CHAPTER 1: URBAN SPACE

Introduction

Ea tanta est urbs ut ex quattuor urbis maximis constare dicatur ...
(So vast is the city that it is said to be four of the greatest cities standing together ...)

Syracuse was the most important city of ancient Sicily. Diodorus (26.19.1) called Syracuse a τετράπολις, a description which closely mirrors Cicero’s above (Verr. 2.4.118). This description reappears in the fourth century AD in Ausonius’ ordo urbi-bium nobilium (16–17) as ‘quis <sileat> quadruplices Syracusas’. From its foundation about 734/3 BC, down to the Byzantine period and its sack by the Arabs in AD 878, Syracuse maintained an actual or perceived dominant role in Sicily, in the island’s affairs and throughout Magna Graecia. Moreover, it is remarkable to note that Syracuse was almost the sole urban community in ancient Sicily to be occupied continuously from its foundation. Its Greek, Sikel or Elymian neighbours: Messene, Tauromenion, Naxos, Catane, Gela, Akragas, Selinous and Segesta, were all at one time or another destroyed and left without inhabitants. Some of these catastrophic events, such as those at Tauromenion, Messene and Catane, were brief in the overall histories of the sites, others, such as those at Gela, Kamarina and Selinous, were of long if not permanent duration. Because of its uninterrupted settlement patterns, Syracuse was unique in Sicily.

Syracuse was also, by far, the largest city in ancient Sicily. The circuit walls, for which the city became justly famous, enclosed a greater area than did the Aurelian Walls at Rome. The overall length of the fortifications is usually given as 180 stades, (33.2 kms/just over 20.6 miles); the northern defences alone were thirty stades in length.

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1 Ausonius by then ranked Catania (Katane) one ahead of Syracuse in his list of the twenty most famous cities of the Roman empire. This statement must surely only apply to the later imperial period, and may result from the devastation caused by the Franks in the late third century or could just as easily be a personal rather than an official appraisal. He follows Cicero in assigning four distinct quarters to Syracuse. Strabo, 6.2.4, however, includes Epipolai as a fifth part of the city. There were obviously two versions of the description.

2 For the foundation date see Leighton, 1999, 222–23; cf. F. de Angelis, Megara Hyblaia and Selinous: The Development of Two Greek City-States in Archaic Sicily, Oxford 2003, 13.

3 According to H.-P. Drögemüller, Syrakus: Zur Topographie und Geschichte einer griechischen Stadt, Heidelberg 1969, 53, Ortygia covers 50 hectares, while that area around the agora – the first to be colonised on the mainland – covers another 70 hectares. The later expansion of Akradina to the southern edge of Epipolai added 114 hectares and finally Akradina expanded to 135 hectares. Tyche was a further small extension of 30 hectares mainly to the north of Akradina, while Neapolis, a much larger extension, corresponding to the present archaeological zone, another 110 hectares to the west and north. Epipolai, later included within the defensive circuit walls, was a larger area than the rest of the city’s suburbs added together. Epipolai, the highest point of the city reaching 150 metres (rather less than 500 feet), is about seven kilometres (4 miles) in length, and four kilometres (2.5 miles) in width above Akradina, H.-P. Stahl, Thucydides: Man’s Place in History, Swansea 2003, 201.
Syracuse in antiquity

The city had fortifications from an early date and the earliest walls joined the mainland suburb of Akradina both to the agora and island of Ortygia. And when Tyche was developed this area was also fortified and thus each of the ‘cities’ came to possess its own defences. However, a consolidation process occurred during the tyranny of Dionysius I, who witnessed the vulnerability of the city when the Epipolai plateau fell into enemy hands, and decided on the construction of circuit walls enclosing all four cities and the neighbouring higher ground overlooking the city.\(^5\)

Syracuse was the most populous city of Sicily (Cic. \textit{Verr.} 2.5.65), with about 200 000 inhabitants when the city was at its greatest extent. And since it had a very benign climate where the sun always shone, says Cicero (\textit{Verr.} 2.5.26), this factor no doubt contributed to its attraction as a destination to settle. It was, moreover, the most affluent of the Sicilian cities (Cic. \textit{Verr.} 2.4.131–134); and there are various comments about its wealth and its renowned art and architecture.

... such great wealth has been obtained by the people of Syracuse that their name has become synonymous with those who have too many riches.\(^6\) (Strabo, 6.2.4)

Its civic buildings, indeed its entire urban landscape, drew admiring comments from observers in antiquity.

You will often have been told that Syracuse is the largest of the Greek cities and the most beautiful of all ... what you have been told is true. Its position is not only a strong one but also is attractive to contemplate, from whichever direction it is approached, by land or by sea. (Cic. \textit{Verr.} 2.4.117)

We know, therefore, that Syracuse’s urban space compared more than favourably with that of its Sicilian and southern Italian neighbours. However, to what extent was Syracuse the ‘jewel in the crown’ of ancient Sicily and \textit{Magna Graecia}\(^7\)? Was it the yardstick by which other cities measured their own endeavours in town planning, in the construction of their public buildings, and the public ornamentation of their cities? Can any indication of Syracuse’s place in ancient Sicily be retrieved by judging its remains, and of the standard and extent of those urban monuments which were raised during the period of Hellenic domination of Sicily in particular? The following discussion concentrates on the general urban area of Syracuse, its various districts or suburbs, its hub both on the island of Ortygia and in and around the agora and the Great and Small Harbours. So significant are the places of entertainment and the places of religious cults that they are discussed here separately.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) From Eurialos to the Scala Greca is a distance of about 5 kilometres, but from there around the coast to Akradina then to the island and back up to Neapolis and Epipolai to Eurialos along the south slopes produces the overall distance.

\(^5\) See Chapter 4.

\(^6\) Cicero, \textit{Verr.} 2.4.120–135, gives some idea of the wealth mostly of the temples, (see Chapter 3), pillaged by Verres. As it had recovered from the depredations of the Second Punic War, Diod. 26.20.1, so it did again; and when sacked in AD 878 its treasures were described as ‘fabulous’, M.I. Finley, \textit{Ancient Sicily}, London 1979, 189.

\(^7\) See Chapter 3.
The Site of Syracuse

Arkhias ... met with certain Dorians at Zephyrium ... who had left the company of those who had founded Megara. He took these with him and with them founded Syracuse. The city flourished because of the country’s fertility and its useful harbours. The citizens became great rulers while tyrants still governed them. The Syracusans dominated the other states in Sicily, and when they were freed from autocratic rule they liberated those who had been made slaves of barbarians. Sailing from Corinth, Arkhias founded Syracuse about the same time as Naxos and Megara were founded. It is claimed that when Myskellos and Arkhias went to Delphi together to consult the oracle, the god demanded to know whether they chose wealth or health. When Arkhias preferred wealth and Myskellos health, the oracle assigned Syracuse to the former to found and Kroton to the latter. (Strabo, 6.2.4; cf. Thuc. 6.3.2)

Syracuse was not the sole city on Sicily to have been originally sited on an offshore island. The Phoenician colony of Motya, south of the harbour of Eryx (Drepana), in a shallow lagoon (stagnone) similarly occupied an island, now the Isola S. Pantaclea. It was connected from the island’s northern end to the Birgi sector of the town, which lay on the mainland at the northern entrance to the bay, by a narrow causeway 1.7 kilometres in length (approximately a mile). The city was partly destroyed by Dionysius I in 397 BC, retaken but then abandoned by the Carthaginians for the stronger site at Lilybaeum, now Marsala. Motya has remained largely deserted down to modern times. Because of its lack of subsequent development this site provides some illuminating evidence of the early development on Ortygia.

There are a number of obvious similarities. Both Motya and Ortygia were island fortresses with circuit walls that hugged their respective shorelines. The entire eastern or seaward side of Syracuse was also to be protected by walls and towers from at least the time of Dionysius. The fortifications of the Small Harbour at Syracuse may well have been based on the (admittedly) much smaller cothon, a fortified inner harbour or repair yard, on Motya. The cothon probably could not accommodate more than a dozen triremes and the entrance is also very narrow. At Syracuse the Small Harbour became a much more elaborate affair and had berthing facilities for up to sixty triremes. But both were enclosed with walls and towers and so made inaccessible to besiegers or pirates. And the concept appears Motyan or at least Phoenician/Carthaginian. The Northern Gate at Motya was a sophisticated defensive building, with a pincer effect in front to isolate and expose attackers, and this is also reflected in the construction of the Epipolai Gate, close to the

8 Megara Hyblaia, Thuc. 6.4.1. Zephyrium near Locri.
9 I exclude here from discussion the island communities on Lipara and elsewhere off the coast of Sicily.
10 For a map of Motya see Chapter 5 and the CD Rom, Chapter 5. For the main sites of interest on the island see CD nos. 687–700. For subsequent occupation of the site, see Wilson: 1990, 408, n. 53.
Syracuse in antiquity

Eurialos fort at the extreme western end of Syracuse. The North Gate at Selinous and the South Gate at Megara Hyblaia also show these signs of thoughtful planning but, like the Epipolai Gate, may be a little later in date than the defences at Motya. It certainly looks likely that some of the urban and defensive innovations that took place in Syracuse were influenced by contact with its Punic neighbour, which came about because of the hostilities in 397. Dionysius I is credited with many military inventions including the fortifications of Syracuse and the island and is often described as a military genius, but he could just as easily have copied the ideas from his enemies.

Ortygia

Ortygia is linked to the mainland by a bridge and boasts the spring of Arethusa, which rises in such abundance as to form a river at once and flows into the sea. (Strabo, 6.2.4)

This bridge link dates to centuries before Strabo’s day, and it remains today. But originally, as at Motya, there was a mole or causeway, perhaps initially the width of a road but later enlarged into a broad mole on which extensive building occurred. The island is not as far from the shore as Motya lies from Birgi; and the earliest land link would, therefore, have been rather less than a kilometre in length. The island had certainly become linked to the mainland before Gelo’s tyranny (480s) and this feature may date back to the mid-sixth century (Thuc. 6.3.2). A number of legends were (or became) associated with the island. Homer (Od. 5.123) refers to Ortygia where Artemis killed Orion although he presumably had Delos rather than the island at Syracuse in mind. Ortygia was also the island of the quail, which was another and older name for Delos, but the myths associated with this place or others in the Aegean were clearly transferred around the Mediterranean. It is, however, the almost miraculous spring at the southern end of the island which dominates the myths and closely ties Ortygia to Artemis. And it is notable that a cult statue of Artemis stood adjacent to the spring, and it is possible that the spring, the statue and the Ionic temple, mentioned in the Prologue, were all related to one another in a precinct from the harbour side to the highest point on the island.

