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The Experience of Battle in the Sicilian Expedition: From the Great Harbour to the River Assinarus

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Classics

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THE EXPERIENCE OF BATTLE IN THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION: FROM THE
GREAT HARBOUR TO THE RIVER ASSINARUS

Monograph

by

Frank D'Earmo

Graduate Program in Classical Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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Abstract

Drawing on John Keegan's *Face of Battle* approach, this MA thesis reconstructs the soldiers' experience during the final phase of the Athenians' Sicilian Expedition (415-413 BC).

By integrating a thorough analysis of the extant historiographical sources (Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch's *Life of Nicias*) with the intrinsic aspects of ancient Greek naval and land warfare, the topography around Syracuse, and the Athenian soldiers' psychological condition, I seek to improve our understanding of how and why the Athenians and their allies lost the decisive naval engagement in the Great Harbour and failed to escape the Syracusans during their final retreat overland.

I make the case that the Athenian defeat is largely caused by factors outside of their control such as access to resources, geography, and Syracusan preparedness. However, the Athenians also suffered owing to their own inaction caused by demoralization.

Keywords

Athens; Syracuse; Peloponnesian War; Sicilian Expedition; Greek Military History; Experience of Battle; John Keegan; Naval Warfare; Hoplite Warfare; Thucydides

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Chapter 1: Objectives, Methods, and Sources

Objectives

In September of 413 BC, the Athenian expeditionary corps stationed just south of Syracuse was in dire straits. The Athenians and their allies made a final attempt to escape from the Syracusans and their allies and to return to their various homelands. This was a complete reversal of fortune for the Athenians. They had gone to Sicily with the intent of defeating Syracuse and possibly conquering the entire island, and had now become themselves besieged, desperately fighting for their very survival. In this thesis, I investigate and analyze the Athenian soldiers' experience from the Battle in the Great Harbour to the surrender of Nicias' forces at the River Assinarus. In the literary sources, we learn that the Athenians – although having a few minor successes - were soundly defeated and destroyed over a ten day period. While Thucydides' account provides a gripping narrative of the Athenian defeat, his writing does not clearly explain why the preeminent navy of Greece was overcome by the Syracusans and why the Athenian land army failed to reach a safe haven in Sicily. Essentially, Thucydides' narrative paints a picture of utter consternation with a great emphasis on the *pathos* of the Athenian army. Thucydides' descriptions of the mood in the Athenian camp are important to our understanding of the ineffectiveness of Athenian forces, but he does not provide enough information in regard to military affairs. In terms of the battles themselves, Thucydides describes these engagements from a macro level, and sometimes summarizes encounters in a single line or less. Writing as a former Athenian general for readers who would almost certainly have military experience, Thucydides does not deal with the subtleties of

the actual naval and infantry combat, which are necessary for us to understand the cause of the Athenian defeat. In this thesis, I intend to rectify this deficiency by exploring the underlying causes for the Athenian defeat. Of course, much has already been written in regard to the Sicilian Expedition. However, these writings seem to fall into three categories. The first group of scholars focuses on the literary goals of Thucydides, which, while elucidating and informative in regard to Thucydides' methods and influences, does not have an interest in analyzing the military matters.¹ The second group of authors discusses the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition as but one element in their general treatment of ancient Greek history.² The Sicilian Expedition is recounted for its political importance. Historians often do not go beyond what is present in Thucydides. Since Thucydides' account is so lucid and detailed, the reader is often presented with a condensed version of events. The third group of scholars freely uses their own imagination to flesh out Thucydides' narrative further.³ While these accounts are certainly enjoyable to read, a major drawback of these writings is that they tend not to have a sufficient level of footnotes or citations, and thus it is difficult to discern what

¹ A few examples are: Allison (1997), Cogan (1981), Connor (1977), Dover (1983), Lateiner (1977), MacLeod (1982), Rood (1998), Zadorojnyi (1998).

² This approach is largely found in populist histories that are attempting to cover a massive amount of material, such as Robin Lane Fox's *The Classical World* (2006). However, even if we consider Victor Davis Hanson's *A War Like No Other* (2005) (a very enjoyable and informative read), he recounts the Battle in the Great Harbour in 2 paragraphs (219). He summarizes the entire Athenian retreat in less than 2 pages (221-23). In other chapters he provides much useful information that can be applied to these battles, but he does not connect them for the reader. The *Cambridge Ancient History* (1992) similarly gives a condensed account of events. This approach is also apparent in Donald Kagan's emphasis on political history in his *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (1981).

³ A great example of this is Peter Green's *Armada from Athens* (1970). Green provides a great amount of new information that goes against the *communis opinio*, but his work lacks citations which would allow the reader to understand how he came to his conclusion. See Cawkwell's scathing review in *The Classical Review* 22 (1972), 245-48, for criticism of the lack of citations. However, Green's findings from a survey of Sicily's topography led him to propose a new Athenian marching route during the retreat that has, for the most part, become the standard interpretation.

information is being filled in by the author and what is either grounded in the text or based on other scholarly research. Arguably, there is no comprehensive treatment of the failures of the Sicilian Expedition in regard to military matters.

To get beyond Thucydides' account, I apply the *Face of Battle* approach pioneered by John Keegan in 1976, which focuses on the experience of individual units, but in doing so, I keep my account as close to the text as possible. I ground my work in current scholarship and make clear what is supposition on my part.

The focus of the second chapter is the Battle in the Great Harbour. In it, I attempt to explain why the preeminent navy of Greece was soundly defeated by the Syracusans. First, I explain what I consider to be the essential aspects of Greek naval combat so that the reader can easily understand my reconstruction of the battle. I give details regarding what type of troops and men were on a trireme and what the purpose of that troop type was on the ship. Next, I lay out the preparations that both sides made for the battle and the implications of these measures. I argue that the Athenians made the proper tactical decisions given their situation, but that they were defeated owing to conditions that were largely outside of their control; most notably, the very space in which they fought as well as the preparedness of the Syracusan navy. Following John Keegan's *Face of Battle*, I consider the impetus for the Athenians to engage in this naval encounter.⁴ Next, I lay out the rationale of my battle analysis in the Great Harbour. With extensive use of primary and secondary sources in combination with the information that has been garnered from

⁴ The Section 'The Will to Combat' which is an integral element Keegan's battle reconstructions.

the reconstructed trireme *Olympias*, I look into the advantages of the Athenian navy as well as the disadvantages that plagued the Athenians in the Battle in the Great Harbour. When health, experience, location, and positioning are considered, it becomes clear why the Athenians failed to overcome the Syracusans in this decisive battle.

In the third chapter, my objective is to uncover how and why the Athenians failed to escape the Syracusans during their retreat through Sicily. To Thucydides' readers, it may seem to be a foregone conclusion that the Athenians have no real hope of ever escaping Sicily. However, when one considers the march of the 10000 as described by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*,⁵ it is clear that it was possible for an army, heavily surrounded by hostiles, to travel great distances and arrive at a safe haven. I argue that there were five major reasons for the Athenian failure. The first was the delay directly after the Battle in the Great Harbour. The second reason was the Syracusan's highly effective use of cavalry and light armed infantry, both as a means to harass the Athenians and to convey quickly troops to the area in which they were required. Further, the Syracusans used the geography of Sicily effectively and managed to keep the Athenians in the wide plains where the cavalry could freely operate. The fourth reason was the lack of provisions, which caused the Athenians to struggle desperately at the River Assinarus. Finally, the disorder of Demosthenes' troops likely played a large role in the surrender of his contingent, and by extension, led to the defeat of Nicias' forces at the River Assinarus. Again, I employ the *Face of Battle* approach in order to gain a better

⁵ This is something that Hanson also notes in *A War Like No Other* (pg. 220). The fact of the matter is that Xenophon's 10 000 hoplites march a far greater distance against far greater odds and manage to escape successfully Asia.

understanding of the experience of the Athenian troops during the retreat. First, I provide the general mood and events that transpired directly after the Athenian defeat at the Battle in the Great Harbour. Next, I come to some conclusions regarding the number of troops involved in the Athenians march and explore what such a mass of men would have looked like while on the move. Third, I explain the unit types that were involved in the march on both the Athenian and Syracusan sides and discuss what the advantages and disadvantages of these unit types were. Then, I describe the march by dividing it into the 8 days, while paying close attention to the factors that adversely impacted the Athenians. Finally, I provide a summary of the events that followed the fateful capture of Nicias and account for the low number of captives taken by the Syracusans given the number of men on the march.

Methodology

In this paper I use the *Face of Battle* approach popularized by John Keegan.⁶ Keegan was frustrated with the general way military history was written. Past works of military history tended to focus on the grand strategy and on the acumen of a particular general.⁷ In this type of history, units of soldiers are generally treated as pawns of the general with no unique characteristics. In these cases, there is a heavy use of metaphor that does not do justice to the realities of war.⁸ We are not told how the soldiers fight, but rather what the troop movements were and the outcomes of these actions. The approach

⁶ Keegan (1976), See pages 15-78 of John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* for a full explanation of the tenets of this methodology.

⁷ Keegan (1976), 28-36.

⁸ Keegan (1976), 35-36. Keegan provides a quotation from General Sir William Napier's account of the battle of Albuera that shows the romantic prose used by military historians of the past.

of grand strategy pulls away from the personal nature of combat and focuses on an isometric view of a battlefield. It fails to take into account the health of the soldier, the weather and terrain, and the fear and dread that may grip a soldier in various circumstances. However, the psychological and physical factors of combat can have massive importance for the outcome of battle.

Keegan's approach shows this most beautifully in his description of the battle of Agincourt in AD 1415.⁹ Here, the French cavalry charged into wooden stakes which were set up by the English archers and impaled the French horses.¹⁰ We learn that, in general, archers fear cavalry; but in this case, the English archers had employed stakes which they kept out of view amid their ranks. The cavalymen fell from their animals.¹¹ The archers had managed to turn a frightening encounter into a highly advantageous situation. They came out from behind their stakes, emboldened, and began to slaughter the French knights with the mallets used for establishing the stakes. The horses that survived became terrified and ran back into their own lines and wrought havoc on the French infantry, leaving them shaken.¹²

The *Face of Battle* approach gives us a chance to envision how an actual battle unfolds. With this method, I look to explain the reason for the defeat of the Athenians in the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition in 413 BC. This approach looks at the experience of the individual soldier. What was it like to be in battle? How did the morale

⁹ Keegan (1976), 79-116.

¹⁰ Keegan (1976), 96.

¹¹ Keegan (1976), 96-97.

¹² Keegan (1976), 97.

of the soldier affect the outcome? What was the motivation for the troops to engage? What were the actual mechanics of battle? What types of weapons were used? What were the advantages and disadvantages of these weapons? How did a battle line hold up against these weapons? What happened when a ship got rammed? How did the oarsmen escape a sinking ship or escape the weapons of a boarding party? How did an army know that they had won or lost a battle, if there is not a complete surrender or destruction of the opposing force?

In this thesis, I apply this approach to both naval and land combat. Ancient historians, first and foremost Victor Davis Hanson, have applied this approach successfully to ancient Greek warfare in general, but naval warfare is not as sufficiently studied.¹³ Moreover, this approach has not been applied to the particular engagements in the Great Harbour and the Athenian retreat through Sicily. Using this *Face of Battle* approach, I hope to improve our understanding of the cause of the Athenian defeat.

