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**THE *BEAUTIFUL WARRIOR* TWENTY-ONE
YEARS AFTER: BRONZE AGE WARFARE
AND WARRIORS
HELLE VANDKILDE**

The seminal article by Paul Treherne in the 1995 volume of this journal seems to have given rise to a mostly independent thread unrelated to the current surge in warfare research. The role of warfare and

941 warrior aesthetics is briefly discussed
942 against this background.

943 Warriors would seem topical to ques-
944 tions of prehistoric warfare, which until c.
945 1996 was a marginal subject area in
946 archaeology. Since then, war has gained
947 considerable momentum as a research
948 theme and today the archaeology of
949 warfare is firmly placed in the suite of
950 archaeologies addressed. The brilliant
951 ‘Warrior’s Beauty’ paper by Paul Treherne,
952 published in 1995 in the *European Journal*
953 *of Archaeology* (then the *Journal of*
954 *European Archaeology*) can, given its many
955 citations, be categorized as a high-impact
956 article; it is a frequently accessed article on
957 the journal’s website. Against this back-
958 ground, it is pertinent to ask if the study
959 has had a role in driving the current inter-
960 est in war and, hence, has influenced the
961 new knowledge now emerging. Are the
962 visual appearance and bodily movements
963 of the ancient warrior, *sensu* Treherne, at
964 all present in the archaeology of warfare
965 now blooming?

966 In the twentieth century, the warrior
967 was considered a heroic stereotype at the
968 head of an ancient society that was
969 deemed essentially peaceful. But, after the
970 ‘discovery’ of the war-like realities of
971 ancient society in the late 1990s, warriors
972 have paradoxically fallen out of the Bronze
973 Age research limelight, although warrior
974 elites sometimes figure in interpretations
975 (Vandkilde, forthcoming, 2016). It is,
976 therefore, timely to assess the value of
977 Treherne’s contribution.

978 *An Impactful Essay Ahead of its Time*

982 Treherne’s essay contains a number of
983 observations and theory-driven hypotheses
984 which have the potential to throw light on
985 the main strands of change in Neolithic
986 and Bronze Age Europe and increase our
987 understanding of the role of the warrior in

these societies. In addition, it is a mani-
festo replete with theoretical insights,
classic, mainstream, and scholarly. The
position taken is not easily slotted in any
theoretical school or paradigm; the article
works equally well as a grand history on
an Eurasian scale, and, by contrast, as an
examination of the male body and equip-
ment as both unique and reiterated
materiality in life and death. This epis-
temological stance embedded in Classical
history may explain the immediate success
of Treherne’s article, not least in the mid
1990s when much energy was invested in
aligning with processual, post-processual
or post-structural persuasions.

Characteristically, the essay works with
dualities rather than dichotomies. In fact,
the inseparability of ideology and reality
on the one hand, and of the body, iden-
tity, and personhood on the other, may
have been an eye-opener for many archae-
ologists struggling to make sense of spe-
cific archaeological remains, in particular
burials: it became clearer that people’s
beliefs were lived through their social
interactions and affiliations, and that con-
cepts such as ‘false consciousness’ tends to
victimize especially those people ‘without
history’ and thence to simplify complex pre-
historic realities. People live out their ideol-
ogies and form their identities through their
bodies in an entanglement where power is
an inherent element. In providing a simul-
taneously sophisticated and straightforward
framework for thinking theoretically about
archaeological things, data, culture, and
change, Treherne was well ahead of his
time. First, the essay can be read as a cri-
tique of archaeology rooted in philosophy,
while at the same time promoting body,
gender, identity, agency, the senses, and
even history as an interleaved package
central to the interpretive agenda. Second,
the essay can be taken to be an innovative
framework for better understanding the
numerous weapons recovered in burials and

988 hoards from around 3000 BC onwards, and
 989 here Classical studies and early written
 990 sources support the argument well. The
 991 immediate impression is nevertheless that
 992 this second aspect has not been invigorated
 993 to any significant extent by the general aca-
 994 demic turn set out by Treherne's essay.

995 Internet data may confirm this broad
 996 canvas. Even if the number of citations is
 997 likely to be an underestimate, the statistics
 998 in Table 1 show that Treherne's article has
 999 contributed more significantly to other
 1000 subject areas (84 per cent) than to warfare,
 1001 weapons, and warriorhood (16 per cent).
 1002 Its main impact is on questions of identity
 1003 and gender, body and agency, emotion,
 1004 art, and the senses, in addition to general
 1005 theory and overviews. Its low impact (very
 1006 few if any references) on the otherwise
 1007 thriving genre of war studies is illustrated
 1008 when leafing through a number of
 1009 anthologies, e.g. those of Carman &
 1010 Harding (1999); Osgood et al. (2000);
 1011 Otto et al. (2006) and Ralph (2013).
 1012 Given this essay's heading and principal
 1013 message it is surprising that warrior studies
 1014 show up in such a low proportion in the
 1015 statistics, but this may relate to warriors
 1016 being rather marginal to the current rise in
 1017 warfare studies. In fact, a handful of major
 1018 warrior studies do recognise Treherne 1995
 1019 as central to the analysis of ancient war-
 1020 riors: Harrison (2004); Vandkilde (2006b);
 1021 Harding (2007); Knöpke (2009); Schulting
 1022 (2013). One could argue that it was
 1023 Keeley's book (*War Before Civilization*,
 1024 1996) and the wars and genocide of the
 1025 1990s that heralded research in prehistoric
 1026 warfare. Meanwhile Treherne's essay
 1027 became one of the guiding threads in a par-
 1028 allel thrust to populate prehistory with
 1029 able-bodied real people, but this comprised
 1030 few analyses of warriors until recently.
 1031 Treherne's article thus seems to have insti-
 1032 gated an independent thread of research
 1033 mostly disconnected from the surge of
 1034 warfare studies from 1996 to the present.

