



The Horsemen of Israel: Horses and Chariotry in Monarchic Israel (Ninth–Eighth Centuries B.C.E.)

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Book Review

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The Horsemen of Israel: Horses and Chariotry in Monarchic Israel (Ninth–Eighth Centuries B.C.E.)

By Deborah O’Daniel Cantrell (History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant 1). Pp. xii + 150, figs. 16, tables 4. Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind. 2011. \$39.50. ISBN 978-1-57506-204-4 (cloth).

Reviewed by [118.3](#)

[Carolyn Willekes](#)

The domestication of the horse and its subsequent use in both chariotry and cavalry had a massive impact on the ancient Near Eastern world. The Hittites, Egyptians, and Assyrians built their empires with horsepower, and, as a result, the horse became the most valuable commodity in the Near East. Israel, despite its location at the center of the empires, has traditionally been labeled as a horse-poor region by scholars. With the present volume, Cantrell aims to disprove this notion by combining her academic training and a lifetime of experience riding and competing with horses to present a reevaluation of the horse in Iron Age Israel.

Cantrell begins with a subject that is essential to any study relating to the horse and its use by humans: equine physiology and behavior. The author presents the topic clearly and effectively by exploring the role of innate equine prey drive, gender, and physical limitations in relation to the battlefield. With this introduction, Cantrell clearly sets out a theme that continues through the rest of her book: that horsepower determined the outcome of battles in the Iron Age.

In the following two chapters, the author combines epigraphic, architectural, archaeological, and environmental evidence to show that the Israelite army was more than capable of breeding, maintaining, and fielding a sizeable chariot corps by the Iron Age. Iron Age Israel was rich in the resources required for large-scale horse husbandry—water, pasture, and grain. The topography of Israel, specifically the combination of open plains and the relatively compact size of the region, made it ideal for the use of chariots. The plains offered plenty of room for training, while the short distances between forts and way stations “made travel by chariot the most feasible means of transportation” (66), and “the short distances between the fortresses allowed Israel and Judah to build and maintain a cohesive standing army” (67). Elsewhere she reinforces this notion by comparing the geographical situation in Israel with that of Assyria, where the annual mustering of horses was considerably more time-consuming because of the distances between breeding/training farms and the military forts.

Cantrell’s two largest pieces of evidence for chariotry in Iron Age Israel are closely interrelated. These are the architectural innovation of six-chambered gates in the late 10th and early ninth centuries and the construction of stables throughout the region. The author persuasively argues that the six-chambered gates found at the entrances of fortresses across Israel were used for the harnessing of chariot teams and the inspection of horses returning from the field. Here we see Cantrell make excellent use of her equestrian background in describing how these chambers made the harnessing/unharnessing process safer and more efficient for horses and people. The discussion of the six-chambered gates leads into a case study of the stables at Megiddo (ch. 5). It is not surprising that Cantrell devotes an entire chapter to the topic of Megiddo, as she was part of a team of archaeologists and equine professionals invited to work there during the 1998 and 2000 excavation seasons. The purpose was to reexamine the Megiddo stables in light of arguments suggesting that the structures were never used as stables, as they were unsuitable for horses (esp. J.B. Pritchard, “The Megiddo Stables: A Reassessment,” in J.A. Sanders, ed., *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck* [Garden City, N.Y. 1970]). Cantrell methodically goes through each of Pritchard’s points and refutes them by using her understanding of equine behavior. The author does an admirable job of showing how the Megiddo structures functioned as stables; however, she does get a bit over-

enthusiastic in this chapter, and her writing becomes stilted and repetitive. This is perhaps the result of trying to translate terminology that is second nature to an equestrian into language that is easily understood by a layperson.

Chapter 6 deals with the topic of warfare in Iron Age Israel, although the title is somewhat misleading. This chapter is more a chronological summary of major battles/invasions in Iron Age Israel than a discussion of actual combat tactics and related military issues. Nonetheless, Cantrell furthers her basic argument for horses in Iron Age Israel by showing that Israel would have been quickly swallowed up by its powerful neighbors had the Israelite army not included a substantial and well-trained chariot corps.

The final chapter offers a cursory look at the transition from chariot warfare to cavalry. I can understand why Cantrell felt it necessary to include this brief chapter (six pages), but it does not relate to the primary purpose of the book, and it introduces a number of questions that are left unanswered.

In sum, this book provides a valuable contribution to the corpus of work on equines in the ancient world. Cantrell provides a clear and concise argument for the importance of the horse to Iron Age Israel by successfully combining literary, archaeological, and architectural evidence with her own knowledge of equine husbandry and training.

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The chariot[s] of Israel and its horsemen!". Biblical scholars and commentators have different opinions about the symbolism of this phrase. Many (like the Aramaic Targum cited in another answer) understand this as a reference to the prophet [Elijah] being more important to Israel, especially in its military defense, than chariots and horsemen. Biblical scholar Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that this draws on the imagery of YHWH as master charioteer of the hosts of heaven (cf. Psalms 68:5, 68:18), and thus reinforces the image of the prophet as carrier of the Divine word. Thus, if this reading is correct, Jehoash is referring to Elisha and mourning the loss of the great prophet and spiritual defender of Israel, rather than what might appear to be an unrelated cry regarding Israel's army. The Horsemen of Israel: Horses and Chariots in Monarchic Israel (Ninth-Eighth Centuries B.C.E.). History, Archaeology and Culture of the Levant 1 by Deborah O'Daniell Cantrell. The Horsemen of Israel: Horses and Chariots in Monarchic Israel (Ninth-Eighth Centuries B.C.E.). History, Archaeology and Culture of the Levant 1 by Deborah O'Daniell Cantrell (pp. 168-169). Review by: Stuart Weeks. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23496463>. Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity by Mark S. Kinzer, Jennifer M. Rosner. Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity by Mark S. Kinzer, Jennifer M. Rosner (p. 171). Review by: H.G.M. Williamson.