Thucydides placed great importance on morale and psychological factors. It is clear that he felt that such dynamics were important to the outcome of battle. Hornblower, writing in regard to Thucydides' description of the battle in Great Harbour, says "it is more of an atmospheric evocation and a report of emotions and morale, well suited to recitation, than a piece of conventional military history."¹⁴ While it is certainly

¹³ Hanson used the *Face of Battle* approach in *The Western Way of War* and *A War Like No Other*. The *Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World* had specific *Face of Battle* chapters by John Lee and others. John Lee also wrote an account of the march of the ten thousand in *The Greek Army on the March*. Further, Barry Strauss applied the same approach in *The Battle of Salamis*. J. E. Lendon (2005) used the *Face of Battle* methodology in *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity*.

¹⁴ Hornblower (2010), 693.

accurate to say that Thucydides provides some information on the morale and psychological state of the combatants, he takes knowledge of the technical aspects of warfare for granted among his readers. Therefore, this paper takes the necessary step to combine the morale and psychology of battle with the actual reality of physical combat in order to answer why the Athenians were annihilated.

However, there is one caveat to the *Face of Battle* approach in that it requires a heavy amount of supposition by the author in order to flesh out the battle narrative since our sources do not provide every minute detail. Yet, since we have sufficient information regarding military tactics and procedure from other battles of this period, it is possible to make reasonable inferences about the engagements under question. Many modern historians attempt to write an account that is both accurate and entertaining, and in some cases, this can lead to assumptions that are not grounded in the text. I look to avoid such a calamity in this thesis.

Other scholars have attacked certain aspects of the *Face of Battle* approach.¹⁵ Everett Wheeler notes that this methodology works on the assumption that there is a universal human nature.¹⁶ In this way, the modern scholar projects his own feelings and cultural experiences onto the ancient soldier. And yet, thanks to a considerable body of 5th – and 4th – century literature we are relatively well informed about the Athenians' way of life, general attitudes, and cultural norms, and Thucydides informs the reader explicitly of the general mood among the Athenians and focuses on the *pathos* and emotions of the

¹⁵ Wheeler (2011), 64-75. Kagan (2006).

¹⁶ Wheeler (2011), 72-73.

soldiers. Therefore, it is not necessary to make conjectures regarding the Athenian experience. Thucydides was an Athenian soldier contemporary to the events, and therefore, his judgments regarding the morale of the soldiers is likely accurate. Another objection to the *Face of Battle* approach concerns the ‘buddy theory’ proposed by Victor Davis Hanson. Drawing on the experience of modern soldiers (particularly in World War II), ‘Buddy theorists’ argue that a soldier does not fight because of patriotism, but rather, the soldier fights for the preservation of himself and his companions.¹⁷ Wheeler is correct to note that it may be incorrect to project this motivational concept into antiquity. In regard to the Athenian phalanx, men would not be grouped with their friends or neighbours.¹⁸ On the other hand, the ‘buddy theory’ might be more applicable to the Spartan phalanx.¹⁹ In this thesis, I avoid using the ‘buddy theory’ and instead focus on unit types as a whole.

Sources

In comparison to other events in ancient history, we have excellent sources for the Sicilian Expedition. There are three extant accounts: Thucydides (ca. 400 BC), who was contemporary to the events, Diodorus (40 BC), and Plutarch (ca. AD 100). In addition to our extant sources, there are three other sources that are no longer available to us. First, is Philistus (ca. 400 BC) who was contemporary to the events, but there is also Ephorus (ca. 350 BC) and Timaeus (ca. 270 BC). All of the later authors seem to follow the accounts of the two contemporary writers, Thucydides and Philistus. In this thesis, I supplement

¹⁷ Wheeler (2011), 66.

¹⁸ Wheeler (2011), 72.

¹⁹ Wheeler (2011), 72.

Thucydides with the works written by Diodorus and Plutarch. In this way, a fuller account of events can be provided. The only contemporary extant source we have for the Battle in the Great Harbour and the ensuing retreat is Thucydides' *Histories*.

Thucydides

In the last few decades, Thucydides' reliability has come into question, especially by those students of Greek history who want to read the works of Greek historians such as Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon primarily as literary artifacts. In this section I provide examples of Thucydides as a literary artist as well as an historian. I show that there does not necessarily have to be a dichotomy between literary goals and historical accuracy. Further, I summarize the other sources that can be used to back up Thucydides as a legitimate historian. In this thesis, I rely on Thucydides as the primary source for the historical information regarding the Battle in the Great Harbour and the following Athenian retreat through the Sicilian hinterlands. He has a unique perspective because he was an Athenian who was exiled, and while living in exile, he was able to travel among the Peloponnesians (Thuc. 5.26.5). Thus, he could gather information from contacts in Athens as well as from Sparta and her allies.

Thucydides as Literary Artist and as Historian

There has been a movement for quite some time that calls into question the reliability of historiographical texts. This movement views ancient historiography primarily as a literary artifact rather than a trustworthy historical source.²⁰ Proponents of

²⁰ Feldherr (2009), 1-8, gives an introduction to this movement.

this approach look at intertextuality as well as style and thus betray a focus on literary artistry rather than substance. In Thucydides' depiction of the Sicilian Expedition, scholars have noted a Homeric as well as a tragic influence.²¹ In this section, I will only focus on the sections of Thucydides' narrative that are relevant to the Battle in the Great Harbour and the Athenian retreat. Moreover, this is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to give a few examples regarding how Thucydides drew on his predecessors while writing his own narrative. We can see for instance the Homeric inspiration in the catalogue of ships in Thucydides, which is similar to *Iliad* Book II (Hom. Il. 2.494-759).²² It is similar not only in the fact that the number of troops and their respective places of origin are noted, but also that the actual narrative composition as written in Thucydides closely corresponds to the Homeric poem.²³ In Thucydides' catalogue, the section for the Athenians is much longer than the list of the forces of the Syracusans. Similarly, in Homer's account, the catalogue of the Greeks is given far more lines of poetry than the Trojans. Moreover, the army that is described second is the besieged city.²⁴ In the case of Homer, this is the Trojan army, and in Thucydides' account, it is the Syracusan forces. Thucydides even mentions Homer's catalogue of ships at 1.10.4, which shows that he was well aware of the particular passage,²⁵ and thus, it suggests that he used Homer's catalogue as a blueprint for his own account. Thucydides also seems to be

²¹ Hornblower (2010), 12-21.

²² Dover (1965), 47.

²³ Hornblower (2010), 654.

²⁴ Hornblower (2010), 654.

²⁵ Interestingly, in this passage, Thucydides questions Homer's numbers, calling them an exaggeration because Homer was employing poetic license. In fact, Thucydides goes on to state that the rowers in the ships of the Trojan War were also the infantry units. This greatly lessens the number of total troops. Thucydides concludes that all things considered, the overall number of troops in the Trojan expedition would not be very impressive.

indebted to Herodotus' catalogues.²⁶ The first influence is the catalogue of Persian troops marching against Greece, wherein Herodotus lists the forces by their ethnic origin (Hdt. 7.60ff.), which Thucydides also does in his catalogue of ships. More importantly, Herodotus' account of the Battle of Salamis is a model for Thucydides' depiction of the Battle in the Great Harbour.²⁷ Those naval battles are undoubtedly the most important sea battles in their respective texts. Herodotus tells the reader about the ethnic origins of the men in the Battle of Salamis (Hdt. 8.43-48), and Thucydides likely paid close attention to this account. Thucydides' categorization of the troops' ethnicities also merits note as it both shows his literary flare as well as his possible mining of earlier works, namely, Herodotus. Dover notes that "the fundamental criterion of classification is geographical."²⁸ The Athenian troops are listed from mainland Greece to the Aegean and then Southern Italy and Sicily. Conversely, the Syracusan troops are listed from Syracuse to Camarina to northern Sicily to Sicel allies to mainland Greece.²⁹ In Herodotus, the list starts from the Peloponnese to the rest of mainland Greece to the islands to the one ship sent from Croton.³⁰ Both authors take care to include the peoples by ethnic group, and both end the section with the types of ships that are employed. When Nicias introduces the grapnels in his speech, it is presented as new information to the reader. Luschnat considers this a technique borrowed from epic to introduce new information in

²⁶ Hornblower (2010), 654-55. Of course, Herodotus certainly looked to Homer when crafting his own narrative in terms of his catalogues.

²⁷ Hornblower (2010), 655.

²⁸ Dover (1965), 48.

²⁹ Dover (1965), 48, 51.

³⁰ Hornblower (2010), 659.

speeches.³¹ In fact, to withhold critical information until later is one of Thucydides' major literary devices, and it is something that he uses quite commonly in describing both the Battle in the Great Harbour and the Athenian retreat. With this narrative technique, Thucydides gives the reader hope that the Athenians will overcome the current calamity and succeed. However, in terms of the grapnels, we learn in 7.65 that the Syracusans were aware of the Athenian preparations and took measures to counteract the grapnels. It is a masterful technique in order to create suspense. The reader is held by the constant changing of fates. Another example can be seen in the immediate aftermath of the naval battle. For a brief moment, it seems that Syracusan celebrations may prevent the Syracusans from blocking the roads with troops and thus allow the Athenians to escape by land during the night. However, the reader's hope is quickly dashed when Hermocrates' trick is employed (Thuc. 7.73.3-4).³² To illustrate this concept further, on the seventh night of the Athenian retreat, 300 men broke through the encircling Syracusan army (Thuc. 7.82.5). Now, Thucydides could have noted that these men were captured, but instead he leaves the reader with the expectation that the 300 will escape and remain free. Thucydides waits until after the Athenians had formally surrendered to inform the reader that the 300 escaped Athenians were captured and brought to Syracuse as well (Thuc. 7.85.2). Further, the battle in the Great Harbour features a *teichoskopia*³³ which can be seen to mimic the events of *Iliad* Book III (Hom. Il. 3.161-244).³⁴ One

³¹ Luschnat, (1942), 85.

³² See Day Seven in Chapter 3: The Athenian Retreat.

³³ This is far clearer in Diodorus' account of events (Diod. 13.14.5).

³⁴ This is only clear in Diodorus' report of the events but can be implied in Thucydides. See: Diod. 13.14.5.

could note the theatrical nature of the battle and cite its similarities to the tragic stage.³⁵

The Battle in the Great Harbour itself appears to be a spectacle. The water of the harbour is the stage. The Athenians and Syracusans on the shore represent the audience watching the spectacle unfold. It can be compared to a modern (or ancient) sporting event in an arena where the two teams have their own cheering sections.

