

ARMIES AND NAVIES

Lecture 22: Fortifications

Prehistory

- ▣ The earliest perimeter walls were built in the early Bronze Age, such as those in Chalandriani in Syros.
- ▣ More important are the Cyclopean walls of the late Bronze Age, such as those in Mycenae.



The Fortified Acropolis

- ▣ Most poleis had a fortified acropolis, around which the asty was built.
- ▣ This was the main defence of the polis against a siege in the archaic period.



Acropolis Corinth



Acropolis Athens

Expanded Fortifications

- ▣ The classical period saw the building of greater fortifications in most poleis.
- ▣ They often encompassed all or most of the asty.
- ▣ Some poleis fortified their harbours.
- ▣ Some poleis constructed Long Walls to connect them with their harbours.
- ▣ Also independent forts and watchtowers became common during the classical period.

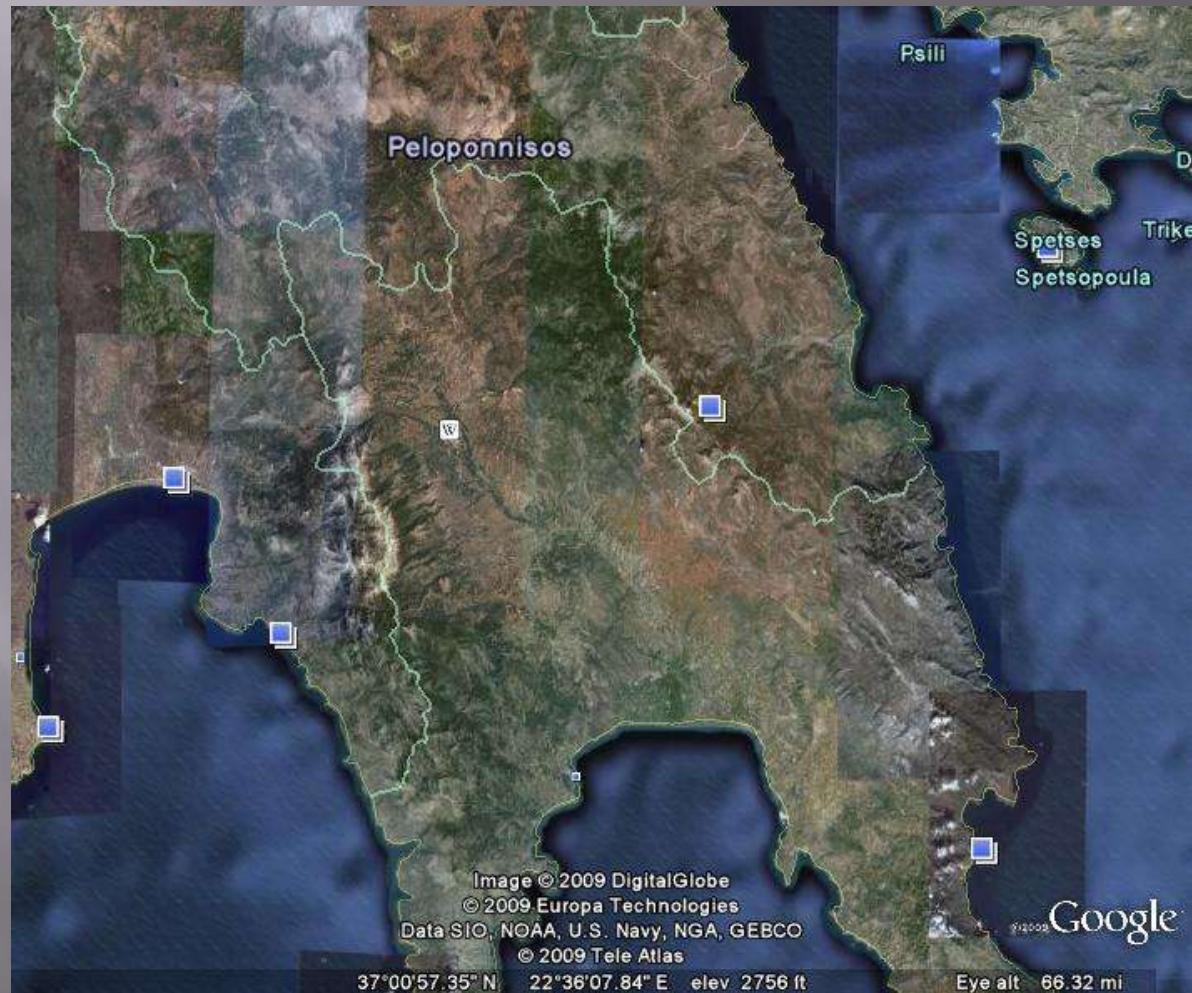
Natural Defences

- ▣ Socrates proceeded: Has it ever caught your observation, Pericles, that a high mountain barrier stretches like a bulwark in front of our country down towards Boeotia — cleft, moreover, by narrow and precipitous passes, the only avenues into the heart of Attica, which lies engirdled by a ring of natural fortresses?
- ▣ Per. Certainly I have.
- ▣ Soc. Well, and have you ever heard tell of the Mysians and Pisidians living within the territory of the great king, who, inside their mountain fortresses, lightly armed, are able to rush down and inflict much injury on the king's territory by their raids, while preserving their
- ▣ Per. Yes, the circumstance is not new to me.
- ▣ And do you not think (added Socrates) that a corps of young able-bodied Athenians, accoutred with lighter arms, and holding our natural mountain rampart in possession, would prove at once a thorn in the enemy's side offensively, whilst defensively they would form a splendid bulwark to protect the country?
- ▣ Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.5.25

