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Introduction

How did war begin? In this book I argue for two separate origins. My conclusion stems from the identification of two types of military organization, one of which, I believe, can be found two million years ago, at the dawn of humankind, and the other five thousand years ago. It is the thesis of this book that early warfare arose first among hunting peoples, who sometimes had lethal encounters with other hunting peoples, and later among peaceful agricultural peoples, whose societies first achieved statehood and then proceeded to embark upon military conquests. The situation that gave rise to the first origin occurred all over the earth—wherever early humans hunted in groups near other groups of hunters; the second occurred independently at different times in four regions, regions in which the first states arose. These two types of military organizations differ in personnel and in the type of armed combat in which they engaged.

Both of these types of military organizations engaged in modes of combat that were equally deadly forms of warfare. From the time of their separate origins, the combatants in each type of military organization tried to kill their opponents, and often did. They engaged in serious warfare. Although it may be difficult for some readers to comprehend, there are “schools” in the social sciences that view the warfare of many nonliterate peoples as nonserious. *How War Began* challenges these views. To the first school belong military historians who focus on warrior traditions. The warrior is seen as an honorable person, and combat is viewed as being bound by rules. The warrior fights for glory and honor; killing the opponent is of secondary importance. The focus of research, however, should be on military organizations, not on warriors or their traditions (see the section titled “Warrior Traditions” in this chapter). To the second school belong the doves, scholars who are usually pacifists, who deny the existence of both early warfare and warfare among nonliterate peoples. This view of reality is incorrect (see the section title “Hawks and Doves” in chapter 2). The third school is composed of scholars, mostly military historians, who erroneously believe that the warfare of nonliterate peoples (which they term “primitive warfare”) is so surrounded by ritual that casualties are infrequent and fatalities rare (see the section “Ritual Warfare—An Illusion” in chapter 2).

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Military Organizations

Warfare consists of the activities of military organizations, groups of men—under the direction of leaders—who engage in armed combat. From the earliest times, these three components of military organizations can be identified: leaders, groups of men, and armed combat. Occasionally women are formed into military units; it occurred in the African kingdom of Dahomey in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ Further, the social and political organization of a people—whether it be a modern industrial nation, one of the first states five thousand years ago, or a hunting-gathering band in prehistory or in recent centuries—spawns and maintains the military organization of that people.

Military organizations engage in armed combat in order to obtain certain goals. These goals include subjugation and tribute, land, plunder, trophies and honors, defense, and revenge. Military organizations differ from other social organizations in that the goals or objectives they pursue can be achieved only at the expense of other independent political entities, technically referred to as political communities, by means of armed force—warfare.² Thus, the activities of military organizations are usually directed at the military organizations of other political communities. When two military organizations engage in an armed combat, the outcome—victory for one, defeat for the other—will depend upon the efficiency of their respective military practices. A victorious military organization makes a political community militarily successful and increases its likelihood of survival in interpolitical community conflicts. The political community with a successful military organization will almost undoubtedly expand its territory.

Basic Types of Military Organizations

Military organizations are typically either nonprofessional, composed of part-time personnel, or professional, composed of full-time personnel. In small-scale societies nearly every able-bodied man is, at one time in his life, a member of an active military organization, but that military organization may be involved in war only a few days out of the year and perhaps not every year. Thus, for much of the time these nonprofessional military personnel are engaged not in military activities but in the subsistence activities of their societies, such as hunting, gathering, fishing, or farming. On the other hand, in large-scale societies the military organizations are composed of professional, full-time personnel. Professionals, in contrast to nonprofessionals, devote substantial time during early adulthood to intensive training, which may involve not only practice in the use of weapons but also practice in performing maneuvers. They may be members of groups comprising all males of a

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given age, of military societies, or of standing armies, or they may serve as mercenaries employed for a specific purpose.³

The vast majority of small-scale societies have military organizations composed only of nonprofessionals. These military organizations are likely to be fraternal interest groups—localized groups of related males who can resort to aggressive measures when the interests of their members are threatened. Fraternal interest groups constitute the vengeance parties that engage in feuding in small-scale societies as well as in modern polities, and in small-scale societies they form the backbone of military organizations. As a cause of war, fraternal interest groups play an important role in all societies except those with an advanced level of sociopolitical complexity—the state. In bands, tribes, and chiefdoms, fraternal interest groups provide the membership core of most military organizations. The leader of a fraternal interest group is a senior member; he often accompanies the group on raids. The ambush and the line form the basic pattern of tactics for these military organizations.

At the state level of sociopolitical complexity, professional military organizations play an important role in producing interstate violence. They are led by officers, who are typically members of the upper class. Officers, particularly the senior officers, may well be members of the aristocracy. Indeed, the leader of the state may be the supreme commander. The common soldiers are usually drawn from the lower class and are likely to have been conscripted; they have had to become members of the military organization whether they wanted to or not. These conscripts are usually placed in units of massed infantry. The troops march and drill as units under the direction of officers. On the battlefield the units are positioned side by side. A coercive command structure forces soldiers to fight even when outnumbered. Corporal and capital punishment can be used to enforce discipline.⁴ Battles and sieges are the two major tactics of warfare employed by professional military organizations.

