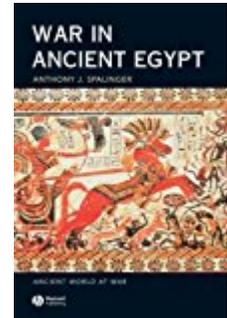


Anthony J. Spalinger. *War in Ancient Egypt*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2005. xx + 291 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4051-1372-4.



Reviewed by James Bloom

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The author of this profound history of ancient Egyptian war-making informs readers, in his preface, that his study concentrates on the logistical side of Egyptian military history. In doing so, Spalinger remarks, he aims to delineate the "military effectiveness" of the ancient Egyptian state. For that reason, he touches only secondarily on such traditional military historical themes such as the technological aspects of weaponry, defensive and offensive tactics, and how these factors shaped successes and defeats abroad. (This conventional approach can be found in, e.g., *Warfare in Ancient Egypt* by Bridget McDermott, 2004.) It should be noted, however, that despite this disclaimer, readers will find adequate discussions of weapons innovations, such as the chariot and siege technology, and their effects. Further, Spalinger eschews a blow-by-blow description of the campaigns of the various pharaohs, although there are sound and clear-cut appraisals of several key battles, such as Megiddo, and Kadesh, slotted into his primary logistical thesis. However, his main emphasis is on the rise to political prominence of the army (including its maritime component) as a social group, one that, up to the time

covered in the book, was influential but not central to Egyptian decision-making. Spalinger is interested in evaluating the long-range effects of this group's rise to power upon the war-making capability of the Egyptian kingdoms. This volume is not a survey of the entire time span of ancient Egypt, for reasons explained in the introduction. The author does provide, in passing, brief references to earlier periods but concentrates upon the vital period of New Kingdom Egypt from ca. 1575-1100 B.C.--that is, Dynasty Seventeen to Twenty, embracing as its nucleus the Ramesside period, in which the Egyptians created a professional army and gained control of Syria, creating an "Empire of Asia." Since Spalinger, does not impart a clearly sequential account, it might help prospective readers to grasp the framework on which Spalinger, based on a detailed analysis of the material and literary evidence, weaves his rich tapestry. The New Kingdom in Egyptian history is probably its most glorious in terms of building, culture, and military accomplishments. It began with the expulsion of those misunderstood Sea Peoples, the Hyksos. From this point on, most of its pharaohs were generals and foreign policy

centered more and more on security, especially in Syria. The pharaohs regarded Syria as not only economically vital, but also their manifest destiny. After the expulsion of the Hyksos, Amenhotep I, who reigned 1551-1524 B.C., began to extend Egypt's boundaries in Nubia and Palestine. When Thutmose III achieved sole rule after the death of his mother, Hatshepsut (noted for her achievement in organizing maritime expeditions to modern-day Somalia) in 1483 B.C., he reconquered Syria and Palestine, which had broken away during their co-regency. He then continued to expand his empire southward beyond the Fifth Cataract, into Nubia and westward into Libya. Amunhotep II, who reigned 1453-1419 B.C., continued the war with the Mitanni for the control of the Levant, leading northern expeditions to maintain Egyptian supremacy over the area conquered by his father, receiving the allegiance of Kadesh and moving on to capture the key Syrian Mediterranean port of Ugarit and campaigning in the vicinity of Megiddo (1398 B.C.) to defeat Mtannian counterattacks. Thutmose IV tried to maintain the Asian conquests in the face of growing threats from the Mitanni and Hittites, but both father and son found it necessary to utilize negotiations as well as force to penetrate further into Mesopotamia. While Amenhotep III ruled peacefully from 1386-1349 B.C., the Hittites had been establishing control over Syria and threatening Egypt's position in Palestine. His success in maintaining the balance of power among Egypt's neighbors was solely due to diplomacy. His son and successor, Amenhotep IV, more commonly known as Akhenaton, was a religious reformer who fought the power of the Amon priesthood. His only military significance was to let the imperial possessions slip away, thereby setting the stage for the more dynamic foreign and military affairs of the Nineteenth Dynasty. The Nineteenth Dynasty was founded by Ramses I, who had served his predecessor, Horemhab, as vizier and commander of the army. He reigned for only two years, from 1293-1291 B.C. He was succeeded by his son, Seti I,

who reigned 1291-1279 B.C. and is considered to have been one of the most active and successful military leaders of the period. He led campaigns against Syria, Palestine, the Libyans, and the Hittites. Ramses' most famous son, Ramses II, (under whom the Israelite exodus is presumed to have occurred) succeeded him and reigned for nearly 67 years. He was responsible for a great deal of construction at sites such as Luxor and Karnak. He built the Ramesseum (his funerary temple at Thebes), the rock-cut temples at Abu Simbel, as well as sanctuaries at Abydos and Memphis and these provide an invaluable source of information on this period. After campaigns against the Hittites, climaxing in the much-interpreted battle of Kadesh around 1300, Ramses concluded a treaty with them culminating in a marriage to a Hittite princess. His son Merneptah, who reigned 1212-1202 B.C., defeated one wave of Sea Peoples, and he is reported to have caused some havoc in Israel, as described in his enigmatic stele. Later rulers of this dynasty had to contend with constant uprisings by subject peoples within the empire. The second ruler of the Twentieth Dynasty, Ramses III, halted, but did not defeat the Sea Peoples. He gave them land in Canaan, which became Philistia. His mortuary complex at Medinet Habu, near Thebes, documents his military victories. The rising power of the priesthood of Amon and that of the army contributed to the decline of the New Kingdom and a general state of chaos after Ramses' death Spalinger, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Auckland, New Zealand focuses on issues such as the probable level of population during his chosen period, the military manpower base, importation of metals vital to forging weapons, horse breeding and provisioning, and a mixture of factors underpinning military preparedness. The book is arranged in sixteen chapters, eleven of which deal with the Eighteenth Dynasty. Usefully, each chapter is divided into three parts: the main text is followed by an "excursus," graphically set apart by a gray font, which summarizes the relevant scholarly literature and