The Athenians began the expedition with early successes. However, the arrival of Gylippus led to a reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) for the Athenians and their situation became more and more hopeless. Again, in the immediate period before the battle, Nicias' speech which suggested that the Athenians had made the appropriate alterations to combat effectively the Syracusans in the naval battle quickly became subject to *peripeteia* when the Syracusans took action to counteract any perceived Athenian advantages. The retreat of the Athenians after the Battle in the Great Harbour was also wrought with reversals of fortune. On the fifth evening of the march, the Athenians managed to march away during the night and Syracusans were left unaware (Thuc. 7.80). There is a brief glimmer of hope that the suffering of the Athenians will end. Then, the Syracusans quickly caught up and forced Demosthenes and his army to submit (Thuc. 7.81.2). Thucydides' use of speeches during the expedition is also subject to intense scrutiny and debate. At worst, he was simply inventing speeches that never actually occurred. At best, he had learned from a Spartan the details of Gylippus' and Syracusan communications and from an Athenian survivor the content of Nicias' speeches. This would also have been the same manner in which he learned the details of the events of

³⁵ See Hornblower (2010), 12-21 for a discussion on Sicilian culture and theatricality.

the expedition itself. Even if we assume the best case scenario, Thucydides' rendering of speeches, while maintaining a kernel of truth, was not necessarily a verbatim record of the statements that were made. Thucydides is honest about this aspect of his historiographical technique. In 1.22, Thucydides says:³⁶

So far as all the speeches in this account either told when the war was about to begin or when the war was already happening, it is difficult for me to remember distinctly the precise words of the things having been said, both of the speeches which I myself heard and the speeches I heard by report from other sources. So, I have put things so as to capture how each speaker would have most seemed to say what in my opinion should be the most needful thing to say concerning the current circumstance, while keeping as close as possible to the general opinion of the things having been said in truth.³⁷

While the Thucydides' honesty regarding the accuracy of speeches is admirable, it raises other questions. Pelling says that:

No sentence in the Greek language can be taken quite so variously as that on speeches here. Some scholars think it clear that the guiding principle here is as much historical accuracy as possible, others think that it points to a high degree of free composition.³⁸

Pelling further notes that Thucydides cannot be writing what was the right policy to urge as this would completely eliminate the debates between statesmen as they occur in Thucydides, since both statesmen would be urging for the correct policy and would thus

³⁶ All renderings of the Greek into English are my own, but at times they draw freely on standard published translations.

³⁷ Καὶ ὅσα μὲν λόγῳ εἶπον ἕκαστοι ἢ μέλλοντες πολεμήσειν ἢ ἐν αὐτῷ ἤδη ὄντες, χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων διαμνημονεῦσαι ἦν ἐμοὶ τε ὧν αὐτὸς ἤκουσα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοθεν ποθεν ἐμοὶ ἀπαγγέλλουσιν· ὡς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν ἐμοὶ ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα εἰπεῖν, ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων, οὕτως εἴρηται.

³⁸ Pelling (2009), 177.

be in agreement.³⁹ Pelling correctly notes that it is difficult to judge the historical accuracy of Thucydides' speeches because we do not know which speeches he heard himself and we do not know how reliable his informants were.⁴⁰ In some cases, Pelling argues that Thucydides would have scarcely any sources for knowing certain speeches. He cites Nicias' final speeches during the Sicilian Expedition as an example of this.⁴¹ However, we know that many Athenians survived the Expedition and eventually made it back to Athens. It is entirely possible that Thucydides was able to garner information from these individuals. Of course, much still hinges on how faithful Thucydides' recording of speeches actually was, and how much content was the product of Thucydides' free composition.

While these examples highlight Thucydides' brilliance as a literary artist, I think that Thucydides' account can still be valid, as I will argue.

We must consider a few features of ancient historiography that make the historical works seem less reliable than the reader would hope. It is a naïve assumption to think that an historian can simply give an account of events as they actually happened. Every historian is telling a story – with a beginning, middle, and an end – and thus he has to draw on the various narrative elements of storytelling.⁴² For example, in Thucydides' account of the Battle in the Great Harbour, he is faced with the difficulty of giving a linear account of a vast naval battle, with a myriad of individual actions. Thucydides

³⁹ Pelling (2009), 177-78.

⁴⁰ Pelling (2009), 180.

⁴¹ Pelling (2009), 180.

⁴² Hall (2007), 8-13.

would have, of course, drawn on his predecessors' accounts of similar naval battles. Besides the basic point of historical narrative, we should also not forget the highly agonistic nature of Greek society, which also left its mark on the Greek historians.⁴³ As we can see in Thuc. 1.1, Thucydides was openly competing with his predecessors, Homer and Herodotus, which further explains his use of their techniques and his attempt to surpass them. Thucydides needed to build on earlier work. So, when Thucydides narrated an event that has similarities or could hypothetically contain similarities, he used the paradigms as set forth by Herodotus and Homer. Thus, when Thucydides gave his account of the catalogue of troops, it is reasonable that he would have looked to the methods employed by his predecessors. For the Iliadic examples, the catalogue of ships was simply an efficient way of reporting the various forces in action. Thucydides would have likely used his predecessors (Homer, Hesiod,⁴⁴ and Herodotus (7.61-99.)) as a guide of how such information should be compiled and presented most effectively. He would have also looked to his predecessors in order to insert himself into the style of discourse of those who came before him. It is important to emphasize, however, that even when Thucydides drew on the literary techniques of his predecessors, he was still trying to represent situations and events which actually happened as best as he could. Thucydides assures the reader that in describing events he was guided by the principal of ἀκρίβεια and reports the results of thorough research (Thuc. 1.22).

⁴³ Luce (1997). 2.

⁴⁴ Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* and *Theogony*.

The *teichoskopia* in fact took place. The walls of Syracuse were directly adjacent to the Great Harbour.⁴⁵ It stands to reason that the non-combatants within the city would have looked out to see how their friends and family members were faring. Moreover, if the battle had gone awry for the Syracusans, this would have given the Syracusans immediate warning of an impending threat. Since Homer had already provided an example of how one would narrate such an event and every Greek had grown up with the works of Homer, Thucydides would have looked to Homer's work as a foundation. Another explanation for Thucydides' narrative techniques – especially in regard to the necessity to create suspense – is the potential for recitation. It has been suggested that several sections of Thucydides may have been meant for recitation either at Symposia or various Pan-Hellenic festivals.⁴⁶ There is speculation that the entirety of the Sicilian expedition could have been a recitation unit that would last roughly 8 hours.⁴⁷ Otherwise, the sections could be broken up and the Battle in the Great Harbour and its aftermath could have been recited.⁴⁸ Another potential performance piece could have been the slaughter at the River Assinarus up to the death of Nicias.⁴⁹ If the potential for recitation is the case, there was an even greater importance for Thucydides to use various literary techniques in order to hold the attention of an audience.

The use of direct (speeches) and indirect discourse (summaries of speeches) is a technique that can be interpreted in a few ways. First, Thucydides could use indirect

⁴⁵ See Figure 1: Map of the Great Harbour and the position of the Syracusan walls.

⁴⁶ Hornblower (2010), 31.

⁴⁷ Hornblower (2010), 11.

⁴⁸ Hornblower (2010), 31.

⁴⁹ Hornblower (2010), 31.

speech as a way to distance himself from the narrative, suggesting that his knowledge of the speech was either lacking or that he did not feel that the contents of the speech were worthy of quotation in full. Second, indirect discourse could be used if Thucydides wished to add his own comments to the speech.⁵⁰ The use of direct speech implies the opposite; namely that Thucydides was familiar with the speech and felt it was important to include. The use of indirect discourse could also be used as a means to maintain pace.⁵¹ In some instances, Thucydides simply states that an individual said the same things that were said in a previous speech. In this way, Thucydides could avoid repetition and thus prevent the text from being bogged down by very similar speeches.

Ultimately, the historian must make value judgments regarding what is necessary to include and what can be omitted. In this way, there is no such thing as an unbiased historian. Thucydides notes in 1.23 that he did not accept the first story given to him as factual. Instead, he investigated the claims and attempted to uncover the truth. He notes that even two witnesses to the same event may give different accounts in regard to the occasion. He was the final judge in terms of what is considered factually accurate. It is clear that while Thucydides certainly had literary ambitions, it is not correct to say that his entire work was an artistic invention rather than a truthful account of events. There does not have to be a strict dichotomy between literature and fact.

In the following sections, I will provide a brief overview of the other historiographical sources for the Sicilian Expedition which can be used to supplement

⁵⁰ Hornblower (2010), 34.

⁵¹ Hornblower (2010), 33.

Thucydides' account. The other authors are Philistus, Ephorus, Timaeus, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch. Both Plutarch and Diodorus are extant sources that can be used to back up Thucydides' narrative. These two writers used all of the sources that were available to them including the Philistus, Ephorus and Timaeus, which are no longer extant. Notably, although three of the historians are Sicilians (Philistus, Timaeus, and Diodorus Siculus), their accounts largely confirm or follow Thucydides which suggests that even the 'enemies', despite their pro-Syracusan stance, considered Thucydides' account accurate or at least plausible enough not to correct him.

Philistus

Philistus is the only other author who was a contemporary to the events of the Sicilian Expedition.⁵² Unfortunately, his work only survives in fragments. However, his writing was available in its entirety to the later authors, discussed in the following sections, either through direct consultation or filtered through an author such as Ephorus or Timaeus. Philistus was a Syracusan who lived in the city at the time of the Sicilian Expedition.⁵³ In fact, he may have been one of the individuals watching from the walls during the Battle in the Great Harbour. This is extremely important to the overall accounting of events. Those who were writing after the events had the ability to consult both Thucydides and Philistus, which would have allowed them to give a potentially more accurate rendering of events. Thankfully, owing to the work of Meister and other philologists, we have a better idea of which authors were using either Philistus or

⁵² Meister (1967). 56.

⁵³ Meister (1967), 56.

Thucydides. Plutarch states that Thucydides' account was superior to that of Philistus by saying that Thucydides even outdid himself in his display of vividness and passionate writing (Plut. *Nic.* 1.1). He further states that Timaeus' writing looked to build on Thucydides' and in turn make Philistus' work seem "altogether coarse and unskilled" (Plut. *Nic.* 1.1). This seems to speak more to Philistus' narrative technique than it does to the quality of information provided. Regardless, the importance of Philistus' work cannot be overstated because it helps to balance Thucydides. However, there is one caveat regarding the use of Philistus. It seems that Philistus was writing after Thucydides and, therefore, may have been influenced by Thucydides' narrative. Theon said that Philistus pulled much of his information in regard to the events of the 'Attic War' from the account of Thucydides.⁵⁴ Certainly, Philistus would have had little knowledge of the events that are happening in the Athenian camp unless he asked Athenian captives, but at the same time, he would have provided details from the Syracusan side to which Thucydides would have little or no access.⁵⁵ In this way, Philistus acted as a check that balanced Thucydides' account.

Ephorus

Ephorus, an historian from Cyme in Asia Minor, wrote a universal history around 350 BC. Like Philistus, his work survives only in fragments. It is apparent that Ephorus used Thucydides, but there is evidence that he had used a source other than Thucydides

⁵⁴ Meister (1967), 56.

⁵⁵ Meister (1967), 56.

as well.⁵⁶ This other source must most likely be Philistus, “über den Ephoros äußerst positiv urteilt.”⁵⁷ Ephorus, though largely lost, was a major source for the surviving account of Diodorus.

Timaeus

Timaeus was an historian from Tauromenium (north of Catane in Sicily). He composed a history of the Greek world. He was writing in the first half of the third century BC. On some occasions, Timaeus’ work seems to differ from both Thucydides and Philistus, but it seems that for most points he followed these two authors.⁵⁸ Perhaps he had access to another source that is unknown to us, or there are segments in Ephorus that differed from the accounts of Thucydides and Philistus. When Timaeus’ account is inconsistent with Thucydides or Philistus, it suggests that he is attempting to correct their accounts for accuracy and, thus could be using a source that is completely unknown in modern times (which is unlikely), or that Ephorus’ attempted to correct the factual accuracy of Philistus and Thucydides and Timaeus was simply copying what Ephorus had written. Plutarch says that Timaeus used not only Thucydides, but also Philistus (Plut. *Nic.* 1.1).

⁵⁶ Meister (1967), 56.

⁵⁷ Meister (1967), 56.

⁵⁸ Meister (1967). 57.

