
The work under review is an updated and expanded version (primarily in terms of bibliography) of the author’s earlier 1996 Hebrew edition of this title. The volume is divided into five chapters: “Introduction” (pp. 1–6), “Sources” (pp. 7–34), “Military Aspects” (pp. 35–113), “Legal and Economic Aspects” (pp. 114–51), and “Social Aspects” (pp. 152–72). Rounding out the volume are a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, an index of subjects and names, and an index of sources.

The brief introduction sets some general limits to the treatment. For example, the author eschews theoretical aspects of siege warfare to focus on the presentation of actual data. In “Sources,” Ephʿal discusses the uses and limits of different materials: texts, artistic representations, and archaeological evidence. This section helpfully discusses such problems as the propagandistic nature of royal inscriptions, the literary character of biblical narratives, and the vexed issue of the literary topos. The author makes an especially salient point (pp. 9–10) when he notes that even if the descriptions of specific sieges may contain fictional elements or literary topos, the accounts were meant to be “accepted by the audience for whom they were composed, and therefore reflect military techniques or political, social and economic realities at the time of composition.” Even a work of fiction is often grounded in reality.

The real heart of the work is the third (and longest) chapter: “Military Aspects.” First, Ephʿal discusses the various ways to bring a walled settlement to submission, without resort to an actual assault, through the use of a blockade. These include negotiations, famine, thirst, and epidemics (the latter three can also affect the besiegers to some degree). This is followed by a discussion of the various means available to breach the defensive fortifications. These include assault ladders, tunnels, battering rams, siege towers, siege and military engines (i.e., devices mentioned in texts as being used in sieges but of uncertain nature), stratagems (such as the Trojan Horse), and, near the end of the period discussed, torsion-powered artillery. This is a well-balanced section; the discussion of the various terms used in cuneiform sources for these operations is especially helpful.

The fourth chapter, “Legal and Economic Aspects,” felt like the odd man out. Instead of being a broad, synthetic survey of the topic, like the previous chapter, it was narrowly focused on certain textual formulae found in documents from Babylonia and the Syrian city of Emar, relating primarily to fluctuating grain prices and the hardship sale of people into slavery as a result of sieges. This chapter probably should have been published as a separate article and summarized briefly in the current work’s fifth chapter.

The chapter “Social Aspects” covers issues related to religion (prayer and human sacrifice) and public life (morale, medical treatment, the freeing of slaves). This chapter might also have evaluated the effects of a siege once the settlement was taken. For example, what happened to the infrastructure of the town, to the soldiers and civilian population (exile, death, enslavement), and to the surrounding orchards and fields in the immediate aftermath of a siege? What were the longer-term repercussions? The studies in recent years of settlement/population trends in Judah following the Assyrian (Sennacherib, 701 B.C.) and Babylonian (587 B.C.) invasions could have been helpfully employed. The concept of דנ, the ban/devotion, would certainly tie into the religious component of the chapter.

The bibliography is solid up to the initial Hebrew publication date of 1996, but less thorough after that. For example, the general survey of Kern (1999) is not cited, nor are more specialized works on this topic from the ancient Near East, such as those of Oredsson (2000) and Ackermann, Bruins, and Maeir (2005).

At times, it would have been helpful if Ephʿal had defined his terms before he set out to discuss their history and use. For example, he discusses siege towers (pp. 97–99) but does not describe what such a structure is. His text seems to imply that it was a tower used as an archery platform for shooting into the besieged city. However, because a wooden wheeled tower from a relief in the tomb of General Intef of the Middle Kingdom shows only an ax-armed soldier at the top of such a platform, the structure does not count as a siege tower (p. 98, n. 182); yet a mobile tower with a droppable gangplank was a practical way to assault a city, and such a plank may be depicted in this relief. It is also difficult to know what to call the mobile Egyptian tower if it is not a siege tower. An odd mistake is found on p. 97, where the author states there are no depictions of siege towers in ancient Near Eastern art, yet figure 10 on the next page shows just such a tower and is even mentioned in the caption. A similar issue with terminology is found on p. 82, where it is said that the Egyptians did not possess battering rams. Yet the well-known tomb painting from Beni-Hasan (Yadin 1963: 70, 158–59) shows soldiers with a long, pike-like object inside what is probably a movable shed preparing to attack the town’s walls. For all practical purposes, this is a type of battering ram similar to those used by the Assyrians to pry bricks and stones from a town wall. The only difference is that the Egyptian shed does not have wheels. Is, then, a battering ram always wheeled? This does not seem to be the case, because figure 6.1 shows
a reconstruction of a “Battering ram” without wheels. Defin-
ting terms beforehand would have obviated such confusion.

