

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This is an updated and expanded edition of a book that originally appeared in Hebrew in 1996. The expansion is reflected primarily in the addition of new sources and bibliographical items that have appeared since the Hebrew publication. Citations of various sources have been updated in the light of new editions published in recent years.

Eleven years have passed since the appearance of the Hebrew edition. Unfortunately, in the course of these years there has been no progress in terms of the isolated situation of the State of Israel. The hopes expressed in the preface to the Hebrew edition, that isolation would gradually diminish and with it the sense of siege that has beset Israel's inhabitants since its establishment, are as yet unfulfilled.

The Perry Foundation undertook to publish the present English edition of the book. The Society of Biblical Literature contributed partial funding of the translation. Dr. Dana Cohen has edited the English style. My thanks to them all.

Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Abbreviations | XIII |
| Chapter One: Introduction | 1 |
| I. What is siege warfare? | 1 |
| II. Purpose of the Book and Method of Discussion | 3 |
| Chapter Two: Sources | 7 |
| I. Literary Sources | 7 |
| 1. Royal Inscriptions | 8 |
| 2. The Historical Story | 9 |
| 3. Greek Historians | 13 |
| 4. Biblical Oracles | 14 |
| 5. Laws | 14 |
| 6. Practical Military Literature | 16 |
| II. Non-literary Documents | 17 |
| 1. Letters | 17 |
| 2. Siege Documents | 18 |
| 3. A Contract | 18 |
| 4. Divinatory Literature | 18 |
| 5. Mathematical Texts | 23 |
| III. Artistic Representations of Siege Warfare | 24 |
| IV. Archaeological Evidence | 26 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter Three: Military Aspects | 35 |
| I. The Blockade | 35 |
| 1. Negotiation | 43 |
| (a) “Friendly Words” | 44 |
| (b) Threats and Intimidation | 48 |
| (c) Rebellion or Riots in the City | 54 |
| 2. Famine | 57 |
| 3. Thirst | 64 |
| 4. Epidemics | 66 |
| II. The Breakthrough | 68 |
| 1. Assault Ladders | 69 |
| 2. Tunnels | 76 |
| 3. Breaching with Battering Rams | 82 |
| (a) Preparations: Construction of the Siege Ramp | 84 |
| (b) Ramming: Transfer and Employment of the Battering Rams and Breaching the Wall | 90 |
| (c) Penetration: the Entry of Warriors Through the Breach | 93 |
| 4. Siege Towers | 97 |
| 5. Siege and Military Engines | 100 |
| 6. Stratagems | 102 |
| 7. The Impact of Artillery on Siege Warfare | 103 |
| 8. Considerations for Preferring Siege to Surrender | 106 |
| | |
| Chapter Four: Legal and Economic Aspects | 114 |
| I. Introduction | 114 |
| II. The Babylonian Siege Documents | 118 |
| 1. A state of Siege | 119 |
| 2. “Famine (and hardship) in the land” | 123 |
| 3. High Prices of Grain | 124 |
| 4. Parents Sell their Children | 127 |
| 5. Explicit Literary Motifs | 129 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| III. Documents of Siege and Hardship from Emar | 135 |
| 1. Explicit Evidence of Siege | 136 |
| 2. (a) Explicit Mention of Hostilities (War) | 137 |
| (b) The General Designation “In the year of hardship” | 139 |
| 3. High Prices of Grain | 140 |
| 4. Parents Sell Their Children | 143 |
| IV. The Legal Significance of the Hardship Formulae | 143 |
| V. “Charitable Deeds” | 147 |
| | |
| Chapter Five: Social Aspects | 152 |
| I. Between Man and God | 152 |
| 1. Prayer | 152 |
| 2. Child Sacrifice | 153 |
| 3. Appeal to the God(s) During Siege | 159 |
| II. Public Life | 162 |
| 1. Maintaining Morale and the Handling of Hostile Elements | 162 |
| 2. Treatment of the Wounded | 167 |
| 3. The Liberation of Slaves | 169 |
| | |
| Bibliography | 173 |
| | |
| Index of Subjects and Names | 191 |
| | |
| Index of Sources | 198 |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I. WHAT IS SIEGE WARFARE?

Siege is a form of warfare in which one of the combative sides defends itself within an area delimited by a system of obstacles, while the opponent attempts to penetrate these obstacles and to engage in hand-to-hand combat, in which its superiority is assured. Unlike pitched battle, which is generally dynamic and brief and in which mobility plays a significant role, siege warfare is protracted and static by nature.

The decision regarding the form of warfare, that is, the determination that a given confrontation between the two parties will take the form of siege rather than that of pitched battle, lies in the hands of the defending party. Generally, such a decision is taken when the defender estimates that his chances of success on the battlefield are slim, and therefore makes an effort to refrain from direct engagement. The attacker determines the technical nature of the siege – whether a breakthrough to the protected area is attempted or a blockade is imposed, which entails the risk of starvation, thirst, and disease for the besieged. This decision depends on the resources at the attacker’s disposal, including time, technical means, the cost in manpower and the availability of breakthrough materiel.¹

1 Unlike the breakthrough, the blockade entails loss of time and involves supply problems for the attackers, but minimizes the loss of manpower; Cf. Plutarch, *Pericles*, 27: “He (Pericles) conquered and routed the enemy and at once walled in their city (Samos), preferring to get the upper hand and capture it at a price of money and time, rather than of the wounds and deadly perils of his fellow-citizens (the Athenians).” By contrast, armies of far-flung empires, with several potential areas of conflict, could not afford extended siege battles – due to factors of time and space – and were forced to break