Diodorus

Another Sicilian, Diodorus Siculus,⁵⁹ wrote his universal history around 40BC. This is the first author after Thucydides whose account of the Sicilian Expedition is still extant. He is often accused of being a simple epitomator, abbreviating the accounts of previous authors. For our purposes, this is actually advantageous. In this way, we know that he was not inserting his own interpretation of events, but rather was rewriting the information that was previously recorded by others. For the sections that are relevant to this thesis, namely, the Battle in the Great Harbour, and the Athenian retreat, Meister argues that the prime source for Diodorus was Timaeus for the sea battle and Ephorus for the Athenian retreat.⁶⁰ However, others have argued that Diodorus used Philistus' work as his primary source. Based on the *Quellenforschung*, even if Diodorus derived his information from Timaeus or Ephorus, his account goes back to both Philistus and Thucydides. Since he more or less had access to the works of both contemporary authors, what he records is essentially a unified account that was likely considered the most realistic by Timaeus and Ephorus. Ultimately, Diodorus' account can be viewed as a collation of Philistus and Thucydides.

Plutarch

The final literary source for the Athenian Expedition is Plutarch. Plutarch covers these events in his *Life of Nicias*. Plutarch was writing around AD 100, and therefore, he

⁵⁹ In this thesis, since I use both Diodorus and Plutarch in order to supplement Thucydides narrative, I make it clear when Plutarch and Diodorus are in agreement with Thucydides by citing the respective author along with Thucydides. However, if the account differs, or something in Thucydides is not mentioned, it will be noted in the footnotes.

⁶⁰ Meister (1967), 63.

was heavily reliant on the earlier sources. He opens his work by informing the reader of the sources that he used. Plutarch used Philistus, Thucydides and Timaeus (Plut. *Nic.* 1.1). Since Plutarch's version of events does not directly contradict Thucydides on any major points, and he had access to the work of Philistus, we can assume that the facts as presented in Thucydides are likely accurate or at least seemed acceptable to the Syracusan, Philistus. However, it is important to note that Plutarch was a biographer. As such, he had a different focus from that of an historian who provided a linear narrative of events. Instead, Plutarch was interested in the character of Nicias, but there is still much in his account that is useful to the historian since the biographer needed to give the historical background that applied to the individual about whom he wrote.

Other Literary Sources

In addition to the sources that cover the Sicilian Expedition, it is also possible to use other military texts in order to explicate Thucydides and the other authors. In other works we can look for parallels that can help to elucidate how events came to pass in the Athenian defeat. For example, Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides a good comparison for an army attempting a retreat in hostile territory. Furthermore, Xenophon in his *Hellenica* features a battle on the Munichian hill in the Piraeus in 413 BC that is very reminiscent of the Athenian battle for the Acraean Heights during the retreat. Polybius also is important as a means to garner information regarding how an ancient army functioned. Thus, in this thesis, I will often make comparisons with other events as narrated by other historians as well as general information as to how the armies of ancient Greece operated.

Non-Literary Sources

Besides the historiographical sources, there is much other information that can be brought to bear in order to gain a better perception of the technical aspects of the Battle in the Great Harbour and the military matters of the retreat. The most important for the purposes of the Battle in the Great Harbour is the insights gained from the reconstruction of an Athenian trireme and its trial runs. The trireme - named *Olympias* and reconstructed by J.S. Morrison and J.F. Coates using information gathered from the ancient sources - allows us to gain valuable insights as to how a trireme actually performed at sea.⁶¹ The data obtained from these experiments are critical to understanding the speed, power, and size of the ancient Greek warship. In addition, the trials of the *Olympias* give us an idea of how quickly a rower can become dehydrated from his exertion. However, the testing of the ancient trireme does not recreate the ancient experience completely. For example, the ancient man was on average far shorter than his modern counterpart.⁶² Since the trireme is built to its ancient scale, the space provided for the arms to move during rowing is not entirely suitable for the modern person who is generally unable to perform full strokes. Further, the trials were carried out with volunteers who would not in any way be trained as thoroughly as an ancient Athenian rower.⁶³

The equipment of Greek marines is known from both literary sources and from archaeological finds. For example, we know that the trireme employed hoplites, and thus,

⁶¹ Morrison (2000), 231-75. See Figure 2: The reconstructed trireme, *Olympias*.

⁶² Fields (2007), 40-41. The ancient Athenian male seems to have been on average about 5'6'', while the modern European male is about 5'10''.

⁶³ Thus, in this thesis, I provide the information garnered from the tests and note the advantages that the Athenian oarsmen would have over the modern rowers.

we can deduce the arms and armour of these men based on what we know from the information about land battles both from writings and archaeological finds. In terms of the armour and weapons involved in the retreat, much information can be garnered from the tests performed by Franz as well as Gabriel and Metz.⁶⁴ With their studies, we get a better understanding of the form and function of the hoplite panoply. Beyond archaeological objects and recreations, there are also inscriptions that can be used as a means to confirm the facts as provided by the historians. Athenian tribute lists are especially important for gaining information in regard to troops, ships, and money which were provided to the Athenians for the expedition.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I laid out my objectives, introduced my methodology, and discussed the available sources. I investigated Thucydides' goals as a literary artist. I provided some examples of how Thucydides could be perceived as an author who might put style before substance and by extension, bring the credibility of his account into question. Then, I explained why Thucydides used his predecessors in the way that he does by examining the nature of ancient writing and historiography. In discussing the other sources for the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition, I suggested that they could be used to strengthen the historicity of Thucydides' account. I also laid out the *Face of Battle* methodology and how I intend to use it in this thesis.

⁶⁴ Schwartz (2011), 80-81.

Essentially, my *modus operandi* is to consider every passage in Thucydides' account of the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition and attempt to figure out how the actions described would have worked in reality. To do this, I consult other sections of Thucydides as well as other ancient authors (especially Xenophon), in order to find parallels for strategies and tactics that help elucidate the military actions during the Sicilian Expedition. Further, I consult the research of other scholars on specific problems of military matters, such as equipment and general strategies, in order to inform my own interpretation.

Chapter 2: The Battle in the Great Harbour

ὄρωμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος... νεκροῖς
ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις (Aesch. Ag. 659-60).

Essentials of Naval Battle

The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with a sufficient amount of information regarding the general techniques employed in a naval battle so that it is easier to comprehend the reconstruction of the Battle in the Great Harbour. Thus, I focus heavily on trireme strategies. In trireme warfare, there were two main forms of combat, ramming and boarding.⁶⁵ These two tactics were not mutually exclusive and navies would have used both skills in order to achieve their objectives. Another tactic that is generally not included in the forms of combat, but was important in the Battle in the Great Harbour, is forced beaching.⁶⁶ This tactic is not included because it does not require actual engagement with the enemy, but rather, forced beaching is a maneuver that relies on the threat of engagement. In the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Syracusans used forced beaching to take Athenian ships out of the battle. The Athenians tended to focus primarily on ramming tactics which required more skill, while the other navies of the Greek world preferred boarding enemy ships.⁶⁷ However, in the Battle in the Great Harbour, we will see that the Athenians embraced the boarding strategy (Thuc. 7.62.2), albeit unsuccessfully.

⁶⁵ Fields (2007), 18.

⁶⁶ See the section Forced Beaching in this chapter.

⁶⁷ Fields (2007), 18-19.

First, it is necessary to discuss the role of the oarsmen in the trireme. The trireme had a crew that was composed of several different people or groups with their own distinct duties. The crew of an Athenian trireme usually consisted of about 200 men,⁶⁸ which was less than that of the ships of other Greek states. There were three groups of oarsmen (*thalamioi*, *zugioi*, and *thranitai*), a captain (*trierarchos*), hoplites called marines (*epibatai*), archers (*toxotai*), a bow officer (*prorates*), a helmsman (*kubernetes*), a flute player (*auletes*), a shipwright (*naupegos*), a boatswain (*keleustes*), and deckhands.⁶⁹ However, in the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians increased the number of men on the deck (Thuc. 7.62.2. and 7.67.2). The oarsmen provided the ships mobility. A trireme crew employed 170 oarsmen on three levels. There were 54 oarsmen on the bottom level called *thalamioi* (27 oarsmen on each side of the ship).⁷⁰ These men put their oars through an oar port (*thalamia*) with leather sleeves called *askomata* which were used in order to prevent water from entering the ship (though small amounts of water still did enter).⁷¹ These men had a distinct disadvantage compared to the other groups of rowers. If the ship took in enough water that it began to sink, the *thalamioi* would have been the most likely to drown.⁷² There were another 54 oarsmen on the second level called *zugioi* (27 oarsmen on each side of the ship).⁷³ These men also placed their oars through oar ports, but there were no *askomata* for these ports.⁷⁴ There were 62 oarsmen

⁶⁸ Fields (2007), 14.

⁶⁹ Fields (2007), 14-15.

⁷⁰ Fields (2007), 13.

⁷¹ Morrison (2000), 139.

⁷² Fields (2007), 14.

⁷³ Fields (2007), 13.

⁷⁴ Morrison (2000), 290.

on the highest level called *thranitai* (31 oarsmen on each side of the ship).⁷⁵ These men placed their oars through an outrigger.⁷⁶ The *thranitai* were the only group that could actually see the water while they were rowing.⁷⁷ Therefore, the *thranitai* could be hit by enemy missiles while rowing.⁷⁸ This could be prevented by blocking the outriggers with canvas.⁷⁹ Every oarsman had a seat, and the seats were likely padded with sheepskin.⁸⁰ Unlike modern rowers, ancient trireme rowers did not have a sliding seat, so they could not take advantage of their leg strength in order to put more power into their strokes.⁸¹ The oarsmen were also quite crowded together. The *thalamioi* were the closest to the center of the ship and each successive level was farther out.⁸² This allowed more men to fit in a smaller area, but meant that there was greater crowding. This reduction of vertical space for the rowers gave the ship a lower center of gravity so that the trireme was more stable in the water.⁸³ While the modern rowers in the *Olympias* reconstruction only reached a sustained speed of 7.1 knots (13.1 km/h),⁸⁴ it is believed that the Athenian oarsmen might have been able to reach a speed of 10 knots (18.5 km/h).⁸⁵ This can be explained by the average height of the ancient man versus the modern man. Because the space on an ancient trireme allowed for about 85cm of horizontal movement for the hands, the Athenians who were of a much shorter stature (likely no taller than 1.67

⁷⁵ Fields (2007), 13.

⁷⁶ Morrison (2000), 140.

⁷⁷ Morrison (2000), 237.

⁷⁸ Fields (2007), 11.

⁷⁹ Fields (2007), 11

⁸⁰ Fields (2007), 11.

⁸¹ Fields (2007), 14.

⁸² See Figure 8: The position of the seats for the oarsmen.

⁸³ Fields (2007), 13.

⁸⁴ Fields (2007), 40.

⁸⁵ Fields (2007), 41.

meters on average) were able to extend fully their arms while rowing which allowed greater power for strokes.⁸⁶

Ramming

Triremes were equipped with a wooden ram (*embolos*) that was plated with bronze.⁸⁷ It was placed at the lowest part of the prow of the ship.⁸⁸ On the ram were three “chisel-like blades just above the water level.”⁸⁹ Navies that intended to ram their enemies rather than to board enemy ships would keep fewer hoplites on deck and craft their ships to be as small as possible.⁹⁰ Keeping the trireme light was essential to maintaining high speeds. Essentially, the goal was to drive the ram into the sides of the enemy ship in order to cut a hole in its hull. While a trireme would often ram an enemy at a 90 degree angle, it was far more effective to ram the ship at a lower angle in order to tear a large gash in the ship. This method also helped to prevent the ram from becoming jammed in the other ship so that the ramming trireme could back away from the enemy vessel, since the ram would not enter as deep into the hull.⁹¹ Furthermore, a large gash in the side of a ship would have made it more difficult to repair, and more water would have rushed into the trireme, incapacitating it more quickly. However, ramming could be quite a risky endeavor owing to the speed required for a successful penetration of the enemy ship. It is estimated that a trireme would have needed to reach a speed of between

⁸⁶ Fields (2007), 40-41.

