

THROUGH  
ARTISTS' EYES

# War & Conflict

Jane Bingham



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Jane Bingham

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# Introduction

The stallion rears up on its hind legs, looking terrified. Its rider grasps his sword and stares wildly out of the picture. In the distance, a fire burns out of control.

The painting captures the moment before a violent action. Will the officer use his sword to run through his enemy? Or will he suffer a horrible death? This famous painting shows a scene from the wars of Napoleon Bonaparte in the 19th century. Like many images of conflict, it shows the drama and glamour of battle. However, it also reveals the horror and cruelty of war.

In this book you will see a range of artists' responses to war, dating from **prehistoric** times to the present day. Some portray war as glorious, showing confident armies and triumphant heroes. Others reveal the tragedy of conflict, and the fate of the innocent victims.



Théodore Géricault, *An Officer of the Hussars* (1812). The officer in this painting is dressed as a glamorous hero. But is he brave or terrified? How do you think Géricault feels about war?



## A range of art

Throughout history, people have been drawn to the subject of war. This book looks at a wide range of art, including paintings, **sculpture**, **tapestries**, and film. It also covers the art of weapon-making and describes the costumes worn in battle.

The book includes masterpieces by famous figures, such as Pablo Picasso, but also shows the work of many lesser-known artists.

## Images through the ages

The first five chapters of this book move through different periods of history. Then, later chapters explore how war is shown through other creative arts, such as film, music, and poetry. To help you to see exactly where a work of art was made, there is a map of the world at the end of the book, on page 52. The timeline on page 53 provides an overview of the different periods of history discussed in the book.

The final chapter of this book presents a picture of a world without war. It reveals a vision of a peaceful world where fighting and conflict no longer exist.

In this photograph, taken during the Vietnam War, a young US soldier grasps his gun bravely, while his face expresses horror and fear. As in the Géricault painting, the viewer is left to imagine what the soldier is seeing.





# Ancient armies

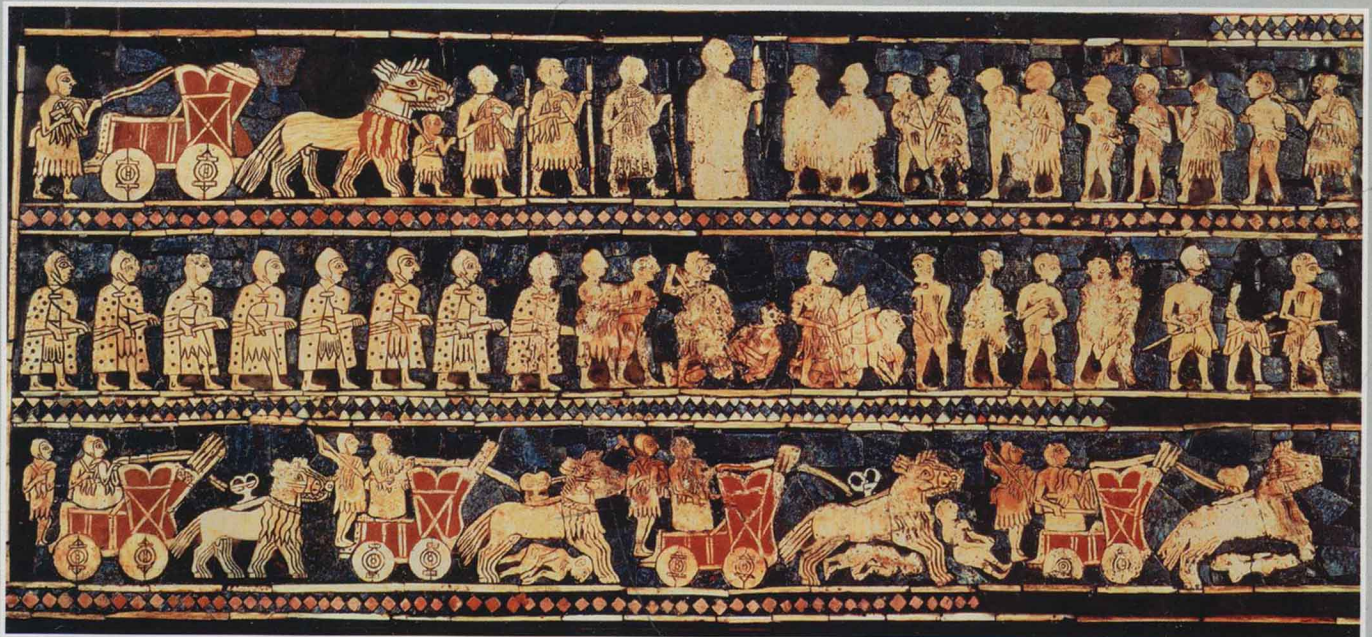
Around 20,000 years ago, some powerful rulers around the world began to build up armies. The rulers used their armies to protect their kingdoms, and to attack the lands of other rulers. Pictures of armies have been found in ancient palaces and tombs.