Warrior Traditions

The approach set forth above—that military organizations are the key to understanding warfare—contrasts with a recently developed approach that emphasizes the warrior and the warrior tradition, rather than the military organization in which the warrior operates. By stressing the individual combatant, both writer and reader can lose sight of the central role that military organizations play in their societies. Scholars who focus on the warrior have produced books with such titles as *The Antique Drums of War*, *Women Warriors*, *Demonic Males*, and *Blood Rites*. In *A History of Warfare* John Keegan also focuses on the warrior, identifying three military traditions linked to the individual.⁵

Andrew Sanders's discussion of the anthropology of warriors ad-

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mirably sets forth the underlying premises of the approach: “Warriors are persons whose vocation is warfare, and who engage in the actual physical activity of fighting. In contrast to soldiers, and in particular to conscripts, they fight for personal glory.” They fight as individuals, rather than as members of disciplined military formations. Warfare is a way of life to warriors, and its values underlie much of their behavior. Warriors supply their own weapons. Further, according to Sanders, the warrior is central in the military organization of some societies.⁶ Warrior societies place a strong positive value upon warfare and warlike achievements; outstanding fighting men receive honor and prestige. Warfare is strongly integrated with religious and social values, and from childhood a male is socialized into warrior ideals and trained in military activities. War achievements are ranked, and the highest ranked achievement typically stresses the bravery involved in the exploit. By performing the higher ranked deeds, warriors achieve prestige and become war leaders. Competition between warriors for glory drives the successful warrior to seek greater achievements, forcing him to become an individual who invites death. In aristocratic states warriorhood was an occupation closely associated with the ruling class; it involved a strong hereditary aspect. Only members of the aristocracy possessed specialized armaments and could develop skill in their use; thus a warrior ethic was a part of the aristocratic way of life.

Warriors often engage in duels. In a study of dueling, I identified four characteristics of the duel: armed combat—fighting with matched weapons that are lethal; agreed-upon conditions, such as time, place, weapons, and those who should be present; duelists from the same social class, often a military aristocracy; and motives ranging from preserving honor, to revenge, to the killing of a rival. I discovered a sequence of stages. In hunting and gathering bands, dueling is nonexistent or rare. In some tribal to state-level societies, duels occur between elite warriors from two political communities, each representing his military organization. A warrior will step forward from the group to take on a challenger. These are the warriors Sanders describes in detail. With intense warfare a new stage arises: Duels occur between military personnel who are members of the same military organization. Finally, in recent centuries in Western civilization, duels take place between civilians within a political community.⁷

Although warriors, considered as a whole, have much in common, it is possible, as John Keegan has done, to distinguish different warrior traditions: “All civilizations owe their origins to the warrior.” Although “there are three distinct warrior traditions . . . there is only one warrior culture. Its evolution and transformation over time and place from man’s beginnings to his arrival in the contemporary world, is the history of warfare.”⁸ I believe, however, that the history of warfare should not be restricted to the study of “warrior culture.” The sociopolitical or-

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ganization of a people must be studied because it generates and nurtures the military organization of that people.

“Primitive warfare” is Keegan’s first tradition. For Keegan its study is instructive because it shows that “warmaking man” has the capacity to limit the nature and effects of his action. The most important device for limiting this conflict is “ritual, which defines the nature of the combat itself and requires that, once defined rituals have been performed, the contestants shall recognize the fact of their satisfaction and have recourse to conciliation, arbitration, and peacemaking.”⁹ Note the similarity between Keegan’s description of “primitive warfare” and the characteristics of the duel. The view that “primitive war” is “ritual war” is an incorrect interpretation.¹⁰

Asian warmaking (which includes that of Islam), based on the steppe nomad and the horse warrior, is Keegan’s second tradition. In this “oriental” tradition evasion, delay, and indirectness lead to a concept of military restraint.¹¹ This view is seldom accepted by military historians; for example, Robert O’Connell argues that the most lethal warfare stemmed from attacks by mounted warriors on agricultural villages.¹²

Keegan’s third tradition is the “Western Way of War,” which comprises three elements. The first element appeared, Keegan writes, when the Greeks “in the fifth century BC cut loose from the constraints of the primitive style, with its respect above all for ritual in war, and adopted the practice of the face-to-face battle to the death.” The second element is the ethic of the holy war, while the third element is the perfection of the gunpowder revolution in the eighteenth century.¹³ Keegan’s identification of this third tradition is taken from Victor Davis Hanson’s study of Greek hoplite warfare, with its emphasis upon the decisive battle. Recently Hanson has expanded his idea; he relates Western military powers to the democratic and constitutional governments of Western nations from Greece to the present.¹⁴

Keegan’s incorrect interpretation of both the warfare of nonliterate peoples and the warfare of the Middle East and Asia leads him to an optimistic conclusion: “Future peacekeepers and peacemakers have much to learn from alternative military cultures, not only that of the Orient but of the primitive world also. There is a wisdom in the intellectual restraint and even of symbolic ritual that needs to be rediscovered.”¹⁵ A correct interpretation of the two alternative military cultures would, I believe, have led him to a pessimistic conclusion.