⁸⁷ Fields (2007), 17.

⁸⁸ See Figure 3: The position of the ram on the bow of an Athenian trireme.

⁸⁹ Fields (2007), 17.

⁹⁰ Fields (2007), 18.

⁹¹ Gardiner (1995), 133.

roughly 2-8 knots (3.7-14.8 km) to cause a gash in the opposing trireme.⁹² The necessary speed differs depending on the angle of attack. A sharper angle required a higher speed. An attack at a 90 degree angle would have only required a speed of about 2 knots.⁹³ The speed could be substantially lowered if the target ship was travelling towards the ramming trireme. If a trireme did not reach the required speed to breach, the ram could very well be more damaging to the attacking ship and leave the target ship nearly unscathed.⁹⁴

A simple way for a trireme to avoid being damaged was to row away from the attacking ship, thus making it harder for the attacking ship to reach the required ramming speed. With the reconstructed *Olympias*, the rowers were able to back water (i.e. to go backwards) at a speed of 3 knots.⁹⁵ If the rowers physically turned around and rowed facing the stern of the ship, the ship could reach a speed of 5 knots.⁹⁶ The rowers of the *Olympias* were able to turn around in their seats in roughly 20 seconds.⁹⁷ However, there is no evidence that the Greeks actually used this technique, so physically turning around in a trireme is simply conjecture. Another tactic was that a trireme could row close to the side of the ship (rowing towards each other). Then, the attackers could pull in their oars. If the enemy failed to retract their own oars, the attacking trireme could shatter the enemy oars, leaving the ship immobile.⁹⁸

⁹² Gardiner (1995), 133.

⁹³ Gardiner (1995), 133.

⁹⁴ Gardiner (1995), 133.

⁹⁵ Morrison (2000), 247.

⁹⁶ Morrison (2000), 247.

⁹⁷ Morrison (2000), 247.

⁹⁸ Holladay (1988), 149.

There were two special tactics that the Athenians employed, that relied on their superior mobility. These were the *periplous*⁹⁹ and the *diekplous*.¹⁰⁰ These maneuvers are generally thought to be group techniques, but Whitehead argues that these tactics refer to single ships.¹⁰¹ The *periplous* is a less clear maneuver based on the descriptions given by primary sources. Whitehead posits that when an enemy ship began to chase a trireme, the chased trireme could attempt a *periplous*. It quickly circled around with its superior maneuverability and rammed the attacking trireme in the side or the stern.¹⁰² It is somewhat similar to the aerobatic technique of the inside-loop (although on a different axis) where a chased plane does 360 degree vertical flip in order to get behind the enemy plane.

Alternatively, the *periplous* has been envisioned as a group flanking attack.¹⁰³ In this method, a group of ships were arranged in a line approaching a hostile line of ships. The ships on the flanks moved outward in order to attack the sides of the enemy ships.¹⁰⁴ Whitehead's argument is based on the description of the maneuver in our primary sources. Thucydides claims that these tactics were only to be attempted by highly skilled helmsmen (Thuc. 7.36.4). The group version of the *periplous* would not have required a high level of skill.

⁹⁹ See Figure 4: The standard interpretation of the *periplous*. See Figure 5: Whitehead's interpretation of the *periplous*.

¹⁰⁰ See Figure 6: The *diekplous*.

¹⁰¹ Whitehead (1987), 178.

¹⁰² Whitehead (1987), 181. See Figure 5: Whitehead's interpretation of the *periplous*.

¹⁰³ See Whitehead (1987), 179.

¹⁰⁴ Whitehead (1987), 179.

The *diekplous* was a breakthrough maneuver.¹⁰⁵ The goal was to go between two ships and then quickly maneuver back in order to ram the side or the stern of the enemy's ship.¹⁰⁶ Holladay argues that another reason to attempt a *diekplous* was to break the enemy oars.¹⁰⁷ An enemy navy would have used a *kuklos* formation¹⁰⁸ as a defensive measure against the *diekplous*.¹⁰⁹ The *kuklos* formation required a group of ships to form a circle (hence *kuklos*) with their rams facing toward the outside of the circle. Then, a much smaller group of ships would form a star formation inside the *kuklos*. These ships would also have had their rams pointing outwards. With this technique, a *diekplous* became very risky. If the attacking ship broke in between the ships of the *kuklos*, it would have been rammed by one of the ships in the star formation inside the *kuklos*. The *kuklos* was utilized by the slower heavier navies of the non-Athenian Greek states as a way to counteract the quickness and maneuverability of the lighter Athenian ships.¹¹⁰ A successful ram would tear into the hull of an enemy ship. However, it seems rare that a ship actually sank.¹¹¹ Instead, the ship dipped into the water, but tended to have enough buoyancy to stay afloat.¹¹² Generally, once rescued or cleared of enemy fighters, the 'sunken' ship could be towed to port and be repaired and redeployed.¹¹³ This is not to say that drowning was not an issue for the *thalamioi*, who were on the lowest level of the three tiers of rowers. A successful ram could cause hundreds of gallons of water to storm

¹⁰⁵ Lazenby (1987), 169.

¹⁰⁶ Lazenby (1987), 169.

¹⁰⁷ Holladay (1988), 149.

¹⁰⁸ See Figure 7: The *kuklos*.

¹⁰⁹ Fields (2007), 20.

¹¹⁰ Whitehead (1987), 179.

¹¹¹ Fields (2007), 18.

¹¹² Fields (2007), 18.

¹¹³ Fields (2007), 18.

in the ship very quickly and submerge most of the hull which would have left the *thalamioi* in a dangerous situation.

Boarding

The other major tactic of Greek naval warfare was boarding. Boarding turned a naval battle into what was essentially a land battle.¹¹⁴ The objective of the attacking ship was to get close to the opposing vessel. This could be achieved by ramming or simply pulling up beside the enemy, but it was also an option once a ship was rammed.

Ramming or being rammed could cause the ships to become jammed together, which allowed the hoplites to leap across and to engage in infantry combat. The Athenians tried to avoid infantry fights once they had successfully rammed an enemy ship, and they were well versed in reversing away from the ship that they had rammed. Since the Athenians tended to keep fewer hoplites on the deck, it was of the utmost importance that the Athenian trireme avoided being boarded. During the Sicilian campaign, both sides came up with a few innovations. For example, if a ship was still in close proximity to the enemy ship, the crew could throw grapnels and hook onto the other ship (Thuc. 7.62.3). The ship that has been hooked by the grapnels could then be pulled beside the attacking ship and boarded.

¹¹⁴ This is not unlike the Roman practice beginning during the Punic Wars. Since the Romans were far more confident in their land warfare abilities, they created the *Corvus* (or *Harpago*). The *Corvus* was a bridge that used a pulley system. It seems to have been placed on the bow of the ship, and then lowered onto an enemy ship. This allowed the Romans to easily cross onto the enemy ship in calm waters, and engage the enemy with infantry. However, there is no evidence that the earlier Greeks ever used such a device. See Wallinga (1956).

A ship could make it more difficult to be hooked by placing animal hides along the outrigger (Thuc. 7.64.2). It was also important to make sure that the mast was down in battle,¹¹⁵ most likely both to prevent the mast from being hooked by the grapnel and to stop the wind from wreaking havoc on the maneuverability of the trireme. Once a ship had successfully become attached to another vessel either by ramming or by the use of grapnels, the hoplites attempted to engage the enemy upon the ship in what was essentially a land battle.

However, getting aboard the enemy ship could be a difficult task in itself. First, if the water was rough, a hoplite may have leapt unsuccessfully to the opposing ship. He could fall into the water, and the weight of his armour (roughly 19.82 kg)¹¹⁶ would make it difficult to swim to safety. Not only did the fallen hoplite have to struggle with the weight of his armour in the water, he might also be assaulted with arrows, stones, and javelins being thrown from the men on the deck of the enemy ship.¹¹⁷ The hoplite leaping to another ship also had to contend with these projectiles. Further, if the area of contact between the two ships was minimal (such as when a ship was rammed at a 90 degree angle), the hoplite would have to leap directly into the enemy hoplites since they would guard the point of contact between the two triremes. Thus, it was ideal to be able to hop onto the enemy trireme when the ships were parallel to each other. This was possible if

¹¹⁵ Morrison (2000), 175.

¹¹⁶ Schwartz (2009), 95-96. Schwartz records the following data: The total weight of a full armour set (shield, greaves, sword, spear, breastplate, helmet and tunic) would be 31.82kg (Schwartz, 95). However, the hoplite would almost certainly remove his helmet (ca. 2kg) (Schwartz, 63), throw his spear (ca. 1kg) (Schwartz, 83), drop his shield (ca. 7kg) (Schwartz, 31), and drop his sword (ca. 2kg) (Schwartz, 68). Thus, once these items are removed, the hoplite would be carrying a total weight of roughly 19.82kg.

¹¹⁷ Hanson (2005), 242.

multiple grapnels were used to hook the enemy trireme. If the attacking hoplites could defeat the enemy hoplites as well as the archers and javelin men, there was little to stop the boarding hoplites from acquiring the ship. The oarsmen (especially in the summer months) were likely wearing only a loin cloth,¹¹⁸ and it seems rare for them to have been armed.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the oarsmen could be quickly slaughtered while attempting to escape the ship if they did not manage to flee before their own comrades on the deck of the ship were overcome. If the trireme was hooked by grapnels and was never rammed during the battle, the hoplites could gain a trireme in perfect condition for their own navy.¹²⁰ Otherwise, the ship could be towed to shore and repaired by the *naupegos*.¹²¹ Since boarding did not require highly trained oarsmen capable of engaging in complex tactical maneuvers, it was the preferred method of naval combat for most Greek navies. The Athenians had the advantage of employing professional oarsmen who trained with their fellow rowers,¹²² and thus were skilled enough to rely on pure ramming combat. The oarsmen of other Greek and barbarian navies generally did not have this skill level, and thus it was better for them to engage in infantry combat, a fighting style with which the men of a Greek polis would be very comfortable. It is important to note how fortunes could quickly change in a naval battle. Even after a successful ramming, the attackers could be overcome by the hoplites on the rammed trireme if the hoplites on the ramming ship failed to defend the deck, and they did not manage to back water and get away quickly enough.

¹¹⁸ Fields (2007), 7.

¹¹⁹ Hanson (2005), 242.

¹²⁰ Hanson (2005), 243.

¹²¹ Fields (2007), 18.

¹²² Fields (2007), 13.

Forced Beaching

There is one other strategy that a navy might have used to gain an advantage, although it did not require any actual contact with the enemy ship. This tactic was forced beaching. This method was important for the Battle in the Great Harbour because it was used by the Syracusan navy against the Athenians (Thuc. 7.70.1). To perform a forced beaching, two or more ships surrounded an enemy ship. If the ship did not dare to engage, owing to the odds against it or because the ship had taken too much damage and could not afford to be rammed, and it tried to escape, it could be forced toward the shore by the other ships. If a ship was forced to beach, its crew could escape unharmed, but the ship would be removed from battle for some time. Either the crew would have to push the boat back out to sea or if the ship beached in friendly territory, the comrades on the shore could push the boat back out to sea. It was far more advantageous to force an enemy ship to beach in one's own territory. In this circumstance, the men on the shore could either kill the men on board, or prevent them from getting the ship back into the water, effectively removing the trireme from combat. If the men on the ship somehow managed to fight off the men on the shore, the ship was still greatly delayed and thus no help to its allies. If the men on the shore could take over the ship, they could acquire a new ship for their own navy.

