and peacekeeping” (Wiesehöfer, this vol.).

The Romans concluded peace only under their own terms and only from a position
of victory and strength (Barton, this vol.). Usually, the resulting treaties of alliance
(like those made by the Aztecs: Hassig, this vol.) were unequal and acknowledged
Rome’s superiority. The defeated handed themselves over (people, land, and prop-
erty) into their trust (*fides*). During the republic, peace was essentially nothing but
intermission between wars (Rosenstein, this vol.). The century of violence and civil
war that destroyed the republic, however, also produced a change in thinking. Peace
became a desirable goal. The emperor Augustus was the first to proclaim it as his
policy, both in writing and through monuments, especially the elaborate “Altar of
Peace” (*Ara pacis*), and rituals, like the closing of the Gates of Janus, “when vic-
tories had secured peace by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman
people” (*Res Gestae* 13; DeBrohun, this vol.).

Augustus’ major achievement, indeed, was to have ended the civil wars. The
“Augustan peace” (*pax Augusta*) or “Roman peace” (*pax Romana*), permitting unpre-
cedented prosperity and cultural unification, affected primarily the lands within the
borders of the immense Roman empire (Momigliano 1940; Woolf 1993). External
conquest continued – in fact, Augustus was the greatest conqueror and expander of
imperial boundaries Rome ever had – but it was now officially called “pacification.”

I made the sea peaceful (*pacavi*) and freed it from pirates . . . I extended the territory of
all those provinces of the Roman people on whose borders lay peoples not subject to our
government. I brought peace (*pacavi*) to the Gallic and Spanish provinces as well as to
Germany . . . I secured the pacification of the Alps (*pacificavi*) . . . , yet without waging an
unjust war on any people (*Res Gestae* 25–26).

The epic poet Virgil famously wrote: “Your skills, Romans, will lie in governing the
peoples of the world in your empire, to impose civilization upon peace, to pardon the
defeated, and to war down the proud” (*Aeneid* 6.850–53; see further R. Glei, in *K&F*
171–90).
Critics were not fooled. A century after Augustus, the historian Tacitus lets a Roman general remind Gallic tribal leaders, who were contemplating a revolt, of the simple Roman principles (that do not differ much from those adopted by earlier empires): they punish rebels with utmost severity but invite those who submit to share in the blessings of peace; although they will do so as subjects of the all-powerful emperor, even in this respect Gallic tribesmen will be equal to Roman citizens and the highest dignitaries (*Histories* 4.73). Tacitus also attributes to a Scottish leader, Calgacus, words that harshly indict Roman imperialism. Victory, he says, “will mean the dawn of liberty for the whole of Britain,” but defeat will mean submission to the most arrogant and exploitative rulers. “To robbery, butchery, and rape, they give the lying name of government; they create a desert and call it peace” (*Agricola* 30; tr. H. Mattingly).

Despite such sentiments, the Roman subjects too profited from the *pax Romana*—so much so that, another 150 years later, during the crisis of the third century CE, most of them, thoroughly integrated and “Romanized” (see, e.g. Aelius Aristides’ speech *To Rome*), defended the empire vigorously against persistent outside attacks.

Perhaps the most successful example of a vision of peace that was sustained over a long time comes from a different corner of the globe: the “Iroquois League” was forged around 1450 CE to foster peaceful relations among six North-American Indian nations, and lasted to 1777, more than 300 years (Crawford, this vol.). The League seems to have been created through negotiation among equal partners rather than compulsion from above or outside. Its foundation was codified in the “Great Law of Peace.” The League’s purpose, achieved to a remarkable degree, was to maintain general peace, unity, and order among its member nations. Nothing like this ever came about in the ancient world, despite numerous attempts.

