

CHAPTER 4: THE FOUR GREAT SIEGES OF SYRACUSE

If Syracuse falls, all Sicily falls as well and Italy immediately afterwards. (Thucydides, 6.91)

When the overall history of Syracuse is recalled there may be a tendency to dwell at length on one of its most famous episodes, namely the siege of the city by the Athenians between spring 414 and early autumn 413 BC. There were, however, four great sieges of the city, and only the last of these resulted in a defeat for the Syracusans. The siege by the Athenians proved to be a turning point in the history of both cities, for Athens the beginning of decline, for Syracuse from the brink of disaster to a place of sustained domination in Greek-Sicilian affairs. The Athenians were foiled by flawed strategies and an imprecise knowledge of the land, and paid an appalling price in casualties in what became for them a catastrophe. Meanwhile, Syracuse emerged victorious, yet that newly won pre-eminence was almost immediately challenged by an invasion and a siege by a Carthaginian army in 396, which probably came closer to succeeding in its aims than had the Athenians two decades beforehand. Brilliant tactical moves, coupled with timely bribes, enabled the Syracusans to emerge stronger than ever before. Once removed, this external threat did not reappear for over eighty years, although in the interim internecine strife in the 350s and 340s, made the city a domestic battleground. The second Carthaginian siege of between 310 and 307 was the longest continuous blockade of the city, probably of any urban area in antiquity, and was again thwarted by, on the one hand, diversionary tactics in Carthage's own backyard and, on the other, by the invaders' severe miscalculations of the land around the city. Finally, the Romans may have been initially baffled by the ingenuity of the besieged, helped especially by Archimedes for nearly two years, but they forced an entry into Syracuse and sacked the city in 212 BC.

The topography of a place can be both affected by events and can also influence how particular events unfold. In the case of Syracuse, it is arguable that the situation of the city and its surrounding hinterland contributed significantly to its success as a military power. However, modern misconceptions about the local topography and often a failure to appreciate the logistical problems regarding the movement of armed forces overland and naval squadrons around the city have resulted in considerable confusion about crucial events in the history of Syracuse. The aim here is to illustrate how, on a number of crucial occasions, the topography of Syracuse played a vital role in the outcome of four great sieges. To attain that objective, not only are the ancient sources of information naturally explored (primarily Thucydides, Diodorus, Polybius, Livy and Plutarch) but their accounts are supplemented and enhanced by reference

to relevant maps and visual material.¹ The landscape and its salient features have, in some instances, changed dramatically since antiquity, but the general contours of the land and the difficulties or ease of moving across it have probably remained constant. Recent and digital-quality photographic evidence can, therefore, help resolve a number of outstanding problems which have adversely affected our understanding of these four historical events at Syracuse.

Athenian interest in Sicilian affairs dates back to at least 427 BC, when twenty ships under the command of Laches were dispatched to bring aid to Leontinoi, then at war with Syracuse (Thuc. 3.86.1).² Since insufficient Athenian land forces had been voted for this expedition it became confined to raiding the islands (Lipara) and the coast (Kamarina to Megara, Himera and Messene) before was finally withdrawn, following a naval engagement in the Straits (Thuc. 4.24.1–25.4), and the Sicilian cities reached a general agreement for a return to peaceful conditions.³ Diodorus (12.54.1) plainly states that a more ambitious ending to this venture had been anticipated.

For a long time the Athenians had wanted to conquer Sicily because of the fertility of the island and ... they voted to send an allied force to Leontinoi, offering as their excuse the need and request of their kin, although in fact they were eager to possess the island.

Although Sicilian affairs remained on the periphery of the main theatre of war, the trade between Syracuse and Corinth, particularly, would have been a source of grave concern to the Athenians. If that link could be severed then the Peloponnese would be deprived of vital imports, and the balance of power would swing back to Athens following the stalemate peace of 422. This and the fear of Syracusan imperialism (Thuc. 5.4.5) explains why a second and much better equipped expedition left Athens bound for Sicily in the summer of 415. However, the siege itself began only in May 414 and lasted until either September or October of the following year, in all between seventeen and eighteen months.⁴

Towards the end of summer the Athenians, just before the recall of Alkibiades, explored (with a force of sixty triremes) the east coast as far south as Syracuse, where they sailed unchallenged into the Great Harbour (Thuc. 6.50.3). Later, at the start of winter (probably some time in November), an initial Athenian attack was launched at the Great Harbour. This mission was more than a reconnaissance since the Syracusan army had been lured away to Katane. Thucydides states (6.65.3–66.2):

1 See CD Chapter 4.

2 The Athenians responded to the request of the Leontinoi, led by Gorgias, A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, Oxford 1956, 2.387.

3 The Athenian *strategoi* Pythodoros and Sophokles were exiled for bribery and a third, Eurymedon, was fined, Thuc. 4.65.3, when they returned home, Gomme: 1956, 3.524.

4 May seems a reasonable starting point, although Thucydides says only that the Athenians captured Eurialos in 'summer', 6.96.1. The end of the siege depends on whether or not Thucydides was correct in stating that the Athenians did not budge from their camp for twenty-seven days following the lunar eclipse of August 27th. Conflicting information exists in the sources. See further below.

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When day came the Athenians landed near the *Olympieion* to occupy the ground for their camp ... the Athenians had plenty of time to dispose their forces in an excellent position where they could begin a general engagement whenever they chose and where the Syracusan cavalry would have little chance of doing them damage either during a battle or before it, because on one side there were walls, houses, trees and a marsh in the way, and on the other there were steep slopes.

The Temple of Zeus lies less than a kilometre (roughly 3 000 feet) from the beach on a shelf of higher land, while the road to Eloros and Kamerina passed close to the east end of the temple as it does today.⁵ The intention was presumably to cut communications with the south; and by doing so also to allow an occupation of the southern end of the bay, including Plemmyrion, thereby imposing a blockade on the city.

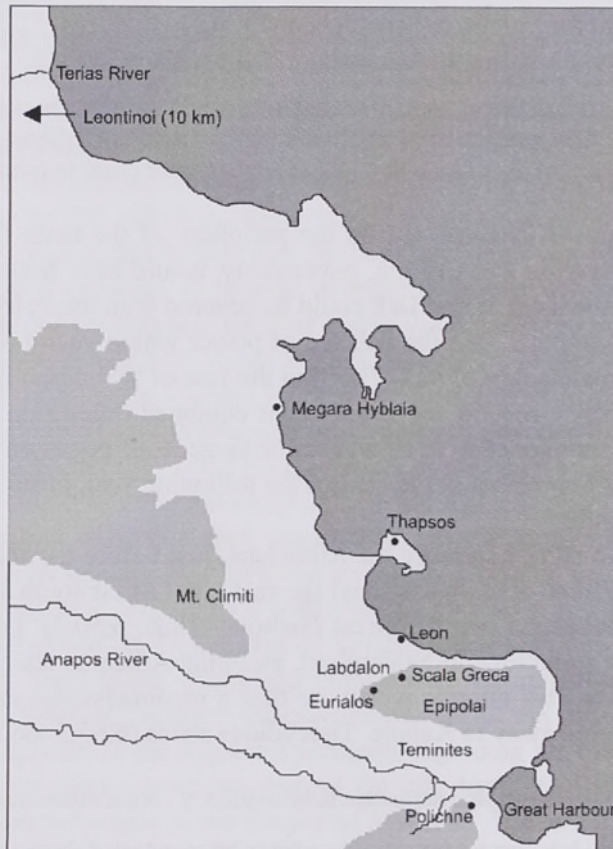


Figure 23: The Northern Extent of Syracuse

⁵ CD nos. 293, 392, 96 (Polichne looking north).

Thucydides implies that a set-piece battle was envisaged, but one where the Syracusan cavalry could not be employed to its full advantage. The land below the *Olympieion* descends in the north to the adjacent mouths of the Anapos, Mammiabica and Ciane rivers, and from there to what was the marshy ground of Lysimeleia, the northern limit of which is within a hundred metres or so of the agora. The area is not large, and Thucydides suggests that at least from the Anapos to Polichne the land was under cultivation and that there were farmsteads in the vicinity. This sort of peri-urban situation did not lend itself to good use by cavalry. The Athenian strategy seems sound and competent:

They also cut down trees in the vicinity and carried these down to the beach where they built a stockade beside their ships. At Daskon Heights, which was most vulnerable to attack by the enemy they quickly constructed a fort with stones that they picked up and with timber. They also broke down the bridge over the Anapos river. (Thuc. 6.66.2)

The ships needed to be protected from attack, especially from fire ships, and the construction of a stockade was a daily practice when a fleet was on campaign. Daskon *akron* is really a continuation of the higher ground from Polichne across to the Great Harbour;⁶ and Thucydides is suggesting that the Syracusan cavalry or even heavily armed infantry could be brought, by quite a circuitous route, around to the south west of the harbour to attack the Athenians from the south. The most immediate route into the city lay across the Anapos, half a kilometre (1 500 feet) north of the temple of Zeus *Urios*, the destruction of the main road bridge was to take care of all possible movements from the rear by the Syracusan army.

When the Syracusans returned from outside Katane they marched up to the Athenian camp and when no response occurred, crossed back over the Eloros road, and pitched camp (Thuc. 6.66.3). This suggests that the Syracusan camp lay closer to Polichne and the *Olympieion* rather than just outside the city walls, yet near enough to account for what happened next. On the following morning some of the Syracusan troops slipped away into the city while the army was drawn up in battle formation (Thuc. 6.67.2), and so were taken by surprise when Nikias drew up the Athenian army and advanced at once (Thuc. 6.69.1). In the middle of a thunder shower, the Athenian right wing and centre forced the Syracusan left and centre back.

The Syracusan army was now cut into two and retreated in confusion. The Athenians did not chase them far, however, since this was prevented by a large number of as yet undefeated Syracusan cavalry who charged and drove back any of the hoplites they saw pressing the pursuit in advance of the others. The Syracusans rallied again at the Eloros road and formed up as best they could under the circumstances; and they even sent a garrison of their own citizens to the *Olympieion*, because they were afraid the Athenians would plunder it. The rest returned to the city. The Athenians did not come up to the temple, and instead collected their dead, put them on a pyre and camped for the night. Next day they gave back the Syracusan dead under a truce. Then they sailed back to Katane. They did this because it was now winter and considered that they were not yet in a position to wage the war from their base outside Syracuse. (Thuc. 6.70.2–71.1)

6 CD no. 101 (Daskon from the south).

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The scale of the movement of the conflicting forces cannot have been that great since the Anapos river is separated from the city only by the marshy ground of Lysimeleia. There was also clearly a secondary route to Polichne by which the Syracusans could place a garrison at the *Olympieion*, although how it was to protect the temple from attack by the nearby full Athenian force is left unsaid. The very next day the Athenians departed, preferring to make their winter quarters at Katane rather than in the Great Harbour. This was precisely the season when this area was most hospitable to an invading force. It is possible that the command considered the problem of communications and obtaining supplies too daunting in the winter, yet in the following year this is exactly where we find the Athenians in their siege. A lull in hostilities was immediate, but can the Syracusans have believed that the Athenians would not return? In the new year it should have become apparent that the Athenians were intent on testing the northern defences of the city, and in the process collecting supplies while denying these to Syracuse.

