"Inanna's Game": The Emergence of War and Social Complexity in the Ancient Near East.

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Résumé

The connection between warfare and the development of social complexity in the Near East is a topic of much debate among archaeologists and anthropologists. Some scholars see warfare as important in the rise of the earliest civilizations while others have held that large-scale warfare was more of a consequence than a cause of the development of early states. The nature of war and its' causes are different in small-scale societies than they are in larger more socially stratified ones. This paper will present some of the evidence for warfare in the ancient Near East through time and offer interpretations of larger cultural patterns.

Warfare was not simply a struggle for survival brought on by desperation or a response to climatic fluctuations. While many assume that population growth and resource scarcity would be the most obvious causes of warfare, archaeology, ethnography, and history shows that wars are also waged not out of necessity, but a desire for more material wealth, a larger labor force, and the protection of trade interests. The possible causes of war are numerous, and not uniform across regions, or through time. Geography, climate, culture, and other factors played a role in the levels and nature of warfare in the ancient Near East but did not predetermine whether conflict between societies would arise. War may not have been inevitable or irreversible but it was self-reinforcing and once conflict emerged it progressively led to greater and more frequent violence. Warfare became embedded in the ideology of rulership in many Near Eastern societies. The more we understand the origins and causes of warfare in the past, the better able we will be in developing ways to reduce the levels of conflict in the present.

Mots-Clés: Warfare, Social Complexity, Conflict, Mesopotamia

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