The Nature of War in Antiquity

In most ancient societies war was pervasive. The “Warring States Period” in China well deserves its name (Yates, *W&S* 25–30; Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999: ch. 9). Peace “was a rare feature in India . . . Indian society was used to war, and in many respects approved of war, and . . . both the sacred and secular writings of India . . . not merely treat war as a normal feature of life, but even extol it as an instrument of policy and a means of releasing heroic and praiseworthy human qualities” (Derrett 1961: 143–44). In Mesoamerica, city-states, grouped in dense clusters, were constantly fighting for control, territory, and prisoners of war; superpowers vied for supreme control, enveloping each other with alliances and subordinate states, or expanding their empires by war and alliance. War was a constant threat and reality (Hassig 1992; Webster, Hassig, *W&S* chs. 13–14). In South America (modern Peru) several warring societies extended their control over sizeable territories (Moseley 2001; Schreiber, in Alcock et al. 2001: ch. 3), long before the Inca built a huge empire within only a few generations (D’Altroy, ibid. ch. 8). Although it is difficult to reconstruct the reality of warfare from later evidence, what can be found out confirms that this did not happen without the application of massive threats and violence (Julien, this vol.). Warriors
returning from battle with prisoners roped by their necks, depicted in murals, on pottery, and in ceramic figurines of the Moche culture, convey the same message. In ancient West Asia, the Hittites, Assyrians, and Persians pursued large-scale conquests and remained frequently at war to defend their empires and suppress rebellions, despite intense diplomatic efforts to obviate the need for doing so.

In Greece, war became endemic in the fifth century, culminating in a long war between two “superpowers” and their allies that was increasingly understood as a fight for domination over the entire Greek world. Even after Athens’ defeat, war remained virtually permanent until Philip II of Macedon subjected the Greek city-states and forced them to abandon their rivalries. Between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, Athens was involved in some kind of war for two out of every three years (Garlan 1975; Raaflaub, W&S ch. 6). The same was true during most of the Roman republic. Moreover, in the period when they conquered the Mediterranean, the Romans mobilized unprecedented percentages of their and their allies’ adult male population: estimates based on ancient historical sources suggest, for example, that between 197 and 168 BCE on average 47,500 citizens (out of a total population of c. 250,000 adult male citizens) fought every year in long wars abroad (Brunt 1971: 422–26; see also Rosenstein, W&S ch. 8, 2004); if we applied the same ratio to the USA, many millions of Americans would be fighting for their country every year.

Grim though this picture looks, should we not beware of generalizing or exaggerating it? No doubt, there were many periods and areas in which war was indeed endemic. But in most of the ancient world, Melko and Weigel claim, “peace appears to have been normal, war an exceptional activity ... Most of the time, even if war was occurring in some society, it was not in most other societies ... At any particular time, if somewhere a boundary was being violated, tens or hundreds of others were being respected” (1981: 131).

No doubt, there is some truth in this. Why, then, do we tend to overlook it? In large part, I think, because war and its results tend to attract the attention, from antiquity to today, of historians and other observers. War prompts action, momentous events, and change; it deeply affects the lives of individuals, communities, and states; it is responsible, directly and indirectly, for the development of social and political structures and for advances in the sciences, technology, and virtually every aspect of culture (Carneiro 1994: 15); it offers opportunities for distinction and, as already the poet of the Iliad knew, eternal glory. By contrast, peace seems static, uneventful, devoid of opportunities, and boring (see also below). War, as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed, “is both king of all and father of all, and it has revealed some as gods, others as men; some it has made slaves, others free” (fr. 53 in Diels and Kranz 1961).

Still, it is likely that Melko and Weigel’s view is too simple. Not only, as Robert Carneiro observes, has war “pervaded too much of human history to be merely an anomaly or a misadventure” (1994: 5), it really seems to have been ubiquitous in the history of humankind, at least from an identifiable and early stage of its development. Relying on anthropological research on war among early societies (see also n. 10)
and using for historical times as an index “the number of wars fought per polity per
the elementary fact that war was pervasive and deeply ingrained in human thinking
through most of world history.