gives some additional commentary. Valuable endnotes, comprising scholarly asides comparing sources and alluding to controversies, conclude each chapter. The book's general bibliography does not include all the extensive studies referred to in the endnotes and excurses but consists of references which emphasize the military and related war-making issues of the New Kingdom. The text smoothly integrates pictorial and archaeological materials, making for a well-balanced treatment of the subject. A chronological table listing dynasties and pharaohs assists readers to grasp the time span and keep track of successors and rivals. The following inventory of chapter headings only hints at the richness of the thematic development: "Prelude to New Kingdom Warfare"; "The System of Early Dynasty XVIII: Technological and Physical Constraints"; "Southern and Northern Expansion"; "Social and Religious Implications of the New Military System"; "The Battle of Megiddo and Its Result"; "The Pharaoh on Campaign: Ideal and Real"; "The Later Military Situation in Asia and at Home"; "Egyptian Imperialism and Thutmose III"; "Dynasty XVIII: Warfare and Economy"; "The Amarna Letters and War"; "The Influence of the Egyptian Military from Late Dynasty XVIII to Dynasty XIX"; "Early Dynasty XIX"; "To Kadesh and After"; "Merenptah and Ramesses III"; "Egypt on the Defensive"; "The Social System of the Military in the Ramesside Period." The quantity of detail, embracing archaeological, demographic, societal and economic analysis, renders a précis difficult. However, a sampling of the central chapters, 4 through 7, gives a good idea of Spalinger's treatment as a whole. Chapter 4 looks at the transformation in military tasks, titles, and ranks as well as the ramifications of political theology once the king became the deputy and son of the deity Amun. Spalinger notes that one major change was the increasing professionalization of the Egyptian army. While higher officers had previously also been engaged in paramilitary functions, their role now became purely military. Spalinger also emphasizes the importance of the charioteers as a

new elite sector which replaced that of the naval commanders. A thorough analysis of the battle of Megiddo and its results is followed in chapter 5. The sixth chapter, ("The Pharaoh on Campaign: Ideal and Real"), takes a brief look at how the army, and particularly the king, camped out while on a campaign by comparing the record of the battles of Megiddo and Kadesh. Chapter 7 evaluates the military situation in Asia and Nubia after Megiddo until the reign of Thutmose IV. The main focus is primarily on the gains of military campaigns on the basis of the later campaign records of Thutmose III. Spalinger begins by analyzing the ambiguous Egyptian term *inu*, which is commonly translated as "plunder" but in a more imperial context refers to an extraordinary delivery of goods. Further attention is drawn to the development of weaponry (bows, axes) and the different chariot types as depicted in artwork. Throughout the book, Spalinger emphasizes the political and geographical situation outside of the Nile Valley, both in Asia (Palestine and Syria) as well as southward (in Nubia). The various excurses at the end of each chapter evaluate logistical factors such as rates of march, average sailing speeds of ships as well as their carrying capacities, food intake, availability of forage and water along march routes, population level, and relative proportion of fighting strength, etc. In his emphasis on mathematical and statistical features, Spalinger acknowledges his debt to Hans Delbruck, the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century German military historian who pioneered the scientific consideration of numbers in warfare. Mathematical models have rarely been applied so conscientiously to the New Kingdom military system. Spalinger's application of Delbruckian methodology is exemplified by the following. When examining the march of the army of Thutmose III across the Aruna mountain pass on the way to attack the town of Megiddo, the author looks at the logistics of the march. He ponders how wide the pass might have been. Spalinger notes that Thutmose's *Annals* tell us that one horse followed another, so

he concludes that the men could not have marched more than four abreast at most, probably less. He examines the speed at which a group of men can march, allowing for the pack animals and horses. By calculating how long it would have taken to march all his men through the pass and assemble them ready for battle, it is possible to determine that Thutmose started his march around six a.m. or slightly later and that it took some six hours to march through the pass--not a long time to move maybe four thousand horses, two thousand chariots and a huge body of men over thirteen kilometers. This is intriguing information (and the book is full of this sort of detail) and it really places the campaigns and exploits of the pharaohs and their soldiers in a new light. In his pithy analysis, the author shows a thorough familiarity with the ancient sources and relevant literature on military topics, ancient and modern. Most interestingly to this reviewer, he often makes comparisons with campaigns of later ages, where armies might have faced similar topographical and logistic challenges. Others have suggested that his study might have been more rounded if it had not started with Dynasty Seventeen, but with a general introduction on how warfare was conducted during the earlier history of Egypt. However, I found the sporadic references to previous warfare scattered throughout the book to be sufficient in that regard. This surprisingly readable, albeit weighty, study is a shining example of what can be achieved by application of focused socio-political analysis, painstaking textual and epigraphic criticism, and environmental realities to ancient warfare. It presents, in a clear and fascinating narrative, everything the military historian might want to know about ancient Egyptian war-making.

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