Artemis received the island of Syracuse from the gods, which was named ‘Ortygia’ after her by both oracles and men. On this island likewise these nymphs to please Artemis caused a great spring to burst out which was given the name Arethusa. Not only in ancient times did this great fountain contain large fish in abundance, but also in our own time we still find fish there, now considered sacred and not to be touched by men. (Diod. 5.3.5–6)

12 For the North Gate at Selinous, see R.R. Holloway, The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily, London 1991, 146–47 (with plan) and CD no. 185, for Megara’s South Gate, Grady: 2003, 350 and CD nos. 345–46; for the North Gate at Motya, B.S.J. Isserlin & J. du Plat Taylor, Motya: A Phoenician and Carthaginian City in Sicily, Leiden 1974, 69–80, and CD nos. 698–700. For a plan of Selinous see also Chapter 3.
13 For Delos as Ortygia, see Athenaeus, 9.392; OCD 760. See also the myth of Asteria associated with Ortygia (Delos) as (Quail Island), OCD 133. For a discussion of the mole and its date, Freeman: 1891, 2139–40, 504–6.
14 See also Chapter 3 and the CD Rom Chapter 3a for a model of the temple, and CD nos. 496, 578, 616–621.
The more romantic legend appears to have been a later development using the natural phenomenon of a freshwater spring so close to the sea, and the proximity of this spring to the next, and Hellenic, coastline which was the Peloponnese and Elis in particular. Hence perhaps the emergence of the Alpheos–Arethusa legend, in part, associated with local Sicilian Greek writers as they sought to establish the ancient credentials of the island. This tale certainly captured the imagination of Greco-Roman writers, just as Sicily as a whole was to become associated with the journey and adventures of Odysseus:

Ortygia, revered place of reappearing Alpheos,
The offset of renowned Syracuse. (Pindar, *Nemean Ode*, 1.1)

Stretching against the wave beaten shore of Plemmyrion
Lies an island, in front of a Sicanian bay: it used to be called by the name Ortygia. Here, so the tale goes, Alpheos, from distant Elis,
Forced a secret way beneath the sea, which now,
At your spring, Arethusa, mingles with your Sicilian waves. (Vergil, *Aeneid*, 3,692-696)

Cicero (*Verr.*, 2.4.118), on the other hand, is (perhaps surprisingly) concerned more about topographical features than legendary beginnings. His evidence appears completely factual:

... the island ... is surrounded by two harbours. Here is the palace of Hieron where the praetors regularly stay. Here too are several temples, two of which are by far superior to the others, Diana and ... Minerva. At the end of the island is a spring of fresh water called Arethusa, incredibly large, and filled to overflowing with fish; and so situated that it would be overwhelmed by the sea if it were not for the protection of a huge stone wall.15

The island would initially have become heavily built over, but all civilians residing there were certainly evicted soon after Dionysius I took power, and even possibly before, and these remained excluded through to the later Roman empire. Although housing the ancient and important temples of Apollo, Artemis and Athena, the island largely became the barracks for a mercenary army which totalled at least 10 000. Ortygia may have sounded like a suitably romantic theme to ancient writers, but in fact in the Hellenistic period it was nothing more than an armed camp. The palaces of the rulers initially lay on the mole, not on Ortygia itself, but at some stage (probably during the peaceful conditions of much of the third century BC) the lack of any need for an army meant that the island could be redeveloped for other uses. Hence the reference by Cicero to a palace of Hieron II, and to extensive open spaces at the island’s southern end beyond the Fountain of Arethusa.

15 Cicero’s comment about the temples of Diana and Minerva being superior to the rest might well illustrate the continued use of the Ionic temple in his day. He may have regarded the archaic temple to Apollo as unattractive, and not worth his attention or note. For models and illustrations of these temples see Chapter 3 and the CD nos. 493, 495, 496.
Cicero mentions (Verr. 2.5.30, 5.80–81) that in the summer months the governor, C. Verres, during his three-year tenure (73–71 BC), chose not to occupy the former palace of the king, which must have been situated in close proximity to the temple of Athena, but instead ordered that tents be pitched in litore, quod est litus in Insula Syracusis post Arethusae fontem, in other words on the shore of the island beyond the fountain. This southerly spot was close to the entrance of the Great Harbour, and was, says Cicero, very pleasant and away from prying eyes. This suggests that the area beyond the fountain had been converted into a pleasure park attached to the palace. This is a far cry from its former use, but also indicates an empty urban space within the ancient city, which could have remained deserted, and was eventually subjected to considerable alteration. Apart from the temples and the palace the island had evidently become an open space, for Cicero states plainly (Verr. 2.5.84, 2.5.98) that the citizens of Syracuse were forbidden from residing there, and that this law had been in effect since the city’s capture by M. Claudius Marcellus in 212 BC, and was still in force.

Today no Syracusan is allowed to live on the island, for it is a place easily defended by a few men. Therefore, Marcellus did not wish to entrust it to men not wholly trustworthy; and moreover it is from that part of the city that you approach by ship, and the Syracusans had often excluded our armies and on that account Marcellus thought not to commit the keys of the city to them.

This did not mean, however, that – as in the time of the tyrants – the population was totally barred from entering the island. Again Cicero (Verr. 2.5.95) demonstrates this fact in recounting an attack made by pirates on Syracuse during the period of Verres’ governorship.

The pirates’ approach was not indicated as it always used to be by a beacon from a watch-tower or high ground, but it was the flames of the blazing ships that announced the impending danger. The crowd was restrained by remembering that the situation was a serious one and the enemy nearby... they called on one another to behave like men, armed themselves and occupied the entire market place and that large part of the city called the island.

Still, it is clear that a rather novel situation had evolved in which some parts of the city had a very high population density, while Ortygia (the original centre of the colony) was for some considerable time virtually a deserted headland, with the exception of some notable and important buildings. Ortygia began as the original colony, then it became

16 For a temple to Hera and its possible site see Chapter 3; Freeman: 1891, 2.442. Later scholars seem to ignore the possibility of a Heraion on Ortygia. A temple to Hera lay close by, however (Wilson: 1990, 290) on the coast near modern Modica. Athenaeus also refers to an altar on the southern end of Ortygia, its offerings being associated with shipping, 11.462. For illustrations of the Castello Maniace which is presumably situated where a Heraion or an altar once stood, see the CD nos. 298–99, 379–89.

17 See Chapter 5.

18 The high ground is the plateau of Epipolai. Cicero’s evidence may indicate that this area was no longer garrisoned or possessed a night-watch.
the nucleus of a larger settlement but with the emergence of the tyrants it became the private backyard of the rulers who kept their military support and camp followers there. Soon after the outbreak of the First Punic War in 264 BC, when Syracuse became an ally of Rome against Carthage, Hieron II incorporated much of the island into the grounds of his palace. The mercenary army was no longer needed as the city entered into an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. After the siege and capture of Syracuse by the Romans the citizens may have been banned from living on the island although it continued to be used for religious purposes – there was easy enough access to it. It was only in the imperial period of the Roman empire that the island began to be built on again, and finally returned to its role as the central area of the city, as Ausonius, for example, might be suggesting. Today there is no park on the island; Ortygia is a place of narrow streets and limited vistas, nor is its population anything comparable to that on the mainland. In many ways it has become what it originally was – the colony of Corinth.

The island on the eastern side facing the Ionian Sea is furthermore considerably higher than it was in antiquity. Allowing for a natural build-up in the level of habitable area on the island by as much as seven to eight metres, there is now a steep drop to the sea accentuated by its receding level. In antiquity citizens would have walked beneath high walls through this quarter of Syracuse, which overlooked the sea while today the modern road is probably at much the same height as the ancient fortifications. On the Great Harbour side (facing west) the sea level conversely has risen to such an extent that the odeon's orchestra in the 'Roman Gymnasium' north of the main road (Via Elorina) and so some distance from the sea, is usually under water. The sea level at the modern Porta Marina on the west side of Ortygia is also now deep enough for large sea-going ships to dock, especially at the modern Mole S. Antonio, which has thrust out the ancient mole even further into the bay. The ancient dockyards lie underneath this mole or even under the western side of the ancient mole, which was considerably enlarged by Dionysius I. Before that time, a much more modest causeway linked Akradina to the island. Thus the dockyards and sheds used by the triremes were in shallow water – much like that to be found on the southern side of the bay, with its sandy beaches.

19 Hieron's treaty with Rome, initially for fifteen years, was honoured until the accession of his grandson Hieronymous in 215, Pol. 1.16.10.
20 Certain subterranean areas (cellars) illustrating habitation from the Greco-Roman period have been open to the general public since 2005.
21 There is some suggestion that an original causeway – mid-sixth century – joined the island to the mainland further north than the mole stands today; Freeman: 1891, 2.139–140, 504–06; cf. A. di Vita. 'Town Planning in the Greek Colonies of Sicily from the Time of the Foundations to the Punic Wars,' in Greek Colonists and Native Populations, ed. J.-P. Descoeudres, Oxford, 1990, 361–63; Wilson 1990, 160. It would have been very much along the same lines as the causeway at Motya.
Syracuse in antiquity

The Great Harbour would then have been situated directly south of the agora, where the *Mole S. Antonio* is now situated along a line of what would have been a causeway. This would also mean that during the Athenian and subsequent sieges the opposing fleets were situated further apart than is usually perceived. The Athenian stockade was nearer to the estuary of the Anapos to the south of Lysimeleia, while the Syracusans had their docks almost opposite the causeway between the agora and Ortygia. The island itself on the west would also have stood out more prominently than it does today, particularly emphasised by the fortifications of Dionysius. The Spring of Arethusa presents nearly the only place on this side of the island which remains at its original level, enclosed by high walls, but these at least give some impression of the ancient defences. The modern promenade which links the spring to the *Porta Marina* northwards is also at this level and therefore walking along it gives one some idea of the relative heights of walls to pavement levels in antiquity.

The Great and Small Harbours

On each side of the island there is an extensive harbour, and the extent of the larger one is eighty square stadia.22 (Strabo, 6.2.4)

The double harbour of Syracuse was one of the main reasons for the city’s strength. Together, the harbours could contain a war fleet of about four hundred triremes, possessed by Dionyius I and Dionyius II, says Diodorus, sixty of which could be berthed in the Small Harbour (14.7.1–5), and three hundred and twenty accommodated in one hundred and sixty boat sheds built along the northern shore of the Great Harbour (14.42.5). Furthermore, in the event of the Great Harbour being partly occupied by invaders – as it was on a number of occasions – the Small Harbour was of a sufficient size to retain a powerful squadron of ships to allow for counter-attacks,23 and to accept with little difficulty supplies for the besieged. The modern topography is different here to what it was in antiquity because of natural changes in the coastline and also because of modern constructions, such as the *Molo/Pontile S. Antonio*. Clearly, by the time Cicero visited Syracuse there was already a bridge linking the island to the mainland, which he mentions himself, as does Strabo writing a little later. But both of these writers provide misleading evidence. Strabo is obviously inaccurate in his estimation of the size of the Great Harbour, and Cicero’s knowledge of the local geography was also faulty for he says:

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23 It is worth bearing in mind that during the wars with Persia – with the exception of Athens – no Greek *polis* possessed a fleet of more than forty triremes, Hdt. 8.1.
Urban space

Figure 4: Ortygia from the West

Figure 5: Ortygia and the Great Harbour from the South East
Syracuse in antiquity

The harbours are nearly enclosed in an embrace of the city’s buildings, and while they have entrances far apart, their exits come together and are joined. At this conjunction, that part of the town which is called the Island, separated by a narrow sea, is attached and made continuous again by a bridge.24 (Cic. Verr. 2.4.117)

The Great Harbour to the south can never have been almost enclosed by buildings since the city’s circuit wall reached the harbour just to the west of the modern railway station. The Bay of Daskon and further south again, the peninsula of Plemmyrion, the latter forming the southern head of the bay, always lay outside the urban area of the city, as earlier writers such as Thucydides state plainly.25 Diodorus supports Cicero’s picture of the Small Harbour on the northern side of Ortygia, at least from the time of the reign of Agathokles (317–289 BC). Then it is said that there were towers along the shore, but whether that means the mainland or the shore of the island as well, is left unclear (Diod. 16.83.2). The Great Harbour – the modern Porto Grande – was, as it is today, a much more open area and rather vulnerable to attack if both heads of the bay were not fortified. Going by the archaeological evidence, the southern head was never established and maintained as a permanent fort, suggesting that the Great Harbour was perceived as being of lesser importance.

The Small Harbour is rather smaller today than it once was. The modern Porto Piccolo has a central entrance between two booms of similar length, but the ancient entrance was more than likely off-centre (cf. Cic. Verr. 2.4.118), since shipping in antiquity generally crept along the shoreline rather than riding the bigger swells further out at sea, as is more usual today – especially for motor-propelled vessels. It is perhaps worth noting that when Agathokles slipped out of Syracuse during the Carthaginian siege on 15 August 310 BC he headed in a northerly direction to avoid interception by the enemy fleet then stationed outside the Great Harbour.26 An entrance to the Small Harbour on the northern shore will have facilitated his escape. The dockyards for the triremes (Arsenale) on the north side of the Small Harbour are at least a hundred metres inland from the present shoreline. Guido comments that during the tyranny of Dionysius I new dockyards were constructed ‘in the Little Harbour, for the naval power of Syracuse had been greatly increased, and the entrance (then narrower before coastal erosion had taken place) was fortified’.27 However, the area around the Great Harbour is actually marshy and low lying.