Be that as it may, ancient war, when it occurred, was brutal. The Maya and Aztecs
hunted for prisoners of war, whom they sacrificed to their gods: human blood was
needed to oil the cosmic engine. The “Temple of the Skulls” in Chichen Itza sym-
bolizes this attitude. One Aztec king, succeeding a weak predecessor and wishing to
restore obedience among the subject cities, made a punitive expedition, supposedly
returned with 80,400 prisoners and sacrificed all of them during a four-day festival
at the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan (Hassig, W&S 369). Unless their opponents
accepted submission, the Inca were likely to exterminate whole tribes, to leave the
fallen enemies on the battlefield as food for scavengers and a grizzly victory memorial,
and to expose prisoners of war to a fight for life with wild animals (Julien, this
vol.). Wars among competing city-states and kingdoms in early China must have
taken an enormous toll in human life and destruction (Yates, W&S ch. 2). Egyptian
pharaohs and Mesopotamian kings displayed the bloody harvest of war in reliefs on
their monuments – as a deterrent and a record of their achievement (Pritchard 1969:
92–132). Assyrians and Persians not only punished most cruelly those involved in
rebellions, they also deported large segments of defeated peoples into the interior of
their country and occasionally replaced them with their own settlers (Oded 1979;
Briant 1996). About the fate of prisoners of war in ancient West Asia and Egypt,
taken in huge numbers, we are unusually well informed through textual and pictorial
descriptions (Helck 1979; Klengel 1981: 243–46; Hoffner 2002). For example, in
Mesopotamia,

in the tenth and ninth centuries the official inscriptions give an impression of unremit-
ting cruelty: most were slaughtered or blinded, some hung on stakes or fortifications
around city walls, as a warning to others. Heads, hands, or lower lips were cut off to
facilitate counting. It is impossible to tell whether the texts exaggerate the violence in
order to frighten wavers into submission (Dalley 1995: 419).

In ancient Israel, so the Hebrew Bible claims, Yahweh occasionally demanded “the
ban,” that is, the wholesale annihilation of defeated enemies, including animals and
property (Niditch, this vol.).

In the Greco-Roman world, customs of war gave the victor the right to dispose of
the defeated at will. The Romans accepted only the wholesale capitulation of defeated
enemies (above). Anything better than physical or social death (through slavery) was a
gift bestowed by the victor’s generosity – hence the unusual success of Rome’s alliance
system that restored to the defeated their communal autonomy. Even so, the massive
influx of enslaved war captives (CAH VII.2: 389), as well as the confiscation of parts
of the former enemies’ territories, enabled the Romans to abolish debt bondage and
to provide their own citizens with land allotments, thereby multiplying their own
territory and the size of their citizen body – and armies (Raaflaub 1996: 287–99). In
Greece, in the long and bitter Peloponnesian War, prisoners of war, unless ransomed
by their relatives, were likely to be sold into slavery or to die from neglect (Ducrey 1968; Panagopoulos 1989). Several communities that resisted integration into the Athenian empire, or defected from it, were annihilated (Karavites 1982). Thucydides commemorated through his “Melian dialogue” (one of the most famous passages in political literature) the fate of tiny Melos that, confronted with the might of the superpower Athens, refused “to give up, in a short moment, the liberty” it had enjoyed for 700 years. The Athenians “put to death all the men of military age whom they took, and sold the women and children as slaves. Melos itself they took over for themselves” (Thuc. 5.112, 116). At the end of the war, Athens, starved into submission, almost suffered the same fate (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.2.10–20). Yet Sparta’s conduct was not much better (Rahe 2002). Nor was the Peloponnesian War unique. Carthage and Corinth, large and famous cities, were destroyed in 146, when Rome’s patience with recalcitrant enemies wore out. After his victory over the Macedonian king at Pydna in 168, the Roman general Aemilius Paullus, authorized by the Roman senate, systematically organized the simultaneous sack of seventy communities in Epirus and sold 150,000 innocent civilians into slavery (Livy 45.33–34).

Moreover, the prevailing political culture tended to encourage war rather than peace. With few exceptions, the voices we hear from antiquity are those of the powerful elites and rulers. They were concerned primarily with legitimizing, securing, and extending their status and power. According to Herodotus, who was familiar with Persian royal ideology, King Xerxes’ decision in the late 480s BCE to conquer Greece was motivated by the desire to avenge previous defeat and especially to emulate his ancestors:

> We Persians have a way of living, which I have inherited from my predecessors and propose to follow. I have learned from my elders that . . . we have never yet remained inactive. This is God’s guidance, and it is by following it that we have gained our great prosperity. Of our past history you need no reminder; for you know well enough the famous deeds of Cyrus, Cambyses, and my father Darius and their additions to our empire. Now I myself, ever since my accession, have been thinking how not to fall short of the kings who have sat upon this throne before me, and how to add as much power as they did to the Persian empire (Hdt. 7.8a).