At the very start of next year's spring, the Athenians in Sicily sailed from Katane along the coast to Sicilian Megara. Here they landed and devastated the countryside, and after they made an unsuccessful attack on a Syracusan fort, they returned along the coast with both army and navy to the river Terias. Here they moved across the plain, destroying everything as they went and burning the wheat. They engaged a small force of Syracusans and killed some of them. After putting up a trophy they went back to their ships. Next day they returned to Katane for supplies, and the whole army then went on to Kentoripa, a Sicel town. After they had received its surrender the Athenians advanced and burned the crops of the people of Inessa and Hybla. (Thuc. 6.94.1–3)

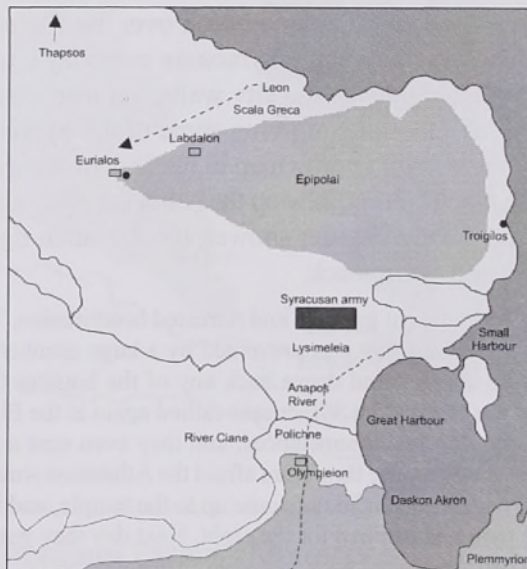


Figure 24: The Initial Athenian Assault on Syracuse in 414 BC

Megara Hyblaia had remained unoccupied since its destruction by Gelon in 483, but the site (or rather its acropolis) may have been reoccupied by the Syracusans shortly before the Athenians put in here, if this is the fort mentioned by Thucydides. Another alternative would have been a fort placed on the peninsula on which the town of Augusta now lies. A fleet sailing along the coast in a southerly direction would have been easily spotted from this point and the city alerted. The Athenians then moved north to the main lowland area which separates Syracuse from Katane. The purpose of this scorched earth policy may have been to deprive Syracuse of supplies, although this land lay closer to Athenian allies than enemies. However, since a small Syracusan force was engaged and defeated while this crop burning was taking place it suggests that the land in question was in the Megarian plain and very much closer to the city – the burning would have, therefore, been visible from Epipolai. Intimidation is the likely purpose of this mission, but it did not bring any message of negotiation from Syracuse.

The same summer the Syracusans heard that the Athenians had received their cavalry and were about to attack them. They thought that, unless the Athenians could control Epipolai – the high ground that lies directly above the city – they would find it difficult, even if they were victorious in battle, to construct a wall to cut off the city. They decided therefore to guard the approaches to Epipolai. (Thuc. 6.96.1–2)

In the event the Syracusans, although they assigned a brigade to the task, were taken by surprise – such was the speed of the Athenian offensive.

They had left Katane and landed their whole force near the spot called Leon between six and seven stades (1.08–1.29 kms/3600–4200 feet) from Epipolai.⁷ When the army had been disembarked the fleet anchored at Thapsos, which is a peninsula with a narrow isthmus jutting out into the sea, and is not far from Syracuse either by land or sea. The Athenian men of the navy built a stockade across the isthmus and remained at Thapsos.⁸ The army meanwhile made straight for Epipolai and ascended via Eurialos before the Syracusans realised what was happening. (Thuc. 6.97.1–2)

Leon was, to judge from Thucydides' claim, a beach close to the eastern edge of Epipolai and hence nearly adjacent to the Scala Greca where the main road rises steeply out of the coastal plain before beginning a more gradual descent down into Akradina. Epipolai was not garrisoned by the Syracusans at this stage, and so the Athenians were able not only to make an uncontested landing but also a very rapid march under the northern rim of the ridge, all the way to Eurialos at the western extremity. At the same time, the fleet withdrew from its vulnerable position on an open beach south of the

7 It is difficult to reconcile Livy's, 24.39.13 'five miles from the Hexapylon', which is more applicable to Thapsos or even Megara. See also Dover, 1970, 468. Note also the inaccuracy by R. Warner: in *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War*, Harmondsworth 1954, 472: 'rather more than half a mile from Epipolai.'

8 CD nos. 65–66, 74, 343 (Thapsos from the mainland); 62, 67–68, 344 (view south from Thapsos); 72–73 (north shore of the peninsula).

peninsula of Thapsos. Instead the sailors built a stockade to protect their ships on the northern edge of the Thapsos peninsula. The Athenian triremes should have still been clearly in sight from Epipolai, but since no Syracusan seems to have been on duty anywhere in the neighbourhood on that morning, the movement of fleet and infantry went completely unreported.

When the Syracusans did at last learn what was happening, a force of about six hundred, led by Diomilos, rushed up to Epipolai in a disorganised fashion to tackle this threat, but was scattered and half were killed. It is interesting to note that, although Thucydides is quite clear (6.96.3) in stating that the entire Syracusan army was gathered for manoeuvres or a review outside the city, on the level ground near Lysimeleia, it did not take part in this engagement. The Syracusan command probably did not want to risk everything on a single fight seeing that the enemy had already occupied the plateau, and given that they had been defeated in battle six months before. It is interesting that Thucydides has the review of Syracusan hoplites take place simultaneously with the Athenian landing at Leon. On the face of it this juxtaposition of events was impossible, assuming that the Athenian army numbered between eight and ten thousand hoplites, light-armed infantry and cavalry, and their supplies. Thucydides explicitly states that the Athenians took a short time to occupy Eurialos, but for so large a force this would have taken several hours – probably more than a single day. Therefore, it is much more likely that an advance guard of perhaps as few as a thousand hoplites actually made the quick ascent, saw off the Syracusans led by Diomilos and secured the heights for the main force which followed. On the next day the Athenians marched down to the city but when no one came out to meet them they went away again and built a fort at Labdalon on the northern edge of Epipolai looking towards Megara Hyblaia.⁹ This fort was intended as a supply depot and a store for equipment and money whenever they went out either to give battle or to work on the encircling wall that they proposed to build.

Today there is no trace whatsoever of the famous circular fort (Thuc. 6.99.3) which became the temporary command headquarters somewhere in the centre of Epipolai, the Athenian encircling wall and the various Syracusan counter walls.¹⁰ The arrival of Gylippos and Corinthian reinforcements began to tip the balance in favour of the defenders, especially when they started to man a fleet to challenge Athenian supremacy at sea. The Athenian forts that were erected on Plemmyrion made sound strategic sense for a blockade, but once these were lost in the early summer of 413 the besiegers could have been seen off, had not Athenian reinforcements led by Demosthenes arrived. Epipolai had already been lost and Demosthenes realised the need for retaking the higher ground. The night attack on Epipolai failed and from then on the Athenians were in an ever-worsening state. The final battle in the bay now calls for some detailed examination.

⁹ Since the Athenians never took Megara it made sound sense to have a fort looking towards the north to check against any Syracusan movement in that area and also to safeguard supplies coming down overland from Katane. CD no. 77 (looking towards Leon from northern edge of Epipolai); 78 (Thapsos from Epipolai); 82, 515–19 (area of Labdalon near the Epipolai Gate and Eurialos fort and out of sight of the city).

¹⁰ Dover: 1970, 473, suggests 'well to the south of the crest of the plateau'. For the walls and counter walls see 475–78 and map. Moreover, note 466–67 and Dover's arguments against Thucydides ever having visited the area.

The final naval battle was the culmination of a number of crises and engagements. At the start of the siege the Syracusans do not appear to have possessed a significant fleet of warships, but at the prompting of Gylippos, who realised that naval power must combat naval power to break the deadlock, triremes were built and those available were manned (Thuc. 7.7.4, 21.2).¹¹ The first battle in the Great Harbour may have been lost by the Syracusans, but whereas there was defeat at sea, there was victory on land when the army led by Gylippos repossessed Plemmyrion (Thuc. 7.24.1), which had been taken earlier in the year and garrisoned by the Athenians (Thuc. 7.4.4–5). The Athenians thereafter were reluctant to fight and indeed in the next naval engagement they lost a squadron of seven triremes and its commander, Eurymedon, one of the *strategoi* (Thuc. 7.52.2). This loss caused the Athenians to lose all confidence in winning the siege, and it was decided to attempt to break out from the Great Harbour, which by then had been virtually sealed by a barrier of ships (Thuc. 7.59.3).¹²

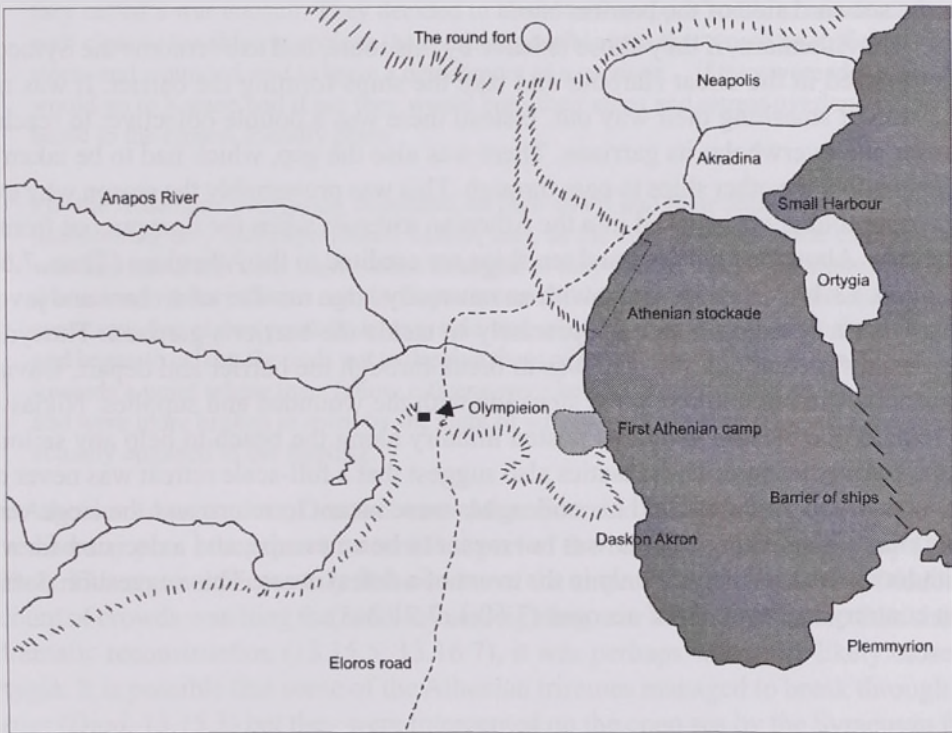


Figure 25: Last Stages of the Athenian Siege of Syracuse

11 Syracuse had a fleet of thirty triremes in 425, Thuc. 4.25.1, but by the summer of 413 there was a squadron of thirty-five ships in the Great Harbour and forty-five in the Small Harbour, which had shipbuilding facilities, Thuc. 7.22.1.

12 For the Great Harbour from Ortygia, CD nos. 583–91; for the Great Harbour from Epipolai, CD nos. 88–89, 254–55, and the Harbour from Daskon, CD no. 99.

