

Book Reviews

***The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East*, by Israel Eph'al. *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, Volume 36*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. XVII + 211 pp., 11 figures. Cloth. €80.00.**

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," Eph'al 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 *topoi*, 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, Eph'al 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 *חרם*, 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 Maier (2005).

At times, it would have been helpful if Eph'al 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. Defining 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, students, 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 Eph’al’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 Alexander the Great. There is not even an indication of the earliest intended limit of the study (e.g., did prehistoric sieges happen?). 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 material 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 analysis. 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, little is actually said about the nature of fortifications in the ancient Near East, a topic about which archaeology and artistic 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 ancient 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 topics 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 Eph’al does discuss are nicely supported by material from all three of the sources he employs. After reading Eph’al’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 Lipiński. *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 181; *Studia Phoenicia* XIX. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2009. 297 pp., 9 figures, 1 color photograph. Cloth. €75.00.

This volume is the latest in a long line of detailed scholarly 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 putative etymological connection with “fire” or “plague.” In view of the varied proposals (see Xella 1999: 701), a circumspect 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 secondary at this point. Lipiński in turn cautions against attributing 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 according 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.