## The first army?

One of the earliest surviving images of war is found on the Standard of Ur. It was made around 2500 BCE in the land that is now Iraq. The Standard was discovered in a ruler's tomb in one of the world's first cities. Nobody knows exactly what the Standard was used for, but some archaeologists believe that it was fixed to a pole and carried like a flag in processions through the city.

The Standard shows a series of scenes from Sumerian life. On one side are images of peace, while on the other side, the Sumerian army is shown marching to war, riding in war chariots, and fighting a battle.

The war-like scenes on the Standard of Ur show the power and force of the Sumerian army. The Sumerian people must have felt that with a powerful army like this, they would be safe. The dramatic scenes also sent out a very clear message to any enemy kingdom – the great Sumerian army should be taken very seriously!



The Standard of Ur is one of the earliest surviving images of war. It shows Sumerian soldiers at war. The figures without uniforms are probably prisoners of war. In the bottom row, fallen enemies are trampled underfoot by the Sumerian horses.





This **fresco** shows Egyptian warriors following their pharaoh into battle. Egyptian warriors went barefoot and wore no armour. They simply relied on their shields to protect them from their enemies' spears.

## Armies of Ancient Egypt

About 500 years after the Standard of Ur was made, the Ancient Egyptians began to build up a kingdom on the banks of the River Nile. Powerful **pharaohs** led their armies to war against neighbouring kingdoms. They also kept a permanent army to defend themselves against invaders.

Images of Ancient Egyptian warriors survive in paintings, carvings, and models found in tombs. These images show well-disciplined ranks of foot soldiers, all marching in time with each other.

The foot soldiers are simply dressed in cotton **loincloths**. They carry wooden shields to defend themselves, and they are armed with tall spears. Pharaohs are shown riding to war in light, horse-drawn chariots. They are often shown shooting arrows from large, flexible bows.

The images of Egyptian warriors provide an impressive show of force. They also send out a warning to Egypt's enemies. Anyone who dares to challenge the power of Egypt should fear the mighty pharaoh and his army.



## Guardian soldiers

In 221 BCE, Shi Huangdi became the first emperor of China. He was a ruthless leader who was determined to unite the vast Chinese kingdom under his rule. Even after his death, Emperor Shi Huangdi still displayed his power. His tomb was guarded by thousands of life-sized warriors.

## Terracotta warriors

The massive burial pit of Emperor Shi Huangdi is filled with an army of over 7,000 warriors. These life-sized figures are made from a type of unglazed pottery called "terracotta". The warriors stand in rows, like a real army. The remains of terracotta horses and bronze chariots and weapons were also found in the pit.

No two terracotta warriors are exactly alike. Each one has a different facial expression or a slightly different uniform, and all the warriors are grouped according to their rank. Many of the figures originally held real weapons – bronze spears, crossbows, and arrows. Some of the crossbows were set to fire automatically at anyone who tried to break into the emperor's tomb.

## Yamato guards

The ancient Chinese practice of setting up model soldiers to guard a dead ruler was later copied in Japan. Here, life-sized tomb guardians have been found in the tombs of the Yamato emperors.

They ruled Japan from around 250 to 550 CE. Like the Chinese warriors, the Yamato tomb figures, known as *haniwa*, are made from clay. Some of the models are shown wearing leather armour, like the later **samurai** (see page 22).