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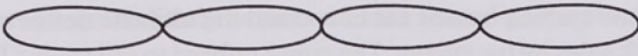
Since the entrance to the bay is roughly a thousand metres in width (3 000 feet), and the length of a single trireme rather more than thirty-five (105 feet), forty triremes, leaving a reasonably small gap, would have been more than ample to form the boom.¹³ That it, therefore, took only three days is really not that remarkable (Diod. 13.14.2). After their original construction triremes deteriorated with age; initially used as warships they fairly soon became troop transports and then merchant ships carrying livestock or various goods and supplies. There was indeed really hardly any need to build anything other than triremes. So the Syracusans must have brought out their old ships (perhaps even the fleet they had possessed a decade earlier) and either rowed or towed them into place. Where did the ships come from? The southern side of the causeway or the fortified smaller harbour are suitable origins – it was probably the latter. These ships were then clamped with chains end to end (Thuc. 7.59.3 – broadside on) forming a simple but effective trap. Merchant ships and other craft lying at anchor perhaps lay close by on the seaward side of the barrier.

The Athenians, if they chose to leave by this route, had to overcome the Syracusan fleet massed in the Great Harbour and take the ships forming the barrier. It was not a question of smashing their way out. Instead there was a double objective: to reach the barrier and overwhelm its garrison. There was also the gap, which had to be taken and held to allow the other ships to pass through. This was presumably the reason why every available soldier was packed into the Athenian triremes when the fleet put out from the stockade. About one hundred and ten ships are credited to the Athenians (Thuc. 7.60.4; cf. Diod. 13.14.4, for 115 ships) with an unusually large number of archers and javelin-throwers on board each trireme, precisely to tackle the barrier's garrison. Thucydides also makes it clear that the plan was to break through the barrier and depart, leaving a substantial Athenian force in the stockade with the wounded and supplies. Nikias was to remain in the camp where he posted infantry along the beach to help any sailors or ships coming inshore. These tactics also suggest that a full-scale retreat was never contemplated. Demosthenes and his colleagues were meant to return and the siege was to continue.¹⁴ The final sea battle was not meant to be an escape, and a decision for a full withdrawal was to be made only in the event of a defeat at sea. This suggestion does not run contrary to Thucydides' account (7.60.1, 7.71.2–3).

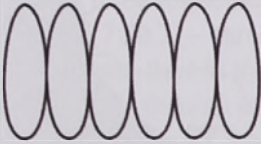
13 CD nos. 571–73, 615. The gap for admission and exit of shipping probably lay closer to the Ortygia island end than towards the middle, for obvious security reasons.

14 Cf. for example, P.B. Kern, 'The Turning Point in the Sicilian Expedition,' *CB* 65, 1989, 82: 'The Athenian goal was no longer victory but escape.'

1) Triremes broadside on at the entrance to Syracuse's Great Harbour (413 BC):



2) Xerxes' ships beam to beam across the Hellespont (480 BC):



When the Athenians saw the harbour being closed and realised what the enemy's plan was, they called a war council. They decided to abandon the upper walls, to construct a cross wall close to the ships to enclose the smallest possible area that would be sufficient for the stores and wounded, and to leave a detachment as a garrison ... if they were victorious they would go to Katane and if not they would burn their ships and retreat overland in order of battle to the closest friendly place.

For the Athenians everything depended on their navy, and their fears for the future were like nothing they had experienced before; and, as the course of the battle changed, so it was inevitable that their impressions changed as they watched from the shore. The battle was close in front of them and, as they were not all looking in the same direction at once, some saw that at one point their own side was winning, and took courage from the sight and began to call on the gods not to deprive them of their safety, others meanwhile, looking towards a point where their fellow citizens were being defeated, cried out in desperation, and were more broken in spirit by the sight of what was being done than were the soldiers actually engaged in the fighting.

The Athenian commanders, Demosthenes, Menander and Euthydemos, do not appear to have had any plan other than to storm that part of the barrier where the gap lay (Thuc. 7.69.4). This was not necessarily at the centre of the entrance to the bay and, if Diodorus' account of crowds watching the hand-to-hand fighting near the island is more than simply a dramatic reconstruction (13.15.5, 13.16.7), it was perhaps was more likely close by Ortygia. It is possible that some of the Athenian triremes managed to break through the barrier (Diod. 13.15.3) but they were intercepted on the open sea by the Syracusan fleet operating from the Small Harbour. Whatever happened, and the sources here are vague, fighting certainly took place on the barrier (Thuc. 7.70.2) but they also had to contend with an attack of the Syracusans launched on their rear. The Athenian triremes were forced back to face the entire Great Harbour Syracusan fleet in battle formation, and in the set-piece battle that followed the Athenians lost between fifty and sixty ships, while

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the Syracusans lost only eight, with sixteen damaged. The casualties on the Athenian side must have been heavy, with possibly as many as ten thousand killed. Once again it was the encircling manoeuvre which caused the havoc and the ultimate defeat of the Athenian fleet caught on both sides by the enemy. The crews refused to sail again (Thuc. 7.72.4–5), and the only way out now lay overland.

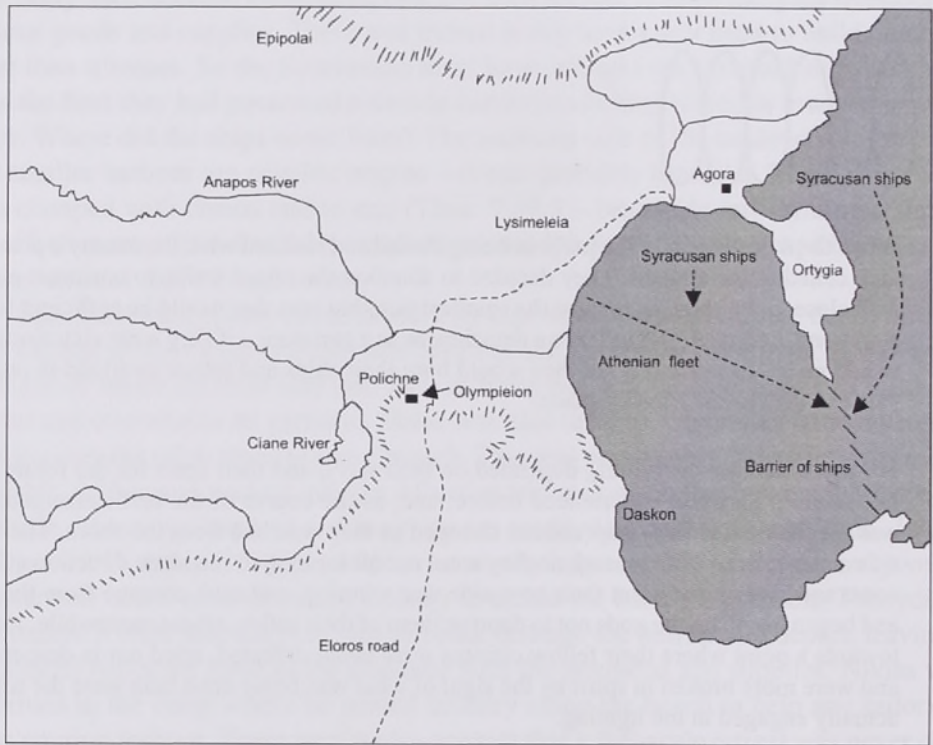


Figure 26: The Final Battle in the Great Harbour

Prior to the battle in the Great Harbour, on August 27th an eclipse of the moon occurred and Nikias, on his own initiative (Plut. Nic. 23.6) or after consulting seers (Thuc. 7.50.4), refused to engage in any activity for the next lunar cycle even though (says Plutarch) three days was considered sufficient religious observance for such an event. Although Thucydides is the contemporary account his evidence is generally discounted in preference for a shorter delay mentioned by Diodorus (13.12), who states that the Athenians indeed delayed any activity for precisely the three days usually recommended for celestial phenomena. The length of the delay, and the events that apparently occurred either during or after it, are crucial for establishing the date of the final sea battle and the subsequent

Athenian departure.¹⁵ The date of the battle must be allocated to either September 7th or September 29th, the evacuation to September 9th or October 1st 413 BC.¹⁶ The sequence of events immediately before and after the eclipse, up to the full-scale evacuation, are:

Defeat of Demosthenes' forces on Epipolai (Thuc. 7.42–46) – second half of August
The August 27th eclipse of the moon began at 8.00 pm just when a withdrawal by sea was about to be implemented (7.50.4).

The delay (7.50.2) – three or twenty-seven days.

The Syracusan fleet in training 'for the right number of days' followed by an overland attack on the Athenian camp (7.51.2) – during or after the delay.

Next day seventy-six Syracusan ships dispatched against the Athenian stockade, the Athenians launched eighty-six ships. Loss of Eurymedon and his squadron of seven at Daskon (7.52.2). Defeat of Syracusan land forces in Lysimeleia. Twenty-five Athenian ships lost altogether.

Three days in which the entrance to the Great Harbour was sealed (Diod. 13.14.2).

Next day the final battle in the Great Harbour.

Two full days' delay (cf. Pol. 9.19.1–4) before the evacuation of the camp

TOTAL: either August 27th + 3+1+1+3+1+2 = 11 days to evacuation = September 9th
or August 27th + 27+1+1+3+1+2 = 35 days to evacuation = October 1st

If Thucydides' evidence, backed by Plutarch, is to be accepted as preferable to that of Diodorus, then Nikias and Demosthenes led their troops out of Syracuse on October 1st (September 9th). The Athenian army departed their camp in Lysimeleia, marched west and crossed the Anapos river probably near *Capocorso*, and proceeded in the direction of the modern village of Florida,¹⁷ about eight kilometres (5 miles). Florida lies on higher land above the Anapos valley. Since Florida is just fourteen kilometres (9 miles)

15 See Freeman, 3. 690–693: 'they did stay, though not twenty-seven days, yet more than three ... nor is it one of great moment.' Either they stayed for three or twenty-seven or somewhere in between, but if not twenty-seven then Thucydides' evidence is discarded. *Contra* Freeman it was important since autumn was imminent. Polybius' evidence might have been useful here, but there is a clear error (9.19.1–4) when he states that the Athenians delayed three days, but is referring to their departure from the camp after the defeat in the last naval battle. The two sets of delays have clearly caused confusion among writers after Thucydides. According to Thucydides the final departure of the Athenian army occurred on the second morning following the final naval reverse, 'on the third day from the defeat' (7.75.1) – an example of the ancient habit of inclusive counting.

16 The earlier dates assume a delay of less than a lunar cycle. Cf. Green: 1970, 318, who prefers the earlier dates but has the Athenian withdrawal from September 11th, his naval battle on September 9th, 306, and the construction of the barrier between September 6th and 8th, 304. The later dates proposed here assume a full month's delay. Some of the military activities which followed the eclipse appear to take place during the period of the delay, but would that have been sanctioned by the soothsayers? A point perhaps not easily recovered today. Still, Thucydides seems to make a great deal of delays that contributed to the destruction of the Athenian navy and army. A further point in favour of his evidence is that the current climate is usually dry until November, when the winter rains start. Thunder showers and rivers with flowing water possibly point to an autumn withdrawal.