Although the bulk of the writing on the warrior and warrior traditions considers the combatants to be honorable men and the traditions to include restraint, at least one military writer, Ralph Peters, treats warriors with disdain. They are, he writes, dishonorable men who kill and like to kill, even women and children. Peters describes “warriors” as “erratic primitives of shifting allegiance, habituated to violence, with no stake in civil order. Unlike soldiers, warriors do not play by our rules, do

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not respect treaties, and do not obey orders they do not like.” Peters describes “five social pools” from which most warriors emerge: the underclass, young males deprived of education, entrepreneurs of conflict, patriots, and failed military men. The entrepreneurs and the patriots, he believes, pose the greatest danger to our social order; the others are swept along by the tide.¹⁶

The warriors that Peters describes are a product of the modern world. They are not the nonprofessional and professional military personnel I described earlier. For Peters it is the professional soldier who is honorable, not the warrior. Peters does not discuss Keegan’s warrior traditions but would probably find them irrelevant for understanding warfare in the twenty-first century. Peters envisions a future in which soldiers and warriors will engage in mortal combat. It is already taking place. The terrorists who hijacked and crashed commercial airliners into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, are an example of Peters’s “warriors.”

The combatants that Peters describes are not new to the late twentieth century. One distinct group, the “borderers” (or Scots-Irish), people from the borderlands between northern England and southern Scotland, emigrated from that region to the American colonies in the eighteenth century. They settled in the mountains extending from what was to become southwestern Pennsylvania to Tennessee and Georgia. There an Old World cultural pattern of self-reliance, based on violent retaliation, raiding of livestock, and feuding among clans, persisted into the twentieth century. These warriors became marksmen with their so-called Kentucky flintlock rifles made by Germans in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. They shot both wild game and each other, usually from ambush. Recently I have described how the borderers served as snipers in the American Revolution and the wars that followed.¹⁷ When infantry tactics changed in 1875, from massed infantry to skirmish lines, the ideal soldier became a rifleman who could stand alone. The borderer was such a combatant. However, these mountain marksmen at this time were engaged in feuds in the states of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Their behavior clearly conformed to that of Peters’s warriors. The governor of Kentucky numerous times sent the militia to eastern Kentucky to stop the feuding. But once conscripted for World War I the borderers became excellent soldiers.¹⁸

To focus on warriors, whether gentle and kind or mean and nasty, is to miss the target. We should put our sights on military organizations. My aim in *How War Began* is to examine groups of men, the armed combat in which they engage, and their leaders. I will be describing non-professional and professional military organizations, not warriors per se or their traditions. The latter approach tends to glorify war, which I have no intention of doing.

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War Defined

To begin our inquiry we must first gain some understanding of what war is. Definitions abound. Some are restricted in that they seemingly pertain only to modern polities; for example, “War . . . is the application of state violence in the name of policy. It involves killing and wounding people and destroying property until the survivors abandon their military resistance or the belligerents come to a negotiated agreement.”¹⁹ I prefer, however, a broad definition that is so inclusive that an armed combat (fighting with weapons) between two men may be considered war if the men are from independent political entities. Terrorist acts, I believe, can also be considered war if the attackers are from another polity. Is an ancient rock painting of two men shooting arrows at each other war? It could be, by my definition, if they are from separate kinship groups. But what if there is intermarriage between the groups? I would still consider it war if the groups are politically independent, each with its own headman. However, if the groups are units within a single political entity, I would not. But perhaps my definition of war is still not broad enough. Intuitively, I want to call what I see painted on the rocks war, yet I realize it could be other things: a game—they are trying to hit but not hurt each other; a representation of other peoples or perhaps deities; a duel to resolve a dispute. Even if what is pictured represents an actual event, I do not know why they are shooting arrows at each other—are they trying to kill each other? And I do not know what kind of groups they belong to.

I do not, however, like definitions that are so broad that almost any aggression leading to potentially lethal violence is considered war. My definition of war—armed combat between political communities—focuses on the use of weapons, not on aggression. If one’s definition focuses on aggression, then one will seek the cause of war in psychological dispositions. Since I focus on armed combat, which I define as fighting with weapons, I put the emphasis on learning to use weapons. Learning is socialization. Thus, learning to use weapons is socialization for armed combat. Once the weapons are used in lethal combat between members of two political entities, war has occurred.

In our search for how war began, however, we need to set aside to some extent definitions of war because of the difficulty of identifying war in the archaeological record. Elsewhere I have distinguished six forms of killing: homicide, political assassination, feuding, warfare, capital punishment, and human sacrifice.²⁰ Dueling can be added to the list. While these seven forms of killing can be differentiated from each other in ethnographic descriptions with the help of definitions, they cannot be differentiated in the archaeological record. When a human pelvis is found with an arrow point lodged in it, no conclusion can be

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reached as to which form of killing occurred. Indeed, it could even have been a hunting accident.

I will try, where possible, to differentiate the forms of killing from each other, but we cannot unequivocally speak of war until we have clearly defined political entities. I have numerous times defined war as armed combat between political communities.²¹ I now have more and more trouble applying the definition. If a band of warriors attacks a camp or settlement occupied only by unarmed women, children, and old men and kills them, where is the armed combat? Raids of this kind are common among nonliterate peoples and occur widely today, carried out by “modern” armies.²² We call this practice genocide and condemn it. Terrorist attacks against noncombatants also do not involve armed combat. In spite of difficulties in applying my definition, I think that it is the most straightforward definition available and hence the easiest to apply.