Before the Battle

In early 414 BC, the Athenians successfully blockaded Syracuse by both land and sea and besieged the city (Thuc. 6.103.3; Diod. 13.7.5; Plut. *Nic.* 18.4-5). The Syracusans

were very close to suing for peace (Thuc. 6.103.3; Plut. *Nic.* 18.4),¹²³ but the Spartan commander, Gylippus, arrived in Sicily with a small force and collected allies throughout Sicily (Thuc. 7.1; Diod. 13.7.7; Plut. *Nic.* 19.4). A Corinthian fleet came to Syracuse's aid as well (Thuc. 7.2.1; Diod. 13.8.3).¹²⁴ Nicias sent a letter to Athens asking for troops and money and for himself to be relieved from duty because of a kidney problem (Thuc. 7.14-15; Diod. 13.8.6).¹²⁵ The Athenians decided to send Demosthenes and Eurymedon with a large number of troops and ships (Thuc. 7.16; Diod. 13.11.1). In 413 BC, the Athenians attempted a night raid at Epipolae, but failed owing to a limited knowledge of the terrain and the confusion caused by the darkness (Thuc. 7.43.6-45; Diod. 13.11.3-6; Plut. *Nic.* 21.5-9). The Athenians postponed their escape from Sicily, due to an eclipse (Thuc. 7.50.4; Diod. 13.12.6; Plut. *Nic.* 23.1). Advised by the soothsayers, Nicias proclaimed that the troops needed to wait 27 days before making any attempt to escape (Thuc. 7.50.4).¹²⁶ Once the Syracusans had become aware that the Athenians were going to remain in Sicily, they attacked the Athenian ships in a naval battle and were victorious (Thuc. 7.52.1-54; Diod. 13.13.1-13.8; Plut. *Nic.* 24.1-2). Eurymedon was killed in the battle (Thuc. 7.52.2; Diod. 13.13.3; Plut. *Nic.* 24.2).

¹²³ Plutarch states at 18.7 that the Syracusans actually held an assembly to debate what the peace terms with Nicias should be.

¹²⁴ Plutarch says that the Corinthians came with a single trireme to inform the Syracusans that Gylippus was en route (Plut. *Nic. Nic.* 20.1).

¹²⁵ This is not mentioned in Plutarch.

¹²⁶ Diodorus claims that the Athenians only had to wait 3 days before departing (Diod. 13.12.6). Plutarch says that they had to wait another full cycle of the moon (Plut. *Nic.* 23.6).

Preparations

With the reinforcements sent in early 413 BC, the Athenians were still unable to win the war. However, owing to the eclipse, the Athenians sat around for too long. By the time the decision was made to sail home, the Syracusans had become emboldened by their recent victories and wanted to prevent an Athenian escape and to destroy the Expedition Corps. Ultimately, the Syracusans looked to encircle the Athenians and entrap them within the Great Harbour and the small area of land which they still held beside the harbour.¹²⁷ In the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians were engaging in a battle of breakthrough. The goal was to break out of the Great Harbour of Syracuse and to escape. The Syracusans made the opening maneuver by blockading the harbour with merchant ships and triremes along with smaller ships (Thuc. 7.40.5). The Syracusans attached the ships together with chains and planks (Thuc. 7.59.3; Diod. 14.1-2).¹²⁸ The exit of the harbour was completely blocked off except for a small gap in the very middle (Thuc. 7.59.3).¹²⁹

At this point, the morale of the Athenians and their allies was dangerously low. Soon after the arrival of Demosthenes and Eurymedon, the Athenians had lost a land

¹²⁷ This is not unlike the battle of Stalingrad during World War II, where the German 6th army became encircled by the Soviets and attempted to breakthrough. In both cases, the breakout fails to succeed, and the army was destroyed.

¹²⁸ Plutarch does not say how the entrance to the harbour was blocked (Plut. *Nic. Nic.*24.3).

¹²⁹ Diodorus' version of the story suggests that there was no gap in the middle of the ships. Further, the claim that the Syracusans spent 3 days crafting this barricade speaks volumes in regard to Athenian intransigence.

battle during the night (Thuc. 7.43-45; Diod. 13.11.3-6; Plut. *Nic.* 21.5-8).¹³⁰

Furthermore, the Athenians had been defeated in an earlier naval battle, which was an embarrassing outcome for the preeminent navy of the Greek world (Thuc. 7.52-55.1; Diod. 13.13.1-8; Plut. *Nic.* 24.2). In that battle, the Athenian general Eurymedon had been slain (Thuc. 7.52.2; Diod. 13.13.3-4; Plut. *Nic.* 24.2), and the Athenians had lost 18 ships (Thuc. 7.53.3; Diod. 13.13.8).¹³¹ This was especially damaging to the psyche of a navy which thought it was invincible. Conversely, the Syracusans gained a massive morale boost for having defeated such an imposing naval force (Thuc. 7.67.1). When this lack of confidence was combined with the illness (Plut. *Nic.* 22.4) and hunger that was running through the Athenian army, the Athenians were in dire need of a morale boost. Nicias attempted to cull the negative attitudes that were present in the army in two speeches.¹³² He appealed to the emotions of the Athenians and their allies by inspiring fear for their families in their various homelands (Thuc. 7.64.1). He also warned them of the consequences for their own lives should they not escape the present situation successfully (Thuc. 7.64.1; Diod. 13.15.1-2).¹³³ However, in terms of their preparations for the impending battle, he assured the navy by pointing out the changes that had been made that he felt would give them a competitive advantage in combat.¹³⁴ However, the

¹³⁰ The Athenians attack Epipolae during the night. There is great confusion owing to the darkness. This is compounded because the fresh troops that travelled to Sicily with Demosthenes are unfamiliar with the terrain. (See Rhodes (2010), 145).

¹³¹ Plutarch did include the number of ships lost.

¹³² Bizarrely, given that Plutarch wrote about the life of Nicias, Plutarch did not include or mention these speeches.

¹³³ This is discussed more fully in the section 'The Will to Combat'

¹³⁴ Diodorus does not mention the changes made by the Athenians for this particular battle. He does mention the grappling irons (as Diod. 13.16.1), but does not note that this is a new tactic employed by the Athenians. Plutarch doesn't speak of the grappling hooks at all.

changes were a massive departure from the tactics that were generally used by the Athenians. Normally, the Athenians relied on their superior maneuverability in the water on account of their highly trained oarsmen.¹³⁵ For this battle, since the harbour would constrain the movement of the ships, Nicias adopted the strategy of the Syracusans, which had been highly successful in the preceding naval battle (i.e. boarding rather than ramming). Thucydides repeatedly uses words that reference the narrowness of the battle area, such as στενοχωρία (Thuc. 7.70.6). Thus, the new plan was to fill the decks with hoplites and bowmen and javelin throwers, whereas the normal Athenian method was to include roughly 10 hoplites and 4 archers. The javelin throwers and bowmen could harass the hoplites on the enemy ships, and the hoplites could board the opposing ships and effectively commandeer them.¹³⁶ The less experienced navies of the Greek world tended to put more hoplites on deck with the intent of boarding.¹³⁷ Nicias chose to use grapnels in order to make the boarding of ships more effective (Thuc. 7.62.3). The strategy was to get close to another ship, and then the grapnels could be used to latch on to the enemy ship in order to make it easier for the hoplites to board. Moreover, Nicias informed the troops that they had taken the proper counter-measures to combat the thickness of the enemies' catheads, which he claimed had the most devastating effect in the previous battle (Thuc. 7.62.3). A cathead is a device used to lower and raise anchors in order to keep the anchor from damaging the ship by keeping it sufficiently far away from the ship

¹³⁵ Fields (2007), 15-16.

¹³⁶ Hanson (2005), 243.

¹³⁷ Fields (2007), 18-19.

proper. Thick catheads helped to strengthen the prow of the ship.¹³⁸ The specific counter-measures taken by the Athenians are difficult to discern.

While Nicias' assurances were able to coerce the Athenians and the allies to engage in a final effort to escape Sicily, there were a few issues with his plan. First, the Athenian navy lacked experience in this form of naval warfare. As the Spartan commander, Gylippus, states in his speech to the Syracusan troops:

Concerning their close imitation of our preparation, it (the army) strains in our manner and we will be well-prepared against each of them, when there are many hoplites upon the deck – contrary to their established method – many javelin men, Acharnanians and others who are men of the land so to speak, having got on board on a ship, they will not even discover how it is possible to discharge a missile while sitting. How will they not make the ships unsteady, all will be confused amongst themselves, moving forth in a manner that is not their own? (Thuc. 7.67.2)¹³⁹

Here, Gylippus questioned the Athenians' ability to engage in battle in a manner in which they were not familiar. Most important is the statement that the javelin throwers would not be able to figure out how to effectively hurl their weapons (Thuc. 7.67.2). Barry Strauss uses this passage as proof that javelin throwers were required to be seated to throw their weapons "because standing would cause the ship to roll and upset the

¹³⁸ Fields (2007), 37. Dr. Alexander Meyer made the reasonable suggestion that it might be the knees of the ship that were strengthened (and not the catheads) since this would provide a sturdier hull.

¹³⁹ Thuc. 7.67.2. Τά τε τῆς ἀντιμμήσεως αὐτῶν τῆς παρασκευῆς ἡμῶν τῷ μὲν ἡμετέρῳ τρόπῳ ξυνήθη τέ ἐστι καὶ οὐκ ἀνάρμοστοι πρὸς ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐσόμεθα· οἱ δ', ἐπειδὴν πολλοὶ μὲν ὀπλῖται ἐπὶ τῶν καταστροφμάτων παρὰ τὸ καθεστηκὸς ᾧσι, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀκοντισταὶ χερσαῖοι ὡς εἰπεῖν Ἀκαρνᾶνες τε καὶ ἄλλοι ἐπὶ ναῦς ἀναβάντες, οἱ οὐδ' ὅπως καθεζομένους χρῆ τὸ βέλος ἀφεῖναι εὐρήσουσι, πῶς οὐ σφαλοῦσί τε τὰς ναῦς καὶ ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς πάντες οὐκ ἐν τῷ ἑαυτῶν τρόπῳ κινούμενοι ταράζονται;

oars.”¹⁴⁰ However, I argue that this cannot be the case. The javelin throwers may remain seated before engaging, but a seated man would not be able to throw effectively a javelin with a sufficient amount of force. Instead, Gylippus should be regarded as engaging in laconic wit rather than making a factual statement concerning naval warfare. This relies on the interpretation of οὐδέ in this passage. The οὐδέ should be taken to mean ‘not even’ instead of simply meaning ‘not’.¹⁴¹ In this way, the fully expressed thought behind Gylippus’ witty statement is meant to be “the Acharnanians, being land people, will not be able to discharge their weapons while standing; they will not even be able to do it while sitting.” Certainly, standing on the ship would be more difficult than sitting, and Strauss is correct to point out the dangers of rolling the ship. However, sitting in order to discharge missiles was certainly impossible. If we consider the crowding on the decks of the ships, where would the javelin men even sit in order to discharge their weapons? They certainly could not sit in the middle of the deck, as their line of sight would be blocked by the hoplites in front of them. The only possibility was that they would sit on the edge of the deck, but this would cause other problems. First, there was the potential to fall off the deck especially if the ship rolls, and second, the javelin men were wearing little armour, and their shields would be difficult to manipulate in a sitting position and therefore, sitting on the edge of the deck would put them in an extremely dangerous situation. Thus, it is quite possible that the javelin throwers remained seated until they were in a position to engage, and then they stood up. Gylippus’ point is that the

¹⁴⁰ Strauss (2004), 231.

