

Diodorus Siculus 20.81-89 – failed siege of Rhodes by Demetrios I (Poliorketes)

81 1 When this year had passed, Euxenippus became archon in Athens, and in Rome Lucius Postumius and Tiberius Minucius were consuls. While these held office war arose between the Rhodians and Antigonos for some such reasons as these. 2 The city of the Rhodians, which was strong in sea power and was the best governed city of the Greeks, was a prize eagerly sought after by the dynasts and kings, each of them striving to add her to his alliance. Seeing far in advance what was advantageous and establishing friendship with each of the dynasts separately, Rhodes took no part in their wars with each other. 3 As a result she was honoured by each of them with regal gifts and, while enjoying peace for a long time, made great steps forward. In fact, she advanced to such strength that in behalf of the Greeks she by herself undertook her war against the pirates and purged the seas of these evil-doers; and Alexander, the most powerful of men known to memory, honouring Rhodes above all cities, both deposited there the testament disposing of his whole realm and in other ways showed admiration for her and promoted her to a commanding position. 4 At any rate, the Rhodians, having established pacts of friendship with all the rulers, carefully avoided giving legitimate grounds for complaint; but in displaying goodwill they inclined chiefly toward Ptolemy, for it happened that most of their revenues were due to the merchants who sailed to Egypt, and that in general the city drew its food supply from that kingdom.

82 1 Because Antigonos knew this and was intent on separating the Rhodians from their connection with Ptolemy, he first sent out envoys to them at the time when he was fighting with Ptolemy for Cyprus and asked him to ally themselves with him and to dispatch ships in company with Demetrius; 2 and when they did not consent, he dispatched one of his generals with ships, ordering him to bring to land any merchants sailing to Egypt from Rhodes and to seize their cargoes. When this general was driven off by the Rhodians, Antigonos, declaring that they were authors of an unjust war, threatened to lay siege to the city with strong forces. The Rhodians, however, first voted great honours for him; and, sending envoys, they begged him not to force the city to rush into the war against Ptolemy contrary to their treaties. 3 But then, when the king answered rather harshly and sent his son Demetrius with an army and siege equipment, they were so frightened by the superior power of the king that at first they sent to Demetrius, saying that they would join Antigonos in the war with Ptolemy, but when Demetrius demanded as hostages a hundred of the noblest citizens and ordered also that his fleet should be received in their harbours, concluding that he was plotting against the city, they made ready for war. 4 Demetrius, gathering all his forces in the harbour at Loryma, made his fleet ready for the attack on Rhodes. He had two hundred warships of all sizes and more than one hundred and seventy auxiliary vessels; on these were transported not quite forty thousand soldiers besides the cavalry and the pirates who were his allies. There was also an ample supply of ordnance of all sorts and a large provision of all the things necessary for a siege. 5 In addition there

accompanied him almost a thousand privately owned ships, which belonged to those who were engaged in trade; for since the land of the Thracians had been un plundered for many years, there had gathered together from all quarters a host of those who were accustomed to consider the misfortunes of men at war a means of enriching themselves.

83 1 And so Demetrius, having drawn up his fleet as if for a naval battle in a way to inspire panic, sent forward his warships, which had on their prows the catapults for bolts three spans in length; and he had the transports for men and horses follow, towed by the ships that used oarsmen; and last of all came also the cargo-ships of the pirates and of the merchants and traders, which as we have already said, were exceedingly numerous, so that the whole space between the island and the opposite shore was seen to be filled with his vessels, which brought great fear and panic to those who were watching from the city. 2 For the soldiers of the Rhodians, occupying their several positions on the walls, were awaiting the approach of the hostile fleet, and the old men and women were looking on from their homes, since the city is shaped like a theatre; and all, being terror-stricken at the magnitude of the fleet and the gleam of the shining armour, were not a little anxious about the final outcome. 3 Then Demetrius sailed to the island; and after disembarking his army, he took position near the city, setting up his camp out of range of missiles. He at once sent out fit and proper men from the pirates and others to plunder the island both by land and by sea. 4 He also cut down the trees in the region nearby and destroyed the farm buildings, and with this material he fortified the camp, surrounding it with a triple palisade and with great, close-set stockades, so that the loss suffered by the enemy became a protection for his own men. After this, using the whole army and the crews, he in a few days closed with a mole the space between the city and the exit, and made a port large enough for his ships.