The definition of war, as well as when war first occurred, may depend upon the theory employed by the scholar. For example, sociobiologists or evolutionary psychologists believe that the acquisition of mates is critical to the survival of the group. Men, as members of groups, fight over women. The groups may be fraternal interest groups, that is, localized groups of related males. Defense and revenge go hand-in-hand with fighting over women—defense of the group’s women and revenge for women lost to another group. Since mating obviously occurs early in human evolution, war may have occurred early, as soon as weapons were used for hunting. Materialists, on the other hand, use a model that employs an assessment of resource availability; they also use a decision-making (rational) approach—a political science cost-benefit analysis. With this model it is hard to “see” war in early times when populations were small and resources presumably abundant. Thus, various definitions of war, as well as theories of war, influence when war is thought to have begun.

My approach does not have theories built into it. Warfare is armed combat between political communities. I look for evidence of armed combat, and I find it in prehistoric times.

The Thesis

Warfare developed along two separate paths. The hunting of large game animals was critical to the development of the first path. Early hunters working as a group in pursuit of game sometimes engaged in attacks upon members of competing groups of hunters; they devised a mode of warfare based upon ambushes and lines. At the origin of the second path were foragers who did little hunting but depended largely upon gathering for subsistence, became sedentary, and then domesticated plants. Intergroup aggression was absent among these early agricultur-

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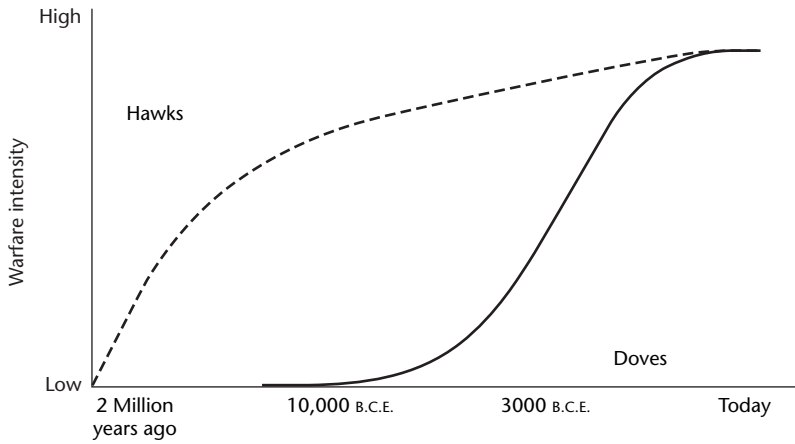


Figure 1.1. Increase in Warfare Intensity over Time—Two Views

alists. The first states developed only in these regions, but once city-states arose, a mode of warfare based upon battles and siege operations sprang forth. The two paths at times intertwined when state-level societies and bands of hunter-gatherers came in contact. *How War Began* describes how each path arose and what the consequences were.

Scholars who study war are at war with each other. One faction, which I have called hawks, believes that warfare arose millions of years ago and has characterized humankind in all places ever since; the other faction, which I have called doves, believes that warfare arose only about five thousand years ago, when the first states developed, and then spread to peaceful hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists. The positions of the hawks and the doves are shown in Figure 1.1, a diagram that relates warfare intensity to time. The two curves are far apart since the hawks see war as early and intense, while the doves see war as late and becoming intense only after 3000 B.C.E.

Scholars who look at big game hunters see warfare, while scholars who look at early agriculturalists see peace. Big game hunters, both in antiquity and in descriptions of native peoples, do indeed appear to engage in intergroup aggression that involves the killing of other hunters. However, a region in which warfare occurs is a region in which agriculture cannot develop; a peaceful, settled life for perhaps two thousand years is a prerequisite for the development of agriculture. Anthropologists Julian Steward and Elman Service both note that the first states arose in regions where warfare was not prevalent.²³ The first state in a region is known as a primary or pristine state. Primary states arose in four regions: Mesoamerica, Peru, Mesopotamia, and northern China. Warfare arose in these regions just as statehood was achieved. The origin of the state and the origin of war are inextricably linked. If warfare

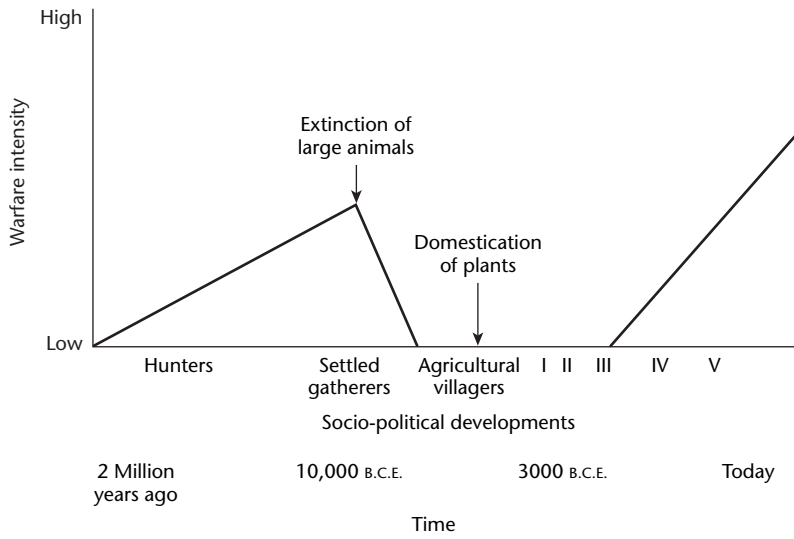
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Figure 1.2. The Two Paths Warfare Has Taken

had occurred in one of these areas before statehood, statehood would not have emerged.