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24 It is possible that here Cicero intends his reader to mean the channel which linked both harbours. The entrance to the Great Harbour was, of course, through the channel between Ortygia and Plemmyrion, and that of the Small Harbour close inshore at Akridaina. Even if the entrance to the Small Harbour was on its southern edge closest to Ortygia, the mouths of both ports will have remained far apart. Cicero contradicts his comments at 2.4.117, and is not precise. It is almost as if he had not visited Syracuse or drew his comment from an imperfect memory. It may well be that Syracuse did not feature highly in his visit in 70, or since he was allowed just seventy days to collect incriminating evidence against Verres he had only a very short stay here. When Cicero was quaestor in Sicily he was stationed at Lilybaeum, not in Syracuse.

25 For the Syracusan Chore see Chapter 2.

26 For the date and the eclipse of the sun which occurred on that day see M. Cary, ‘Agathocles,’ in CAH 7, Cambridge 1928, 625 and n.1.

and hence more susceptible to erosion, while Akradina is the furthest extension of the limestone escarpment of Epipolai, and is much more hardwearing. Coastal erosion does not occur where the sea level is falling. In all probability, therefore, an ancient barrier or fortification closed off the Small Harbour from at least the time of Dionysius I, and possibly earlier than his tyranny. The Athenian besiegers made no attempt to gain an entry into the Small Harbour which further suggests that it was fortified by 415. Meanwhile, the Portus Laccius (Diod. 14.7.1–5), a name used in antiquity to mean a lake, pond or tank, may well signify a harbour where there was a lack of tidal influence.

The modern connection between mainland and island consists of three bridges over the Darsena, but none which stand on the site of the ancient bridge for it lay closer to the mouth of the Great Harbour if indeed it was, as it must surely have been more or less aligned with the Marine or ‘Urban’ Gate. Neither the channel nor the bridge can have been of remarkable size or appearance, however, since in width the former would have been no more than double the breadth of a single trireme – about five metres, (Diod. 14.7.1–5) – while the latter will have been a slight, almost certainly wooden affair, probably either rising over the channel to a sufficient height to allow ships to pass beneath with sails furled or it was withdrawn as each vessel passed through with its oars being pulled. The current channel is the product of construction work ordered during the Spanish occupation but its ancient equivalent must have lain close by, although possibly silted up by then. Moreover, whatever the precise location of the bridge, it also did not join Ortygia to the mainland but rather to the ancient mole on which the tyrants had their acropolis and fortified palaces. This too has altered shape over more than two millennia. The ancient mole must have been a narrower edifice, but with nearly as much an urban landscape as it possesses now. Yet the placement of a gate beyond the present channel indicates that a bridge existed in the vicinity and that the island began at this same point.

Today the mole is covered to an almost uniform height with apartment blocks of six to seven stories. In the Hellenistic period, and probably for some after that, this quarter of the city was guarded by high walls and towers (to prevent infiltration from the mainland) within which there were palaces and gardens. A bridge at the exit to both harbours also implies that they were connected internally, as Diodorus also suggests, but probably not before the tyranny of Dionysius since Thucydides seems unaware of a connecting channel during the Athenian siege. It is probably significant that Thucydides, on more than one occasion, notes that the squadron stationed in the Small Harbour sailed around Ortygia to join in naval engagements in the bay. This manoeuvre would have been made unnecessary had the harbours been connected.

30 For modern impressions of the mole see the CD nos. 646, 580, 532, 654.
31 Just one garden can be seen on the mole today, very close to the channel on the corner of the Via Malta and Via Maieli.
32 It is probably significant that Thucydides, on more than one occasion, notes that the squadron stationed in the Small Harbour sailed around Ortygia to join in naval engagements in the bay. This manoeuvre would have been made unnecessary had the harbours been connected.
strength and could allow sorties to be made from the Small to the Great Harbour when there was an attack, and allow reinforcements and supplies to reach a secure berth if they arrived from the south. The interlinked double harbour was clearly the foundation for much of Syracuse’s power in antiquity. The bridge connecting the mole to Ortygia outside the Marine Gate was probably a wooden construction since it would have been necessary to be raised to allow traffic between the two harbours. This is certainly implicit in Diodorus’ description of the harbours during the tyranny of Dionysius, and may well have been maintained down to the Roman period since it provided additional security to the city. Of course, at a later stage the channel may have silted up and the island reverted to being a peninsula until refortifications were ordered in 1526.

**Akradina**

Cicero (Verr. 2.4.119) calls Akradina the second city of Syracuse, and is recognised as the initial phase of expansion from the original colony on the island.33

... this contains a broad market-place, fine colonnades, an elaborately decorated town-hall, a splendid senate house, and a fine temple to the Olympian Zeus, as well as the rest of the city, filled with private buildings and divided by a single continuous street crossed by a number of others.

The single broad street running north to south was the *Hekatompedon*, thirty metres in width (100 feet), which ran down from the *Hexapylon* (six-gated entrance) on the northern circuit wall of Dionysius down to the agora. If Cicero is correct in stating that the transverse streets ran west to east then these mirrored the axis of the streets on the island.34 These smaller streets appear to have often been little more than narrow passages between quite tall buildings (Diod. 19.7.1). The suburb has sometimes been divided by commentators into Upper and Lower Akradina, the latter being the area around the agora, the former being the largely residential quarter which ran along the shore in a northwards direction, and which was protected again, from the elder Dionysius’ time, by a wall on the seaward side.35 There is, however, no ancient evidence for such a division.

The dominating feature must have been the agora or civic centre of the city. This was the centre of one of the largest cities in antiquity, and must therefore have compared favourably with the agora at Athens. Today the agora lies underneath the *Fora Siracusana*, and is more distant and isolated from the sea which has retreated since antiquity. The mole has also been extended in a southerly direction in modern times so that the nearby harbours are not immediately visible. In common with other Greek harbour cities, the

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34 See Holloway: 1991, 54-55, for a plan of the streets on Ortygia and a discussion of its earliest phase; also G. Voza, in *Syracuse: The Fairest Greek City*, Roma 1989, 11; Di Vita: 1990, 362., which suggests that the earliest main road on the island ran north-south leading from a causeway more or less where the modern boom of the Porto Piccolo lies and into Akradina. Again highly reminiscent of the situation at Motya, but one which changed during the fifth century BC.
agora of Syracuse was originally adjacent to the sea wall; and shipping could, therefore, berth alongside the markets they served (Cic. Verr. 2.5.96-97). While there must have been a defensive wall this did not prevent pirates gaining easy access to the agora in a night attack during Verres’ governorship:

When I say that these pirates entered the harbour ... I must explain the lie of the land ... for Syracuse is not bounded by the waters of its harbour, rather the harbour is itself encircled and embraced by the city and the sea, rather than washing against the outer walls of the harbour, itself flows into the centre of the city. And here it was that ... Heracleo the pirate and his four small galleys sailed about ... right up to the forum of Syracuse and to all its quays and reached a place where the fleets of Carthage, at the height of her naval power, after numerous attempts in many wars failed to reach ... a place so situated that the Syracusans witnessed an enemy’s triumphant arms within their walls, in their city, in their forum ...
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Vitruvius (1.7.1) says that where a town is situated at the coast, then its marketplace should be next to the harbour in order to receive any traffic from the sea. The agora at Syracuse certainly appears to have fully complied with this opinion, and is easily comparable to other coastal or island sites such as Delos and Thasos. The original environment has nonetheless been altered both naturally and also by the activities of the inhabitants.

In or close to the agora must have been situated the banqueting hall ‘The Hall of the Sixty Couches’, the largest and grandest building in Sicily. Built during the reign of Agathokles, it was destroyed by lightning (Diod. 16.83.2). Also here (as both Cicero and Diodorus (16.832) state) was an Olympieion, a temple to Zeus. Cicero states that the Council chamber or Prytanium was particularly fine (Verr. 2.4.119). He also records that Verres stole from it a statue of Sappho, by the sculptor Silanion (2.4.126).

Tyche

There is a third city called Tyche from the ancient temple of Fortuna that once stood there. This has a grand gymnasium, and several temples and is also a crowded and densely populated quarter of Syracuse. (Cic. Verr. 2.4.119)

Tyche lay between Akradina and Neapolis, and was probably walled between 466 and 415 BC. It is a rather vague area, and Cicero himself does not provide sufficiently accurate topographic features to pinpoint this quarter. The precise location of Tyche has not, as yet, attracted a consensus. There seems to have been a Tyche Gate – on some maps near the sea, in others close to Epipolai. It seems likely that Tyche was originally beyond, that is outside, the walls of Akradina, at the northern edge of Epipolai and corresponds to that area today which contains the Cappucine Quarry, a large sports ground and extensive modern housing development. It reached as far as the sea on its eastern edge, and linked with Neapolis on the west. If indeed it was a small expansion of the city, as Drögemüller suggests, and was a narrow strip, as appears on Fabricius’ map, this position seems to be a reasonable conclusion to a problem that has taxed modern commentators. Tyche was not adjacent to the Hexapylon on the northern circuit walls, but was the first suburb reached from the north after passing through the city’s original defensive circuit.
Tyche is frequently mentioned in the sources, but not by Thucydides. However, Diodorus (11.68.1) has Tyche north of Akradina but it need not be at a great distance. Livy (24.21.7) has Tyche plainly south of the *Hexapylon* and towards Akradina and the agora. His evidence also suggests a high population. When Marcellus forced an entry into the city in 212 he took Epipolai and the Eurialos fort and camped (says Livy (25.25.5)) between Neapolis and Tyche but outside the populated area. This suggests that the Romans camped on the plateau between the *Hexapylon* and a wall which enclosed Tyche just to the north of Akradina, as Fabricius thought. The most celebrated feature of Tyche today, besides the museum, is the *Latomia dei Cappucini*, which provided the stone for the buildings in the city and probably for its walls. The base of the quarry is a full sixty metres below the current surface, and it is quite plain that massive amounts of stone were cut from this southern edge of Epipolai. However, the quarry may well have been much less impressive when the Athenians were incarcerated here, since the great building programmes of Dionysius, Agathokles and Hieron II occurred long after the prisoners had gone. The topography has evidently changed here too, although the atmosphere of this site has brought out the best and worst in modern commentators.41

**Neapolis**

There is also a fourth city which because it was built after the rest is called Neapolis. On its highest point stands the greatest theatre,42 besides which there are two fine temples, one to Ceres and the other to Libera, and a very tall and beautiful statue of Apollo Temenites ...

Neapolis is situated to the north west of the agora and encompasses the modern archaeological park above the *Via Paolo Orsi* and west towards the city’s main cemetery. In antiquity it seems to have included a fair section of the area around the modern *Via Teocrito*. Neapolis was also heavily populated, at least in later times (Livy, 25.25), but it was its monumental buildings which made it famous. Interestingly, Cicero makes no mention of the great altar erected next to the theatre by Hieron II, and which was surely intact then and used much later.43 Although Diodorus comments on its construction and dimensions (16.83.2), it obviously had no impact on Cicero who perhaps missed seeing it on this occasion. It should have been memorable. Just north lies the most famous of the *latomia*, two hundred metres (600 feet) in length according to Aelian (*VH*. 12.44),

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43 See Chapter 6.
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where vast holes punctuate the topography and which were put to other uses once worked out, becoming the city’s prisons or places of work such as, for example, the ‘Cave of the Rope-Makers’. The quarries were still used as prisons nearly four hundred years later (Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.68, 2.5.143, 2.5.160), and were plainly effective holding areas.

There was presumably a shortage of space on Ortygia near the precinct of the *Apol-lonion* as a result of the mercenary army stationed on the island. This would account for the *Temenos* or statue of Apollo being located immediately next-door to the Greek Theatre on its western side — there is also little space between the theatre and the defensive wall. Following the usual cult practices, the statue was in an enclosure with a shrine and altar. This precinct along with the whole of Neapolis was only fortified after the initial Athenian attack on the city in the winter of 415/4 (Thuc. 6.75.1). Temples to Demeter and Kore and Herakles were also to be found in this district, the last probably someway outside the walls of 415, perhaps close to the modern cemetery. The temple of Demeter and Kore was probably below the *Temenos* of Apollo and incorporated into the city at the same time. They were certainly within the city walls when they were plundered by Himilkon in 396 (Diod. 14.63.1). If Syracuse was perceived to possess a weak spot then it lay in the Neapolis/Temenites sector at the junction of the wall with the Great Harbour. This perception may account for the fact that invaders usually chose to camp in the marsh of Lysimeleia adjacent to the shore of the Great Harbour. Although this area was unhealthy, it gave rapid access into the centre of the city in the event of a breach in the walls. The Romans, on the other hand, after the unsuccessful attempt to break through the walls in Akradina where these came down to the Small Harbour, in the end simply stormed the city walls on Epipolai near the *Hexapylon* and the *Scala Greca*.

