



## Ancient Siege Warfare

*By Paul B. Kern, Paul Bentley Kern*

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**Ancient Siege Warfare** By Paul B. Kern, Paul Bentley Kern

Siege warfare was the most brutal form of war in the ancient world. Typically involving whole urban societies, ancient siege warfare often ended in the sack of a city and the massacre or enslavement of entire populations. Assyrian emperors, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and the future Roman emperor Titus all commanded great sieges that ended in fearsome slaughters. This book examines the origins of such unleashed violence and shows how the methods of siege warfare devalued the skills of traditional warriors as well as the shared values of honor and prowess that limited the violence of traditional field battles.

Siege warfare was the only form of war in the ancient world in which the presence of women was common. This book pays major attention to their role in sieges, as both participants and victims, and to the way their presence affected the nature of siege warfare. The book also examines the social and moral chaos of siege warfare as the major theme in its representation in ancient literature. The Bible, Assyrian palace records, and Greek and Roman literature contain horrifying accounts of siege warfare. Ancient Hebrew prophets and Greek poets such as Homer and Euripides described it as a world without limits or structure or morality, in which men violated deep-seated taboos about sex, pregnancy, and death.

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## **Ancient Siege Warfare By Paul B. Kern, Paul Bentley Kern Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

The idea of total war--meaning war waged against a whole people, rather than merely its army--didn't start with bombing raids during the Second World War. Nor did it begin with Sherman's march to the sea. Instead, it dates to the beginning of recorded history itself. "All the characteristics of modern war--the blurring of the line between battlefield and society, the engulfing of women and children in the violence of war, the destruction of society's infrastructure, the uprooting of entire populations--were anticipated in ancient siege warfare," writes author Paul Bentley Kern. This fascinating book begins by describing the theory of siege warfare and its engineering, but focuses mainly on its historical practice from biblical times through the Roman period. Kern shows that besieging fortifications was mainly a technical problem that put warriors on the sidelines. When the problem was solved, however, "the assaulting troops found themselves not on a conventional field of battle opposed by an army but in a maze of streets and buildings opposed by an entire population," writes Kern. "Often they were under orders to sack the city, one of the few circumstances in which military commanders countenanced indiscriminate violence." Kern does not shy away from this uncomfortable fact, and actually focuses on the special plight of women and children: "Their presence threatened the notion of war as a contest between warriors, undermined the conventional standards of honor and prowess that governed ancient warfare, and paradoxically made war less restrained by creating a morally chaotic cityscape in which not only the walls collapsed but deeply rooted social and moral distinctions as well." *Ancient Siege Warfare* is a masterful book by an author in full command of his compelling subject. --  
*John J. Miller*

### About the Author

Paul Bentley Kern is Professor of History at Indiana University Northwest.

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