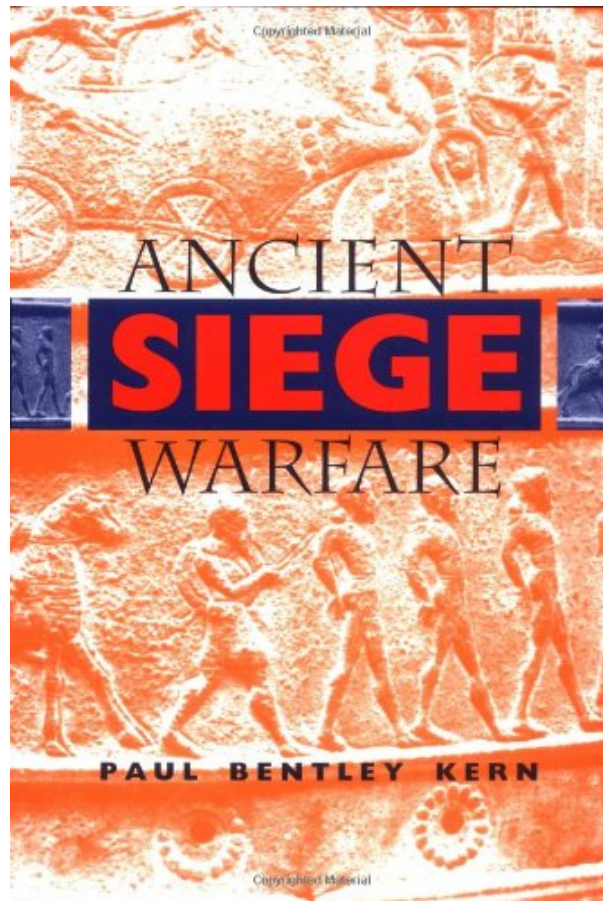
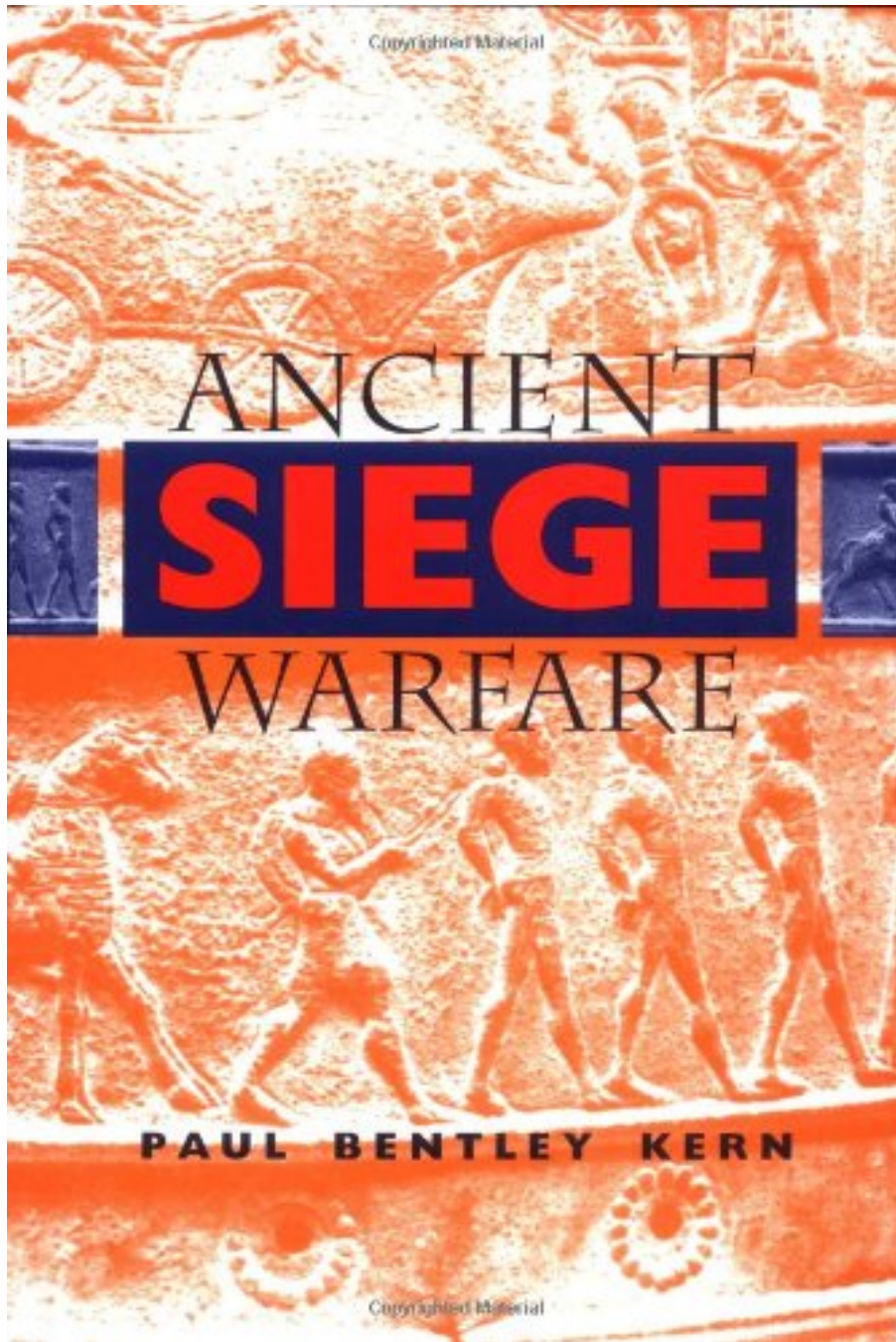