The Fortifications

From early in the rule of Dionysius I (Diod. 14.7.1) the city and the entire plateau of Epipolai was fortified. Dionysius took power in 406/405, and soon after that is said to have fortified Ortygia and the harbours. However, it is difficult to understand precisely what occurred at this juncture because not only has the topography altered but the geography itself has changed. Initially Dionysius had concentrated his power base at the harbour (Diod. 13.96.2) which is either in the area to the south and west of the agora, or south east — depending on whether the Great or Small Harbour is meant. Dionysius must have possessed a house here but it does seem clear that, from the start, he had his eye on the island.

44 Cf Freeman: 1891, 2.42, who thought that a temple must be situated here, although none is attested, but who did not know of the existence of a third temple on Ortygia.
46 For the Syracusan recapture of the *Herakleion* see Thuc. 7.73.2. This temple was probably included in the city by the Dionysian walls.
47 Himilkon seized Akrodina, says Diodorus, and robbed the temples, intimating a close proximity. See also Chapter 4.
48 Diodorus seems to suggest from 404 BC, following the peace with the Carthaginians, 14.7.1.
Ortygia, for example, must already have been surrounded by walls long before the Athenian expedition arrived in 414, but to Dionysius is credited a wall with towers (Diod. 14.7.2) which blocked off Ortygia from Akradina. This statement implies that the link between mainland and island was already more than simply a causeway and had already become the mole that is seen today. Diodorus also states that a fortified acropolis was constructed on the island which contained the dockyards and was connected to the Small Harbour (14.7.3). Whether the Small Harbour was the location of dockyards sufficient for sixty triremes and an entrance through which only a single ship could pass at any one time – hence a channel between the two harbours – or whether this is a reference to a pen for the triremes (rather similar to what was devised by the Athenians in Lysimeleia in 414) is unclear. It could mean either. In a subsequent passage (14.42.5) Diodorus further recounts that 160 ship sheds were built in the Great Harbour for triremes then under construction for the campaign against Motya. This mention should further indicate that the Small Harbour, a *lacus* or *lacuna,* was by then a landlocked lake.

On the landward side of his wall Dionysius was also responsible for the construction of an impressive agora, presumably where the agora is still situated. The acropolis mentioned by Diodorus ought, as its name implies, to be situated on the highest part of the island, namely in the vicinity of the temples of Athena and Artemis, rather than down by the present *Castello Maniace* as some modern commentators have argued. The walls themselves have certainly exercised the imagination of modern scholars, some of whom appear to believe that a double wall ringed Ortygia and divided the mole from Akradina, although there is neither evidence for nor any sense in this assumption. The Epipolai wall from the sea to Eurialos was built in twenty days, thirty stades in length, with towers at regular intervals, and along this wall (probably near to the present *Scala Greca*) was the *Hexapylon* (Diod. 14.18.2-8), which was either a simple gate with three entrances and three exits, or conceivably a system of three double gates. It seems incredible that *Hexapylon* has been interpreted as a complex consisting of six successive gates. Had such a gateway existed, traffic in and out of the city would have been at a constant standstill. It was at the time of the fortification of the mole and the Small Harbour that the civilian population appears to have been expelled from Ortygia (Diod. 14.7.5) – if indeed there was by that time a substantial number of private homes there. The quarter of Akradina may have already become a more attractive place to live. Probably a little later than this came the construction of a fortified palace – a second acropolis – on the mole, although since Diodorus seems to refer to this only after Timoleon’s victory in 344/343 BC (16.70.4) this complex may date to quite late in Dionysius’ rule. A palatial dwelling close to the mole’s fortifications, to the harbours and to the *Pentapylon* would

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49 Vitruvius, 5.12.7, suggests that boat sheds should be built facing north. The sheds in the Great Harbour presumably faced south or south west, and in the Small Harbour east or south east. Sheds facing south had the benefit of sunshine for drying out the triremes, of course.
appear to make sound sense of the use of the defences of Ortygia, and control over the harbours made the island almost impregnable. During the reign of Dionysius II the island and mole could be held by a garrison when the city itself had fallen to opposing factions. Entry to the mole was by way of the Pentapylon. The Pentapylon was either a gateway with five entrances (compare the Tripylon at Eurialos which was converted, probably during the Roman siege, to a simple gate of two entrances), or was just conceivably a tripylon followed by a bipylon. It is inconceivable, given the limited space on the mole, that this gateway was a complex consisting of five successive gates. This would have to be negotiated before reaching the fortified acropolis of Dionysius — all in a space of barely a kilometre. There is simply insufficient room on the mole for such a complicated access which would also have given onto the adjacent port areas. A more elaborate version of the Epipolai Gate may be preferred but, of course, remains a conjecture.

Timoleon is credited with the destruction of the fortifications of Ortygia and the two acropoleis, one on the mole and the other on the island (Diod. 16.70.4; Plut. Tim. 22).50 Close to the agora a building named the Timoleonteion was constructed — either courts of law or a gymnasium — but whether this was situated on the site of Dionysius’ palace on the mole is unclear. Cicero seems to refer to it in the context of the civic buildings in Akradina and around the agora (Verr. 2.4.119).51 Diodorus (19.6.4) also mentions this building as the place where Agathokles initiated his coup d’etat in 317, a spot close to the agora would appear to be most likely.52 Furthermore, it is likely that some restoration work on the Eurialos fort took place during Timoleon’s rule,53 which may have been merely the result of general dilapidation caused by the incessant civil strife of the 350s when Dionysius II lost control of the city, during Dion’s brief rule and that of his successors, such as Hiketas, until Timoleon gained control in 344.

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50 Diodorus does not state that one acropolis was on the mole and the other on the island, and may in fact be using the word loosely for the entire area of fortifications. Cf. Diod. 16.70.1, where the singular alone is used to describe Dionysius II’s power base.
51 Freeman: 1894, 4.374 also places the Timoleonteion ‘round the lower ground of Achradina’.
53 R.J.A. Talbert, Timoleon and the Revival of Greek Sicily, 344–317 B.C., Cambridge 1974, 147 and n. 2. See also Chapter 4.
Conclusion

The urban topography of ancient Syracuse underwent a continual process of change which was especially radical during the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and again later under Roman rule. There were sometimes drastic and very rapid alterations to the city’s appearance, in accordance with the needs or desires of Syracuse’s citizens or rulers. In more recent times these in turn have been compounded by the natural changes in geography brought about by changes in sea level and by earthquakes. Looking at the Porto Piccolo today is hard to imagine that this area, with Akradina to the north and Ortygia to the south, was ringed with high walls and even higher towers. But Diodorus is quite explicit in his description and on more than one occasion notes these aspects. From Polybius and Livy we happen to know that in Akradina the walls came down to the sea, but again no trace of these have remained. However, the comments of ancient writers have allowed some recreation of this sector of the city, as noted above. This survey of topographical features shows just how much has been lost of ancient Syracuse and how much was lost already during antiquity. Cicero was impressed but he did not see Syracuse in its hey-day. That time was during the rule of the tyrants – Dionysius, Agathokles and Hieron II – when Syracusans were justified in believing that their tetrapolis, indeed their τετράπολις, exceeded all others in fame and riches.
Figure 9: Map of Syracuse
CHAPTER 2: Chorē

Introduction

Surprisingly, the citizens of Syracuse were not a regular sea-going crowd prior to the Athenian siege of 415–413 BC;¹ and even after that, although the city came to possess one of the strongest war fleets in the Mediterranean, trade by sea was never a primary occupation of its citizens (Thuc. 7.21.3). Instead agricultural production, based on the great fertility for which Sicily was famous (thanks to volcanic soils) was clearly the focus of local endeavour (Diod. 16.83.1). Sicilian cities, of which Syracuse was the leader, are supposed to have become very wealthy through selling foodstuffs to merchants who then transported these goods to mainland Greece, probably to the Peloponnese, specifically to Corinth. The Syracusans themselves seem not to have operated merchant shipping to any great degree. Their wealth - in common with most ancient poleis - was, therefore, founded on the land; and, since a polis was never simply an urban area, its chorē - its hinterland or territory - was absolutely integral to its prosperity and its political/military muscle. The chorē of Syracuse, which forms the subject of discussion in this chapter, was (by ancient Hellenic standards) a large one,² and extended, certainly by the time of Gelon, from the plain of Megara in the north to, at least, Notum and Eloros in the south and some way up the valley of the Anapos and its tributaries into the Ibla mountains.³ In the north, Syracusan land was bounded by the poleis of Leontinoi and Katane (also for some of the time tributary), to the south and west by Gela (normally independent), and Kamarina (also for a time dominated by Syracuse).⁴

Certain specific areas of the chorē can easily be identified, and are discussed below. Less straightforward is determining where agricultural produce may have been centred, and what particular crops could have comprised the mainstay of the local economy. Perhaps the most distinctive geographical features of Syracuse, and certainly its most

¹ Thuc. 7.7.4: 'manning a fleet and training crews' suggests a novel exercise which had not occurred for some time. However, Hieron I had intervened outside Sicily during his regime, but clearly even his famous sea victory over the Etruscans at Kyme in 474 and the brief colonisation of Ischia had not left a lasting impression. The colony on Ischia may well have been withdrawn not because of its unhealthy climate, Freeman: 1891, 2.251–52, but because the Syracusans saw no advantage in holding the island. It was another two decades before the Syracusans intervened militarily in this region, and again it was a transient feature of the city's foreign policy. F.R. S. Ridgeway, 'Etruscans, Greeks, Carthaginians: The Sanctuary at Pyrgi,' in Greek Colonists and Native Populations, ed. P-J. Descoeudres, Oxford 1990, 525; P.J. Stylianou, A Historical Commentary on Diodorus Siculus Book 15, Oxford 1998, 198. In 425 Syracuse possessed a modest fleet of about thirty ships, Thuc. 3.115.2, 4.25.1, but this was probably not maintained in battle-readiness nor enlarged. See also Chapter 4.
² See Freeman: 1891, 2.28 for a comparison between Athens and Attica.
³ Akrai (founded in 664) and Kasmenai (founded about 20 years later) were outposts of Syracuse, but before the reign of Hieron II may have been little more than military outposts marking the western extremity of the Syracusan chorē. Eloros was founded in the seventh century, while Notum (originally Sikel) also became a Syracusan sub-colony early in the city’s history.
⁴ For further discussion see Chapter 5.
Syracuse in antiquity

famous, are firstly the island of Ortygia and, secondly, the abundance of fresh surface and spring water, of which the Fountains of Arethusa and Ciane are the best known. However, across the countryside as a whole the rivers are mostly seasonal, becoming torrents following heavy rains in winter, and dry beds through the summer. Dams and irrigation would have been necessary for any crops to be produced in the quantities required for profitable export. The coastal plain is also obviously narrow. To the south the Ibla mountains encroach almost to the coast, while the plain broadens only around Syracuse. The plain of Megara in the north is also relatively narrow, with the mountains along the entire region rising steeply out of the plain, which is itself heavily indented with the beds of streams and rivers. This is not typical land for growing grain compared, for example, to the land in the chorē of Metapontion, famous for wheat production. Today’s landscape in S.E. Sicily can hardly have changed that dramatically since antiquity. Grain in its various forms – whether barley or wheat – was grown on the higher land of the Sicilian interior where the land is less disturbed with undulating hillsides, the temperatures less extreme in summer, and where there is higher rainfall.