17 Thus following Green: 1970, 321.

from Syracuse, the Athenian army probably did not reach this place.¹⁸ On October 2nd (September 10th) the Athenians descended from east of modern Florida to 'some level ground' (Thuc. 7.78.4) in the valley of the Anapos, a distance of about three to four kilometres (2–3 miles). On October 3rd and 4th (September 11th and 12th) the Athenians attempted to force their way through the 'Akraion' or 'Bare Heights' beneath Mount Climiti (Thuc. 7.78.6). On October 5th (September 13th) the Athenians marched 'five or six stades' (1 000–1 200 metres/3 030–3 636 feet) up the escarpment between Mount Climiti and what is now the village of Belvedere. Beaten by the Syracusan cavalry, they returned to their previous camp and rested and departed after dark, marching overnight to the Kakyparis river (roughly eighteen kilometres or about 12 miles). On October 6th (September 14th) the Athenians crossed the Kakyparis river, and Nikias marched his column up to the Erineos river fifty stades south (ten kms/about 6 miles), crossed and made a camp on the other side (Thuc. 7.81.3). Demosthenes, meanwhile, was caught south of the Kakyparis at the estate of Polyzalos mentioned by Plutarch (*Nic.* 27.1) and surrendered in the late afternoon. On October 7th (September 15th) the Syracusans caught up with Nikias in the morning when a truce was arranged for the Athenians to check that the report of Demosthenes' surrender was true and when Nikias made a last appeal to Gylippos. On October 8th (September 16th) the Athenians struck camp in the morning and marched south to the Assinaros before their destruction on the banks of this river some time in the afternoon.¹⁹

From the mouth of the Anapos river, or indeed at any point within the area of Lysimeleia, a straight line points towards Belvedere with its notable pinnacle of rock and the easterly buttress of Mount Climiti; and is the obvious and most easily accessible way out overland from the territory of the Syracusans.²⁰ Diodorus (13.18.6) is explicit in naming Katane as the intended refuge for the Athenian army, but is discounted for the more obscure information provided by Thucydides (7.80.2). Katane had been the forward base of Athenian operations and remained friendly to Athens after the disaster.²¹ Today the main road to Catania lies between Belvedere and Mount Climiti, but the Athenians initially avoided this most obvious route, probably because the Syracusans had now garrisoned Eurialos, and could employ their cavalry on the wide escarpment leading to the Megarian plain beyond. Instead, it looks as if the Athenians chose to aim initially for an inland site such as Leontinoi, even Akrai, and after that Katane. Thucydides suggests that the objective was Gela or Kamarina, although both of these cities were hostile (6.67.2). Still, the plan was sensible and the march would have led them

18 Dover: 1970, 455, places Florida 10 kilometres west of Syracuse, but the distance is incorrect. Even if the distance were ten kilometres, not 14 kilometres, this was well beyond what the Athenians could have marched in a single day.

19 Cf. Plut., *Nic.* 28.1–2: '26th of the month Carneius which the Athenians call Metageitnion,' which would fix the date in late September rather than early October.

20 CD no. 569.

21 Like Leontinoi and Naxos, Katane paid the supreme price for this alliance. After Dionysius became tyrant of Syracuse revenge was exacted on each of these three cities. Naxos was razed to the ground, while the people of Katane and Leontinoi were either sold as slaves or incorporated into the citizenry at Syracuse (Diod. 14.15.1–4).

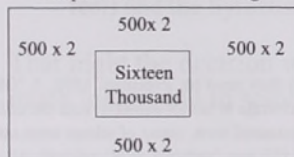
via the entrance to the valley of the Anapos, along its right-hand side and an ascent of Mount Climiti, onto its broad plateau, and then a straightforward march to the territory of Leontinoi. This is the route of the modern road.²² However, the planned retreat was to be thwarted. The army was divided into vanguard and rearguard – each of approximately twenty thousand – although the physical state of the latter, commanded by Demosthenes, was far inferior to the former, led by Nicias (Thuc. 7.80.4). The movement of an army mostly on foot – there were roughly 1 500 cavalry with their mounts – is not one easily or rapidly accomplished. An armed column accompanied by pack animals may be able to progress at a rate of twenty-five to thirty kilometres (15–20 miles) per day, but the use of a hollow square formation, while explicable because of the anticipated flank attacks by Syracusan cavalry units, necessarily inhibited a march at the double.²³ Movement of a hollow square across a flat plain would be reasonably straightforward albeit slow, but the land from the Great Harbour up the Anapos valley does not lend itself to this tactic and the difficulties were compounded by the movement of forty thousand men, many in full armour and carrying their belongings at the end of the summer when the heat is still intense, and when there was little fresh water available in rivers or streams. It is easy to believe that the harrying Syracusan detachments were able to pick off many stragglers from both sections of the retreating army. The unarmed or lightly armed interior of the square was covered by hoplites perhaps two deep, which is considerably less than the normal eight for the phalanx, as Thucydides indicates (5.68, 6.67.1).²⁴ A hollow square with about five hundred hoplites per line on the outside edges means that each was up to a kilometre long, allowing about two metres for each of the four thousand armed men. Inside the square were the sixteen thousand walking wounded, non-combatants, rowers from the triremes and the high command, and the horses and other pack animals.²⁵ It is, therefore, quite understandable, although overlooked, that this formation at the march could accomplish just forty stades (eight kilometres/5 miles) on the first day, as Thucydides says. This is under half the distance to the town of Floridaia where Dover places the Athenians at the end of the first day.²⁶ However, the slow movement was necessary

22 See Chapter 4 on the CD. CD nos. 541–42; *Video Clip: Anapo Valley*.

23 See also, Xen. *Anab.* 1.8.9, 3.2.36, 3.4.19; Arrian, 4.5, for a similar hollow square, a formation presumably reserved for retreats.

24 The Syracusan hoplites (on that occasion) were drawn up sixteen deep, and perhaps later too, Thuc. 7.79.1–2.

25 A hollow square is perhaps too simplistic a description. It was, in effect, a guarded, condoned-off area made up of heavily armed troops on the circuit moving in one direction.



26 Dover: 1970, 455, and so discounts Thucydides' evidence, which he again later, in the account of the fighting, 456, considers a 'characteristic lack of precision'.

because of the number of men who were not hoplites, which also meant that stragglers might be easily picked off. The square would inevitably have broken apart whenever a natural obstacle emerged – the land is one of ditches, hills and indented dry stream beds – and the formation would have to be reformed before proceeding further. Nikias was obviously intent on leaving as few behind as he possibly could, but whether this apparently charitable action arose from concern about (or fear of) the *nautikos ochlos* is not specified by Thucydides. The fact that it was this unruly Thetic mass, which broke ranks at the Assinaros and is so censured by Thucydides (7.84.2), suggests that Nikias was afraid of being prosecuted for the loss of precisely these Athenians, should he arrive safely home.

The Athenians left their camp (which lay north of the Anapos in the three kilometres from the river to the city gate) and again crossed Lysimeleia moving west northwest. Thucydides states (7.78.3) that the Athenians crossed the river, which meanders across the coastal plain at this point and scattered a detachment of Syracusans who were guarding the ford, although the river may have been dry at this time. The Athenians bivouacked for the night on high ground near to where the modern village of Floridia is now situated.²⁷ Floridia lies above the Anapos valley on its left or western side. The valley and the river had to be crossed to ascend Mount Climiti. The next day the Athenians advanced a further ‘twenty stades’ (four kms/2 $\frac{1}{3}$ miles) before ‘descending into a place in the plain’, and made camp.

The Syracusans went on and fortified the pass in front where there was a steep hill with a rocky ravine on each side of it, called the ‘Bare Heights’ (Thuc. 7.78.6: ἀκράϊον λεπας).

The location of this pass has certainly exercised the minds of scholars, although it is less of a problem if the logistics of moving a hollow square across the land is taken into account.²⁸ Generally speaking, the ‘Akraian Heights’ have been taken to indicate either a spot close to Akrai (some 25 kilometres inland) or in the direction of that settlement. Hence the quest for a suitable pass either higher up the Anapos valley or in the Cava Spampinato, even further way in a westerly direction.²⁹ Green, however, proposed an obvious cleft in Mount Climiti as an alternative to the consensus, but this cannot have been the route chosen by Nikias because it is simply too steep for forty thousand men to ascend with all their supplies and pack animals,³⁰ especially since the road to Leontinoi is just a few kilometres further north. Following Green, I suggest that Thucydides’ ‘Bare Heights’

27 CD nos. 629–30 (the Anapo below Floridia).

28 Therefore the ‘bare heights’ have been situated much further away from Syracuse than they need be, Freeman: 1892, 3.704, for the location in the *Cava Spampinato* above Floridia. Green: 1970, 324–27, is more accurate in his location but sees the cliff as the high cleft in the rock of Mount Climiti, but this is an impossible route for forty thousand men, many of whom were not hoplites. The gully below this much better suits the evidence.

29 *Cava Spampinato*, CD nos. 26–30.

30 See the CD Chapter 4 and CD nos. 539–40, 543–45.

has nothing whatsoever to do with Akrai, and cannot be far from Syracuse because the Athenians were not marching in a column, hence could not cover large distances.³¹

And indeed locating this natural feature is relatively straightforward, although missed by Green and others. It lies more or less where Thucydides says it was: roughly twelve kilometres west of the Great Harbour at the base of Mount Climiti, but not on the mountain itself. The Anapos is heavily indented in the coastal plain and in summer it is usually dry, receiving its water from a tributary shortly before its estuary at the Great Harbour. At twelve kilometres (6–7 miles) from the coast the river also passes through a noticeable defile with steep sides and flat hilltops either side before it skirts the limestone massif that is Mount Climiti. The Athenians presumably aimed to pass through this ravine and continue their march up the Anapos valley about another five kilometres (3 miles) before ascending to the top of Mount Climiti, nineteen kilometres (11 miles) from the city, as the road does today, before passing onto Leontinoi or another destination. To prevent the escape the Syracusans meant to defend this gap. The Athenians retired for the night and the next morning

... forced their way towards the hill which had been fortified and here they found before them the enemy's infantry drawn up many shields deep to defend the fortification, the pass being narrow. The Athenians attacked the barricade but were received with a volley of javelins from the high ground that found their mark with great accuracy on account of the height above the attackers. (Thuc. 7.79.1–3)

The Athenians retreated out of the pass and when they failed to make any progress the next day, especially since the Syracusans tried to block them inside the gully, they decided to try the direct route out between Belvedere and Mount Climiti. Today the road rises gently up a broad incline before it drops away again in the north into the Megarian plain.³² The way up would not have been arduous for an army in any formation, but it is naturally disposed to attacks by cavalry units, as the Athenian commanders were no doubt fully aware.

Next day they went on again, and the Syracusans came around them and attacked on all sides wounding many of them, and gave way whenever the Athenians charged and resumed their sorties as soon as they retired. They attacked the rearguard in particular, hoping that if they could rout some regiments separately this would cause a widespread panic in the army. For a long time the Athenians held out and fought in this way, but finally they halted in the plain to rest, having advanced five or six stades (1 000 – 1 200 metres/3 030 – 3 636 feet) and the Syracusans departed and returned to their own camp. (Thuc. 7.79.5–6)

That night the decision was made to turn about and march south instead. The route was much longer, but in some ways much less perilous if the Athenians could give the Syra-

31 For the 'Bare Heights', see CD nos. 552–555; 632 (entrance from Syracuse), 663 (exit up the Anapo towards Florida); and Chapter 4 on the CD. For the 'Bare Heights' at Akrai, see CD nos. 375–76.

32 CD nos. 377, 631.

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cusans the slip. The Syracusans had dug themselves in on Eurialos and in the Anapos valley because these were the obvious ways of escape. If the Athenians moved quickly and far enough they could move beyond the *chorē* of Syracuse, where their attackers might feel less inclined to pursue them. Marching inland from one of the river valleys further south would also eventually bring them to Akrai and then to Leontinoi, and these were far enough away for them to have been left unguarded by the Syracusans.³³ The Athenians perhaps did not expect the Syracusans to pursue them in such strength as they moved beyond Syracusan territory, and unfortunately the Athenian command seriously underestimated the extent which the Syracusans were prepared to go, to ensure the complete destruction of their enemy. The disaster played itself out as the Athenian troops broke in disorder on the eighth day and were slaughtered by the jubilant Syracusans. The prisoners were led back into captivity in the quarries in Tyche.