84 1 For a time the Rhodians kept sending envoys and asking him to do nothing irreparable against the city; but as no one paid any heed to these, they gave up hope of a truce and sent envoys to Ptolemy, Lysimachus, and Cassander, begging them to give aid and saying that the city was fighting the war on their behalf. 2 As to the metics and aliens who dwelt in the city, to those who wished they gave permission to join them in the fighting and the others who were of no service they sent forth from the city, partly as a precaution against scarcity of supplies, and partly that there might be no one to become dissatisfied with the situation and try to betray the city. When they made a count of those who were able to fight, they found that there were about six thousand citizens and as many as a thousand metics and aliens. 3 They voted also to buy from their masters any slaves who proved themselves brave men in the battle, and to emancipate and enfranchise them. And they also wrote another decree, that the bodies of those who fell in the war should be given public burial and, further, that their parents and children should be maintained, receiving their support from the public treasury, that their unmarried daughters should be given dowries at the public cost, and that their sons on reaching manhood should be crowned in the theatre at the Dionysia and given a full suit of armour. 4 When by these measures they had roused the

spirits of all to endure the battles with courage, they also made what preparation was possible in regard to other matters. Since the whole people was of one mind, the rich contributed money, the craftsmen gave their skilled services for the preparation of the arms, and every man was active, each striving in a spirit of rivalry to surpass the others. 5 Consequently, some were busy with the catapults and ballistae, others with the preparation of other equipment, some were repairing any ruined portions of the walls, and very many were carrying stones to the walls and stacking them. They even sent out three of their swiftest ships against the enemy and the merchant ships which brought provisions to him. 6 These ships on appearing unexpectedly sank many vessels belonging to merchants who had sailed for the purpose of plundering the land for their own profit, and even hauled not a few ships up on the beach and burned them. As for the prisoners, those who could pay a ransom they took into the city, for the Rhodians had made an agreement with Demetrius that each should pay the other a thousand drachmae as ransom for a free man and five hundred for a slave.

85 1 Demetrius, who had an ample supply of everything required for setting up his engines of war, began to prepare two penthouses, one for the ballistae, the other for the catapults, each of them firmly mounted on two cargo vessels fastened together, and two towers of four stories, exceeding in height the towers of the harbour, each of them mounted upon two ships of the same size and fastened there in such a way that as the towers advanced the support on each side upheld an equal weight. 2 He also prepared a floating boom of squared logs studded with spikes, in order that as this was floated forward it might prevent the enemy from sailing up and ramming the ships that were carrying the engines of war. 3 In the interval while these were receiving their finishing touches, he collected the strongest of the light craft, fortified them with planks, provided them with ports that could be closed, and placed upon them those of the catapults for bolts three palms long which had the longest range and the men to work them properly, and also Cretan archers; then, sending the boats within range, he shot down the men of the city who were building higher the walls along the harbour.

4 When the Rhodians saw that the entire attack of Demetrius was aimed against the harbour, they themselves also took measures for its security. They placed two machines on the mole and three upon freighters near the boom of the small harbour; in these they mounted a large number of catapults and ballistae of all sizes, in order that if the enemy should disembark soldiers on the mole or should advance his machines, he might be thwarted in his design by this means. They also placed on such cargo ships as were at anchor in the harbour platforms suitable for the catapults that were to be mounted on them.

86 1 After both sides had made their preparations in this way, Demetrius at first endeavoured to bring his engines of war against the harbour, but he was prevented when too rough a sea arose; later on, however, taking advantage of calm weather at night, he

sailed in secretly, and after seizing the end of the mole of the great harbour he at once fortified the place, cutting it off with walls of planks and stones, and landed there four hundred soldiers and a supply of ordnance of all kinds. This point was five plethra distant from the city walls. 2 Then at daybreak he brought his engines into the harbour with the sound of trumpets and with shouts; and with the lighter catapults, which had a long range, he drove back those who were constructing the wall along the harbour, and with the ballistae he shook or destroyed the engines of the enemy and the wall across the mole, for it was weak and low at this time. 3 But since those from the city also fought stoutly, during that whole day both sides continued to inflict and suffer severe losses; and when night was already closing in, Demetrius by means of towboats drew his engines back out of range. The Rhodians, however, filled light boats with dry pitchy wood and placed fire in them; at first they went in pursuit and, drawing near to the engines of the enemy, lighted the wood, but afterwards, repelled by the floating boom and by the missiles, they were forced to withdraw. 4 As the fire gained force a few put it out and sailed back with their boats, but most of them plunged into the sea as their boats were consumed. On the following day Demetrius made a similar attack by sea, but he also gave orders to assail the city at the same time by land from all sides with shouts and sound of trumpet in order to throw the Rhodians into an agony of terror because of the many distractions.

