



Archaeologies of Conflict

John Carman



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Preface

A friend and colleague – knowing my interest in archaeologies of conflict – once asked: ‘Do you like war then?’ My answer was ‘no’ – and a fuller answer is available from a paper given at the CHAT (Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory) conference in 2003 (Carman and Carman 2007).

I first entered the field of Conflict Archaeology – not completely wittingly, and before the field received a name – in 1991, when I undertook to edit a volume on the archaeological study of warfare and violence for Cruithne Press. I had initially volunteered to contribute to such a volume as a result of my longstanding interest in matters military, but the original editor passed on to a different project and I was invited to take over. The book finally saw the light of day as *Material Harm: Archaeological Studies of War and Violence* (Carman 1997). After completing my PhD (in an entirely separate field) in 1993, I sought a new project and the entry of battlefields into the category of ‘heritage’ in the 1990s caught my interest. Out of that grew the *Bloody Meadows Project* shared with Patricia Carman from 1995 (Carman and Carman 2006). A conference in 1996 – in Durham on prehistoric conflict – led to a collaboration with Anthony Harding and the co-edited volume *Ancient Warfare: Archaeological Perspectives* (Carman and Harding 2006) that can perhaps claim to represent the standard work on prehistoric warfare in Europe so far: it has since been reprinted twice.

Like many in the burgeoning field of battlefield research at that time, Patricia Carman and I were largely unaware of the growing interest that was developing. Like others, we offered what we thought would be an eagerly snapped-up paper to help fill a day at a conference on the topic to be held in Glasgow in 1999 and organized by Tony Pollard and Phil Freeman. The wealth of papers that were in fact

offered – from all over the globe – caused a delay to that conference, which was held in the following year as the first of the *Fields of Conflict* conferences (Freeman and Pollard 2001). In the meantime, I had contributed to a session at the Fourth World Archaeological Congress in Capetown, South Africa, organized by John Schofield and others on the archaeology of modern conflict, which resulted in a further publication (Schofield et al. 2002). These various publications have given me a footing in all three main areas of conflict research in archaeology: prehistoric, historic and modern. It is these period divisions that provide the central structure for this book.

Quite by chance, in 2004, I gave a paper at a conference in Cambridge that mentioned the battlefield at Oudenaarde, one of those the *Bloody Meadows Project* had studied (Carman and Carman 2006, 78–81). As a result, we were invited by the Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Interpretation to become part of an advisory group for the commemoration of the battle to be held in 2008 (Lachaert 2008). The commemoration comprised three elements: a major exhibition about the city of Oudenaarde and the battle; a re-enactment weekend on the anniversary of the battle; and the *Fifth Fields of Conflict* conference, held in Ghent and Oudenaarde in October 2008, co-organized by Patricia Carman and myself with the Ename Center.

Out of the Oudenaarde collaboration have since emerged other projects that will be referred to in this book:

- an ongoing process of collaborative research into the Oudenaarde battlefield, one of the largest in Europe;
- the establishment of a register or inventory of battlefields in Flanders, akin to those in – or planned for – England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland;
- the foundation of the ESTOC (European Studies of Terrains of Conflict) group, comprising leading figures in battlefield archaeology from all across Europe; in turn developing

- a European register of historic battlefields; and
- guidelines on research into, conservation of and providing access to historic battlefields.

This book derives from this long involvement in Conflict Archaeology and the associations I have developed in the study of prehistoric conflict, historic battlefield research and modern conflict study. By having a place in all these three areas, I am one of the few able to give a complete overview of the development of Conflict Archaeology as a distinct branch of the discipline. The connections – or lack thereof – between the three periods provides a context for the MA in Conflict Archaeology established at the University of Birmingham in 2007. It also informs the work of a number of current PhD students, also based in the University of Birmingham, with whom I am privileged to work. The book aims not only to provide an overview of the current state of Conflict Archaeology internationally, but also to look beyond this to what Conflict Archaeology *could* be and the wider contribution it can make to the study of the past and beyond. Its ultimate purpose – in line with the purpose of the *Debates in Archaeology* series – is to promote debate and discussion within Conflict Archaeology circles and outside. I look forward to taking part in discussions of the issues it raises.