The Syracusans collected all the prisoners they could find, and hung the captured arms on the finest and tallest trees along the banks of the river, and then they crowned themselves with wreaths and decorated their own horses in a splendid fashion while they cropped the manes and tails of their enemies' mounts, and so marched back to the city. They had brought to a successful conclusion the most brilliant struggle ever waged between Greeks, and had won the most comprehensive of victories by their enormous display of daring and enthusiasm. (Plut. *Nic.* 27.6)

Thucydides (7.75.5) explicitly states that forty thousand men left the Athenian camp. The majority of those who set out hoping to escape from Syracuse were rowers and non-combatants; and it is evident that the cavalry – perhaps over a thousand men – and another thousand hoplites escaped to Katane from Nicias' vanguard (Lysias, *pro Polystrato*, 24–25). Six thousand prisoners were taken from the rearguard, commanded by Demosthenes, and perhaps as few as a thousand were officially taken prisoner in the chaos of the final battle. Where were the huge numbers of Athenian dead buried, if they were indeed ever buried at all? During the siege and in previous hostilities the end of each engagement was followed by the usual truce in which the dead were collected and bodies buried, and trophies were set up by whichever side considered itself to be victorious. In the final naval battle in the Great Harbour the Syracusans collected their dead but the Athenians were too dejected by the defeat to bother. It is surprising that Nicias, notorious for his religious scruples, could not command the recovery of the Athenian dead, which perhaps illustrates a complete breakdown in the command structure following this beating and shows how rudimentary this control by the leadership actually was.³⁴ Green has noted the possibility that the Syracusans collected the dead and buried them out on Plemmyrion.³⁵ Would they have concerned themselves? Certainly the Macedonians collected the Athenian dead after

33 The inland route west of Notum, CD nos. 46–51.

34 H. Van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, London 2004, 108–113, on the nature of the Greek military command structure and its amateur character.

35 CD nos. 100, 390, 564, 574, 622–25.

Chaeronea in 338, but Philip II had an ulterior motive for doing so. In 413 it is probably unlikely that, given the circumstances, the besieged would have fulfilled religious niceties ignored by their enemies. The sea rapidly removes human remains and the entrance to the bay – once open again – would have cleaned out the area quickly. In the final massacre at the river, where thousands of Athenians were apparently cut down, the question of where the burial of the dead occurred is again posed by Green in support of his contention that the modern Tellaro is the ancient Assinaros, and by DeVoto who prefers the modern Assinaro.³⁶ It is possible that a makeshift cemetery along the modern Tellaro at S. Paolo may be the Athenian dead of Nikias' vanguard (or some of them), but in battles defeated enemies are not often afforded burial rites. The question of where rather more than thirty thousand Athenians and their allies disappeared in a matter of eight days may not be solved until comprehensive excavation work is undertaken in the area. Given the number of casualties also suffered by the Athenian forces in the last stages of the siege: seven ships taken and the crews killed or taken as prisoners of war (Thuc. 7.41.4), the loss of Eurymedon's squadron of seven ships at Daskon, and those crews presumably also killed (Thuc. 7.52.2, Diod. 13.13.4), eighteen ships lost and the crews killed (Thuc. 7.53.3), fifty-five ships lost in the battle in the harbour (7.72.3), the 'not less than forty thousand' noted by Thucydides (7.75.5) who evacuated Lysimeleia may be an overestimate, but he alone of the sources was in a position to know the truth.

The victory over Athens did not bring stability to either Syracuse or Sicily. A Carthaginian invasion in 409 resulted in the sacking of Selinous and the destruction of Himera. This success spurred on Carthaginian ambitions of territorial expansion into eastern Sicily. In 406 a further attack was launched with Akragas the main objective (it was abandoned by its population after an eight-month siege).³⁷ The crisis allowed Dionysius to come to power (Diod. 13.94.5) and, although he was unable to

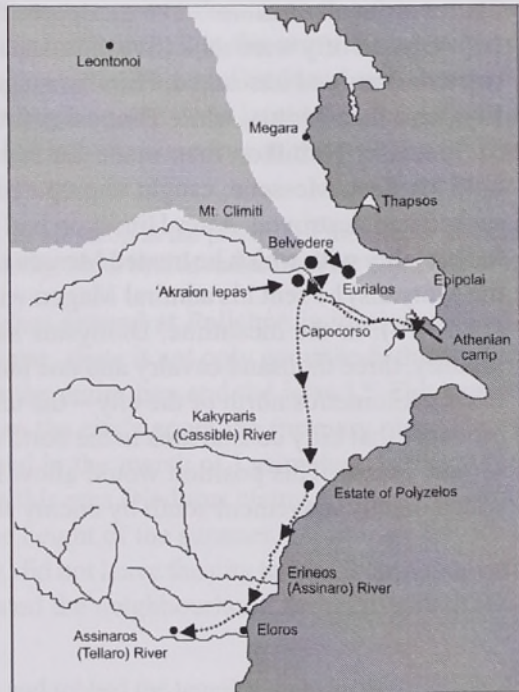


Figure 27: Route of the Athenian Retreat

36 Green: 1970, 330–36; J.G. De Voto, 'The Athenian Retreat from Syracuse', *AHB* 16, 2002, 61–69. See Appendix 4 for further discussion. CD nos. 637–38 (Assinaro); 546–51, 639–40 (Tellaro).

37 Diodorus, 13.91.1, says that the Carthaginians took the city just before December 21st – the winter solstice – in 406 BC.

prevent the loss of Gela and Kamarina (Diod. 13.111.2–3), he survived a counter-coup (Diod. 13.112–113). Meanwhile, plague or some other form of contagious disease forced the withdrawal of the Carthaginians. Dionysius concluded a peace favourable to Carthage, but his ambitions lay in territorial expansion or plunder from the west, partly in reply to the Carthaginian incursions but also to bolster his own position. Dionysius was a real warrior lord, personally leading his troops into battle and constantly on the front line. The sacking of Motya in late summer 397 by Dionysius and his coalition of Sicilian Greek states met with a swift response from Carthage (Diod. 14.59–76). Himilkon, the Carthaginian general, had been unable to lift the siege of Motya (14.50.4), finding the forces of Dionysius superior in number and firepower and as a result ‘was unable to achieve his objective and sailed back to Libya because he believed that a battle at sea would achieve nothing since the enemy had double his number of ships’. Motya was garrisoned by Syracusan allies, while the main Syracusan fleet of one hundred and twenty ships, commanded by Leptines, was also stationed here to watch for any Carthaginian counterattack.³⁸

That offensive occurred in the following summer with a huge army, if Diodorus’ figures are at all credible.³⁹ The transport ships, sailing to Panormos, were intercepted by Leptines and fifty were sunk (five thousand men and two hundred chariots). The warships (triremes) arrived unscathed. Himilkon, again in command, made rapid progress taking Eryx and then Motya, while Dionysius (in the process of besieging Segesta) retreated to Syracuse. Himilkon then made for Messene since its harbour had the capacity to hold his fleet. Messene, caught unprepared, put up a brief defence before the city was sacked and destroyed. After Himilkon had shown his animosity towards the Greeks by the brutality with which he treated Messene (but little different to Syracusan treatment of the Motyans) he sent his admiral Magon with the fleet to the mountain known as Tauros (14.59.10). In the meantime, Dionysius had gathered his own forces: thirty thousand infantry, three thousand cavalry and one hundred and eighty ships,⁴⁰ and led them about twenty kilometres north of the city – the text states – to a place called Tauros, which is probably that hilly coastal area to the north of the present town of Augusta (today called Mount Tauro). This position would allow Dionysius to block the coast road and keep watch on any movement south by enemy shipping.

38 For the siege of Motya, see Chapter 5 and on the CD.

39 300 000 infantry, 4 000 cavalry, 400 chariots, 600 ships according to Ephorus, according to Timaeus 130 000 infantry including Sicilians, Diod. 14.54.5.

40 The text of Diodorus, 14.58.2, is surely corrupt here, stating that only a few of the Syracusan ships were triremes, which must be the opposite since any war fleet consisted primarily of triremes. Later Dionysius was able to dock over three hundred triremes in the two harbours of the city, while his son had four hundred at his disposal. Dionysius is also credited with building ships larger than triremes.

The Carthaginian forces moved south as far as the harbour at Naxos,⁴¹ but because of a recent eruption by Etna that had brought lava as far as the coast (14.59.3), the direct land route to Katane was no longer available. Himilkon's infantry was forced to go inland around the volcano, while the fleet continued its move south. When Dionysius realised that the invaders had been obliged to divide their forces he quickly moved up-country with a view to engaging the Carthaginians at sea. By stationing his own infantry along the shore he hoped to intimidate his enemy and put them at a disadvantage by having no safe place of refuge. Leptines led a squadron of thirty ships against the Carthaginians with initial success, but the sheer number of enemy triremes eventually overwhelmed the entire Syracusan fleet, which was scattered with the loss of about a hundred vessels (Diod. 14.60.5). The infantry on the foreshore looked on as the survivors were picked off by Carthaginians in smaller boats, which had been placed between the main battle area and the beach. Twenty thousand Sicilian Greeks were killed in what appears to have been a well-made trap, and the way to Katane lay open as Dionysius pulled his army back to Syracuse. The Carthaginian army arrived in Katane two days later.

Dionysius cast around for allies and mercenaries but it seems that within a matter of days Himilkon led his fleet into the Great Harbour, while the army seems to have skirted Epipolai to join the ships at their anchorage. Although Diodorus' text is corrupt here (14.62.2) it looks probable that the Carthaginian army was larger than the Athenian force of 415. But would the Carthaginians fall into the same trap as the Athenians? The simple answer seems to be yes!

Himilkon, the commander of the army, set up his camp in the precinct of the temple of Zeus while the rest of the army camped in the vicinity, about twelve stades from the city. (14.62.3)

The position of the *Olympieion* on the higher ground at Polichne is ideal as a headquarters for a besieging force outside Syracuse, since it not only commands the road to Eloros but also provides a good view over the entire bay and the island.⁴² The temple of Zeus is also a mere three kilometres from the city's agora (the primary objective of the Carthaginian army, which had encamped in the marsh of Lysimeleia, between the estuary of the Anapos and the city walls). In this area Diodorus claims that over 300 000 men were accommodated. And this was the height of the summer.

Since the Syracusans, understandably, did not leave the city to face their opponents in battle, the enemy plundered and devastated the neighbourhood for a full month. Diodorus then states the following:

Himilkon seized the quarter of Akradina and robbed the temples (one or two cf. 14.70.4) of Demeter and Kore and for these impious acts against the gods he soon suffered a suitable penalty. (14.63.1)

41 The harbour at Naxos, CD nos. 451–52.

42 View from Polichne, CD nos. 293–295, 300.

Diodorus is more concerned with the declining fortunes of Himilkon than he is with the more important information contained in this passage. How was Himilkon able to enter and apparently hold a large section of the city, which probably included the area around the agora directly in front of the mole to Ortygia? Diodorus has missed some vital episodes in this account, for we are not told about the Carthaginian siege machines which would have been needed to effect an entry through the walls at the Great Harbour. This was presumably where Himilkon's troops managed to break through, but without siege machinery the only way in was by treachery. However, Diodorus' reference to cutting down trees (14.62.5) perhaps indicates the construction of scaling ladders, palisades and other paraphernalia for launching an attack.