¹⁴¹ Hornblower (2010), 687.

Athenians and their allies would not be able to do this effectively given their lack of experience.

Another issue was the introduction of the grapnels. The Syracusans saw the Athenians preparing their ships and took measures to counteract the grapnels (Thuc. 7.65.2). The Syracusans placed animal hides over the prows and a considerable portion of the upper works of the ships (Thuc. 7.65.2)¹⁴² which helped to prevent the grapnels from successfully grabbing hold of the ships. The hides were also used to block arrows, which was a common tactic.¹⁴³ It would make sense for the Syracusans to take this precaution after having seen the Athenians increasing the number of archers and javelin throwers on their triremes (Thuc. 7.67.2). It is difficult to interpret what exactly Thucydides means by the ‘upper works’ (Thuc. 7.65.2). Thucydides could simply mean the railings (outrigger) along the side of the boat. In the Battle in the Great Harbour, it is unknown whether the Athenians had access to animal hides or canvas to protect the *thranitai* and to prevent the triremes from being hooked by grapnels. It is possible that when the Athenian storehouse was captured, the Athenians had lost such items,¹⁴⁴ and therefore, the *thranitai* of the Athenian triremes were in far more danger than their Syracusan counterparts. In conclusion, the Athenians were given a boost to their morale through Nicias’ appeals and with his assurances regarding their changes to strategy. However, because they had failed

¹⁴² Diodorus mentions the use of grapnels in his account (13.16.1), however, it is not clear which army is using the grapnels. It is implied that it is both navies. He fails to mention the countermeasures taken by the Syracusans; namely, applying animal skins to their outriggers in order to prevent the hooks from successfully grasping their ships.

¹⁴³ Fields (2007), 13-14.

¹⁴⁴ Diod. 13.9.4 says that there was much naval equipment, money and other equipment, but he does not specify what exactly was contained in these storehouses.

to make these changes in secrecy, their perceived advantages were nullified. Furthermore, their lack of experience in naval boarding put them at a disadvantage against the Syracusans who tended to fight in such a manner.

Nicias' Tactical Decisions

In this section, I will argue that, regardless of the outcome of the battle, Nicias made the best possible tactical decisions. Nicias' fault was that he was reactive to the movements of the Syracusans rather than proactive. He was largely responsible for the delay in the decision to sail home and for giving in to the soothsayers after the eclipse, as we have seen. Nicias did not attempt to escape at the earliest possible moment. However, once the Syracusans had blockaded the harbour with ships (Thuc. 7.58.3; Diod. 13.14.1-2; Plut. *Nic.* 24.3), the Athenian strategy to escape by ship was sound. It was necessary that the Athenians break out, since they had told Catane to stop delivering supplies even before the eclipse (Thuc. 7.62.2),¹⁴⁵ and thus, the Athenians would eventually starve should they not take action. The risk for the Athenians would have been much higher if they attempted to escape by the land as they would not have had a clear contingency plan to escape the island. Moreover, travelling across Sicily would do little to help the Athenians. In this circumstance, the Athenians would have had to burn all of their ships or to surrender all of their ships to the Syracusans. On land, the Athenians could forage for food, but their journey back to mainland Greece would rely on the kindness of strangers and their allies to provide them with

¹⁴⁵ Diodorus does not mention this order and neither does Plutarch.

ships. Therefore, it was better for the Athenians to attempt to break the blockade and arrive at Catane. This would have allowed them to acquire food from Catane and also keep their navy. Regardless of their defeat in the preceding battle, the strength of the Athenians still lied in their navy. The Athenian side still had more ships than the Syracusans.¹⁴⁶ Nicias made massive changes to the general Athenian tactic of ramming, as he had decided to fight on the terms of the Syracusans, where there was a greater reliance on boarding enemy ships. He decided to emulate the other navies of Greece in this way, and to focus on boarding (Thuc. 7.67.2) for a few good reasons. While the Athenians were not well versed in this form of naval combat, it was the best method given their situation. The Athenian navy shone in the open water. Their triremes were able to out-maneuver their foe owing to their lighter weight and their more experienced rowers.¹⁴⁷ Further, the Athenians were superior at rowing in the rougher waters that are present in the open sea.¹⁴⁸ However, in the Great Harbour, the space was narrow and the water was calm. Thus, the Athenian rowing advantages were nullified to a degree. Another issue for the Athenians was that their ships were waterlogged (Thuc. 7.12.4-5). Usually, a navy would beach their ships after a day of sailing in order to let them dry. However, the Athenians had left the triremes in the water in case of a quick Syracusan attack (Thuc. 7.12.4-5). A waterlogged ship was heavier and therefore, more sluggish

¹⁴⁶ The Athenians had 100 ships (Thuc 7.60.4), while the Syracusans maintained 76 ships (Thuc. 7.52.1 and repeated at 7.70.1).

¹⁴⁷ Fields (2007), 18. Hanson (2005), 244.

¹⁴⁸ Hanson (2005), 243.

in the water and not able to perform difficult maneuvers. Furthermore, the ships could not receive proper maintenance by the *naupēgos*.¹⁴⁹ The Athenians might still be able to maneuver their boats more efficiently owing to their experience, but the actual area of combat made this advantage negligible.

In the previous year (414BC), Gylippus captured an Athenian naval storehouse which had been filled with equipment for repairs (Thuc. 7.23.1; Plut. *Nic.* 20.2).¹⁵⁰ Therefore, their ships were in bad shape for the upcoming fight and it was especially important for the Athenians to avoid being rammed since they may not have had sufficient materials to repair the ships during and after combat.¹⁵¹ Generally, a trireme kept roughly 30 extra oars as replacements for the rowers.¹⁵² If some of these oars were kept in the naval storehouse, the Athenian rowers had to be very careful with their oars. Shattered oars could leave a trireme immobile. Based on this, the Athenians made the reasonable decision to focus on avoiding ramming and being rammed and to rely on grapnels to attach their ships to enemy triremes (Thuc. 7.62.3). If the Athenians could capture a boat with the grapnels and pull it parallel to their own ships, they would have a large boarding area. This would allow the large number of hoplites on the trireme to leap onto the enemy ship simultaneously, making it more

¹⁴⁹ Harrison (1999), 169.

¹⁵⁰ However, Diodorus at 13.9.4. gives greater detail in terms of the provisions captured by Gylippus. The storehouses were filled with money, naval supplies, and equipment.

¹⁵¹ Plutarch says that the reason the Athenians only had 110 ships in the Battle in the Great Harbour is because there was simply not enough oars to outfit the ships (Plut. *Nic.* 24.4), which suggests that the loss of the naval storehouses was crippling for the Athenians.

¹⁵² Fields (2007), 36.

difficult for the Syracusans to prevent the attack. Since the Athenians happened to have a large number of hoplites on this campaign, they might as well use them for fighting on board the ships rather than have them sit and watch the battle from the shore. While the Athenians were less familiar with this type of combat, it was the most effective way to achieve victory given their current circumstances.

The Will to Combat

What was the impetus for the Athenians and their allies to stake everything on a naval battle with the Syracusans at this particular point in the conflict? The Athenians were moved largely by necessity and fear. At this point in the war, the Athenians were dealing with sickness among the ranks of the army (Thuc. 7.50.3; Diod. 13.12.4; Plut. *Nic.* 22.4).¹⁵³ It stands to reason that the rate of illness among the troops would increase owing to a lack of provisions (Thuc. 7.60.2). The Athenians had informed Catane not to send them any more provisions because they had expected to leave before the eclipse postponed their departure (Thuc. 7.60.2). Thus, the Athenians were hungry and tired with no hope of obtaining food unless they made an excursion inland which would bring them into collision with hostiles. To add to the Athenian plight, the Syracusans were attempting to block the Athenians in the Great Harbour of Syracuse, preventing them from receiving provisions and supplies by sea and forcing them to travel inland. If the Athenians were to make it to Catane,¹⁵⁴ they would either have to break the blockade or

¹⁵³ Also, the sick are mentioned again at 7.60.2.

¹⁵⁴ See Figure 11: The distance between Syracuse and Catane.

attempt to travel across the island on foot. The Athenians chose to rely on their naval ability since they still felt that they held an advantage (although they had lost the previous naval engagement with the Syracusans (Thuc. 7.55.1)).¹⁵⁵ However, Nicias was able to alleviate the damage done by the previous defeat by unveiling what he felt to be a winning strategy. Nicias impelled the Athenians and their allies to fight by instilling in them the fear of the consequences of failure. He appealed to the Athenians by informing them that if they were to lose and fail to escape Sicily, the consequences for their families back at Athens would be dire. He said:

And to those of you who are Athenians, I remind you again, that you left behind no other ships in your docks that are equal to these ships here nor did you leave behind any hoplites fit for military service, and if anything shall happen other than for you to prevail, our enemies here will sail straightaway to there (Athens), and those of us remaining in that place (Athens) will be unable to ward off those enemies that are present and those coming upon them (Thuc. 7.64.1).¹⁵⁶

Thus, Nicias made an emotional plea to the Athenians to think about the potential repercussions that might come upon Athens should their forces fail to escape. Further, he invoked ancestors and reminded the Athenians of their great deeds in battle (Thuc.

¹⁵⁵ The Syracusan navy with 76 ships defeated the Athenians with 86 ships. The Syracusans defeated the centre line of Athenian ships and cornered the Athenian general Eurymedon who was attempting to flank them. Eurymedon was killed and the Syracusans were repelled by the Tyrrhenians. The Syracusans captured 18 ships and killed every man (roughly 3600 people (18 X 200)) (Thuc. 7.52-54). However, Diodorus says no less than 2000 men were killed (Diod. 13.13.8).

¹⁵⁶ Thuc. 7.64.1. τούς τε Ἀθηναίους ὑμῶν πάλιν αὖ καὶ τάδε ὑπομνήσκω, ὅτι οὔτε ναῦς ἐν τοῖς νεωσοίκοις ἄλλας ὁμοίας ταῖσδε οὔτε ὀπλιτῶν ἡλικίαν ὑπελίπετε, εἴ τε ζυμβήσεται τι ἄλλο ἢ τὸ κρατεῖν ὑμῖν, τούς τε ἐνθάδε πολεμίους εὐθὺς ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα πλευσομένους καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖ ὑπολοίπους ἡμῶν ἀδυνάτους ἐσομένους τούς τε αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἐπελθόντας ἀμύνασθαι.

7.69.2). Nicias managed to put similar fear into the hearts of the Athenian allies as well.

He said:

And the rest of you (Sicilians) will come under the Syracusans straightaway, you yourselves know with what sort a purpose you came upon them, and those who are there (from the Greek mainland) will come under the (compulsion of) the Lacedaemonians (Thuc. 7.64.1).¹⁵⁷

Here Nicias instilled the troops with the fear of enslavement or the loss of independence (Thuc. 7.64.1). He implied that the troops knew that they came against the Syracusans with the intention of conquest and enslavement (Thuc. 7.64.1). Should the Athenian alliance fail to ward off the Syracusans, the Syracusans would be likely to retaliate in kind. Those who lived in mainland Greece would be punished and enslaved by the Spartans and the Peloponnesian League.