## Powerful guardians

The model warriors found in Chinese and Japanese tombs provide valuable evidence about the armour and weapons of ancient armies. They also show the power and wealth of the emperors. Some of the warriors served a more practical purpose, too. With their weapons set to fire, they protected the emperor's body from tomb raiders.

## Making the warriors

Terracotta is a soft clay that can be easily moulded. The Ancient Chinese potters shaped their figures by hand. Then they used a wooden or metal tool to carve delicate details such as facial features, hair, and armour. Finally, the finished figures were baked slowly over an open fire. When the figures had completely cooled down, they were painted, using a range of natural colours made from powdered rocks and minerals.





Rows of terracotta warriors guard the tomb of China's first emperor. The warriors are incredibly life-like, and they may have been **portraits** of real soldiers.



# Conquering heroes

The civilization of Ancient Greece lasted from around 1000 to 150 BCE. The Greeks had a strong and efficient army, which reached its peak under the famous **general**, Alexander the Great. Alexander led the Greek army in a series of conquests, winning land in the Middle East and India. Many people consider him to be the greatest general who has ever lived.

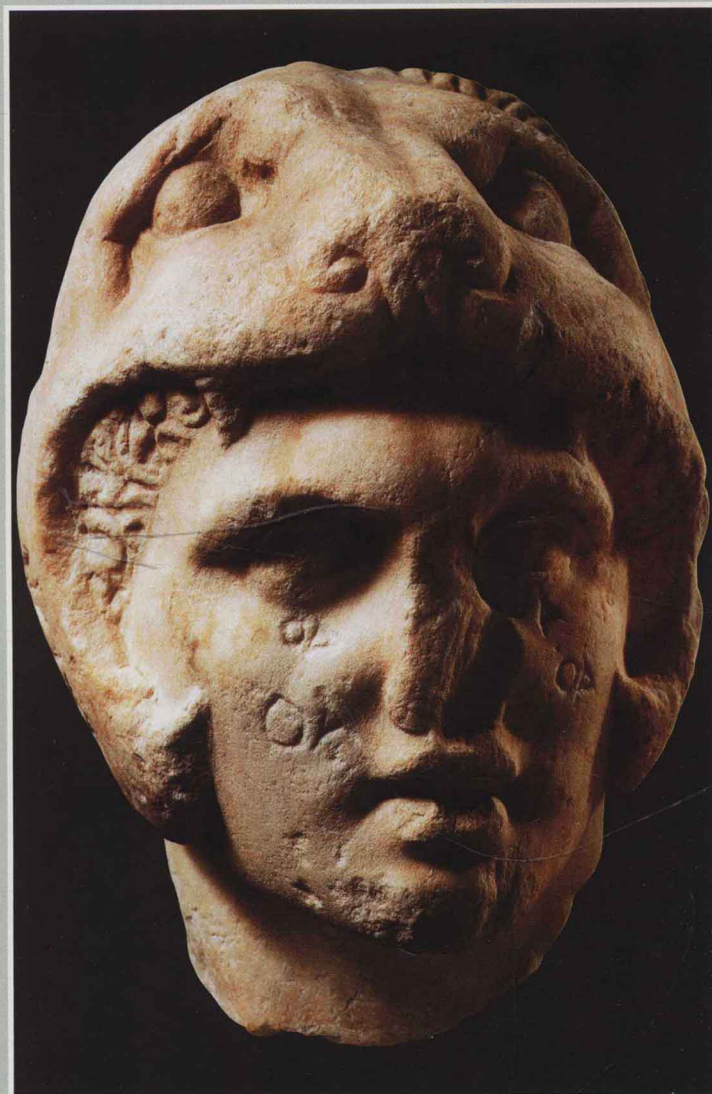
## Images of Alexander

For the Ancient Greeks, Alexander was a super-hero. Greek historians and poets told the story of his adventures, while the work of painters, **sculptors**, and **mosaic** makers made him instantly recognized all over the Greek world.

One of the earliest **portraits** of Alexander appeared on coins that were issued during his reign (time as leader). The coins show him wearing a helmet made from a lion's head. The face of the young hero stares out bravely from inside the lion's jaws. It gives a striking impression of daring and strength.