The thesis of *How War Began* is diagrammed in Figure 1.2. The two paths for the development of warfare are far apart in a totally different sense. They began at different times and in different locations. Warfare intensity increased early, then rapidly declined in both the New and the Old World with the extinction of large animals. In those areas where there was little warfare, settled gatherers began the domestication of plants and became agricultural villagers. Once the villages became organized into larger units, political centralization was well under way; warfare developed. The Roman numerals in Figure 1.2 represent five stages of increasing political complexity: I, minimal chiefdom; II, typical chiefdom; III, maximal chiefdom/inchoate early state; IV, typical early state; and V, transitional early state, transitional to a mature state. Warfare is shown originating near the end of stage III. Whereas the theories of the hawks and the doves are oriented to time and do not focus on geographic differences, the theory presented in this book focuses on the changes over time in a particular region of the world. This theory acknowledges that, beginning with the first real extinction of large game animals, the intensity of war was not the same for all geographic areas and, furthermore, that the nature of war in a geographic area was not the same across time. Indeed, the four case studies describing the warfare of pristine states begin at different dates.

Two key features of the theory underlying the thesis are illustrated in Figure 1.2. First, as early hunters increased in number and hunting abil-

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ity, large game species declined in number due to both the hunting and the changing climatic conditions related to the receding of the last glacier; this theory holds true for both the Old World and the New. (However, in the Old World the continent of Africa retained many of its large animals.) Warfare increased at the same time. Hunting and warfare went hand-in-hand. More people were competing for the game with better weapons and hunting tactics. Once the extinction of many large animals began, the early hunters turned to small game procurement (a form of hunting that had begun earlier) and developed a greater reliance upon gathering wild plant food. The frequency of warfare declined, and I believe it did so rapidly. Weapons and tactics used to hunt large game fell into disuse and populations became more stationary. For an area to have little or no warfare, big game hunting must no longer be significant. For agriculture and permanent settlements to arise, there must be no warfare. It was settled gatherers who domesticated plants and developed agriculture. It took hundreds of years of domestication—perhaps two thousand years—for the major crop species to evolve from their wild ancestry, longer in Mesoamerica, sooner in the Fertile Crescent. If warfare occurred in a region of emerging domesticated plants, the domestication process would stop because people would be forced to leave their fertile agricultural lands and move to locations suitable for defense but not optimal for growing plants. Where hunting remained strong and warfare continued, plants were not domesticated. Those societies that did not domesticate plants because warfare continued or was reintroduced nevertheless could, at a later time, accept domesticated crops and animals from peoples who had developed them. But the first people to domesticate plants did not have war, and they did not have war because they had ceased to be hunters of large game.

Second, as the early hunter-gatherers spread over the earth, they developed different cultures with different tool traditions and different ways of life. Some remained hunters, while others became gatherers. Gatherers who settled and domesticated plants became agricultural villagers. Since warfare did not disrupt their lives—through battle casualties, crop destruction, and the burning of houses and settlements—populations grew in size and settlements developed into villages. The different groupings of villages constituted people of differing cultures. Within villages, wealth differences arose between individuals and between kinship groups. Social stratification emerged, with the dominant wealthier class providing the leaders. Competition and conflict between leaders led to internal power struggles. When the leaders who emerged from these struggles consolidated their power, they were able to form chiefdoms. Multiple chiefdoms arose within each culture. Despotism followed. States emerged. The culture—its people and their resources—produced the state in the sense that chiefdoms within each culture became states. Specifically, an ideology that the winners should