John Carman
Birmingham, March 2012

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Introduction

The last two decades has seen the emergence of a specific set of archaeological approaches to warfare and conflict across the Anglophone world and beyond, so that it is emerging as a specific area of interest for archaeologists. For some it can be classed as an archaeological specialism in its own right, something that can be called Conflict Archaeology, although what precisely to call it has been the subject of debate, some of which continues. At the time of writing, the field boasts not only several regular conference series, as well as individual sessions at most major conferences, but also a dedicated journal, a growing number of accessible and widely available publications, and specialist postgraduate courses in universities. What the field of Conflict Archaeology so far lacks, however, is a single text outlining the achievements and limitations of the field as it has emerged. This is the gap this short book seeks to fill.

Although the study of prehistory was arguably never quite the 'pacified past' that some (e.g. Keeley 1996) have claimed, there was a clear rise of interest in prehistoric conflict from the 1990s, coincident with and possibly the result of the return of warfare to Europe after an absence of 50 years. The development of key methodologies for the study of battlefields – previously understood to be largely devoid of material evidence – in the United States in the 1980s inspired a generation of British and European archaeologists to turn their attention to sites in their own countries. The end of the Cold War and

key anniversaries of the World Wars inspired others, especially in the United Kingdom, to examine the material legacy of those conflicts before they disappeared. By 2000, the study of war was firmly on the archaeological agenda and the number and range of studies has grown apace over the past decade.

This book reviews the development of the field of Conflict Archaeology with the intention of providing not only a historical assessment of the current state of the field, but also looking forward to what Conflict Archaeology could offer as it develops. The central argument – derived from the author's experience of involvement in Conflict Archaeology for two decades – is that at present Conflict Archaeology is effectively divided into closed communities that do not interact to any large extent. These separate communities are divided by period, so that prehistory, historic battlefields and modern conflict represent entirely different domains of enquiry. They are also separated by nationality, especially in the case of historic battlefield and modern conflict research, so that a truly international Conflict Archaeology has yet to emerge. These divisions prevent the exchange of information and ideas across the division boundaries and thereby limit the scope of the field to develop as it should. This book discusses these issues in detail. It clearly outlines how they affect the development of Conflict Archaeology as a coherent branch of archaeology.

The book also promotes the unification and globalization of the field by demonstrating the aspects of the different period divisions, which carry implications for the others and how they can usefully inform each other. Looking beyond archaeology to other fields that study conflict, the book argues for a move away from prehistory's conventional association with anthropology, historic battlefield archaeology's with military history and modern conflict study's with cultural resource management (CRM), to other connections that can be made. In particular, the long-term perspective on human violence and conflict that archaeology can provide is discussed in terms of

its value to those disciplines that also seek to understand war and conflict rather than merely document it: especially but not exclusively Military Sociology, Strategic Studies and (especially Critical) Security Studies.

The book is divided into seven chapters that fall into three distinct sections.

- An Introduction and Chapter 1 provide the necessary background, explaining the reason for the book and outlining the need for it. In particular, Chapter 1 outlines the history and development of Conflict Archaeology – including its antecedents – and its current structure. Taking a critical stance, it outlines the ‘fault-lines’ that divide the periods of study, and the consequent gaps in coverage. The diversity of names that have been offered for the field is examined for their implications and the limitations they place upon its development.
- The three subsequent chapters each describe one of the three ‘periods’ into which the archaeological study of conflict is divided, emphasizing the distinctive qualities of each and the periods and areas each leaves unaddressed. The specific historical development of that branch of Conflict Archaeology are outlined. Key developments and texts are identified, and the specific discourse this encourages is analysed. The extra-disciplinary influences and links that exist, and the nature of the academic community thereby created, are made clear. Together, these chapters represent a comprehensive and challenging critique of Conflict Archaeology as it presently exists.
- Chapter 5 and the Conclusion look forward to what Conflict Archaeology could be and the wider contribution it could make to fields beyond archaeology. They focus on the dormant links between periods that are at present unexploited, and the benefits for the field of developing those linkages. They also look beyond