While Treherne's article demonstrates a
 good knowledge of the archaeology
 outside the English-speaking world, the
 works quoting Treherne come predomi-
 nantly from the latter. German archaeology
 has recently discovered war as a research
 area; this *Kriegsarchäologie* seems to largely
 be an independent development apparently
 little influenced by the global rise in war
 studies since 1996, as the few cross-refer-
 ences reveal (e.g. Meller & Schefzik,
 2015). It may be that the interest in war
 now manifest in German archaeology is a
 logical continuation, or offshoot, of the
 strong *Kriegergräber* tradition, which was
 also a major source of inspiration for
 Treherne (pp. 105). More broadly, weap-
 onry is still an important research focus in
 Germany (as well as elsewhere), albeit the
 interest has shifted slightly more towards
 investigations of damage and wear on deadly
 weapons, such as swords and spears, as well
 as research on traumata (e.g. Peter-Röcher,
 2007; Horn, 2013). Furthermore, recent dis-
 coveries have been influential too, notably
 the Corded Ware multiple burial at Eulau
 in central Germany (Meyer et al., 2009) and
 two early Urnfield sites, the battlefield of
 Tollense (Jantzen et al., 2011) and the
 Neckarsulm warrior cemetery (Knöpke,
 2009; Wahl & Price, 2013) in north-eastern
 and southern Germany, respectively.

In sum, the growing field of the archae-
 ology of warfare follows several research
 directions which have so far been little
 concerned with the beautifully-bodied
 warrior, despite his implicit capacity for
 violence. It may well be that the warrior
 needs to be instated as an instrumental
 agent in the sometimes war-like reality of
 prehistoric society.

*The Bronze Age Warrior – Epic Hero or
 Militant Professional?*

Treherne used as a springboard, firstly, the
 ostentatious panoplies of weapons deposited

1035 in the so-called *Kriegergräber* and, secondly,
 1036 Homer's warrior tales and their reinterpretations
 1037 in Classical studies traditionally
 1038 favouring masculine bodily aesthetics. The
 1039 association of both these categories with
 1040 grooming tools, dress and accessories,
 1041 drinking equipment, and wheeled vehicles
 1042 may be a convincing argument that they
 1043 represent the shared characteristics of
 1044 warrior elites—centred on both the living
 1045 and the dead masculine body: common life/
 1046 death style and norms, beliefs, appearance,
 1047 as well as inbred social superiority and
 1048 habits of cultural consumption. This ideol-
 1049 ogy is accordingly lived through individua-
 1050 lising and communal action in the group of
 1051 warriors among which courtly conduct is
 1052 preeminent, not least during the funerals of
 1053 companions. It is indeed the Weberian
 1054 notion of the status group which permeates
 1055 the analysis and which is similar to van
 1056 Wees' status warriors in the setting of
 1057 Homer's epics (1992), or for that matter
 1058 Kristiansen's warrior aristocracies in the
 1059 Bronze Age (1984, 1999). Treherne does
 1060 not use the word 'hero' which is neverthe-
 1061 less implicit throughout his article, in
 1062 which, furthermore, the concept of warrior
 1063 elites is not criticised, but becomes a static
 1064 component of Bronze Age society.

1065 Today we know that prehistoric warfare
 1066 cannot be reduced to rituals such as
 1067 Treherne erroneously contends (1995:
 1068 109), extending the paradigmatic absence
 1069 of war and violence prevalent in much
 1070 earlier archaeological interpretation, which
 1071 also venerated the gallant warrior as the
 1072 head of society. Homeric warfare is, to put
 1073 it simply, about prowess and honour, and
 1074 about fame and glory on an epic scale; but
 1075 bloody raids and piracy represent the
 1076 reverse of the gleaming coin. Van Wees
 1077 (1992) shows that Homer's epics narrate a
 1078 social world in which rivalry thrived, and
 1079 where power and leadership were con-
 1080 stantly under pressure rather than making
 1081 an undisputed, stable warrior hierarchy.