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The idea of total war--meaning war waged against a whole people, rather than merely its army--didn't start with bombing raids during the Second World War. Nor did it begin with Sherman's march to the sea. Instead, it dates to the beginning of recorded 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

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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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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Brian

Awesome product

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A Good Overview of Siege Warfare

By Aarontjax

So little has been written about ancient siege techniques that I was immediately intrigued when I first saw this book. After reading it I must profess that I enjoyed it immensely. It is at times plodding and repetitive, however it does an excellent job of emphasizing the importance of siege warfare in the ancient world. I find that I now have a much deeper appreciation of what was required to take or protect a city in ancient days.

This book provides a good overview of the developments of siege tactics throughout ancient history. Most of the subject matter deals with empires or peoples near the Mediterranean. The author does a good job of organizing the available sources to back up his discussions of different cultures, sieges, etc. At times he does attempt to expand on the sources and usually his opinions are logical interpretations. An added bonus is his bibliography which is an excellent source of references for continued research if desired.

All in all I found this book to be very interesting. It handles a lot of subject matter in detail that is usually passed over or severely summarized by military historians. Even a seasoned military historian will find that he has learned something from this book. It brings a surprising level of humanity to ancient warfare. However, one thing I do wish the book had was a chapter that went in depth into the design and manufacture of the different siege machinery. This is touched on but not nearly enough.

31 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting & Detailed Account of Ancient Siege Warfare

By Aussie Reader

After I finished reading this book I was not too sure how I felt, I was a bit ambivalent about how good or bad it was. At times I found it hard going to continue but then it picked up with a very interesting account of some particular siege or battle. However other times I felt it was becoming repetitive, the same story with variations on the number of dead or the way the victors tortured or killed their enemies. There is no doubt that the author has thoroughly researched the subject but the narrative came across a bit dry in the end. The chapters on the Roman army's conduct of siege operations stand out. There were a number of line drawings and maps but I found the maps to be of poor quality, I'm sure better ones could have been found. If you are looking for a detailed account of how siege operations were carried out in ancient times and the result of those sieges then this is the book for you. I can only say that I did not find the narrative as free flowing as I usually like in a book, it was almost like reading a school text book at times. I would recommend this book only for those who have a keen interest in the subject matter.

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