In and around Polichne, on the southern slopes of Epipolai, and on Plemmyrion there is high-density market gardening, fruit orchards and viticulture. Much of this produce is for the local market in the city – on Ortygia the market is a daily feature of the streets immediately to the north of the temple of Apollo. It is very likely that for a city that for some of its history in antiquity was more populated than it is today, the immediate vicinity provided food only for daily needs. And quite clearly this produce was not exported nor is there sufficient room for grain production on a scale needed for export and for creating Syracuse’s prosperity. Therefore, if the community was not composed of farmers, where did its wealth emanate from?

If Syracuse was plainly not an agricultural producer of any substance, it must rather have been the exit point for grain and other foodstuffs brought down to the harbour from the interior beyond its own chorē. And was also the entrance point for goods, which could be purchased in return for grain and which headed inland. The Anapos valley was the most accessible route from the hills to Syracuse. Merchandise would come overland directly via Kasmenai and Akrai then down to Syracuse – a distance of no more than forty kilometres (25 miles). The Syracusans presumably exacted a tithe for entry to their territory and for use of the direct route down to the city, where they could also tax any transactions between merchants and farmers in the agora and at the port side. Moreover, grain cannot be transported in bulk loose, and so sacking must have been manufactured in the city for merchants and farmers alike, as must vast quantities of amphora for the movement of olive oil and wine.

5 It is interesting nonetheless that Hieron II (265–216) wrote a treatise on agriculture, Pliny, NH. 18.23, and a wine named ‘Pollios’ was famous, Aelian, VH. 12.31.  
6 While I am not suggesting that Syracuse possessed industrial enterprises on a modern scale, a very substantial banaisic element is attested in the sources for the mid fourth century BC. Since they were evidently quite distinct from the nautikos ochlos, they must have been employed in other concerns such as those noted here. For these discrete (and potentially destabilising) elements at Syracuse, see A. Fuks, ‘Redistribution of Land and Houses in Syracuse in 356 B.C. and its Ideological Aspects’, CQ 18, 1968.
The farmers would (for the most part) have been Sikels, while the beneficiaries of Sicilian agricultural resources were the Greeks of Syracuse and their cousins from the Peloponnese. Diodorus notes (16.83.1) that

... having established peace throughout Sicily, Timoleon caused the cities to experience a great growth in their prosperity ... new colonists poured into the land in large numbers and since there was a lengthy period of peace the fields were reclaimed for cultivation and produced abundant crops of all sorts ... the Sikels sold these to merchants at good prices and rapidly increased their wealth.

Whenever there was a universal peace, conditions existed in Sicily for the generation of great wealth. The Syracusans (by occupying a unique place on the Ionian Sea) benefitted, in particular, from trade that filtered out of the interior. The entrepôt facilities at Syracuse were almost as famous as the city’s wealth, but it is worth bearing in mind that prosperity was not solely derived from trade passing through the harbours. Those were also used to accommodate triremes which policed and plundered the coasts of Sicily and Magna Graecia. Great wealth was also obtained in equal measure, or even more so, from territorial ambitions.7

Plemmyrion

Plemmyrion is the southern head of the entrance to the Great Harbour. The peninsula is a further outcrop of the limestone escarpment8 which dominates the entire region and is balanced on the northern side of the bay by Epipolai. Plemmyrion is not as prominent as Epipolai, however, and is also arid (Thuc. 7.4.4), at least in the summer months, and in antiquity was obviously mostly uncultivated and treeless. Yet, there are indications of very early settlement in this area, with finds dating to the Mycenaean period.9 Today Plemmyrion is mostly suburban rather than rural, with extensive market gardening and

214-18. Although Fuks calls these ‘the urban proletariat’ and ‘poorer artisans, skilled and semi-skilled workers in workshops’, which cannot really apply to conditions in antiquity, his underlying thesis is not without value. The banausic crowd, men involved in handicrafts such as Syracuse’s famous leather goods, Luc. 468 (Warmington), or as artisans, will rather have been the owners of small workshops using slave labour and there would have been many of these, perhaps hundreds of workshops in and around the harbour and agora which had the primary function of producing those materials required by shippers and farmers to facilitate the movement of food. Lysias, a metic at Athens (who made his wealth from the manufacture of armour) was born in (and presumably a citizen of) Syracuse. For the significance of amphora in trade in the Roman period, see R.J.A Wilson, ‘Trade and Industry in Sicily during the Roman Empire’, ANRW 11.1, 1988, 263–75, and for industry and trade more generally in Sicily in later antiquity, in which Syracuse naturally features prominently, R.J.A. Wilson, Sicily under the Roman Empire, Warminster 1990, 237–76.

7 See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Syracusan imperialism. It is clear that the contents of the treasury had to be supplemented on more than one occasion by acts of piracy. Syracuse was notable for its basic ‘pork and cheese’, Hermippos, Phormophoroi (ca. 424 BC – a time when the Athenians were scrutinising affairs in Sicily), OCD 5 692; A. Zimmer, The Greek Commonwealth, Oxford 1911, 376. But it is difficult to believe that such items could be the basis of an economy.

8 Described by Freeman: 1891, 1.347, as a ‘a low isthmus of a peninsula which itself grows into a hill, rocky, but of no great height ... it forms the southern horn or pillar of the entrance of the Great Harbour’. Green’s description, 1971, 224, is altogether more dramatic: ‘a desolate sandstone wilderness, eroded into grottoes, pocked with Neolithic rock-tombs and cave dwellings ...’ CD Catalogue nos. 100, 390, 564, 574, 622–25.

holiday homes. The entrance to the Great Harbour is a little more than a thousand metres (300 feet) wide.\textsuperscript{10} The northern head must always have been the more prominent, and today certainly is since it is endowed with the \textit{Castello Maniace}, named after the eleventh century Byzantine general, George Maniakes, but was actually built by Frederick II (Hohenstaufen) in the 1230s. The entrance to the bay may be relatively narrow, but the waters in the Great Harbour can become choppy due to prevailing currents, and this would have caused problems in manoeuvering triremes and other oared vessels when battles occurred in these conditions.

The strategic value of Plemmyrion was evidently not fully appreciated by the Syracusans before it was garrisoned by the Athenians in 413 (Thuc. 7.4.4):\textsuperscript{11}

Nikias also decided to fortify the spot known as Plemmyrion, which is the headland directly opposite the city that juts out into the sea and makes the entrance into the Great Harbour a narrow one. Therefore, he sent over the fleet and a force of hoplites to Plemmyrion and constructed three forts. Most of the Athenian equipment was stored there and the larger merchant vessels and triremes made this their base.\textsuperscript{12}

Thucydides goes on to describe the nature of the place, and adds that it proved difficult to bring in supplies from the surrounding land, especially since the Syracusans stationed cavalry units at Polichne to prevent the Athenians from roaming far from their forts.\textsuperscript{13} Once the Syracusans, led by Gylippos, had taken the Athenian forts and captured Plemmyrion they retained control (Thuc. 7.23.1–3); and the Athenians made no attempt whatsoever to regain it, even though their access to the open sea was now made more difficult.\textsuperscript{14} Thucydides further notes (7.24.1) that the Syracusans demolished one of the forts and retained the other two for use.

This capture of Plemmyrion was indeed the greatest and principal reason for the deterioration of the Athenians. Ships with supplies were from now on in danger even at the entrance of the harbour for the Syracusans had triremes ready to intercept them, and it became necessary to fight if supplies were to be brought in at all.

This statement requires some attention since the Syracusans were always in a position to intercept incoming Athenian sea supplies, even when they did not hold Plemmyrion.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Dover: 1970, 467, ‘the distance is 1.040 m’.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} The point is also made by Freeman: 1892: 3.249; cf. Green: 1971, 224–25.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} The Athenian equipment had previously been stored at the fort (on the northern edge of Epipolai) called Labdalon, which had been captured by the Syracusans, Thuc. 7.3.4, as the defenders successfully prevented the encirclement of the city by an Athenian wall through their own counter wall, which was constructed westwards from Neapolis towards Eurialos, Diod. 13.8.2. After this setback almost the entire Athenian force was concentrated at the camp in Lysimeleia, with the exception of a garrison in the circular fort on the southern edge of Epipolai, which was withdrawn just prior to the final battle in the harbour, Thuc. 7.60.2.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} The Athenians had 650 cavalry, Thuc. 6:98.1, and 30 mounted archers, Thuc. 6:94.4, even before their initial assault on Epipolai in 414, and reinforcements were surely added later, Thuc. 7:42.1. These could have been deployed to safeguard the occupants of the forts on Plemmyrion, but were not. See also Chapter 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Diodorus gives a similar if less precise account of this action, 13.9.3–6, but fails to mention Plemmyrion or how the Syracusans were able to move troops into that vicinity.
\end{itemize}
Thucydides omits a crucial point here. When the Syracusans held only the northern head the Athenian triremes entered the Great Harbour near the southern head and so avoided the city’s main fortifications and the enemy’s ships. When the Athenians lost Plemmyrion their own supply ships now had to enter in the center of the gap, perhaps not in range of missiles launched from the land but in open sea and vulnerable to warships. Thucydides is correct in his assessment of the increasingly critical situation the Athenians faced, however. Finally, although the barrier of ships constructed across the entrance was a very late tactic to be employed against the Athenians, it was the inevitable conclusion once both Ortygia and Plemmyrion were in Syracusan hands. This barrier linked both heads of the bay for a brief spell. It was not a strategy ever repeated; and the Syracusans evidently abandoned the two forts soon after their victory – a weakness to be exploited by the Carthaginians and the Romans. After the final defeat of the Athenian fleet in the Great Harbour, the dead of the invaders lay unburied in the bay. Some of these may have been interred on Plemmyrion in more ancient tombs. The headland therefore became both a cemetery and a memorial to foiled Athenian imperialism.

At the beginning of the Carthaginian siege in 396, Himilkon had three forts built: one on Plemmyrion, the others at Daskon and Polichne (Diod. 14.63.3). This was a sound tactical move to avoid allowing the Syracusans to block his fleet inside the Great Harbour, an error the Athenians had made to their cost. Nonetheless, the neglect of Plemmyrion does provide an interesting insight into the psychology of the Syracusans in that they could be caught off guard repeatedly, and appear to have lived in a state of unpreparedness, only galvanising themselves into action when a threat was actually at their front door. Indeed, on this occasion Dionysius personally led an outflanking manoeuvre against the enemy, moving troops overnight around to Polichne, perhaps via Eurialos, and attacking the Carthaginians from the south and west. Diodorus does not relate the recapture of Plemmyrion, but does state that the Syracusans took all three forts from their enemy (14.72.4).

**Daskon (Akron)**

Daskon – *Bushy Point or Heights* – is really neither a point nor a height in geographical terms and not today a place of thick woodland or scrub. It is actually a rocky outcrop of no particular altitude which bulges into the bay of the Great Harbour about two-thirds down its length, causing a subsidiary bay at the southern end. Very nearly a shelf, it is elevated above the sandy beaches on either side and hence a useful beaching place for ancient shipping. It is hardly noticeable from the other side of the harbour, but its

\[15\] Nineteenth-century excavation work had suggested this to Freeman: 1892, 3.364–65 and n. 1, although no recent work appears to have confirmed Orsi’s suggestions; cf. Green: 1971, 318.
\[16\] Freeman: 1894, 4.127, 4.510.
\[17\] CD nos. 101, 283, 584–85, 589.
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strategic value is made clear on a number of occasions by our sources. Entirely suburban today and a place for weekend holidaymakers, its ancient isolation has been totally altered. The Athenians first built a fort here when they attacked the Great Harbour towards the end of 415 (Thuc. 6.63-72). The purpose of this assault was to gain a very rapid victory by a set piece battle outside the city or, more likely as it turned out, to test Syracusan readiness and their defensive works. The Athenians were advised to land their forces, having first (amazingly enough) lured the Syracusan cavalry all the way to Katane, at a place where the cavalry would not hamper their activities. Some Syracusan exiles with the Athenians advised a landing in the Great Harbour in front of the Olympieion (Thuc. 6.64.1). Overnight the full Athenian force sailed south along the coast from Katane – surely an exceptional event, though Thucydides makes nothing of it – and by daybreak the invaders were ashore at the beach a little north of Daskon. The locality was a good one for defence from cavalry (Thuc. 6.66.1-2) since the Athenians found ample trees to cut down to use as a stockade for their ships, and they were protected by the natural lie of the land since there were

... on one side, walls, houses, trees and marshy land and, on the other side, a steep hillside (at) Daskon, which was the point most vulnerable to attack from the enemy, they hurriedly built a fort with stones which were lying around and timber.