87 1 After carrying on this kind of siege warfare for eight days, Demetrius shattered the engines of war upon the mole by means of his heavy ballistae and weakened the curtain of the cross-wall together with the towers themselves. Some of his soldiers also occupied a part of the fortifications along the harbour; the Rhodians rallying their forces joined battle against these, and now that they outnumbered the enemy, they killed some and forced the rest to withdraw. The men of the city were aided by the ruggedness of the shore along the wall, for many large rocks lay close together beside the structure outside of the wall. 2 Of the ships which had conveyed these soldiers no small number ran aground in their ignorance; and the Rhodians at once, after stripping off the beaks, threw dry pitchy wood into the ships and burned them. While the Rhodians were so occupied, the soldiers of Demetrius sailing up on every side placed ladders against the walls and pressed on more strongly, and the troops who were attacking from the land also joined in the struggle from every side and raised the battle cry in unison. 3 Then indeed, since many had recklessly risked their lives, and a good number had mounted the walls, a mighty battle arose, those on the outside trying to force their way in and those in the city coming to the defence with one accord. Finally, as the Rhodians contended furiously, some of the men who had mounted were thrown down and others were wounded and captured, among whom were some of their most distinguished leaders. 4 Since such losses had befallen those who fought from the outside, Demetrius withdrew his engines of war to his own harbour and repaired the ships and engines that had been damaged; and the Rhodians buried those of their citizens who had perished, dedicated to the gods the arms of the enemy and the beaks of the ships, and rebuilt the parts of the wall that had been overthrown by the ballistae.

88 1 After Demetrius had spent seven days on the repair of his engines and ships and had made all his preparations for the siege, he again attacked the harbour; for his whole effort centred upon capturing this and shutting off the people of the city from their grain supplies. 2 When he was within range, with the fire-arrows, of which he had many, he made an account on the ships of the Rhodians that lay at anchor, with his ballistae he shook the walls, and with his catapults he cut down any who showed themselves. 3 Then when the attack had become continuous and terrifying, the Rhodian ship-captains, after a fierce struggle to save their ships, put out the fire-arrows, and the magistrates, since the harbour was in danger of being taken, summoned the noblest citizens to undergo the perils of war for the sake of the common safety. 4 When many responded with alacrity, they manned the three staunchest ships with picked men, whom they instructed to try to sink with their rams the ships that carried the engines of the enemy. 5 These men, accordingly, pushed forward although missiles in large numbers were speeding against them; and at first they broke through the iron studded boom, and then by delivering repeated blows with their rams upon the ships and filling them with water, they overthrew two of the engines; but when the third was drawn back with ropes by the men of Demetrius, the Rhodians, encouraged by their successes, pressed on into the battle more boldly than was prudent. 6 And so, when many large ships crowded around them and the sides of their own ships had been shattered in many places by the rams, the admiral Execestus, the trierarch, and some others were disabled by wounds and captured; and as the rest of its crew jumped into the sea and swam to their own fellows, one of the ships came into the possession of Demetrius; but the other ships escaped from the battle. 7 When the naval battle had turned out in this way, Demetrius constructed another machine three times the size of the former in height and width; but while he was bringing this up to the harbour, a violent storm from the south sprang up, which swept over the ships that were anchored and overthrew the engine. And at this very time the Rhodians, shrewdly availing themselves of the situation, opened a gate and sallied out upon those who had occupied the mole. 8 A severe battle ensued lasting for a long time; and since Demetrius could not send reinforcements because of the storm, and the Rhodians, on the other hand, were fighting in relays, the king's men were forced to lay down their arms and surrender, in number above four hundred. 9 After the Rhodians had gained these advantages there sailed in as allies for the city one hundred and fifty soldiers from the Cnossians and more than five hundred from Ptolemy, some of whom were Rhodians serving as mercenaries in the king's army.