In the Inca world, too, leadership qualities, even if expected to be inherited, needed to be demonstrated through martial success, thus prompting each ruler to prove his *capac* status by engaging in war and conquest (Julien, this vol.).

Victory on the battlefield, riches gained in war, and imperial might enabled kings and generals to erect monuments, palaces, temples, and inscriptions that eternalized their glory; poets in their service sang their praise. This is what we still see and hear today. In city-states too, such as mid-republican Rome (below), and even in democratic Athens, the monumental city-scape reminded the citizens constantly of their city’s glory and power, achieved through victories in war, and conditioned them to emulate their ancestors (Hölscher 1998, 2001; Raaflaub 2001a). Leaders found that success in war and conquest provided them with glory, wealth, and continuing influence. Policies based on action and intervention paid dividends; policies of peace meant inactivity, lack of success, stagnation: nothing to fight and die for! So in 415 BCE Alcibiades, the ultimate demagogue, prevailed over the cautious Nicias in persuading
the Athenians to send a magnificent armada to Sicily, aiming at conquest – and meeting disaster (Thuc. 6.1–8.1, with the debate in 6.8–26; Raaflaub 1994). In Thucydides, Athens’ enemies observe that, in contrast to the cautious Spartans, the Athenians have been conditioned to be activists, and this is reflected in their collective character, their way of life, and their policies (1.70–71). In the Athenians’ own view, this quality of polypragmosyne (activism, meddlesomeness), despised by others, has carried them to the peak of power and glory, made their city the “greatest and freest” (Raaflaub 2004: 181–93). An apragmon citizen, by contrast, is inactive, not involved, and essentially useless to the community (Thuc. 2.40).

In Rome, too, constant warfare over centuries had molded society (Raaflaub 1996; Rosenstein, this vol.): the commoners had been conditioned to accept war as inevitable and profitable; the community had learned to live with war and to use it to increase communal power and wealth, to impress allies and subjects with ever new victories and so to deter them from revolts, to satisfy communal needs (e.g. for dependent labor or land for poor citizens) at the expense of the defeated, and to deflect internal conflicts toward the outside. Most importantly, the aristocracy had developed a value system that focused entirely on service for the community, especially in war; hence gloria and dignitas (status based on one’s own and one’s ancestors’ achievements), indispensable for rising to the highest ranks among the political elite, could only be gained through successful leadership in war. In the ceremonial “triumph” the victorious general, dressed in the star-studded purple coat of the former kings, rode in a chariot at the head of the victorious army displaying the spoils and prisoners of war to the Capitol, where he paid homage and thanks to Jupiter: in a fleeting moment of equality, the greatest mortal shook hands with the greatest god (Versnel 1970; Beard et al. 1998: 44–45). That was worth dying for.

Searching for Peace

All this is well known and has often been discussed. It seems important to look at the other side of the coin as well. Where in this world of constant war and violence do we find peace? What role did peace play in people’s concerns, in the thoughts of the mighty and lowly? Was peace an ideal, promoted by propaganda and ideology, even if these intended to deceive and hide different realities? Was it reflected in religion? Did poets and philosophers think and write about peace? Was “peacefulness” ever a virtue, balancing manliness and bravery (Roman virtus, Greek andreia)?