This was probably the first fort constructed at Daskon, and shows that without cavalry the Athenians recognised the dangers from the more open nature of the land. The Syracusans eventually offered battle and were defeated, but since it was winter and it was clear that a single engagement would not bring the war to an end, the Athenians withdrew from the Great Harbour and returned to Katane by ship.

The next we hear of Daskon is at the climax of the naval engagement between the Athenians and the Syracusans towards the end of September 413, just prior to the final sea battle between the besieged and the besiegers, though by then the roles had become reversed. Not only had the Syracusans retaken Epipolai, but they had also encircled the Athenians from the south, holding Polichne and Plemmyrion and, in between the two, Daskon. The Athenians were hemmed in on all sides, with at that stage only the entrance to the Great Harbour still open for an orderly retreat. During (or soon after) the delay in the withdrawal from Sicily imposed on the Athenians by Nikias (on the advice of his

18 Freeman: 1892, 3.116, considered that the fleet anchored or beached south of Daskon, in the area sometimes called 'Daskon Bay', but there is no reason why they should have chosen this spot further from the Athenian camp. Freeman also noted that 'the sea has plainly encroached here' and that as a result the beach is not as wide as it was in antiquity. The water level has obviously risen on the north side of the bay where there is now no beach, while at the southern end the beach is fairly narrow but the water shallow and suitable (even today) for berthing oared vessels. However, it should be assumed that some of the Athenian triremes merely anchored in shallows protected by a stockade, which was constructed out into those waters. Dover: 1970, 480-81, draws attention to a certain ambiguity in the name or term 'Daskon'. Green: 1971, 302, notes 'the melancholy Dascon sea dunes', whatever that may mean!

19 Freeman: 1892, 3.167, also noted that Daskon Point 'commands a view of the whole range of Syracuse in the widest sense ... It is a view which ... outdoes the outlook from the Olympieion itself'.
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soothsayers in response to the eclipse of the moon which began at 8.00 pm on 27 August 413 (Thuc. 7.50.4)\(^{20}\) the Syracusans tried to tempt their enemy into action. A minor tussle occurred outside the Athenian camp in which the Syracusans were successful and some Athenian hoplites were killed and horses lost. On the next day the Syracusans launched a fleet of seventy-six ships into the bay to entice the Athenian triremes out from behind their stockade (Thuc. 7.52.1). This resulted in the battle in which Eurymedon, one of the most experienced Athenian commanders, was killed.

The Athenians launched eighty-six ships against them and went into action at close quarters. Eurymedon commanded the Athenian right wing and headed off from the main body more in the direction of the land intent on outflanking the enemy. But the Syracusans and their allies first defeated the Athenian centre and then caught up with Eurymedon in that part of the harbour in which there is a shallow bay. Eurymedon was killed and the ship under his command destroyed. Then the entire Athenian fleet was driven back and forced onto the shore.

Thucydides indicates that Eurymedon was on the offensive wing facing east, while the Syracusan fleet took up position with Ortygia behind them. He seems to have set off towards Plemmyrion in order to come around the rear of the Syracusans. Unfortunately for him, the Athenian centre seems to have given way, allowing the Syracusans to come after Eurymedon and forcing him to land at Daskon where he was killed by enemy troops waiting there above the beach. Thucydides supplies none of these details, which are found in Diodorus’ account (13.13.3–8).

... Eurymedon tried to outflank the opposing wing, but when he became detached from the Athenian line the Syracusans (no longer having to concern themselves with the centre) turned to face him and cut his escape off and forced him into a bay called Daskon, which was held by the Syracusans. He was boxed into a tight spot and forced to run ashore, where someone wounded him so severely that he died; and seven of his ships were destroyed in this place.

This engagement, in which the Athenians lost eighteen triremes in total, and, says Diodorus, about 2 000 men, more or less sealed the fate of the expedition for the Syracusans now began their blockade of the Great Harbour – a trap from which it would be even more difficult and perilous to escape. Once the Athenians chose to beat a retreat by land, Daskon no longer became relevant to the issue of that adventure.

The site and maintenance of a fort in the south of the Great Harbour could play a crucial part in the outcome of hostilities around Syracuse. A fort at Daskon is next mentioned by Diodorus during the first Carthaginian siege in 396 (14.63.3), nearly two decades after the Athenians had been defeated. Daskon again became the site for dramatic events in the struggle between the Syracusans and the Carthaginian invaders. Himilkon’s

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fleet had entered the Great Harbour while his land forces must have marched down the main road from Katane around Eurialos and met up at the Olympieion (14.62.3). He seems to have used the temple as his headquarters and the Carthaginian camp was nearby, perhaps exactly where the first Athenian camp had been.21 This is certainly implicit in Diodorus' description, especially when the main camp was walled with stone taken from demolished tombs, including that of Gelon and his wife Demarete. These probably stood along the main road between Polichne and the city walls. Diodorus also says that three forts were built, perhaps rebuilt would have been a better description since they are said to have been 'at Plemmyrion, in the middle of the bay (Daskon), and near the temple of Zeus'. The fort at Daskon is likely to have been on the ruins of the former Athenian construction, a spot that had a good view of the Great Harbour northwards, the smaller bay of Daskon to the south, and Plemmyrion beyond.

When the fortunes of the Carthaginians declined as a result of sickness (Diod. 14.71.1–4), Dionysius launched a strong counterattack under cover of darkness and threw the enemy into total confusion. He sent the Syracusan fleet into the bay to attack the besiegers' camp from the beach, and simultaneously attacked the enemy with land forces directed from Polichne.22 Dionysius stormed the fort at Polichne, which must have been very close to where Himilkon had his own base, but was not necessarily one and the same. Diodorus states that all three forts of the enemy were captured, but it was in the conflict at Daskon that the most dramatic events occurred. The Syracusan cavalry attacked the Daskon fort while triremes operated from the shore, perhaps landing hoplites on the beach. Meanwhile Dionysius, having secured the Polichne fort, arrived with further troops (Diod. 14.73.2):

Finding forty fifty-oared ships there, drawn up on the beach, and nearby some merchant ships and triremes anchored, the Syracusans set them on fire. The flames quickly leapt upwards into the sky and spread out over a large area, catching the other ships so that none of the merchants or owners was able to bring any help because of the violent blaze.

Chaos ensued when a strong wind blew up in the Great Harbour, since the anchor cables were burned and ships then collided in the (by now) rough seas, with the result that these were sunk by collisions or fire. The scene, says Diodorus,

... was like that at the theatre to the inhabitants of the city and the destruction of the barbarians looked like that of men struck by lightning sent from heaven for their impious behaviour. For from a distance the sight resembled a battle with the gods, so many were ships that went up in flames, which leapt above the sails, while the Greeks cheered every

21 Himilkon tried to entice the Syracusans into battle, 14.62.4, by leading his whole army up to the walls and sending his fleet around the harbours. Freeman: 1894, 4.125, believed that the Carthaginian fleet entered the Small Harbour but that seems highly unlikely. The Athenians had certainly not attempted that feat nor did any other besiegers — including the Romans in 214–212.

22 Diod. 14.72.3, a place very close to Himilkon's own headquarters, which is said to have been within the precinct of the Olympieion, Diod. 14.62.3.
success with great shouts, and the barbarians in their dismay at this catastrophe raised a huge uproar with their confused cries.

The Syracusans watched this episode from their walls (Diod. 14.74.2) at the harbour-side; and, as they had done before, they joined in the plunder of the wreckage as the enemy fled from the battle.23

Polichne and the Olympieion

Polichne is a flat-topped steep-side rise, not really a hill and not elevated enough to be termed a ‘plateau’, it is more like a shelf approximately fifteen to twenty metres (45–60 feet) above the coastal plain and situated about eight hundred metres (2 500 feet) south of the present triple estuary of the Anapo-Mammiabica-Ciane riverine complex.24 The plain has become heavily industrialised close to the city but at Polichne uncultivated land predominates and is perhaps not substantially different in appearance to what it was in antiquity. The main road runs close by the sea roughly two hundred metres (600 feet) from the Olympieion. An older road, not much more than a dirt track, deeply undercuts Polichne at the temple’s eastern side, and possibly indicates that the sea has withdrawn at this point. Polichne was also a village, perhaps even a lesser or sub polis, initially even an outlying fort. It is also possible that Polichne and Ortygia were the earliest Greek settlements here, and the former diminished in importance since it was not as easily defensible.25 A fort is certainly mentioned at Polichne on numerous occasions in the ancient sources. Polichne is also called Olympieion because of its close geographical association with the temple of Zeus Urios, which occupied a substantial part of the hill. At Polichne there is also a reference to a shrine (perhaps a small temple) to Ciane near the spring of the same name. The spring is about two kilometres (about a mile) west of the Olympieion, in low-lying and what must have been marshy land, although this has now been reclaimed for agricultural use.

Dramatic events took place repeatedly at Polichne. In his war against Syracuse in 492 Hippokrates, tyrant of Gela, says Herodotus (7.154), defeated the Syracusans at a river near Eloros – either the Tellaro or Assinaro perhaps – as the Geloans marched from the southwest towards their goal of conquest.26 From there the invaders marched

23 Diodorus, 14.73.1, describes how the young and oldest men went out in small boats to collect the plunder from the sinking and sunken vessels of the enemy.
24 CD nos. 94–96, 392, 626. For an illustration of the triple estuary see the CD nos. 566–70. Dover: 1970, 479, notes that the Mammiebica and Ciane estuaries are relatively modern construction designed to drain this southerly section of Lysimeleia, and that the Ciane, until then, joined the Anapo ‘5 km from the sea’.
25 Postulated by Freeman: 1891, 1.360–62. The legend associated with Ciane and the temple or shrine close to Polichne does suggest an early occupation and perhaps even an independent beginning before Ortygia and then Akradina were preferred.
26 Freeman: 1891, 2.116, calls this river the Helorus, and the battle site where it is crossed by the main road from Gela to Syracuse. The problem with this identification is that no Helorus river is now marked on maps, and in the Barrington’s Atlas this is plainly the Tellaro. The change of river names proves a major difficulty in examining the region, as a number of scholars have noted. Vibius Sequetor mentions various rivers in Sicily but not alterations to names. He does note the Fountain of Arethusa (4) as a river, the Anapos (16) and that it flowed underground for two miles (4–5 kms), the Fountain of Ciane (186) as a pool, a river Helorus (79) in the chorē of Syracuse.
to Polichne where Hippokrates, to be emulated by later would-be conquerors, made his camp next door to the temple precinct (Diod. 10.28.1–2), but it was not pillaged. Greeks of the Classical period were reluctant to plunder religious sites, but no such qualms seem to have bothered Greek or non-Greek leaders of the Hellenistic period. Nikias too occupied Polichne in the first Athenian expedition against Syracuse at the end of 415. He too was religiously scrupulous and refrained from profanation of a deity which took care of seafarers – a god of some importance to the Athenians. Himilkon followed in the wake of earlier invaders when he pitched his camp here in 396. We are not told of the fate of the temple treasures at this time and they may have been removed on the order of Dionysius prior to the arrival of the Carthaginians. There is, however, an anecdote about Dionysius robbing the Olympieion (Diod. 14.67.4), and the removal of temple wealth to preserve it from the approaching enemy may just have given the tyrant of Syracuse the opportunity to appropriate gold for the payment of mercenaries. It is significant that he was away from Syracuse soon after the arrival of the Carthaginians, successfully whipping up support for his cause. The gold of Zeus may have helped grease palms. Himilkon is credited with sacking other temples and elaborate tombs along the main road. The temple shrine to Zeus would not have been safe at this time, nor are we told how the temple shrine of Ciane fared during all this destruction.