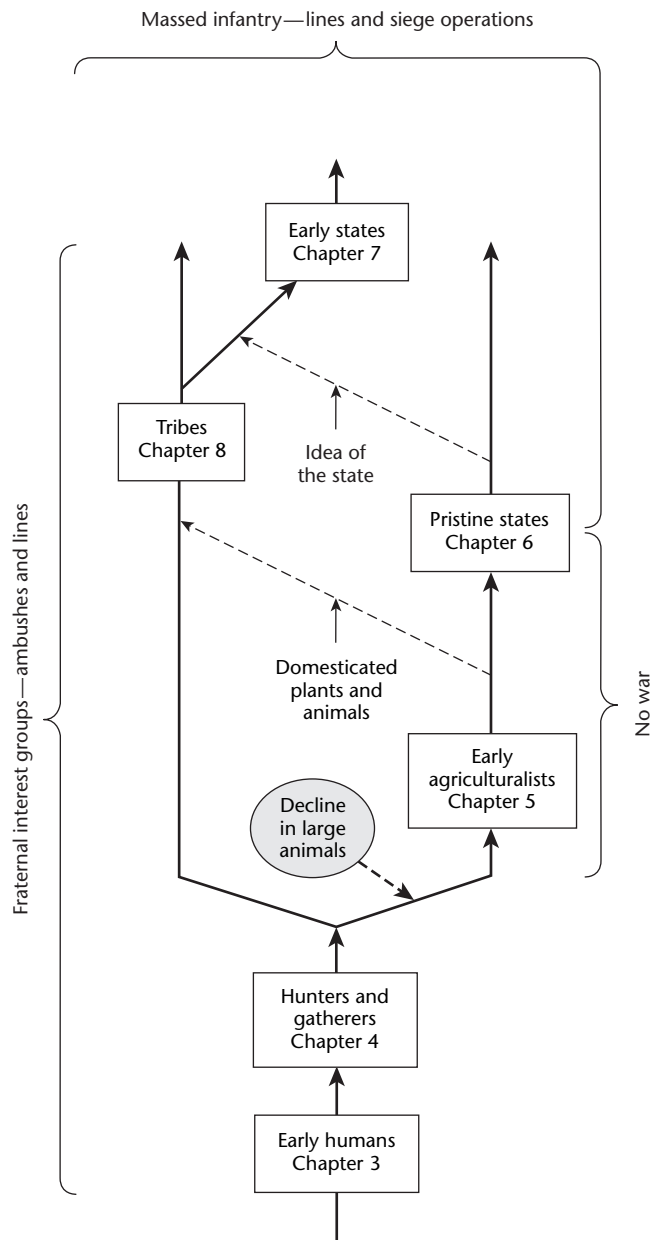


Figure 1.3. Overview—The Two Paths War Has Taken

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rule the losers developed. A ruling class emerged. The *idea* of the state crystallized as political leaders gained power over their constituent populations. Warfare arose. The first state-level battles took place between elite fighters who were drawn from the ruling class. Coercion of the population eventually led to the creation of military units that could engage in battle with similar units from other states. The first people to develop states did not have war until they had centralized political systems. Thus, warfare cannot be the cause of pristine state formation.

A schematic overview (Figure 1.3) shows the relationships of the key features of the theory to the origins and development of military organizations and tactics. Specifically, it shows the two paths of warfare through time. Furthermore, it suggests how the chapters of this book relate to each other. Early humans (chapter 3) and hunters and gatherers (chapter 4) lie at the base of the first path. The first path—the path that originated in a hunting and gathering way of life—persisted into the twentieth century in those regions where large animals continued to be hunted. Examples include nineteenth-century Indian hunters of the American bison, herders of eastern Africa who hunt lions, and Australian aborigines who hunted the kangaroo into the twentieth century. The same weapons used in the hunt were used in war. Early agriculturalists (chapter 5) lie at the base of the second path. As pointed out above, the decline in large animals moves us from the first path to the second. Early agriculturalists became villagers, then members of chiefdoms and the first states (chapter 6). Pristine states in their initial stages are early states. The diffusion of the idea of the state to nonstate peoples created other early states (chapter 7). Domesticated plants and animals spread from path two to path one and created tribes (chapter 8). Some hunting and gathering peoples, after agriculture and the state had developed in a few regions, acquired plants and crop technology from their more advanced neighbors. They became tribes, with their way of life based on hunting and gathering as well as agriculture. The spread of warfare eventually encompassed nearly all peoples except some isolated hunter-gatherers. There are a few agricultural tribal peoples who, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, gave up warfare.

Methodology

The methodology I use in this book consists of inferential techniques that permit the interpretation of archaeological data. My approach is eclectic; it employs techniques used by archaeologists, physical anthropologists, historians, and cross-cultural researchers.

Analogy

Interpretation in archaeology consists of what Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery have called “bridging arguments”—the connection between

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archaeological data and the theoretical framework used.²⁴ These arguments can range from simple ethnographic analogy to complex inferential methods. I identify four arguments: implicit ethnographic analogy, the “direct historical approach,” explicit ethnographic analogy, and “Murdock’s method of ethnology.” All of these methods make use of ethnographic data—descriptions of peoples living in the last two hundred years or so, often at the time or just after they were first contacted by members of a European culture.

Implicit ethnographic analogy finds the archaeologist making a common-sense evaluation; for example, a burial is uncovered, and the body is laid out with breastplate, shield, sword, and spear. The researcher deduces that the body is that of a man who must have been a warrior and the culture he is from must have had war. (We will later see, in “How the State Arose” in chapter 5, an example of this reasoning from a 5800 B.C.E. tomb at Catal Huyuk in present-day southern Turkey.)

The “direct historical approach” utilizes ethnographic and historical data from the area in which the excavations are under way in order to provide meaning and interpretation to what is found. The method assumes that there is a direct link from the ethnographic case to the archaeological culture being interpreted.²⁵ In other words, what peoples of a given region were doing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is probably what inhabitants of that region were doing several hundred years earlier.