Alexander was also shown in action. A large mosaic discovered in southern Italy shows the Greeks' victory over the Persians at the battle of Issus. In the centre of the mosaic, Alexander is shown on a horse, charging bravely towards the enemy. Meanwhile, King Darius of Persia has turned his chariot.

He flees in terror from the battlefield. The mosaic gives a powerful sense of the drama and confusion of war. It also contrasts Alexander's bravery with the cowardly behaviour of the Persian commander.



A stone head of Alexander, wearing his war headdress made from a lion's head. Even though this statue is damaged, it is still clear that Alexander is presented as a young and handsome hero.



## Heroes of war

Alexander was not the only Greek war hero. Hector, Achilles, and Odysseus were also great military leaders who had poems and plays written about them.

The most famous Greek war poem was the *Iliad*, which was written by Homer. The *Iliad* tells the adventures of Odysseus in the Greek wars against the Trojans, and his plan to capture the city of Troy.

He sent a huge wooden horse as a gift to the people of Troy. This "gift" was secretly filled with Greek soldiers.

## Warriors on vases

Many Ancient Greek vases feature paintings of warriors in action. The warriors wear short tunics and elegant plumed helmets. They hold circular shields and fight with long spears.



The "Alexander mosaic" discovered at Pompeii, showing Alexander's victory at the Battle of Issus in 33 BCE. Alexander is on the left of the mosaic, preparing to throw his spear. On the right-hand side of the picture, the cowardly King Darius flees from the battlefield in his chariot.



## Roman heroes

By the first century BCE, the Greeks were losing power. In their place, the Romans became the most powerful people in the area around the Mediterranean Sea. Then the Romans started to conquer new land. Gradually, they built up a vast empire.

A series of brilliant army generals led the **campaigns** to win land for the Empire. These outstanding military leaders were often emperors as well. They were remembered and honoured with grand statues and monuments.

## Statues and monuments

The Emperor Augustus was an excellent general who won large areas of land for Rome. In order to recognize his achievements, a larger-than-life statue of Augustus was carved out of marble. This striking work of art shows Augustus dressed in his general's uniform, with one hand raised to command his troops. The statue gives an overwhelming impression of the power and strength of the Roman leader.



A marble statue of the Emperor Augustus, made around 20 BCE to celebrate one of his greatest military victories. The carvings on his battle tunic show the leader of the defeated army surrendering.



As well as carving statues, the Romans also built massive monuments to remind the people of their triumphs in war. One of the first military monuments was built by the Emperor Trajan. After his victories in Eastern Europe, Trajan had a tall column erected in Rome, with a golden statue of himself on its top. Trajan's column is covered with a series of scenes showing the Roman army in action. The column is 30 metres (100 feet) high. It could be seen for miles around and it provided a lasting record of the Romans' success.

Another famous monument was built to celebrate the victory of the Emperor Constantine over his rival, Maxentius, in 312 CE. This monument took the form of an enormous marble arch, which was covered with carvings.

The carvings show Constantine's battles. Constantine's arch was the last of a series of arches built in Rome. These impressive arches were used as the focus for processions through the city. In these grand processions, military heroes drove their chariots in triumph through the archway.

## Columns and arches

The Roman practice of building victory columns and arches was copied by later civilizations. Nelson's column in London commemorates the victory of the British navy over Napoleon's French army at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The Arc de Triomphe in Paris was built to celebrate Napoleon's victories in the early 1800s.



This detail from Trajan's column shows the Roman army fighting against the Dacians (a fierce German tribe). The Romans wear armour, carry large shields, and fight with swords. However, the Dacians wear basic trousers and fight with wooden clubs. What message do you think the sculptor was trying to give about the Romans and their enemies?



# Dressing for war

In many **indigenous** cultures, warriors wear very distinctive clothing. They may wear a special mask or headdress, or they may decorate their bodies with colours and patterns that have a special meaning. Wearing a traditional costume can connect a warrior with his **ancestors** and with past battles of his people. Costumes may also be associated with a particular god or spirit. So, if someone wears a mask **depicting** a spirit, they take on some of the powers of that spirit. Special battle dress also has the effect of making warriors look very frightening.