The hill at Polichne was ideal as a headquarters for invading armies since it commands a complete view of the entire bay, the city, Ortygia and Epipolai. The Syracusans eventually realised the strategic importance of this higher ground and it is interesting to note that in the Athenian siege, and in the later Carthaginian siege of 396 BC, a Syracusan garrison was maintained at Polichne, which was never dislodged by the invading forces. This presence must surely have hampered any enemy’s room for action, and access to supplies brought in overland. Polichne also commanded the main south road, which explains the need to have a permanent Syracusan presence here. Polichne could almost be described as Syracuse’s Dekeleia.27

Lysimeleia

This was the ancient marshland lying between the River Anapos and the main western fortifications of the city, which came down from Epipolai to the harbour beside the agora. The marsh extends for about 2.6 kilometres (a little more than 1½ miles), and its width here, slightly wider at the coast, cannot have changed much from antiquity since the area is hedged about by rivers and urban areas. Lysimeleia extended inland right up to the

27 The land around Polichne is not extensive yet at times two opposing forces were stationed here and surely within sight of one another. No ancient source seems to have found this at all interesting since it draws comment nowhere.

28 Freeman, 1892, 3.329, was less sanguine, believing that ‘the sea has most likely encroached on the land’, and thought that a considerable beach or firmer land lay between the sea and the marsh. Such a strip, even a mole, would have allowed for the fight between the Syracusans and Etruscans, as described, Thuc. 7.53.1–2. Dover: 1970, 484, suggests that Lysimeleia was a lake between the Anapos and the Athenian camp (see the map facing p. 481) but this leaves too little space for the entire Athenian force and shipping north of a lake up to the walls of the city. A marsh could easily be described as a ‘lake’. Green: 1971, 199
southern edge of Epipolai, and even now in Neapolis, close to the Greek Theatre, marshy ground is still visible along the main road – the Via Paolo Orsi next to the Tennis Club. Today there is a heavy concentration of industrial and commercial buildings on what was once marsh, but a good idea of its former boggy nature (the land is probably slightly below sea level in places) can be gauged from the existence of three large drainage channels conveying surface water into the bay, even at the height of summer.

This marshy terrain should have provided additional strength to Syracuse’s western walls although most invaders seem to have had little trouble in traversing this ground, or at least exercised some ingenuity in getting across what appears to have been a great deal of surface water and mud.

... at dawn the army came down from Epipolai into the plain and made its way over the marsh by laying down doors and planks of wood over the parts where the mud was deepest and the ground firmest. (Thuc. 6.101.3)

In the summer of 414 BC the Syracusans were trying to throw up a cross wall to prevent the complete circumvallation of the city. The Athenian siege wall was being constructed on Epipolai and, from there, down towards the harbour. The Syracusans planned to prevent this by building a wall west from the city through the marsh. The Athenians responded by attacking from Epipolai, but first had to get across the marshy ground. This they did, and the Syracusans retired before them – some to the city and some towards the river and the fort at Polichne. The Athenians thought that they could cut off the Syracusan retreat to Polichne if they gained the bridge over the Anapos first. Lamachos, Nikias’ colleague, led three hundred hoplites at the run, but the opposition’s cavalry proved too strong.

After crossing over a ditch, Lamachos and a few others who had gone with him were left isolated and he with five or six of his men was killed. (Thuc. 6.101.6)

There are some puzzling points here, not least the ability of the Syracusan cavalry to negotiate this marsh, which perhaps points to a fight actually having taken place along the road and not in open country. But then how could the Athenian strategos have been so isolated from the bulk of his forces? There were clearly meadows or cultivated fields in the vicinity and these seem to have encompassed sufficient space for the entire Syracusan army to muster, and for the enemy to assemble as well:

The Syracusans drew up the whole of their line of hoplites 16 men deep. This line included the entire Syracusan army, together with their allies who had come to lend support. Most describes Lysimeleia as ‘a low-lying area with frequent patches of bog and standing water’ and added that when the Syracusans attempted to build a cross-wall in 414, ‘they squelched through the black, stinking slime ...’ CD nos. 670–72.

29 The Syracusans must have been expert cavalrymen. Time and time again the sources refer to the Syracusan horse, yet the country is not suitable for great cavalry movements. However, it was the cavalry that hampered the Athenian withdrawal and attacked the enemy in steep-sided river valleys, or attacked forts (in and around the Great Harbour) constructed in rocky and hilly terrain.
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of these were from Selinous; the next important force being the cavalry from Gela which numbered 200 ... The cavalry was at least 1 200 strong ... As the Athenians were going to attack first, Nikias went along the lines encouraging the whole army ... (Thuc. 6.67.2)

In the winter of 415, during the rainy season, two opposing armies were drawn up for a set piece battle in full view of one another, no more than five hundred metres apart, but in that area which is supposedly marsh because they were not standing immediately below the walls. This is plain since the Syracusan left wing, closest to the city, was broken by the Argives and fled, and the centre (presumably Syracusan hoplites) was pushed back by the Athenians. However, no mention is made about easy access to the city (Thuc. 6.70.2–3).

Later in the spring of 414 Thucydides (6.96.3) notes that while the Athenians were launching their first attack on Epipolai, the Syracusans ‘went down at dawn in full force to the fields along the Anapos river and held a review of the hoplites’. Yet this is Lysimeleia, and there cannot be field and bog in equal measure, unless this review of the troops was conducted further west and higher up the Anapos valley, closer to the way up to Eurialos. If indeed this was the case it would explain why the Athenian army was able to land at Leon and, from there, march unseen up to Eurialos, and only when the troops arrived at this highest point on Epipolai were they spotted by the Syracusans, who hurriedly launched an uphill offensive, but with too few men and in too disorganised a fashion. However, this fight, which resulted in three hundred Syracusans being killed, did allow the main army to retreat in good order into the city.

The marsh itself was an unhealthy place for an encampment, as the Athenians and subsequently the Carthaginians and Romans discovered to their cost. Of course, this was Lysimeleia’s greatest contribution to Syracuse’s defence. The Athenians – from being in a dominating position on Epipolai – were gradually confined to the depths of Lysimeleia. The command’s evident belief that naval and ground forces should be kept closely together and that lines of communication should be kept short account for the increasing concentration of Athenian forces in the marsh. In the hot summer, however, disease began to take its toll and by the time the Athenians began their withdrawal by land, many of those who marched out from Lysimeleia were sick. That sickness was no doubt a combination of incipient malaria, typhoid and cholera, coupled with a lack of supplies and hygiene, which would have brought on dysentery and other forms of gastroenteritis.

30 It is curious that Selinous appears here allied with Syracuse. Selinous was in conflict with Segesta, which had received some aid from Athens. But Selinous’ founding city of Megara Hyblaia had been destroyed by the Syracusans.
31 Thucydides says only that the Athenians did not pursue the enemy far, primarily because the Syracusan cavalry remained unbroken.
32 However, Thucydides, 6.97.3, has the Syracusan commander Diomilos and the 600 troops used to attack the Athenians at Eurialos in meadows ‘nearly three miles’ away. This cannot be in the valley immediately below Eurialos, which is less than a mile away, but right back in Lysimeleia beside the walls near the agora.
33 During the Roman siege another outbreak of illness occurred, but the Romans appeared less affected than the Carthaginians (Liv. 25.26). See also Chapter 5.
34 It is easy with hindsight to see that the Athenians should have maintained their fleet at Thapsos or Megara and directed their attack on the city from Epipolai and the north, as the Romans were to do two hundred years later.
Two decades later the Carthaginians fell into the same trap. A huge army, says Diodorus (14.62.3), needed to be encamped where it, and the war fleet of 250 triremes, could be supplied from merchant vessels numbering up to a thousand. The Great Harbour must have become very congested.\textsuperscript{35} The summer was also exceptionally hot (Diod. 14.70.4), and disease was rampant within a short time.\textsuperscript{36} As a result, notwithstanding some sound tactics, Dionysius won a surprisingly easy victory over this vast host, debilitated by the sicknesses lurking in the marsh, Syracuse’s permanent ally.\textsuperscript{37}

**Epipolai**

The ground is high and slopes down to the city so that it is all within sight from inside. It is called Epipolai or ‘the Heights’ by the Syracusans because it lies above the level of the rest.\textsuperscript{38} (Thuc. 6.96.1)

The northern side of Epipolai rises steeply out of the plain of Megara,\textsuperscript{39} the southern and eastern slopes fall gently towards the Great Harbour and Ortygia respectively, and the lower land which surrounds the bay. On the eastern side the plateau narrows appreciably at Eurialos, and then continues to rise towards Belvedere before dipping away again to form the pass that divides Epipolai from the steep-sided plateau of Mount Climiti, which rises still higher (to 406 metres/1 200 feet) inland. Epipolai is the dominating geological and physical presence in Syracuse. Although its altitude is not great, its relative height means that, on the one side, the city, Ortygia and the harbours are clearly in view, and, on the other, any approach from the north. The direct route from the north first involves a steep rise, via the *Scala Greca*, into the city and from there down again to Akradina. All other routes involve either bypassing the plateau altogether, as the main road (SS115) does today, or by an ascent to Eurialos, which after about 400 BC was incorporated into the city defences and provided with a gate which became the western entrance to Syracuse – the Epipolai Gate.

\textsuperscript{35} Diodorus’ account here (14.62.2) is jumbled with different totals for the merchant shipping. Two hundred and fifty triremes probably needed at least the same number of support vessels carrying supplies. Himilkon’s army was probably less than the 300 000 noted by Diodorus, but would still have required an enormous fleet of ships to bring in sufficient supplies.

\textsuperscript{36} Diodorus (14.71.1–4) does not describe the symptoms of malaria but rather a collection of symptoms applicable to a number of diseases prevalent in such circumstances, including typhoid and cholera that could easily be contracted during a prolonged stay in marshland in the heat of summer. The madness described here is as likely to have been panic as much as anything physical. However, for arguments that it was malaria, see R. Salares, *Malaria and Rome*, Oxford 2002, 38; cf. R.J. Littman, ‘The Plague at Syracuse 396 B.C.’, *Mnemosyne* 37, 1984, 110–16 for smallpox.

\textsuperscript{37} In 310 Hamilkar besieged Syracuse during the absence of Agathokles, see Chapter 4. Diodorus, 20.16.1–2, does not specify the placement of the Carthaginian camp, nor where an attempt to scale the walls was made. Diod. 20.16.7–9, but it is assumed that it was from the south, Lysimeleia, and not from the north. For a discussion see Freeman: 1894, 4.416.

\textsuperscript{38} Thucydides’ description appears accurate, though elsewhere – 6.97.3, 6.101.6, 7.43.2–4 – he is sufficiently casual with detailed information to indicate that he probably never visited the city and relied on eyewitness accounts for his narrative. For Dover’s discussion of this issue, see 1970, 466–69, CD nos. 82–83, 256, 515–19, 250–51, 260, 272.

\textsuperscript{39} Green: 1971, 183: ‘These heights (sometimes known as the Syracuse Terrace) are a natural outcrop of calcareous limestone, some three miles long from east to west, and just under two miles wide at their broadest point, narrowing sharply as they approach their western extremity. Here at the “waist” of the plateau, is the easiest approach to the summit, a gently sloping col known in antiquity as Euryalus.’
Epipolai's crucial importance to both sides was quickly exposed in the initial Athenian assault on the city. The army was landed at Leon (Thuc. 6.97.1), which was the stretch of beach between Thapsos and the Scala Greca. Then the army marched west under the escarpment to reach Eurialos (close to Belvedere) probably in a matter of hours, and unnoticed by the Syracusans until too late. The Syracusans who came up to Eurialos were thrown back with heavy casualties. Soon after this the Athenians built a fort at Labdalon, which Thucydides says was ‘on the edge of the cliffs of Epipolai and looking out towards Megara’. The Athenians then moved east to invest the city more closely and were as careless as the Syracusans in keeping a watch at Eurialos, for in the summer Gylippos arrived from Sparta via Himera and the interior.

Gylippos first captured a fort of the Sikels on the way called Ietas, then formed up his army in order of battle and advanced to Epipolai. He made his way up along the same road which the Athenians had used before, by Eurialos and then, with the Syracusans, moved forward against the Athenian fortifications. (Thuc. 7.2.3–4)

The Athenians were taken completely by surprise, and on the next day since Nikias refused to do battle on Epipolai, Gylippos took the fort at Labdalon (Thuc. 7.3.4), and the process of pushing the enemy down to the Great Harbour began. When Demosthenes arrived with reinforcements in the next summer, by which time the Athenians were already under severe pressure in Lysimeleia, he recognised the necessity of retaking Epipolai.