Ugly violence and brutal assaults, like
 plundering cities for revenue and taking
 captives for slavery, are present as subtexts
 to the dominant narrative of heroic
 conduct, which also tends to evaporate
 when the fallen heroes are left unburied
 and mutilated on the battlefield, in danger
 of losing their social status.

These are important nuances to con-
 sider in regard to Bronze Age archaeology
 too; the interface between heroic and
 violent realities is becoming clearer but
 still needs further study. Van Wees' find-
 ings can be said to parallel the duality
 present in the archaeological sources for
 the Bronze Age:

There can, first of all, be no doubt that
*a heroic logic is embedded within much
 Bronze Age materiality* in the same way as
 it is at the core of Homeric society,
 reflected in particular in the Iliad. This
 implies that heroization formed part of the
 social reality in both these connected
 worlds and later gave rise to the varied
 and probably quite widespread practice of
 hero cults (Whitley, 1995; Vandkilde,
 2013a), echoed in Hesiod's men of bronze
 and his notion of an age of heroes.
 Against this background, it becomes prob-
 lematic merely to dismiss the hypothesis
 of warrior aristocracies, even though this
 institution needs to be nuanced in Bronze
 Age settings. Treherne is not overmuch
 concerned with bodily techniques as phys-
 ical action, *sensu* Mauss (1936), and is
 more in line with Vernant's (1991a) aes-
 thetic body perspective. Aesthetics on its
 own is, however, inadequate: through a
 more complete body perspective, Warnier
 (2011) contends that warfare always
 involves the fighter's subjectivity and that
 warriors are the professional agents specifi-
 cally trained in the techniques of warfare.
 The movements of both body and
 weapons have to be synchronised to effect-
 ively overcome the innate fear, as mental-
 ity is clearly important for survival.

1082 Secondly, new data strongly suggest that
1083 prehistoric *warfare was quite widespread and*
1084 *often deadly*: there is now substantial skel-
1085 etal evidence for war-related violence (e.g.
1086 Schulting, 2013). *Kriegergräber* have so far
1087 not revealed skeletal trauma—probably not
1088 because it did not exist but because the ske-
1089 letons are generally badly preserved and
1090 often cremated. The social status of the
1091 warrior as sword carrier or as charioteer is
1092 effectively commemorated in the burial
1093 rites (e.g. Clausing, 1999; Winghart,
1094 1999), and there is nothing to suggest that
1095 this did not have a bearing on conflict and
1096 war. A violent reality at the transition to
1097 the Urnfield period emerges clearly from
1098 two recently excavated sites. Around 1250
1099 BC in the Tollense river valley, numerous
1100 plundered corpses of warriors with projec-
1101 tiles often still embedded in their bodies
1102 were left on the battlefield by the victors
1103 (Jantzen et al., 2011). This is paralleled at
1104 the cemetery of Neckarsulm, dated to the
1105 early Urnfield period (Ha A1) (Knöpke,
1106 2009). Both sites contain almost exclusively
1107 young male warriors, many of them for-
1108 eigners and probably mounted (Wahl &
1109 Price, 2013; Brinker et al., 2015). This
1110 matches well the quantification of weapon
1111 burials calculated by Clausing (1999: 392)
1112 with peaks at the beginning and end of this
1113 long period. Earlier evidence, such as the
1114 Corded Ware burials at Gerdrup and
1115 Eulau, and the Wassenar and Over-
1116 Vindinge burials dated to the transition to
1117 the Middle Bronze Age clearly show that
1118 war-related violence occurred, if not
1119 throughout the period then definitely at the
1120 thresholds of change (see Otto et al., 2006;
1121 Peter-Röcher, 2007; Vandkilde, 2013b).
1122 These datasets concur with the outcome of
1123 use-wear studies of Bronze Age weaponry
1124 (e.g. Kristiansen, 2002; Mörtz, 2010;
1125 Horn, 2013). In addition, weapons like
1126 swords, spears, shields and armour became
1127 more deadly, effective, and standardised
1128 over time, culminating in the Urnfield

period. While bows and arrows are infre-
quent in burials and other deposits they are
prominently attested across the periods in
the data for skeletal trauma. This reveals
that archery was instrumental in war whilst
it did not officially form part of the concept
of heroic valour and of special codes of life/
death-style conducted in the companies of
warrior peers.

Warriorhood can thus be defined as a
social identity springing from militant
bodily-material interaction but also from
heroic tales of men, war, and glory.
Therefore, Treherne's warrior obsessed
with his bodily appearance still exists and
ought to be taken seriously when we add
the violence that is *also* integral to the
warrior's being and doing. Such an
entangled reality for Bronze Age warrior is
in full agreement with the outcomes of the
few warrior-focused studies mentioned in
the introduction. If the identity of the
warrior is disconnected from the activity of
warfare there is a risk that the many data
obtained, notably, for weaponry and
trauma will not further our knowledge of
how war and its agents influenced history
and vice versa. Quantitative variations over
time in trauma and weaponry already hint
that warriors and their actions were placed
centrally in the historical web of causes
and effects with major thresholds at
around 3000 BC, 1600 BC and 1200 BC.