Dionysius had been responsible for replacing much of the city's fortification system only recently, and it is possible that, as with Messene a short time before, the walls were not in a good state (14.56.4) or had yet to be completed.⁴³ A weak point along this lower section of the walls would have made Akradina vulnerable, especially as it seems to have been the case that Dionysius had concentrated on fortifying Ortygia, to the neglect of the landward side of the city. Still, Diodorus missed the opportunity to relate a dramatic event, which must have involved either a high mortality rate among the Syracusans or a mass and hurried evacuation into the acropolis. Instead, the historian relates the capture of a Carthaginian ship by the Syracusans while Dionysius was absent from the city. The Carthaginians responded by putting forty ships to sea but, of these, twenty-five were destroyed or captured. This unexpected victory caused the Syracusans to debate the restoration of the democracy, but this came to nothing since Dionysius arrived back, and was supported not only by his mercenaries but also by the Spartan Pharakidas, who had recently sailed from the Peloponnese bringing thirty triremes (14.64.1–70). The lengthy speech of the Syracusan Theodoros in support of a democracy (14.65–70) disrupts the account of the siege and leaves much to conjecture.

Himilkon had walled his camp (14.63.3) and while it is not unlikely that sufficient remains of the Athenian stockade remained to be reused or at least supplemented, the emphasis here is on the use of stone. The stone came from tombs, which must have lined the road to Eloros just outside the city walls (and these included the tombs of Gelon and Demarete). Like the robbery of the temples in Akradina, this is presumably meant to illustrate the impiety of the Carthaginian whom the gods then punished with failure. It seems that these had been left untouched by the Athenians, who of course were led by the superstitious and religious Nikias, although his piety had not saved his expedition. However, Himilkon's tactics were far from unrealistic with forts constructed at Polichne, Daskon and Plemmyrion to strengthen his hold on the harbour and the transportation of supplies to his camp by sea. Nonetheless, once the anger of the gods had been invoked – although there is no suggestion that the *Olympieion* was a target of plunder – everything

43 The walls of Dionysius above Akradina, CD nos. 648–50.

began to turn against the attackers. Dionysius launched counter strikes at night to confuse and agitate his enemy, but the greatest threat came from the marsh of Lysimeleia.

After the Carthaginians had seized the *proasteion*, and pillaged the temple of Demeter and Kore, a plague struck the army. (14.70.4)⁴⁴

Besides the anger of the gods Diodorus notes (14.70.4) that

... thousands of people were gathered together, that it was the time of the year which is most conducive to infections, and that that particular summer had brought unusually hot temperatures. It also appears as if the place itself was responsible for the great extent of the disaster, because once before the Athenians who had also made their camp here had died in great numbers from the disease since the ground is marshy and in a depression. First before the sun rises because of the cold from the breezes over the water the body is struck with chills, but by the middle of the day the heat is stifling, as must be the case when so many people are gathered together in so narrow a space.

Malaria was, until fairly recently, the prevalent disease of any low-lying land in southern Italy or Sicily, and with a ten-day to a fortnight incubation period in a siege, which certainly occupied at the least two months in midsummer, it would begin to account for a number of deaths. Besides the malarial mosquitoes which lived in the marsh, the unhealthy nature of the land, and the numbers involved (although probably considerably fewer than that claimed by Diodorus) would have produced cholera and typhoid – both major and rapid killers when sanitation standards are low. The following is therefore hardly surprising:

At first they buried their dead, but later on both because of the huge number of dead bodies and because those tending the sick came down with the disease, nobody dared to come near the sick. In fact the disease struck down all those who watched the sick, and thus the condition of those with the illness was miserable since no one was willing to nurse the unfortunate. (14.71.1–4)

In such circumstances the outcome could hardly have been in doubt; Dionysius took full advantage of the situation in the Carthaginian camp. He cannot, however, have acted as Diodorus claims (14.72.1) only when he heard of the raging epidemic, but must have waited for the disease or rather various diseases to take their course to a point where the morale and fitness of the enemy was at a low point. Then the counter attack was launched with great vigour. Syracusan land forces were moved overnight when there was no moon, which suggests some planning, and passed the temple of Ciane (cf. Diod. 5.4.1–2) and stationed on the landward side of the Carthaginian camp, along the bend on the north bank of the Anapos river. At daybreak he attacked the camp and the forts around the bay, taking those at Polichne and Daskon – which indicates that some of his divisions had crossed the Anapos. While this action was taking place a Syracusan fleet

⁴⁴ Akradina is presumably the suburb meant here, the centre of the city being the acropolis on Ortygia.

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of eighty triremes (14.72.1) attacked the enemy stockade in the Great Harbour (14.72.4). Some ships were clearly not beached since these were rammed athwart or broadsides by the Syracusans. The Syracusan ships came rapidly inshore from the east, ramming the sides of the Carthaginian ships and then reversed back into the bay only to move forward again. This was a deadly if difficult exercise for so many triremes making the intricate manoeuvre alongside one another.⁴⁵

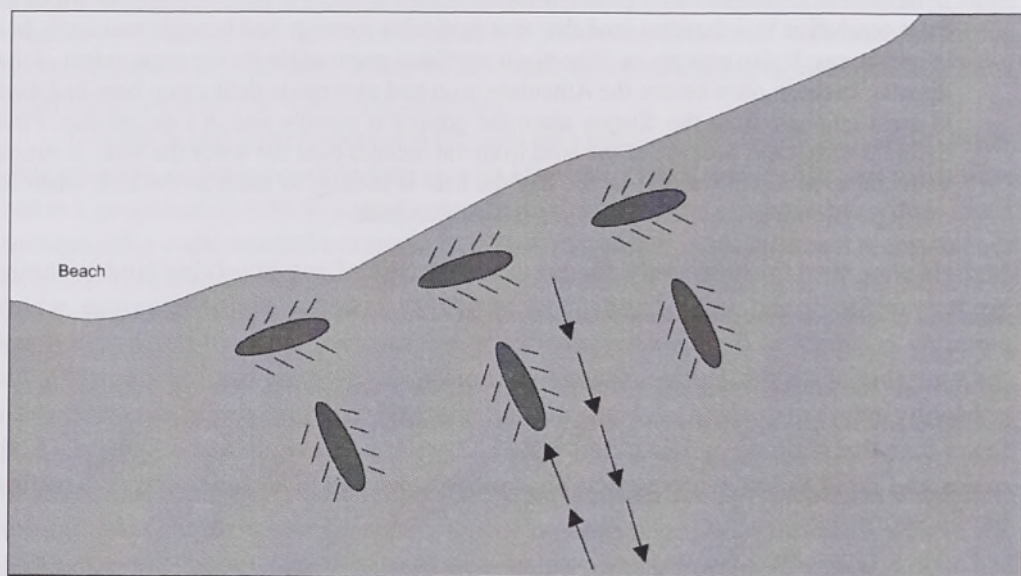


Figure 28: The Ramming Manoeuvre

While this was taking place at the camp of the besiegers, Dionysius led another detachment probably to the southern end of Daskon, beyond the fort which had been captured, where there were forty fifty-oared ships beached, and some merchant ships and triremes at anchor (14.73.2). The ships on the beach were all fired and since a strong wind had blown up, the fire spread to the ships at anchor. The crews jumped into the choppy waters, while the ships – many of whose anchor cables had burned through – struck others in the chaos, which Diodorus (14.73.5) describes vividly:

Immediately, as the flames swept up through the sails of the merchantmen and enveloped the yard-arms the sight was like a scene from the theatre to the citizens of Syracuse, and the destruction of the barbarians looked like that of men struck by lightning from the heavens for their sacrilegious behaviour.

⁴⁵ The Great Harbour at Lysimeleia, CD nos. 532, 557, 654; *Video Clip: Great Harbour*.

The victory was all but complete. Plundering of the sinking and damaged enemy ships took place and, although the fighting ceased with the arrival of darkness, Dionysius kept up the pressure by making his own camp near the *Olympieion*. Himilkon had presumably been expelled from this area as well and had retreated into the main camp on the beach.

The epilogue to this affair is interesting. The Carthaginians offered Dionysius three hundred talents to allow them to escape. Dionysius was always, it seems, susceptible to bribery and, claims Diodorus (14.75.3), was aware that the continued threat of Carthaginian attack would strengthen his own position, and agreed that the citizens of Carthage would be allowed to go unmolested on the fourth night after the negotiations. The rest, mainly mercenaries and Sikeli, would be left to their fate. Himilkon and the Carthaginians slipped out of the Great Harbour in forty triremes, but how they could have managed this unobserved is not explained. Although pursued by some enthusiastic Corinthian ships which sank some of the enemy ships – perhaps with the connivance of Dionysius who was also not averse to double dealing – the Sikeli for the most part seem to have managed to escape ‘almost to a man’ (Diod. 14.75.6). The mercenaries were captured but some, especially a group of Iberians, were re-enlisted in Dionysius’ own army. A description of the remarkable scenes of devastation brought on by a turnabout in fortune concludes Diodorus’ coverage of this siege:

They who broke down Syracusan tombs looked on 150 000 dead heaped up and unburied because of disease, and they who had plundered the Syracusan territory now in their own turn witnessed their own fleet suddenly go up in flames. (Diod. 14.76.2)⁴⁶

Although in duration not as long as the Athenian siege, the Carthaginian attack in the summer months of 396 is an important episode in the history of Syracuse, not least because its denouement was to be another landmark victory for the besieged. The triumph over Carthage became further proof of Syracuse’s supreme status in Sicily, further boosted the confidence of its people and confirmed the position of Dionysius as tyrant.

In 317 BC Agathokles took sole power in Syracuse through a violent coup. Like the Syracusan tyrants before him, his rule was strikingly characterised by military campaigns in which, like Gelon, Dionysius (father and son) was an eager and prominent participant.⁴⁷ His vigorous policy of Syracusan expansion brought an inevitable conflict with Carthage. An invasion force led by Hamilkar was despatched to Sicily (Diod. 19.106.2). Thereafter, in a sequence of events that recall the military situation in 406 and 397, which Dionysius had been able to exploit to further his own career, Agathokles almost came to disaster. Hostilities were already evident in 312 when a Carthaginian fleet of light vessels

⁴⁶ Himilkon subsequently committed suicide.

⁴⁷ Dionysius and Agathokles were regarded in antiquity as ‘men of action’, Pol. 15.35.6; Freeman: 1894, 4.384, who also notes Polybius’ comment that although Agathokles’ rise to power was violent, his rule afterwards was less so. Diodorus’ evidence, 20.71.1–5, of such episodes as the massacre at Segesta, seems at odds with this ancient opinion.