## African traditions

In many parts of Africa, warrior traditions still survive. Craft workers still carve warrior masks and make shields and headdresses, and people still perform ancient war ceremonies and dances.

Each different tribal group has its own traditions, costumes, and weapons. However, these weapons and costumes are no longer used for battle. When Africans get involved in wars today, they fight with modern weapons.

## Grebo masks

The Grebo people of West Africa carve war masks with small, round eyes to represent alertness and anger. Grebo masks also have a sharp, straight nose, rather like a bird's beak. The sharp nose shows that the mask's wearer is fierce and determined, and unwilling to retreat in battle. A carved block under the nose represents teeth, and the teeth are bared to show **aggression**. Today, Grebo masks are worn for traditional dances and ceremonies.



The patterns and colours on these shields have special meanings for the Masai people. In traditional African warfare, warriors believed that symbols like these helped to protect them.



## Masai warriors

Masai warriors from East Africa often decorate their bodies and faces for their ceremonial war dances. They use a white pigment to paint dramatic stripes and geometric patterns on their skin.

The warriors also carry painted shields and wear headdresses made from animals' skin and feathers. This special "battle dress" makes the warriors appear very frightening.

## Maori tattoos

For many centuries, Maori warriors in New Zealand had traditional patterns tattooed onto their faces. These striking designs made them look especially fierce in battle. The tattoos were created by making a series of deep cuts in the skin, using a sharp chisel made from bone. These cuts were filled with natural pigments made from powdered

rocks. Tattooing was a long and painful process and there was always a danger of infection. A warrior's tattoos were a sign of his bravery and physical endurance.



## Performing haka

In the past, Maori warriors performed a wild dance, known as *haka*, before they charged into battle. *Haka* involves fierce shouting, flexing the arms, and stamping the feet. Today, the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team perform *haka* before they start to play a match.

A Maori dressed in traditional costume performing *haka* – a wild dance of warriors before battle. This man also has traditional patterns tattooed on his face, making him look very fierce.



## Maya and Aztec knights

Around 300 BCE, a war-like people called the Maya began to build stone cities deep in the rainforests of Central America. A thousand years later, the **Aztec** people settled in the same area. Both these cultures flourished until the 16th century, when Spanish conquerors arrived in America.

## Feathers and skins

Warfare played a central part in the life of the Maya and the Aztecs. It was a great honour to be a warrior, and their proud warrior **knights** wore distinctive clothing made by skilled craft workers.

Maya knights wore stunning costumes made from spotted jaguar skins and the colourful feathers of rainforest birds. Maya headdresses, tunics, wristbands, and boots were all made from feathers and animal skins. The towering headdresses of the Maya knights often featured the heads of fierce beasts and birds.

The fiercest and bravest warriors in the Aztec army were the eagle and jaguar knights. Aztec eagle knights wore a costume made almost entirely from golden eagle feathers. A pair of eagle claws covered the eagle knight's feet. A long, feathered tail was attached to the back of his tunic, and his headdress was shaped like an eagle's beak. Jaguar knights wore tunics made from spotted jaguar skins and a headdress constructed from a jaguar's head.

## Special powers

When Aztec knights dressed as eagles or jaguars, they believed that they became as fearless as these creatures. Warriors believed that costumes made from the skin and feathers of fierce beasts gave their wearers special powers. In particular, the vivid green feathers of the **sacred** Quetzal bird, worn by the Maya and the Aztecs, were believed to protect warriors in battle.

## Carvings and codices

We have plenty of evidence of how the Mayan and Aztec warriors looked, thanks to their skilful carvers and artists.

The Maya people built stone **pyramids** for their gods, and covered them with carvings. Some of these carvings still survive today. They show warriors and their leaders fighting wars and taking part in ceremonies. Mayan artists also produced **codices**, an early type of folded book, which told the history of their people. These colourful picture books contain many portraits of warriors dressed in elaborate costumes.

The Aztecs also built pyramids, but they have not survived. However, Aztec codices illustrate the history of the Aztecs and their battles. They include some dramatic portraits of eagle and jaguar knights.