



Siege Warfare and Fortifications in archaic and classical Greece

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.

Persian Siegecraft: The Determining Factor?

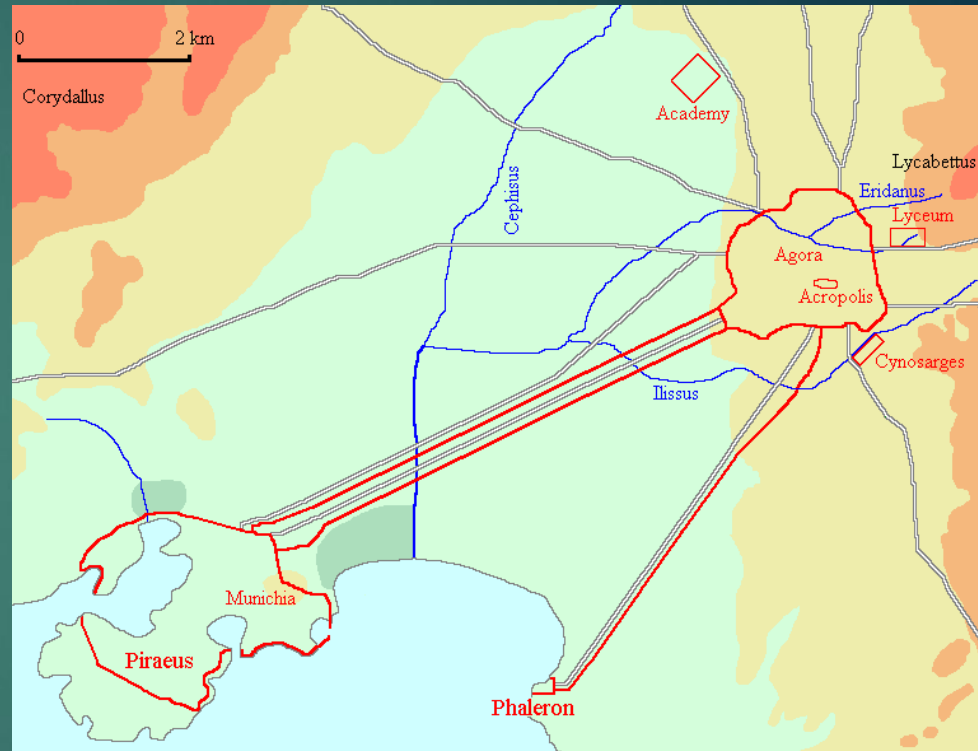
- ▶ This the Amathusians did, and have done to this day. When, however, the Ionians engaged in the sea-battle off Cyprus learned that Onesilus' cause was lost and that the cities of Cyprus, with the exception of Salamis which the Salaminians had handed over to their former king Gorgus, were besieged, they sailed off to Ionia without delay.
[2] **Soli was the Cyprian city which withstood siege longest; the Persians took it in the fifth month by digging a mine under its walls.**

Herodotos 5.115

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



Treachery and Starvation: Main weapons in the 5th century

- ▶ The same winter the Potidaeans at **length found themselves no longer able to hold out against their besiegers**. The inroads of the Peloponnesians into Attica had not had the desired effect of making the Athenians raise the siege. **Provisions there were none left; and so far had distress for food gone in Potidaea that, besides a number of other horrors, instances had even occurred of the people having eaten one another.** So in this extremity they at last made proposals for capitulating to the Athenian generals in command against them, Xenophon, son of Euripides, Hestiodorus, son of Aristocleides, and Phanomachus, son of Callimachus. [2] **The generals accepted their proposals, seeing the sufferings of the army in so exposed a position; besides which the state had already spent two thousand talents upon the siege.** Thucydides 2.70

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



Invention and the Fourth Century

- ▶ **In fact the catapult was invented at this time in Syracuse, since the ablest skilled workmen had been gathered from everywhere into one place.** The high wages as well as the numerous prizes offered the workmen who were judged to be the best stimulated their zeal. And over and above these factors, Dionysius circulated daily among the workers, conversed with them in kindly fashion, and rewarded the most zealous with gifts and invited them to his table. [2] **Consequently the workmen brought unsurpassable devotion to the devising of many missiles and engines of war that were strange and capable of rendering great service.** Diodoros 14.42

Further Reading

- ▶ Munn, M. H. 1993. *The defense of Attica: the Dema wall and the Boiotian War of 378-375 B.C.* Berkeley: University of California Press. You can also find this book on Open Access via the [UC Press E-Scholarship](#) scheme.
- ▶ Ober, J. 1985. *Fortress Attica: defense of the Athenian land frontier, 404-322 B.C.* Leiden: Brill.