Explicit ethnographic analogy draws upon a worldwide ethnographic data base. Anthropologists have grouped societies into categories such as hunting-gathering band, autonomous village society, and chiefdom. Since societies within a category have many characteristics or traits in common, the archaeologist determines the appropriate category for the people under investigation and infers that they probably were doing what peoples in that category were doing in the past two hundred years. Thus, a hunter-gatherer group found by archaeological excavation is assumed to be similar to hunter-gatherers in recent ethnographic description. Although ethnographic analogy is much used, there are two major difficulties in its application. First, the matching—how does the archaeologist know, for example, that the people at a site being excavated are a chiefdom? By the presence of elite burials, platform complexes, or various-sized settlements in the immediate area? The criteria have been widely discussed by archaeologists in the past few decades. Without agreement on criteria, matching has been difficult. Second, the way nonliterate peoples lived in the past two centuries may not be the way hunter-gatherers and agricultural villagers lived thousands of years ago. The archaeologist must be cautious in inferring early life ways from recent practice. Two examples germane to *How War Began* show the difficulty. Hunter-gatherers living today, or described in

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ethnographies, are sometimes peaceful. Can it then be inferred that hunter-gatherers, say, ten thousand years ago, were also? This book argues “no.” Nearly all state-level societies engage in warfare. Can it be inferred that pristine states in their earlier stages had war? This book argues “no.”

The fourth mode of ethnographic analogy has been called “Murdock’s method of ethnology.”²⁶ George Peter Murdock pioneered the cross-cultural method, a research technique from cultural anthropology that utilizes a probability sample of societies drawn from a large sampling universe of primarily nonliterate societies. The purpose of this research is to test theories and the relational hypotheses drawn from the theories. If the research finds a strong association in a worldwide sample of societies, the hypothesis is deemed supported and one assumes that the association reflects human behavior in general.²⁷ The generalization should hold for prehistoric societies as well. Sometimes the research is explicitly designed to help the archaeologist.²⁸ Furthermore, cross-cultural studies provide frequencies of culture traits and correlations between traits for peoples at the same level of sociopolitical complexity as archaeologically known peoples. The cautions discussed for using explicit ethnographic analogy must be followed; however, there are circumstances when probabilities can be assigned with some assurance. Numerous empirically supported generalizations, derived from cross-cultural research, are utilized throughout *How War Began* to interpret archaeological data in support of the central thesis.

The results of cross-cultural research studies are not used as a substitute for a lack of archaeological data. Rather, the studies are used to interpret those data. For example—and this is a key argument of this book—there are substantial data to support the notion that homicide and warfare were prevalent in the late Upper Paleolithic and that there is a lack of data to support the notion that homicide and warfare occurred in the early Neolithic. Why? The cross-cultural research that shows that hunting (the primary mode of subsistence in the Upper Paleolithic) and frequent warfare are linked and that gathering (a major activity of early agricultural villages) and infrequent warfare are linked helps us interpret why the archaeological data appear as they do.

Physical anthropologists, especially paleontologists and primatologists, also use bridging arguments to interpret the fossil record. Using methods akin to explicit ethnographic analogy, experts on fossil humans use conclusions from studies of hunter-gatherers to infer what the behavior of early humans might have been like. Primatologists, on the other hand, use the behavior of primates, commonly chimpanzees, to make inferences about the behavior of early humans, particularly the predecessors of *Homo sapiens*. Sometimes a single local population, such as the chimpanzees of Gombe made famous by Jane Goodall, is used to make the inferences; sometimes multiple populations—up to nine in

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one study—are used to establish chimpanzee behavior before deriving implications for human evolution.²⁹ The nine-group study, as well as a more recent comparative study of six chimpanzee populations that focused upon cultural differences between the groups, employs a research procedure nearly identical to Murdock's method of ethnology.³⁰

Results of cross-cultural studies that play a key role in support of the thesis of *How War Began* include the findings enumerated below. I think of these generalizations as “bricks” or building blocks; each stands alone, but placed together they produce a structure that is greater than the parts. The bricks are presented below in the approximate order in which they make their appearance in this book.

1. A two-component warfare pattern of ambushes and lines is associated with uncentralized political systems (bands and tribes), while a two-component pattern of battles and sieges is associated with centralized political systems (chiefdoms and states).
2. Military organizations vary in efficiency, thus permitting the construction of a military sophistication scale. For a society, the higher the level of political centralization, the more likely the society is to have a high military sophistication scale score.
3. The tool use of wild chimpanzees includes both “missile-throw” and “stick-club,” which constitute antipredatory patterns of weapons use.
4. Spears with stone tips are used in big game hunting and warfare.
5. Hunter-gatherer bands are not internally peaceful. Homicide rates are high, and frequent executions of killers and witches occur.
6. Hunters have a greater frequency of warfare than gatherers.
7. Fraternal interest groups are associated with feuding and internal war.
8. Tribes with fraternal interest groups and despotic states kill captured enemies; despotic states also kill their own members.
9. Centralized political systems at war suppress feuding.
10. Centralized political systems are likely to have fortified villages.
11. Village fortifications predict warfare; the opposite is not true—war does not predict village fortifications.
12. Centralized political systems at war with neighboring societies are likely to have siege operations.
13. Societies with high military sophistication scale scores have high battlefield casualties.
14. Uncentralized political systems with councils of elders may have human sacrifice. Centralized political systems, particularly despotic states, have human sacrifice and slavery.
15. War is nearly universal in human society. Societies without war are usually physically isolated. For nonisolated societies an efficient

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military organization—one that has a high score on the military sophistication scale—is needed for survival. A high score on the scale is associated with offensive external war.