In many parts of the ancient world we search in vain for traces of this elusive commodity. No doubt, peoples everywhere, oppressed by frequent war, conscription, destruction, and death, yearned for peace and security. But we rarely hear their voices – sometimes because this kind of evidence has simply not survived, in other cases because the extant evidence reflects only the perspective of the mighty elites. At any rate, what was written concerned war more often than peace, and our chances of success in our search for peace are limited. Yet there is evidence, and it is of considerable interest.15
Analyzing words and concepts

To begin with, we can look for words or concepts that formulate peace, explicitly or implicitly: for instance, *pax* in Rome, *eirene* in Greece. The examination of such terminology and of the forms in which it is expressed can yield important insights (C. Milani, in Sordi 1985: 17–29; M. Job, in *K&F* 27–44). Is there one term for “peace” or are there several, and how are they distinguished? And what spheres of life and relationships do they cover? The Greeks use *eirene* but also *hesychia* (quiet); *homonoia* (oneness of mind, concord) and *philia* (friendship) are closely related, both in domestic and foreign relations. The legal language designating peace accords is even more varied (Alonso, this vol.). In fact, friendship is a condition for treaties that establish peace, in Greece and ancient West Asia. Roman *pax* is related to *paciscor* (making an agreement) and comes to reflect the pact between a superior and inferior power (Barton this vol.). Here the external aspects of the word dominate, while in India the internal ones (peace of mind) prevail (Salomon this vol.).

Do peoples conceptualize peace? It is surely significant that already Homer contrasts the condition of peace with that of war (*Iliad* 2.797–98; 9.403) and juxtaposes on the famous shield of Achilles a city in peace and a city in war (18.490–540; Zampaglione 1973: 18–23; Effe, in *K&F* 9–26). His slightly younger contemporary, Hesiod, distinguishes between a good and bad form of *eris* (competition and strife; *Works and Days* 11–26), makes all the negative traits associated with conflict the children of Night (*Theogony* 211–32), and compares a city of justice that enjoys peace and prosperity with a city of injustice that is haunted by infertility, drought, famine, and war (*Works and Days* 225–47; Zampaglione 23–26). In Homer, we also find reflection and laments about the misery caused by war and a desire for peace, voiced by the masses of warriors. Laments about the destructive impact of war are frequent in other cultures too, especially in Mesopotamia (Foster, this vol.). The Sumerian view of the Golden Age, found in the epic “Enmerkar and the Land of Aratta,” “describes a once-upon-a-time state of peace and security, and ends with man’s fall from this blissful state.” At that time, man was not threatened by wild animals, “there was no fear, no terror, man had no rival.” The lands had all that was necessary, rested in security, and, in unison, praised their god, Enlil (Kramer 1981: 255–58). “Peace,” however, seems implied here; what the poem emphasizes is plentiful bliss, safety, and social harmony (see also Foster, this vol.).

Do peoples have deities of war and peace and what is their role in the pantheon? Is peace incorporated in monumental displays (statues, temples, inscriptions); does it serve as a title of honor? Of course, the question of cult applies only to polytheistic societies – although it is surely meaningful that Jahweh is a warrior god (Niditch, this vol.), while both the god and the savior of the Christians lack martial attributes, however ambivalent Christian attitudes toward war and violence may have been (Swift, this vol.). The Hittites had a god of peace (Beal this vol.), the Mesopotamians and Egyptians apparently not. In Greece, Peace was personified very early. Soon after 700 BCE, the poet Hesiod placed Peace high up in the divine hierarchy and made her, like Justice and Good Order, one of the Horai, goddesses of growth and
prosperity, and the daughter of the supreme god, Zeus, and his wife Themis, Divine Law, thus emphasizing peace as one of the primary communal values (Theogony 901–02). Eirene was prominent on Athenian vases and in comedy and tragedy in the fifth century (Zampaglione 1973: 71–90; LIMC 3.1: 704), clearly reflecting a reaction to the time’s intense experience of war (Tritle, Konstan, this vol.). Even so, Peace received an official cult in Athens only after the victory of Timotheus over the Spartans in 375 (CAH VI2: 174). As Robert Parker comments,

Here then the association of the abstract cult with a specific event is explicitly attested. What is more, the character of that event sets the idea of “Peace” in a particular light which is not that of a nascent pacifism. Of course, the cult must also have been a celebration of “the blessings of peace”: a famous statue by Cephisodotus, perhaps the cult statue itself, showed the cheerful goddess with the boy Wealth in her arms. But Isocrates, our earliest witness, explains that Timotheus’ victory had forced the Spartans to make terms which destroyed their power, “in consequence of which from that day on we have sacrificed to Peace every year, in the belief that no other peace has brought such benefits to the city” … The cult began and was for some time remembered as one of Glorious Peace, in a century in which Athens had to accept so many peaces that were bitter humiliations. It too was a kind of war-memorial.19