Natural Defences: Attika



Natural Defences: Laconia



Watchposts and Garrisons

- Soc. Well then, we will defer tending advice on the topic of peace or war, in a maiden speech at any rate. I can understand that, owing to the magnitude of the questions, in these early days of your ministry you have not yet fully examined them. But come, I am sure that you have studied the defences of the country, at all events, and you know exactly how many forts and outposts are serviceable and how many are not; you can tell us which garrisons are strong enough and which defective; and you are prepared to throw in the weight of your advice in favour of increasing the serviceable outposts and sweeping away those that are superfluous?
- Glauc. Yes, sweep them all away, that's my advice; for any good that is likely to come of them! Defences indeed! so maintained that the property of the rural districts is simply pilfered.
- But suppose you sweep away the outposts (he asked), may not something worse, think you, be the consequence? will not sheer plundering be free to any ruffian who likes?... But may I ask is this judgment the result of personal inspection? have you gone yourself and examined the defences? or how do you know that they are all maintained as you say?
- Glauc. I conjecture that it is so.
- Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.6.10-1

Deceleia

- ▣ You must fortify Decelea in Attica, the blow of which the Athenians are always most afraid and the only one that they think they have not experienced in the present war; the surest method of harming an enemy being to find out what he most fears, and to choose this means of attacking him, since every one naturally knows best his own weak points and fears accordingly. The fortification in question, while it benefits you, will create difficulties for your adversaries, of which I shall pass over many, and shall only mention the chief. Whatever property there is in the country will most of it become yours, either by capture or surrender; and the Athenians will at once be deprived of their revenues from the silver mines at Laurium, of their present gains from their land and from the law courts, and above all of the revenue from their allies, which will be paid less regularly, as they lose their awe of Athens and see you addressing yourselves with vigour to the war. Thucydides 6.90

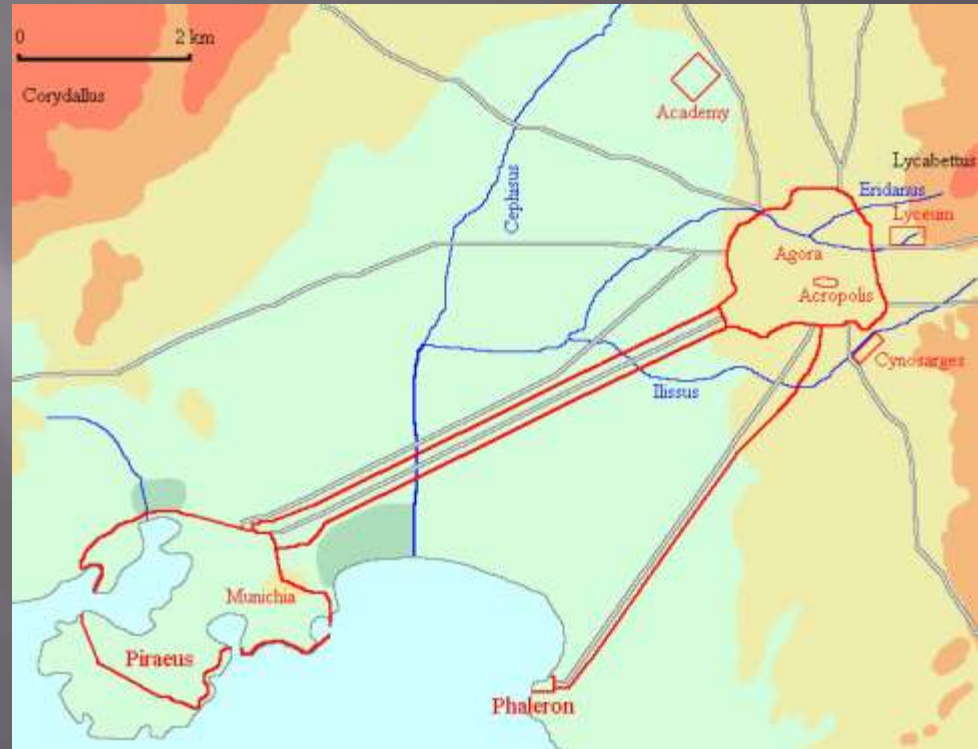
Aigosthena

- ▣ Aigosthena was on the border between Attika and the Megarid.
- ▣ It was built jointly as a fort in the fourth century, probably against Theban aggression.



The Long Walls

- About this time the Athenians began to build the long walls to the sea, that towards Phalerum and that towards Piraeus. Thucydides 1.107



Make the city into an island

- The rule of the sea is indeed a great matter. Consider for a moment. Suppose that we were islanders; can you conceive a more impregnable position? Well, this in future should, as far as possible, be our conception of our position. Dismissing all thought of our land and houses, we must vigilantly guard the sea and the city. No irritation that we may feel for the former must provoke us to a battle with the numerical superiority of the Peloponnesians. A victory would only be succeeded by another battle against the same superiority: a reverse involves the loss of our allies, the source of our strength, who will not remain quiet a day after we become unable to march against them. We must cry not over the loss of houses and land but of men's lives; since houses and land do not gain men, but men them. And if I had thought that I could persuade you, I would have bid you go out and lay them waste with your own hands, and show the Peloponnesians that this at any rate will not make you submit. Thucydides 1.143

Fortifications and Siege warfare

- ▣ The fourth century saw new and improved fortifications due to the advancement of siege warfare and the invention of new and improved siege engines.
- ▣ A good example of the new type of fortification are the towers of Messene



Questions?

Follow-Up Reading

- ▣ Munn, M. H. *The Defence of Attica* (1993), pp.1-36, 187-98.
- ▣ *Available as an E-Book (California Digital Library)*
<http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/>