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(perhaps fifty-oared galleys or pentekonters) had sailed into the Great Harbour at Syracuse, caused some damage and sailed away unscathed.⁴⁸ In 311 Agathokles marched against the Carthaginians who were camped at Cape Eknomos. There the Carthaginians were victorious, and in an episode highly reminiscent of Dionysius' retreat from Katane in 396, the Syracusans retreated first to Gela and then to their own city.⁴⁹

Agathokles, who had been defeated at the Himeras river and had lost the greatest and strongest part of his army, took refuge in Syracuse. (Diod. 20.3.1)

The Carthaginians meanwhile advanced at a leisurely pace, and Hamilkar won over numerous cities including Kamarina, Leontinoi, Katane and Tauromenion (Diod. 19.110.3), by his generous behaviour; and Syracuse was isolated once again. A Carthaginian fleet was already blockading the city when Agathokles decided on a masterful diversion. He would attack Carthage. In order to break out he waited for the arrival of some merchant ships bringing in wheat, and when the Carthaginians went to intercept these he launched what appeared to be an attack to save these threatened vessels. The Carthaginians, thinking that battle would be offered, turned away from the ships carrying badly needed supplies to face the Syracusans. Agathokles ordered his ships to row at full speed past the Carthaginians and with evening at hand the supply ships made it to the harbour while Agathokles eluded his enemies (Diod. 20.5.1–5). He was pursued for six days until he reached the coast of North Africa, probably Cape Bon, where he managed to get his forces safely ashore.⁵⁰ Diodorus does not stipulate from which harbour Agathokles escaped, but it seems likely that the break-out occurred from the northern end of Ortygia and it is perhaps significant that the Syracusans are credited with sixty triremes, the maximum number which could be accommodated in the fortified smaller port. Initially, Hamilkar offered terms to the Syracusans (Diod. 20.16.1), but these were rejected and a siege of the city commenced. The information is vague and details are not provided. Hamilkar was close to the city and had been constructing siege engines (Diod. 20.16.2) when two ships arrived from Agathokles with news of recent victories over the Carthaginians. When the people went down to the harbour to receive the news Hamilkar ordered the walls to be scaled by ladders (Diod. 20.16.7) and a short stretch was taken between two towers, but this advance party was discovered by the guard and in a fight were killed or thrown back.

48 Diodorus, 19.103.4, describes the Carthaginian ships as 'light vessels', perhaps pentekonters or similar, but offers no clue as to how or why these were not intercepted by Syracusan triremes. These ought to have been (or were once) stationed there, and why were there just two Athenian traders at the port? The Carthaginians were later killed or captured in southern Italy, 19.103.5; Freeman: 1894, 4.386.

49 Diodorus, 19.109.5, claims seven thousand Greek casualties.

50 The course of Agathokles' African campaign does not concern me here, but see Chapter 4, Diod. 20.6–18, 20.33–34, 20.38–44, 20.54–69; Freeman: 1894, 4.400–423. Diodorus claims that in the victory over the Carthaginians, 20.11.1, Agathokles possessed an army of 13 500. This indicates that his forces consisted of the entire complement of the sixty triremes. The ships were burned, 20.7.5, which also points to a raiding party of rowers-cum-fighters, a relatively rare departure in military forces in that the *nautikos ochlos* were not simply the means by which armed forces were transported. These men were probably mercenaries who could row, but also carried sufficient arms to be a highly effective force once on land.

Hamilkar was very distressed at this and withdrew his army from Syracuse and sent a relief column to Carthage of five thousand men. (Diod. 20.16.9)

Why such a small reverse should have caused this sudden Carthaginian withdrawal remains unexplained, as does Hamilkar's neglect of his siege engines. It is possible that a much heavier engagement took place in 310, probably along a stretch of the city walls near the agora, but that once this incursion had failed Hamilkar felt duty bound to send military aid back to his home city. However, the Carthaginians cannot have retreated much further than Gela or Akragas, and an enemy naval presence may have been maintained near Syracuse. Hamilkar returned in the following year with a formidable army.

Hamilkar ... gained possession of the remaining outposts and advanced with his army against Syracuse, intent on storming the city. He prevented the import of wheat since he had controlled the sea for some time, and after he destroyed the crops on the land now undertook the capture of the area around the Olympieion. (Diod. 20.29.2–3)

What happened next, if it were not for its tragic climax, has all the elements of a farce. Hamilkar had been told that he would dine in Syracuse on the next day and so decided to launch an immediate attack.⁵¹ However, instead of a daytime assault on the walls closest to his intended camp in Lysimeleia he chose to lead an attack at night on Eurialos.⁵² The Syracusans learned of this intention and heavily garrisoned, with three thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry, the western end of the circuit wall. And then Diodorus describes (20.29.5–11) how the victor of the battle at the Himeras river proceeded – rather like a circus act – up from the marsh, army and camp followers all in confusion and noise, guided by Syracusan exiles, along a similar path followed by Demosthenes in 413.⁵³

The main body of the infantry was divided into two phalanxes, one made up of barbarians, the other Greek allies. Outside the ranks a mixed crowd of rabble also followed for the sake of obtaining plunder, men who are totally useless to an army but are the source of noise and irrational confusion, from which the most dangerous situations arise. And indeed on this occasion because the roads were narrow and rough, the baggage train and some of the camp followers kept pushing one another as they competed for the right of way. And since the crowd was pressed into narrow spaces and on this account became involved in arguments and many became involved on either side, great confusion and noise predominated in the army. (Diod. 20.29.7)

The Carthaginians presumably skirted the southern edge of Epipolai more or less along today's main road, before turning up towards Eurialos again following a route which can still be followed on the road towards Belvedere.

51 Cf. Livy's account of Maharbal's promise to Hannibal immediately after the battle of Cannae, 22.51.

52 The most likely route of Hamilkar's forces, CD nos. 253–255; 90, 272 (Eurialos facing west).

53 Freeman: 1894, 4.425–29, considers that the Carthaginian camp cannot have been completed, which was why the entire army had then to proceed to Epipolai.

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At this point the Syracusans who occupied Eurialos saw that the enemy was advancing in a confused fashion while they were in a higher position and charged down on the Carthaginians. (Diod. 20.29.8)

Not only had the defenders plenty of warning to organise their defence and attack the enemy from above, but also the enemy did not only have to scale the heights of Epipolai, a difficult enough objective in the dark, but also faced the prospect of (once reaching the higher ground) scaling a six-metre wall, strong towers, and at the western end of Epipolai, by now, the almost impregnable Eurialos fort. It is not surprising that an outnumbered garrison could easily rout the superior numbers of Carthaginians and capture their general, who was publicly executed in the city on the next day. With their leadership in disarray the Carthaginian siege faltered again, and although new commanders were chosen the immediate threat was removed, and a naval blockade of the city resumed. In effect the danger to the city had passed, and although naval pressure was kept up for some time, and at least one battle was fought outside the harbour, terms were agreed between the warring parties in 306.⁵⁴

... he (Agathokles) sent envoys to the Carthaginians and made peace with them on the following terms: the Carthaginians should regain all the cities which had previously belonged to them, and in return for these Agathokles received gold to the value of three hundred talents of silver and 200 000 *medimnoi* of wheat. (Diod. 20.79.5)

The good times under Hieron II (see Chapter 6) came to an abrupt end with his death, and the succession of his inexperienced grandson Hieronymous, who was murdered at Leontinoi, was followed by a coup by pro-Carthaginian politicians (Plut. *Marc.* 13.1). Syracuse's treaty with Rome, so long advantageous, was thrown aside, but Carthaginian promises brought no benefits while a swift Roman military intervention was aimed at reducing the city. The final great siege of the city occurred over a period of three years.

The fullest account is that of Livy (25.23–32) and it is interesting to note the abundant evidence of a topographical nature contained in his and other accounts. For example, before the Roman siege began, during the uncertainty following the murder of Hieronymous, the people gathered at the *curia* in Akradina (Liv. 24.22.1), which was presumably in the agora where an Altar to Concord was used as a platform for public speeches. Moreover, it is clear that, however benign had been Hieron II's rule, Ortygia and the mole were still separated from Akradina by a wall and gate – the *Pentapylon* (24.22.12). This gate complex was possibly usually open if the closure of the gate has any significance (24.25.3). In any

⁵⁴ Agathokles returned to Sicily in 307 and campaigned against exiles supported by Akragas, Diod. 20.55.5–57.2, and when he learned that his son, Arkagathos, had suffered a defeat in North Africa he planned to return. It is at this point, Diod. 20.61.5, that it becomes clear that a Carthaginian squadron of thirty ships was blockading the harbour while Agathokles possessed just seventeen triremes inside. Luckily for Agathokles eighteen Etruscan ships arrived unobserved at night, and on the next day the Syracusans broke out. The Carthaginians pursued them but became trapped between the Greeks and the Etruscans and they lost five of their ships. Agathokles made it to North Africa. And again this break-out presumably came from the Small Harbour.

event, mercenary troops seem to be still stationed there and on the island. Events in the city were unstable where pro and anti-Roman factions struggled to gain control. Negotiations about the renewal of the treaty with Rome were still underway when news of a Carthaginian fleet near Cape Pachynos gave the pro-Punic leaders, Hippokrates and Epikydes, sufficient incentive to conspire for power. A Roman fleet commanded by Ap. Claudius Pulcher was also anchored off the Great Harbour as an encouragement for the pro-Roman party.⁵⁵ A request from Leontinoi to quell internal civil disturbances played into the hands of the pro-Punic leadership, which used Syracusan troops to infringe on the Roman *provincia*. The consul M. Claudius Marcellus responded by taking Leontinoi, but this action too was put to good use by Hippokrates and Epikydes, who returned to Syracuse (24.32.4). At the *Hexapylon* they demanded admission with troops loyal to their cause.

By this time one of the gates of the *Hexapylon* had been opened, and by it they had begun to be admitted ... and the gates were being forced with no less violence from inside as from outside and when all had been broken open the column of troops was admitted through the entire *Hexapylon*. (Livy, 24.32.5–7)

Although some scholars have argued for a succession of six gates, this seems altogether unlikely for it is not a form of fortification seen elsewhere.⁵⁶ More plausible is a system of entries and exits which, if opened altogether, meant a very rapid influx, in this case, of troops. The Syracusans loyal to Rome were killed and the pro-Punic faction took power. A Roman ambassadorial party narrowly escaped capture 'in the channel of the port' (*fauces portus*), presumably either at the entrance to the Great Harbour or the fortified entry to the Small Harbour (Liv. 24.33.2–3). Soon afterwards a Roman army encamped in the usual place for besiegers, by the *Olympieion* (Liv. 24.33.3). When further negotiations proved fruitless, Marcellus launched assaults by land on the *Hexapylon* and by sea against the walls of Akradina. Polybius was probably Livy's source:

The Romans ... appointed Ap. Claudius Pulcher as propraetor to command the army and M. Claudius Marcellus to command the fleet. These commanders then took up positions not far from the city and decided to launch an assault with the army on the section known as the *Hexapylon* while the fleet was to attack at a spot known as the *Stoa* of Skytike in Akradina, just where the wall of the city extends to the harbour's edge.⁵⁷ (Pol. 8.3)

The Roman fleet intended to employ a piece of siege equipment called a *sambuca* against the 'city's towers', says Polybius, who gives a detailed description of what was essentially

55 This fleet of 100 ships had, says Livy, 24.27.5, been stationed at Murgantia. Morgantia is inland near Enna. The editor (*LCL*) postulates an unknown harbour called Murgantia. A place large enough for such a fleet would presumably not be unknown. Megara Hyblaia is probably meant, or even conceivably Messene; and this item should be treated as a clerical error that has crept into the text.

56 See the discussion in Chapter 1.

57 Note that Polybius and Livy provide variant details of the duties assigned to Pulcher and Marcellus, T.R.S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, New York 1951–52, 1.259–60, 262 n. 6, suggests that Ap. Claudius Pulcher (pr. 215) was the provincial governor until M. Claudius Marcellus arrived to take overall command of the campaign against Syracuse. Plutarch, *Marc.* 14.3, also has Pulcher in charge of the army and Marcellus the fleet.