By day it seemed impossible to approach, so he ... set out for Epipolai about midnight with Eurymedon and Menander and the whole army. They came to Epipolai via Eurialos — the same route by which the first army had ascended previously and unobserved by the enemy lookouts reached the fort which the Syracusans had there and captured it, killing some of the garrison. (Thuc. 7.43.2–4)

The night assault was a disaster, although many of the Athenians (including their generals) escaped back to the marsh. The reason for what eventually became a chaotic shambles lay in the timing. The attack began too early in the night and resulted in troops being deployed around an area many did not know, and which was too large to become familiar in so brief a time and in darkness. Epipolai is an awkward place to cross even in daylight as it is covered with boulders and irregular rocky outcrops. At night this place was almost as dangerous as the marsh below. Finally, night attacks were risky ventures and prone to disaster.

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41 Labdalon cannot be identified, but a number of locations on the western end of Epipolai ‘would do very well’, says Freeman: 1892, 3. 661–62. It was probably very close to the current Eurialos fort or the Epipolai Gate, both out of sight from the city. A good position is likely to have been reused.
42 Ietas is closer to Segesta than to Syracuse. Thucydides has conflated a forced march into a single terse statement. For Ietas see the CD nos. 194–95 and Video clip: ietas.
43 Thucydides lacks precision here, since the army led by Demosthenes came up to Epipolai from Lysimeleia and from there to Eurialos from the south. Only the end of the route was the same as that followed by Lamachos and Nikias the year before. He also seems to suggest that there was by now a fort at Eurialos, and also mentioned another three forts on Epipolai. The first may be the one situated at Labdalon, seeing that this one had already been constructed, and seems a logical primary objective of the Athenians.
44 Compare the night attack of Dionysius on Tauromenion in Chapter 4. Thucydides, 7.44.1, notes that this was the sole night battle of the Peloponnesian War, and that even with moonlight visibility was limited, but does not comment on the lie of the land.
Thucydides suggests that the Athenians mostly tried to retreat by a single narrow passage down from Epipolai, but this is unlikely to have been at Eurialos which is the long way around to Lysimeleia. It is more likely that the Athenians went down by as direct a route as they could find close to the walls of the city. While the Carthaginian Himilcon avoided Epipolai altogether in 396, nearly a century later his compatriot Hamilcar also came to grief attempting to force an entry into Syracuse through the fort at Eurialos. 45 The account in Diodorus is both brief and vague, but involves another night attack. Hamilcar had first set up camp at the Olympieion (Diod. 20.29.3), but only for a brief spell before launching an attack on Epipolai. The Syracusans had strongly garrisoned the Eurialos fort because they had been warned of the Carthaginians’ intentions. ...

The men became easy targets for the defenders holding the high ground. The Syracusans also seem to have organised sorties (20.29.9) and blocked the narrow tracks up to Eurialos, forcing the attackers back over the cliffs. The Carthaginians had no idea of the strength of their opponents, did not know the lie of the land, and in the darkness they panicked. Hamilcar was captured as his main forces were routed. 46

The Roman siege, which finally brought about the conquest of Syracuse in 212, was not concluded by an attack through Eurialos where the fort, so heavily invested with the latest military technology, 47 was abandoned without a fight, but through the Dionysian walls near the Scala Greca. The Syracusans were celebrating a festival of Artemis and the northern walls had been left patchily guarded. The Romans scaled the walls of northern Epipolai and then opened the gates of the Hexapylon, which allowed the besiegers easy access to the agora via the Hekatompodion, the main north road. 48 Thereafter, Epipolai remained within the walled area of the city, although it was relatively sparcely populated. It does not feature in any later military events affecting Syracuse.

45 For Hamilcar’s two sieges of Syracuse in 310 and 309 and the lengthy naval blockade of the city see Chapter 5. Neither Dion in 357 nor Timoleon in 344 entered Syracuse by way of Epipolai. Dion may have been expected at Eurialos, but instead bypassed the stronghold with his army, on another night march, down the Anapos valley from Akrai to enter the city near the agora, Plat. Dion 37–38. Timoleon camped in Lysimeleia and entered Syracuse through the western defensive walls, Plat. Tim. 20.

46 The Carthaginians regrouped, Diod. 20.30.2, 31.1–2 (probably back in Lysimeleia) and maintained their blockade, but the danger to the city had been averted.

47 See Chapter 4. Although Livy says that M. Claudius Marcellus, the Roman commander, stood on Epipolai and gazed over the city, Eurialos was clearly not the entry point for the besiegers. Marcellus may have visited the fort later. Equally he cannot have looked out from the Hexapylon over the city since Akradina and Ortygia are not visible from that point. For the Eurialos fort see CD nos. 76, 85–87, 90–93, 244–49, 251–53, 257–72, 514.

48 The Romans were delayed by the internal walls of Akradina and only completed their capture of the city by gaining entry to Ortygia through a postem gate near the Fountain of Arethusa, see Chapter 4.
From Thapsos to Megara Hyblaea

Immediately to the north of Epipolai lies the fractured limestone countryside that is the Plain of Megara. Megara Hyblaea was the fourth Greek colony founded in Sicily, preceding its Dorian neighbour Syracuse by nearly two decades.49 The peninsula of Thapsos possessed a much earlier settlement, dating as far back as approximately 1400 BC, probably a Sikel community, but one which had trading contacts with Greece.50 Thapsos was clearly not inhabited by the Classical period, while Megara’s chorē was too limited for much chance of sustained growth because Leontinoi lay to the north and Syracuse to the south. Megara was destroyed in 483 by Gelon and although repopulated in the fourth century BC, was never to be a major centre.51 Early in the Athenian expedition against Syracuse, Lamachos, one of the three strategoi had recognised the strategic value of Megara as a base simply because of its proximity to Syracuse (Thuc. 6.49).52 However, the Athenians only sailed past Megara by night, eluding the watchmen, on their way into the Great Harbour in the winter of 415 (Thuc. 6.65.2).53 That Megara was cleared of a civilian population in 414 is clearly noted by Thucydides (6.94.1 cf. 6.4.1–2):

In the following year, right at the start of spring, the Athenians in Sicily set out from Katane and sailed along the coast to Sicilian Megara. The Megarians ... were expelled from their polis by the Syracusans during Gelon’s tyranny and they still hold this land. The Athenians landed at this point and devastated the countryside and after they made an unsuccessful attack on the Syracusan fort, they went further along the coast with both army and triremes to the Terias river.54

Later in the same summer the full Athenian force, army and navy bypassed Megara again to land at Leon intent on the assault of Epipolai. Having landed the army from their transport vessels, the navy then retired to Thapsos which is a peninsula with a narrow isthmus that juts out into the sea and is not far from Syracuse by any route. The Athenians from the triremes built a stockade across the isthmus and remained in reserve at Thapsos. (Thuc. 6.97.1 — 2)55


50 Mycenaean pottery has been excavated at Thapsos, Sjoqvist: 1973, 13. For tentative occupation dates, see Holloway: 1991, 33–35.

51 The earliest walls constructed in the 480s, when under threat from Syracuse, enclosed an area just 1 000 metres in width. For the recolonisation of Megara, see Talbert: 1974, 149. For its subsequent and final destruction in 214 see Guido: 1967, 200. Megara did, however, send out colonists to found Selinou, which became a substantial power in the west until its own destruction in 409.

52 Lamachos was also the advocate of the attack on Epipolai via Eurialos, and had clearly received sound information. On Lamachos see Freeman: 1892, 3.144–145, 3.210.

53 If a garrison was posted throughout the winter months when normally no military activity would take place, it does seem incredible that a fleet of about 130 triremes plus support vessels could sail at night along the coast without raising some suspicions.

54 Some part of the town may have been maintained as a fort, its position above the beach would have made it ideal as a military outpost guarding the road to Syracuse. Freeman: 1892, 3.210 considered this likely.

55 For the Thapsos peninsula see CD nos. 65–74, 343–44.
Again it is odd that the Syracusans were unaware of these facts unless there was no guard stationed at Megara. It is also remarkable that the Athenians did not maintain a permanent base either at Thapsos or Megara throughout the siege—a major tactical error, unless the Syracusans had installed a sufficiently strong garrison here as they had done at the Olympieion. Significantly, the garrison at Polichne was never dislodged. Yet the point must also have occurred to Thucydides (6.99.4) who notes:

The Athenian ships had not yet sailed round from Thapsos into the Great Harbour, and so the Syracusans still controlled that coastline while the Athenians brought in their supplies overland from Thapsos.

The implication being that it was easier to seize the Great Harbour, but putting all their eggs in one basket did not bring permanent security, as the Athenians found later to their cost. Megara and Thapsos were important elements in the Syracusan chorē and once there the Athenians should not have relinquished their occupation.56

No mention is made of this area in either of the Carthaginian sieges, nor indeed in the campaigns of Dion and Timoleon. Himilkon in 396 BC must have marched south (passing Megara and Thapsos to his left) before taking the pass between Belvedere and Mount Climiti and swinging left again into the Anapos valley and then down to Lysimeleia and Polichne. The Romans, however, with surer instincts or closer attention to military manuals did indeed occupy the north coast. Polybius (37.1—3) clearly knew about the exceptional fortifications of Syracuse, but also (8.3—7) plainly indicates that the Romans were not about to copy the mistakes of their predecessors (cf. Liv. 24.33).

These commanders (Claudius Pulcher and Claudius Marcellus) ... decided to launch an assault with the army on the part known as the Hexapylon while the fleet was to attack ... Akradina just where the city wall extends to the harbour’s edge.

Attacks on this sort of scale and from this quarter had not been attempted before; and although the sea-borne assault failed, and the siege settled down to a blockade, it was eventually the Hexapylon which fell to the Romans. The walls, so neatly coursed, were easily counted from a distance, says Polybius, and the height accurately measured so that Romans then built scaling ladders without having to come close. Livy (25.23) gives much the same account.

A Spartan named Damippos was captured by Roman ships while on a mission from Syracuse to King Philip (V). Epikydes was very anxious to ransom him at any cost ... Representatives were sent to discuss the ransom and they decided to meet at the Troigili harbour near the

56 Thucydides (6.96.3—97.2) suggests that the Syracusan review of the hoplites took place in the fields near Lysimeleia, and the movement of the Athenian army from Katane to Leon was concluded at the same time. It is simply impossible that the whole Athenian force (eight to ten thousand) men could have been moved into place to attack Epipolai in the space of a single morning. It may well be that an advance guard of hoplites was landed at Leon, secured Eurialos, fought off the Syracusan attack, and then waited for the main force to follow. The oarsmen of the 130 war triremes numbered about 20 000 and hence the greater part of the expedition, but seemed to have played no role in this episode. There must also, therefore, have been a significant number of troop transports.
Syracuse in antiquity

tower known as Galeagra as being a half-way point and most convenient for both parties. They came here a number of times and on one occasion a member of the Roman delegation had a closer look at the wall, counted the courses in it and estimated the height of the stone slabs which composed them and arrived by reasonable calculations at the total height of the walls. Since it turned out to be much lower than he or anyone else had supposed and consequently scaleable, in his opinion by ladders of quite moderate length, he reported his discovery to Marcellus.

The walls were scaled and a postern gate in the Hexapylon was broken in and then the Romans began to pour inside. Yet again it was a night attack but this time with precision planning – and helped a great deal, it must be added, by very careless Syracusan guards. Once the Romans were inside the city’s fate was sealed.57 Fortunately for the Syracusans only their property was looted – the city survived to recover its fortunes.

57 See also Chapter 4. For Epipolai see CD nos. 75, 77–78. The wall lay along the lip of the ridge which rises steeply out of the plain, Stahl: 2003, 202, ‘the rim of the plateau falls off steeply in altitude for about 10 to 15 metres.’ The Romans may have had scaling ladders to the correct height but had to bring these up cliff-like terrain before they could attack the walls. The story may therefore be fanciful and the real entry point for the attackers was a postern gate opened by a traitor, as occurred later on Ortygia.