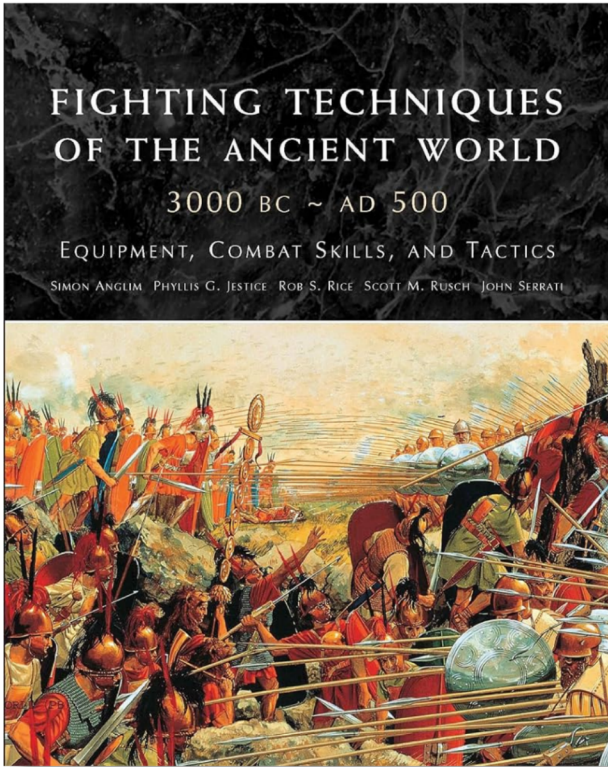




HOSEA LESSON 37



(Hosea 11:6) The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels.

(Nahum 3:2-3) The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end — they stumble over the bodies!

The Assyrians are known to history as a people of brute force, with a strong military organization, who were responsible for several advancements in military technology. Yet most of all, they are remembered for their utter savagery. They created the world's first great army, and the world's first great empire. This was held together by two factors: their superior abilities in siege warfare, and their reliance on sheer, unadulterated terror. It was Assyrian policy always to demand that examples be made from those who resisted them; this included deportations of entire peoples and horrific physical punishments. One inscription from a temple in the city of Nimrod records the fate of the leaders of the city of Suru on the Euphrates River, who rebelled from and were reconquered by King Ashurbanipal (668–626 BC). "I built a pillar at the city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins: some I walled up inside the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes." Such punishments were not uncommon. Furthermore, inscriptions recording these vicious acts of retribution were displayed throughout the empire to serve as a warning. Yet this officially sanctioned cruelty seems to have had the opposite effect: though the Assyrians and their army were respected and feared, they were most of all hated, and the subjects of their empire were in an almost constant state of rebellion. Throughout much of Assyria's history, this had the positive effect of giving the army a core of highly experienced troops and placing it in a state of perpetual combat readiness. However, the constant warfare eventually depleted Assyria of much of its manpower; shortly after the empire had reached its zenith in the mid-seventh century BC, it began to crumble. As a result of the great loathing the people of the empire felt towards the Assyrians, the first cracks to appear were quickly exploited, and the end was brutally swift. By the last quarter of the seventh century BC, nearly every part of the empire was in a state of rebellion; these were not just struggles of freedom, but wars of revenge. In 612 BC, a coalition of rebels seized the empire's capital at Ninevah, and burnt it to the ground. According to the Bible (Nahum 3:7), the sentiment that echoed across the near east as one of the world's most brutal empires came to a brutal end was this: "Ninevah is laid to waste. Who will mourn her?" (pages 185-187)