

Roman siege tower

A siege tower was widely used in antiquity. The Assyrians already used it for siege and conquest. The Persians adopted this method of attack, and the Greeks soon used it as well. In ancient Rome, siege towers were used since the 2nd century BC. The Romans built their first towers on the Greek model.

Siege towers were equipped in different ways. The typical features are shown in this model. On six to eight wheels, the tower was moved as close as possible to the walls of the besieged cities. So that the towers could be moved, the terrain was levelled or ramps were built. In the lower part was a movable battering ram with which the walls could be torn down. Above this was one or more floors from which the soldiers could cross over to the wall of the besieged city with the help of a drop bridge. From the top platform archers could attack the guards on the wall. The towers, built of wood, were often covered with fireproof material to protect the tower and the soldiers inside from attacks with incendiary devices. Some towers were even armoured with iron plates. As these towers were more difficult to move due to their weight and sometimes even collapsed, this armouring was soon abandoned again.

Under Caesar, there were siege towers that had up to ten storeys. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, the Romans used a tower that is said to have been over 22 metres high. The largest Roman siege tower was used in the storming of the Jewish fortress of Masada in 73 AD. Because of the height of the walls, the Romans had to build a tower more than 26 metres high for this battle.

Some towers were hung with animal skins to take the momentum away from the attackers' arrows. Since many besieged cities raised their walls during the siege to avoid the attacks with the drop bridges, there is said to have been another special construction. Allegedly, the Romans equipped some towers with height-adjustable platforms that could be operated with pulleys. Unfortunately, there are hardly any sources that prove the existence of such towers.