Scientific and Historical Explanation

How War Began focuses on what happened long ago. It presents an interpretation of what is known. Archaeological data are interpreted, sometimes with the assistance of ethnographic analogy; these data are organized to support an overarching interpretation. The interpretation argues that war arose first among hunter-gatherers and then arose a second time once agriculture was firmly established. This interpretation is based on both scientific and historical explanations.

Scientific and historical explanations go hand-in-hand. They are not alternative modes of explanation, nor are they incompatible. There are two components to science: description and explanation. Objective reporting of observations, whether the descriptions are ethnographic or historical, is science. Explanation, however, goes beyond description. It is an attempt to answer the “why” question: Why does something occur? Scientific explanation consists of “laws,” that is, empirically verified generalizations, each of which would be the statement of a relationship between or among two or more variables.³¹ The results of cross-cultural studies are verified generalizations. They are scientific laws, and because they presumably hold for all times and places, they can be used to explain events in the past.

Historical explanation, on the other hand, deals with the determination of a unique event. While historians have used the notion of causality in at least five senses, most seem to have settled on a paradigm that employs two levels: particular causes (actions of individuals and the reasons they had for acting) and profound or underlying causes. Military historians are likely to use this two-level paradigm, which I believe is the equivalent of Aristotle’s material and efficient causes. With this paradigm events are seen as inevitable. Historians may focus on one or the other level. Historian Allan Millet, who seems to focus on the first level, has noted that the traditional focus of academic military historians is on the three “C’s”—the causes, conduct, and consequences of warfare.³²

Historical explanation uses a narrative style, a style that is employed today by some evolutionists in the biological sciences. Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has described the style: “Narrative explanations . . . require a knowledge and reconstruction of actual sequences of antecedent events, for outcomes are contingent upon a previous chain of occurrences.” Such explanations may be as detailed, as decisive, and as satisfying as those developed via the experimental method. Gould concludes that “the nature of history’s complex and singular unfolding en-

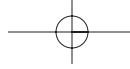
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joins this style of explanation as the only adequate approach for achieving the detail of understanding that we seek.”³³ *How War Began* uses a narrative style of presentation; it also seeks to be vigorously scientific.

Unique historical events can be explained by the simultaneous application of both the narrative style and scientific laws. The two modes of explanation are both ways of trying to explain why something occurs. *How War Began* not only attempts to describe the first occurrence of war, meaning when and where, but also attempts to explain why it occurred. As noted in “The Thesis” section above, war had multiple origins. Insofar as possible, sequences of the type that military historians employ will be constructed and they will be interpreted through the use of scientific generalizations that have often been derived from cross-cultural studies, the bricks that I have listed above.

Recent scholarship in the social sciences has brought the individual back into explanatory paradigms. Talk of agency abounds. In part it seems to be an attempt to avoid dehumanizing the people studied—a charge that has been leveled against cultural anthropologists in particular. It is also a shift in emphasis from material to efficient causes. One example is cultural anthropologist Andrew Vayda’s 1989 “recantation.” Vayda, a pioneer of ecological theories of warfare, now argues that it is important to focus on the “context-relatedness of purposeful human behavior,” in other words, efficient causes.³⁴ Earlier he argued that such reasons, which he called proximate causes, were of less importance than material causes.³⁵ Archaeologists have also tried to bring the individual back into their analyses. Action theory, as described by Joyce Marcus and Kent Flattery, is an explicit attempt to do so: “By putting the actors back into the scheme, action theory also responds to complaints that most evolutionary theory makes humans little more than cogs in a machine.” Marcus and Flattery further tell us that “action theory is appropriate for studying the evolutionary history of a single group.” They go on to note that “action theory is less useful for comparing all civilizations.”³⁶ For comparative studies they revert to identifying stages in an evolutionary sequence. Another archaeologist who is an action theorist is Elizabeth Brumfiel. As the coeditor of a volume on factional competition and political development in the New World, she argues for the necessity of “a theory that integrates agent-centered and system-centered analyses into a single framework.”³⁷ This view is not new to those who have studied sociopolitical evolution. In 1962 anthropologist Fred Gearing, in his study of the evolution of Cherokee political institutions, stated, “The Cherokees in these pages (though they are usually invisible as particular men) are sentient beings, creators as much as creatures of culture, and social structure is here something in the awareness of actors, under continuing, conscious, purposeful modification.”³⁸

Although I agree that humans are important, I nevertheless believe that their decisions are determined. I have long noted that the more in-



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formation available about an event and what led up to it, the more inevitable the event seems. It is a waste of time asking the “what if” question, although it may be a lot of fun to do so: What if a particular leader had thought and done differently? A battle would have been won, not lost, and the course of history would have changed. (Answering this question is a favorite pastime of military writers and readers, and in particular military buffs who play war games with miniature soldiers.³⁹) But that leader did not think and do differently. Multiple factors led to the decision. A different decision could not have been made unless the factors had been different. And they were not.