When reviewing a book, I first look for a statement by the
author in the preface or introduction about what his or her
goals are. Who is the intended audience; professionals, stu-
dents, lay readers? What is the intended scope of the work:
brief scholarly survey, extensive and in-depth treatment of
a broad subject, or narrowly focused analysis? It is only fair
to judge an author based on what he or she set out to do, not
on the reviewer’s beliefs about what the author should have
done. But Ephʿal’s introductory material does not provide
such a statement. Beyond the general topic of siege warfare,
the reader is given only the general chronological limits of
the study—that is, the period prior to the arrival of Alexan-
der the Great. There is not even an indication of the earliest
intended limit of the study (e.g., did prehistoric sieges hap-
pen?). Other than serving as a platform to discuss a variety
of topics related to siege warfare, it is unclear what the specific
goals of the work might be. Similarly, the volume has no
summary or conclusion to tie together all the diverse mate-
rial into some kind of synthesis. It simply ends. It is perhaps
no wonder that three of the five chapters contain “Aspects”
in their title, reflecting something of the ad hoc nature of the
presentation. It also would have been helpful if the author
had specified why certain topics were left out of this analy-
sis. Some examples are mentioned above. Another example
of a curious omission is that, while various techniques of
breaking through fortifications are discussed at some length,
lttle is actually said about the nature of fortifications in the
ancient Near East, a topic about which archaeology and ar-
tistic representation have provided much data. For the above
reasons, it is difficult to ascertain whether the author was
successful in what he set out to accomplish. If he intended
to canvas the complete subject of siege warfare in the an-
cient Near East, then he was not successful. If his intent was
merely to present a series of limited, but related, essays tied
to this general subject, then he was much more successful.

Despite the above caveats, the volume is a gold mine of
information and well worth the read, especially on some top-
ics not covered by Yadin’s seminal, but now dated, work, or
by other more general works on siege warfare in the ancient
world, which primarily focus on the achievements of the
Hellenistic and Roman periods. The topics that Ephʿal does
discuss are nicely supported by material from all three of the
sources he employs. After reading Ephʿal’s book, it is quite
clear that, except for torsion-powered artillery, the Assyrians
were every bit as proficient at sieges as their more famous
classical successors. A volume covering the topic in depth
across the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean is
much to be desired.

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Resheph: A Syro-Canaanite Deity, by Edward
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€75.00.

This volume is the latest in a long line of detailed schol-
arily volumes by Lipiński. According to the foreword,
Lipiński began collecting material on Resheph 30 years ago.
The discovery of new tablets at Ebla and Emar, as well as
other developments, delayed this work.

Chapter 1 addresses Resheph in the Ebla archives, which
show that he is a very old deity. According to Lipiński, the
god’s name “must . . . be a derivative of the same Semitic
root as the Akkadian divine epithet rašbu, ‘redoubtable’,
‘awesome’, ‘fearsome’” (p. 23). Lipiński rejects any pu-
tative etymological connection with “fire” or “plague.” In
view of the varied proposals (see Xella 1999: 701), a cir-
cumspect approach is perhaps advisable. A bilingual lexical
text from Ebla identifies Resheph with Nergal, a war god.
Lipiński sees no evidence for the latter’s chthonic attributes
in the texts from Ebla and thus views such attributes as sec-
ondary at this point. Lipiński in turn cautions against attrib-
uting the same features to Resheph (cf. Fulco 1976; Xella
1999: 701). The argument is essentially one from silence in
the Ebla texts. The Ebla texts also identify the god accord-
ing to places, most commonly Resheph of Adani (over 85
times), Resheph of Gunnu (about 50 times), and Resheph
of Tunip (about 25 times). The first is a place not far from
Ebla; the second is “Resheph of the enclosure,” a sort of
expression also known in the Ugaritic texts (and not Resheph
plus a theophoric element, nor “Resheph of the garden,” as
entertained by others); and the third might be Tell Asharne.
Befitting his nature as a war god, these forms of Resheph
receive weapons as offerings.