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an extended covered ladder made of wood and protected by a roof which was lifted up against the walls by the crews of the ships. The sambuca proved to be useless against the defensive machinery created by Archimedes, Syracuse's most famous resident at that time, which included catapults designed to prevent the enemy approaching close to the walls and grappling devices that were capable of picking up ships by their prows and, when released, dropping them back into the water.⁵⁸ Diodorus, again probably accessing Polybius, offers much the same material (26.18.1):

During the time when Marcellus, general of the Romans, was attacking Syracuse by land and by sea, Archimedes first hauled up out of the water some of the enemy ships by using a mechanical device, and after raising them to the walls of the city sent ships and men tumbling down again into the sea.⁵⁹

From all accounts it would appear that the Small Harbour was still ringed with walls and towers, as it had been during the rule of Agathokles a century earlier. The army encountered similar difficulties in its assault on Epipolai. The massive circuit walls may have been in a state of some disrepair as a result of fifty years of peace under Hieron II, but proved to be still formidable.

The strength of Syracuse's defences lies in the fact that the city's fortifications extend in a circle along the high ground, with steeply overhanging crags that are very difficult to climb (except at certain points), even then only if the approach is not contested. (Pol. 8.7)

For an attack on the plateau the Romans must have secured a secondary encampment to the north of the city, besides possession of beaching facilities in the Great Harbour. Both sea-borne and land assaults failed, however, due to Archimedes' ingenuity (Liv. 24.34.1–15). The failure to breach the fortifications resulted in the almost inevitable blockade, and a frontal assault was delayed for another two years.

... in view of the city's large population, the best way to reduce it was by starvation and the Romans therefore cut off supplies from the sea by a naval blockade, and by land through deployment of the army and placed their hopes on this solution. (Pol. 8.7; cf. Plut. *Marc.* 17.3)

In fact, as Livy indicates

... the siege of Syracuse came to an end, aided not only by the vigour and excellence of the general (Marcellus) and his army, but also by internal treachery. (Liv. 25.23.1)

Moreover, it is notable that the occupation of the city did not occur as the result of a single incursion, but was a gradual process over a period of several days, if not weeks, and that the conclusion was therefore more drawn out than Livy's description might initially suggest.

⁵⁸ Plutarch, *Marc.* 14.3, describes a Roman naval ballista.

⁵⁹ See also Plutarch's elaborate account, *Marc.* 15. This was the occasion of Archimedes' famous bath-cry 'Eureka', Vitruvius, 9, *pref.* 9–12.

Again the topographical details are illuminating. Although the blockade was maintained, Syracuse was regarded as impregnable while supplies could still be brought in by sea from Carthage. A pro-Roman coup failed, but while negotiations near the *Portus Trogilorum* were taking place about a ransom for the return to Syracuse of a captured Spartan ambassador (25.23.8–10; Plut. *Marc.* 18.1), estimation of the height of the city's walls at Epipolai was accomplished. Polybius was surely the source of this episode:⁶⁰

A few days later a deserter reported that for three days the Syracusans had been celebrating throughout the city a festival of Artemis, and that they had eaten little bread because it was in short supply but had drunk plenty of wine ... and Marcellus now remembered his estimate of the wall's height at its lowest point and thought that it was very likely that the men would be drunk because of their consumption of wine and the lack of real food, [so he] decided to take a chance.⁶¹ (Pol. 8.37.1–13)

The walls were scaled by ladders at night. About a thousand soldiers were able to secure a position unnoticed, and they spread out along the apparently undefended walls since the Syracusans had assembled in several of the towers for the sacrifices and they were mostly drunk and asleep. Those few sentries on duty were killed and a postern gate was opened to admit more Roman troops as the assault began in earnest with heavy fighting in the vicinity of the *Scala Greca*. By dawn the *Haxapylon* was secured and opened to admit Marcellus and the rest of his army. The Syracusans, even at this late stage, seemed unaware of the seriousness of their situation and that Epipolai had been taken by the enemy.⁶² The Eurialos fort was not as yet in Roman hands but was soon surrendered by its commander (25.25.2–9) in return for safe passage down to Akradina.⁶³ This formerly impregnable fortress was lost through Syracusan carelessness; the Romans held all the higher ground and pitched a camp between Neapolis and Tyche, both of which they controlled and sacked.

When Marcellus entered the walls and from the higher ground saw with his own eyes one of the most beautiful of all cities at that time, he is said to have wept, in part for joy in the accomplishment of so great a campaign, in part for the city's ancient glory. He remembered the sinking, long ago, of the Athenian fleets, and two huge armies wiped out with their two famous commanders, and so many wars waged at such great risk with Carthage, so many wealthy tyrants and kings, above all Hieron – a king who was still vivid in the thoughts of men, and made glorious for his generosity to the Roman people before everything which his own valour and success had achieved. All these memories raced through his mind, and the thought occurred to him that within an hour all he saw might be in flames and reduced to ashes ... (Livy, 25.24.11–15; cf. Plut. *Marc.* 19.1)

60 Pol. 8.37.1–13: 'He (Marcellus) counted the courses since the masonry of the tower was even so that it was easy to reckon the distance of the battlements from the ground.'

61 Cf. Diod. 26.18.1: 'Now when Syracuse was ... suddenly betrayed to Marcellus ... while the citizens were celebrating a nocturnal festival of Artemis ...' Livy provides the additional information that the pro-Punic leader Epikydes provided the wine for this feast, 25.23.14.

62 Cf. Pol. 8.7: 'None of the citizens knew what was happening on account of the distance, the city being great in size. The Romans gained great confidence as a result of their capture of Epipolai.'

63 The towers at the Eurialos fort, CD nos. 76, 252, 258–59.

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Marcellus offered terms which the Syracusans rejected, and, at this point there was definitely a pause in operations since a Carthaginian relief fleet arrived in the Great Harbour. The northern suburbs of Syracuse may have fallen but Akradina and the island were still protected by their internal walls and held out (Plut. *Marc.* 18.4). The Carthaginians pitched their camp – perhaps at Daskon. Livy does not give details other than that an attack was launched against the Roman camp, which was presumably still near the *Olympieion* (Liv. 25.26.4). This was repulsed and a stalemate ensued during which disease again broke out in the opposing camps, although the Carthaginians appear to have fared much worse than the Romans (Liv. 25.26.7–15). They sensibly transferred their troops from Lysimeleia up onto the higher ground, while the remnants of the Carthaginian forces retreated south (Liv. 25.27.1) perhaps in the direction of Eloros.⁶⁴ Another Carthaginian fleet reached Cape Pachynos but was prevented from reaching Syracuse by easterly winds. Epikydes left the city to join this fleet and urged an engagement with the Romans. The Carthaginian commander Bomilkar made off without a fight while Epikydes left for Akragas. Akradina and Ortygia were left garrisoned by mercenaries and their commanders. One of these offered to betray his allocated area of responsibility on the island (Liv. 25.30.2–6). And it was this offer followed by a night infiltration via Ortygia at another postern gate (this time beside the Arethusa fountain), and treachery by Iberian mercenaries which finally caused the city's fall.⁶⁵ For the first time in its long history Syracuse fell to a besieging army.

... to Moericus himself fell the section from the Fountain of Arethusa round to the mouth of the Great Harbour. He was careful to let the Romans know of this. Therefore, that night Marcellus ordered a merchant ship with troops aboard to be towed by a quadrireme to Ortygia, where the troops were to be landed near the gate by the Fountain of Arethusa. This was accomplished in the hours before sunrise and when the men had been landed and Moericus had admitted them according to the plan, Marcellus at dawn made a general assault on the defences of Akradina ... (Liv. 25.30.7–9)

The city was sacked of its moveable treasures, but the fabric of Syracuse and its infrastructure was preserved for its new role as a Roman city. Livy claims (25.31.11) that the plunder taken in this sack was scarcely less than would have been taken from Carthage, had that city fallen to Rome at this time.⁶⁶

Why did the Athenians, and later the Carthaginians, choose to site their camps in Lysimeleia, an area of marshy and hence unhealthy land when a situation to the north of the city would have been more hospitable? Reliance on their fleets for communications and supplies would seem the obvious answer to this question. However, Thucydides,

64 Livy states that the Carthaginians retreated to two towns three and fifteen miles south of Syracuse. Wherever these were precisely, in any event they played no further role in subsequent events.

65 For the wall at the Fountain of Arethusa, see CD nos. 559–60.

66 Plutarch, *Marc.* 19.3, compares what was actually plundered from Syracuse at this time with that looted from Carthage in 146 BC.

for example, makes it clear that supplies were delivered to the Athenians overland and, given the nature of Syracuse's hinterland, it was relatively straightforward to send out foraging parties and import food by road. A camp on Epipolai would not have been a disadvantage because it was further from the accompanying fleet. Communications too could be conducted by land since the Athenians certainly possessed cavalry units, and the Carthaginian high command and elite troops were usually equestrian.

Occupation of Lysimeleia and Polichne was probably attractive because it allowed control of the road south to Eloros, and before construction of the channel linking the two harbours, also placed pressure on the city in the vicinity of the agora, which although adjacent to both harbours presumably took its main imports from the south. Possession of the Great Harbour was clearly viewed as a sound strategy to force a siege to a successful conclusion, hence, also the occupation of Plemmyrion, the southern head of the bay. Furthermore, the fortifications of the city in the Neapolis sector – especially where the walls came down to the beach – may have been regarded as a weak spot where a concerted attack could lead to a breach. But these considerations all presume a brief siege, which in these instances simply did not take place.

Green has argued very plausibly for command mismanagement of the Athenian siege and has stated that Nicias was convinced a Syracusan surrender would come, the longer the invaders remained outside the city. Not only did Nicias have connections inside Syracuse but he was obviously aware that a prolonged campaign would become a massive financial drain on the treasury of the city which could only pay for its defence while it had reserves. Without settled conditions the treasury was not replenished and hence a lack of funds for mercenaries would force a capitulation long before starvation set in. However, does this explanation also fit the situation in 396 and 309 BC?

It is claimed between 415 and 413 the Syracusans depended heavily on the support they received from Sparta and Corinth, and there were indeed Spartans and Corinthians fighting alongside the local citizens. However, for the most part the Syracusans had a strong citizen army that seems to have excelled in the cavalry units, which they possessed in superior numbers to the Athenians. There were also mercenary units, but who were these? Again for the most part they appear to have been drawn from allies within Sicily. Similarly, although there were some ships from mainland Greece the Syracusan fleet was predominantly recruited from its citizen body. Syracusan reserves of manpower were clearly equal to those enjoyed by Athens, even though the city at this time cannot have held the 200 000 later credited to it. The city of Dionysius I and Hieron II was a far greater metropolis than it had been in the fifth century BC. The later Carthaginian armies relied heavily on mercenary troops who were not always of the highest calibre. The Carthaginian command equally had no scruples about leaving their mercenaries in the lurch, as occurred in 396. In 309 it was simply command incompetence which caused the failure of Hamilkar's campaign. By that time too it is clearly evident that the fort

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at Eurialos had added considerable strength to the city, and even with a naval blockade supplies to Syracuse could still be brought in.

Was it, therefore, simply a series of blunders in which the besiegers were outmanoeuvred by the besieged (a series of misadventures from which the Romans learned a good lesson) and realised that any successful attack must come from the north and not the south? The Romans also camped in Lysimeleia and suffered from the disease there, but they also held the Megarian plain and were able to exert greater pressure on the city as a result. The Eurialos fort could not save Syracuse in the end. Indeed it did not feature in the last assault by the Romans. Finally, it was a strike to the very heart of the city that brought its end as an independent community. In at least one sense Thucydides was, therefore, prophetic for with the fall of Syracuse in 212 BC, Sicily in its entirety was absorbed into the Roman empire and southern Italy, *Magna Graecia*, as a separate Hellenic entity also ceased to exist.