Because in the period of the Peloponnesian War external war often went together with internal strife or civil war (stasis), which was capable of producing unprecedented excesses of treachery and cruelty (Thuc. 3.81–84; Gehrke 1985; Price 2001), a contrasting concept, concord (homonía), rose to political prominence in this period; the term was apparently invented in the late fifth century and mentioned in treatises and speeches of several thinkers (sophists). The concept was realized in a spectacular way in the Athenian “amnesty decree” of 403 BCE, that ended the civil war between the supporters of the “Thirty Tyrants” and those of democracy. A cult followed a few decades later; its earliest extant attestation concerns an altar in Olympia established in 363 (Pausanias 5.14.9). Anticipated by the famous teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias, in a speech probably given at Olympia in 408, the cult was expanded in the second half of the fourth century to include panhellenic unity against the Persians.20

In Rome, pax was conceptually important all along because every cult act had the purpose of securing “peace with the gods” (pax deorum; Sordi 1985: 146–54), but personification and cult followed much later. While “internal peace, concord” (cordia) was personified and received a temple already in the mid-republic (Hölscher 1990), this happened with Peace only in the aftermath of the disastrous civil wars that destroyed the republic, when peace was imposed by the victors and eventually became the pax Augusta. Caesar seems to have celebrated Pax on one of his late coins (Crawford 1974: 480/24); a celebratory coin (cistophor), minted in 28 by the city of Ephesus, praised Augustus as liberator of the Roman people and shows the word Pax on the reverse (Mattingly 1923: n. 691 p. 112 and pl. 17.4). Most importantly, Augustus emphasized his accomplishment of establishing peace not only in his Res Gestae (13, see above) and with the Ara Pacis (Weinstock 1960), but also by linking this monument symbolically and monumentally with the great sundial adjacent to it and with the sanctuary of Janus on the Forum, which served as “indicator of peace...
and war” (Livy 1.19.2). When the shadow of the obelisk fell through the door of the Ara Pacis on Augustus’ birthday on the fall equinox, it was clear that the first emperor wanted to be seen as “born for peace” (Simon 1986a: 28–46, esp. 29–30; 1994). Finally, and only after another round of civil wars, the emperor Vespasian built a temple to Pax in 75 CE (Suetonius, Vespasian 9.1). Obviously then, even more than in Greece, in Rome the cultic and monumental elevation of Peace came late and was prompted primarily by political and ideological motives.

It is instructive to consider “war” in the same way. The Romans saw themselves as descendants of the war god Mars; his sacred animal, and the “totem animal” of the Romans, was the wolf, and statues of the wolf (with or without the twins, Romulus and Remus), were displayed prominently in the city (Wiseman 1995). A shrine of Mars (sacrarium Martis) in the center of the city housed an ancient weapon cult (Plut. Rom. 29.1). The cult image in his temple outside the Porta Capena, dedicated in 388 BCE, showed him surrounded by wolves (Livy 22.2.12). Bronze statuettes of the warrior god date back to the sixth century. He was connected with rituals of war already in the early republic (DNP 7: 946–51; Simon 1984). Julius Caesar planned a temple for Mars (Suet. Div. Iul. 44.1), Augustus built it, for Mars Ultor (the Avenger) in his new Forum (Simon 1986a: 46–51; Siebler 1988 on the cult statue). Moreover, Mars was not the only god connected prominently with war: Jupiter and, to some extent, Juno, were as well. From the early third century, when the conquest of Italy reached its climax, Roman generals began to use spoils to erect monuments and shrines, celebrating their victories and honoring the gods who had supported their achievement. The list of gods honored in this way contains many variations of the war and victory theme: Salus, Bellona Victrix, Jupiter Victor, Venus Obscurans, Victoria, Jupiter Stator, Fors Fortuna (CAH VII.2: 408; Hölscher 1978). In subsequent centuries, the Capitol, Forum, Field of Mars, and adjacent areas became a vast “memorial space,” shaping the Romans’ identity and reminding ever new generations of the great deeds of their ancestors (Hölkeskamp 2001; Hölscher 2001).

By contrast, among the Greeks, the war god Ares enjoyed the worst possible reputation. Homer describes him as a “maniac who knows nothing of justice” (Iliad 5.761) and a “thing of fury, evil-wrought” (5.831). Even Zeus, his father, finds nothing good in him:

To me you are the most hateful of all gods who hold Olympos.
Forever quarrelling is dear to your heart, wars and battles (5.890–91; trans. R. Lattimore).

“Beginning with Homer, Ares embodies the most abhorrent aspects of war. Nothing noble, no dignity or decency is in him; hence he can be portrayed as a coward in battle, a cheater and adulterer” (my trans. of Schachter 1996: 1048; cf. Burkert 1985: 169–70). It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the city of Athens did not have a sanctuary of Ares in the Classical Period. But there was one in the deme (district) of Acharnai in Attica, famed for its feisty warriors, and its fifth century temple was moved to the Athenian Agora in the first century BCE (Travlos 1971: 104–11; Camp 1986: 184–85).

Conversely, monuments and inscriptions celebrating victories proliferated in Athens. The elegant little temple of Nike (Victory) near the entrance of the
Acropolis, decorated with friezes representing military victories and with Nike reliefs on the parapet, commemorated an important victory over Sparta in 425/4 (Travlos 1971: 148–57); statues of Nike stood as akroteria on each wing of the magnificent Stoa of Zeus the Liberator in the Agora, built around 430 (Travlos 1971: 527–33; Camp 1986: 105–07); even the gold accumulated in the treasury of Athena was cast in Nike statuettes. And the greatest temple of all, the Parthenon, served as a monument of Athens’ Persian victories and imperial might (Smarczyk 1990: 31–57; Osborne 1994; Hurwitt 2004: 106–54). The virgin goddess worshipped there was a warrior (Herington 1955; Fehr 1979–81), and as such, fighting in the front rank and leading her people to victory (promachos), she stood in a famous bronze statue (Athena Promachos) on the Acropolis, the greatest among many dedications commemorating Athenian victories (Travlos 1971: 69 fig. 88; Hurwitt 2004: 79–84 and 63 fig. 56; LIMC 2: 969–74, esp. 972). Moreover, monuments celebrating Athenian martial exploits stood also in the Agora and elsewhere, and the public tombs of the heroes fallen in Athens’ wars formed a long “façade of honor” along the main road in the public cemetery outside the walls. By “monumentalizing and perpetuating with works of art the glory of her great citizens and their famous achievements, Athens gradually developed into a monument of her own historical identity” (Hölscher 1998 [quote: 182]; Raaflaub 2001a).

Did peoples create a spatial distinction between a sphere of peace and a sphere of war? Here Rome offers outstanding examples. The gate of Janus, the two-faced god of the threshold that separates inside and outside, was closed whenever peace prevailed in the Roman realm (DeBrohun, this vol.). In close analogy, the sacred boundary of Rome (and any Roman or Etruscan city), called pomerium, separated the inside, the sphere of homes (domi) and peace, from the outside, the sphere of violence and war (militiae).21 Rome is also illuminating for distinctions in time: calendrical separations between seasons of war and seasons of peace (below).

Examining rituals

Another avenue to discovering the meaning of peace leads through a society’s actions and rituals. This approach is useful also for societies that do not have an explicit terminology for peace or whose terminology we do not know. Such actions may aim in various directions: toward separating the spheres of war and peace, towards securing the justice of one’s cause and thus the support of the gods if war proves necessary, towards avoiding war or achieving the same goal by different means (e.g. diplomacy), or explicitly toward preserving or restoring peace.

A certain amount of ritual separation of war and peace was provided by the sacrifices, attested in many societies (for instance, the Inca: Julien, this vol.), that were conducted when an army left for war and returned after war. In Athens, before leaving town, the army offered sacrifices at the shrine of heroicized maidens called Hyakinthides. Their cult was connected with the myth of the sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus, Athens’ first king, whose death had brought Athens victory, and so the army’s sacrifice, like the annual communal cattle-sacrifice celebrated with choruses of maidens, was