Another fear for the Athenians was that if they failed to break out of the harbour and were forced to retreat into Sicily, it would be necessary to burn their ships in order to prevent the enemies from acquiring the armada for themselves (Thuc. 7.60.2). The ships would be lost for the Athenian state and the Athenians would be left at Syracuse with even less hope of fleeing the island.

At the time of the battle, the Athenians still held a beach head (Thuc. 7.60.2; Diod. 13.16.6). While other parts of the harbour were controlled by the Syracusans, the Athenians still maintained a wall (although they had pulled back from it) and commanded

¹⁵⁷ Thuc. 7.64.1. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἄν ὑπὸ Συρακοσίοις εὐθὺς γίγνοισθε, οἷς αὐτοὶ ἴστε οἷα γνώμη ἐπήλθετε, οἱ δὲ ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ Λακεδαιμονίοις.

a small portion of land (Thuc. 7.60.2).¹⁵⁸ The break out from the harbour needed to be attempted as soon as possible while the Athenians had troops on the ground and before the land army could come under assault. Moreover, if the naval battle were unsuccessful, the Athenians still would have an opportunity to safely land their troops on the beach among friends. If the Athenians were forced to swim or land ships on a hostile shore, the troops would likely be cut down before they could gain a foothold.

Therefore, the Athenians and their allies were driven to fight by both necessity and fear. The illness that was inhibiting the troops would only become further compounded by the lack of provisions available to support the army. Further, the sick Athenians being in close quarters with others would spread illness amongst the troops. Moreover, the swampy terrain would bring a greater chance of widespread infection. They must move against the Syracusan blockade in order to obtain supplies and escape Sicily. The Athenians still held some portion of the Great Harbour, but it was not something that could be maintained forever owing to the aforementioned lack of provisions and the ailments among the troops. Being pushed from the beach would leave the Athenians with only the option to retreat to safety on the much more risky march over land to Catane if they failed to break the blockade or to destroy the Syracusan fleet. Thus, the longer the Athenians delayed, the worse the situation on the ground would become. Nicias compelled both the Athenian and allied troops by reminding them of the potential consequences should they fail either to crush the Syracusan navy or to run the blockade.

¹⁵⁸ In 414BC, the Athenians built a circular wall south of the city of Syracuse as the base for their operations. Then, they decided to build a length of wall to match the wall built by the Syracusans in the previous winter. The two sides attempt to prevent each other from completing the projects by building counter-walls. See Rhodes, 144. See Fig.1.

We can reasonably assume that this fear compelled the Athenian alliance to fight with zeal against the enemy even though they had become discouraged by the previous naval defeat. Essentially, each passing moment weakened the chance of victory, so the necessity of the situation forced the Athenians into action.

The Battle

Thucydides' narrative paints a picture of mass confusion. Neither side seemed to know which side is winning the battle. Thucydides notes the differing reactions of various Athenians watching the battle from the shore. People looking at different areas of the Great Harbour had diverse opinions regarding either the plight or the success of their navy. There is little information in the narrative that provides evidence as to why the Athenians were defeated. Therefore, it is important to attempt to recreate the battle using the scant details that we have regarding the flow of battle. Using the *Face of Battle* approach, it is possible to give an explanation for the outcome. In the next sections, I will account for the Athenian defeat by analyzing the various roles of the different classes of troops on the triremes, and their experience of this battle.

In John Keegan's seminal work, the battles that are analyzed are infantry battles.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, it is simple to organize the recreation based on the different lines of battle engaging in steps (archers, cavalry, and infantry). However, in a naval battle, especially one as chaotic as the Battle in the Great Harbour, it is not apparent how the recreation is best organized. Therefore, the battle must be broken into artificial divisions.

¹⁵⁹ Keegan (1976) analyzes the battle of Agincourt, the battle of Waterloo, and the battle of the Somme.

Hornblower, following Rutter, notes that Thucydides divides the narrative into groups of three.¹⁶⁰ First were the “initial efforts of the rowers, the steersmen, and the soldiers on board.”¹⁶¹ Next, we learn of the “activities of the same three groups in reverse order (soldiers fighting hand to hand, steersmen attacking and defending simultaneously, sailors unable to hear orders).”¹⁶² Finally, Thucydides elucidates the reactions of those on the shore who were viewing the battle. These men are broken into three groups. There are those who were viewing a part of the harbour where their side was winning, those who were viewing a part of the harbour where their side was being overcome, and those who were viewing a part of the harbour where the battle was inconclusive.¹⁶³ This is the manner in which I reconstruct the battle.

Initial Charge

After loading the ships, the Athenians made a run at the blockade with 110 triremes (Thuc. 7.60.4).¹⁶⁴ First, the Athenians had to pass the Corinthian ships that were blocking the way to the line of merchant ships. Thucydides reports that the Athenians got the better of the Corinthians and were able to arrive at the blockade itself (Thuc. 7.70.2).¹⁶⁵ They reached the wall of ships and attempted to break the chains and escape (Thuc. 7.70.2). The Athenian triremes likely sailed out in rows of ships abreast. The

¹⁶⁰ Hornblower (2010), 695.

¹⁶¹ Hornblower (2010), 695.

¹⁶² Hornblower (2010), 695.

¹⁶³ Hornblower (2010), 695.

¹⁶⁴ Diodorus says 115 triremes at 13.14.4. See Figure 1: Map of the Great Harbour and the position of the Syracusan walls.

¹⁶⁵ Diodorus completely omits this detail. He suggests that the Athenians had, in fact, broken the barrier and there is no mention of any Corinthian ships blocking the barricade (Diod. 13.15.3). Plutarch says nothing of the assault on the barricade but does mention that there were Corinthians present (Plut. *Nic.* 25.1-2).

Syracusans, who probably had their ships in the water already, launched their ships from the parts of the harbour that they controlled, which seem to have been both the north and south sides of the harbour and the battle proper commenced (Thuc. 7.70.1).¹⁶⁶ The Syracusans and their allies launched 76 triremes, and were thus disadvantaged in terms of pure numbers (Thuc. 7.52.1).¹⁶⁷ It seems that the Syracusans were hoping for the Athenians to become bogged down at the barricade, where the Syracusans would be able to encircle the Athenians and to batter their ships with their strengthened prows.

Once the Syracusan ships headed towards the Athenians, the Athenians were in a very dangerous predicament. Since the Syracusans were coming *πανταχόθεν* (from all sides) (Thuc. 7.70.2), the Athenians were effectively surrounded. Now, the Athenians needed to turn their ships to face the enemy. Those on the left flank turned left to face the Syracusan ships coming from the north part of the harbour, and the triremes on the right flank turned right to face the ships attacking from the south of the harbour. The Athenians would most likely have maneuvered their ships into a modified *kuklos* formation. There would have been ships that were still attempting to break the barricade, but the ships in the rear would have turned either left or right to create a semi-circle.

These commands would have been carried out by the oarsmen by order of the *kubernetes* with assistance from the *keleustes*. The helmsman (*kubernetes*) was the *de*

¹⁶⁶ It is said that Sicanus and Agatharcus each control a wing and the Syracusans launch ships from all sides. This suggests that the Syracusans must control both the north and south of the harbour. This is certainly accurate when we consider the capture of the Plemmyrium by Gylippus. In Diodorus' account, the Syracusans seem unprepared and have yet to actually man their ships (Diod. 13.15.3).

¹⁶⁷ Thuc. 7.52.1 gives the number of ships. Thuc. 7.70.1 claims that the Syracusans launch the same number of ships. Diodorus says 74 triremes at 13.14.4.

facto captain of the ship.¹⁶⁸ He was an experienced sailor.¹⁶⁹ He controlled the steering of the ship with two steering oars.¹⁷⁰ The steering oars, and thus the helmsman himself, were at the stern of the ship.¹⁷¹ The *kubernetes* had the greatest responsibility on the ship and could be credited with victory or defeat based on his reactions to the circumstance of the battle. The helmsman stood in a vulnerable position and could be struck by enemy missiles, and therefore, he was protected by other troops.¹⁷² The boatswain, called *keleustes*, was another assistant to the helmsman. It was his duty to manage the rowers.¹⁷³ His exhortations were intended to maintain the morale of the oarsmen.¹⁷⁴ A disheartened and tired rowing crew would make a trireme very ineffective. Thus, it was necessary to make sure that the spirits of the rowers remained high. The *keleustes* was also a communications medium between the helmsman and the oarsmen.¹⁷⁵ This would be especially necessary in the din of battle, where the shouting of soldiers and the clashing of ships could drown out the voice of the helmsman (Thuc. 7.70.6; Diod. 13.16.5).¹⁷⁶ He likely spent most of his time under the deck with the oarsmen,¹⁷⁷ but sometimes he may have popped up above the deck in order to clarify commands from the helmsman. Xenophon notes the negative effect of a bad boatswain, suggesting how important this man was to the morale of the rowers. Xenophon says:

¹⁶⁸ Fields (2007), 15.

¹⁶⁹ Fields (2007), 15.

¹⁷⁰ See Figure 9: The position of the rudder (and thus the position of the *kubernetes*) at the stern of the ship.

¹⁷¹ See Figure 9: The position of the rudder (and thus the position of the *kubernetes*) at the stern of the ship.

¹⁷² It seems that the helmsman is surrounded by 4 archers. See Fields (2007), 17.

¹⁷³ Morrison (2000), 111.

¹⁷⁴ Morrison (2000), 112.

¹⁷⁵ Morrison (2000), 112.

¹⁷⁶ Later in the Battle in the Great Harbour, the oarsmen are unable to hear the *keleustes* owing to the din of battle.

¹⁷⁷ Morrison (2000), 129.

As for example on a trireme, it is said, when they cross the sea, and there is need for the sailors to travel a day voyage, some of the boatswains are able to say and do such things so that they sharpen the souls of the men to work hard willingly, while others are senseless in this way, so that they accomplish the same voyage more than in double the time. The former boatswain and rowers when they disembark perspire and applaud each other, while the latter boatswain and rowers arrive slowly, the rowers hating the boatswain and being hated by him (Xen. *Oec.* 21.3).¹⁷⁸

While this passage refers simply to making a voyage, a particularly incompetent *keleustes* would certainly have a similar impact on oarsmen in battle. Since the orders would have been able to be heard clearly at this point, the rowers should have been able to turn roughly 90 degrees rather quickly in order to form a *kuklos*. For example, the triremes on the left flank would turn left by having the rowers on the port (left) side row backwards and those on the starboard (right) side rowing forwards. The *kubernetes* would likely assist the starboard side by pushing the left rudder outwards. The ship could pivot and turn. However, this left the Athenian ships with no forward momentum while the Syracusan ships were barreling towards them. This was extremely troublesome for the Athenians owing to the strengthened catheads of the Syracusan ships (Thuc. 7.62.3). The Syracusans could simply ram the Athenians directly in the bows of their ships and cause massive damage. If Nicias' claim that the Athenian ships were properly outfitted to counteract the power of the prows of the Syracusans was correct, the damage to the

¹⁷⁸ Xen. *Oec.* 21.3. οἷον καὶ ἐν τριήρει, ἔφη, ὅταν πελαγίζωσι, καὶ δέη περᾶν ἡμερινοῦς πλοῦς ἐλαύνοντας, οἱ μὲν τῶν κελευστῶν δύνανται τοιαῦτα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν ὥστε ἀκονᾶν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τὸ ἐθελοντὰς πονεῖν, οἱ δὲ οὕτως ἀγνώμονές εἰσιν ὥστε πλέον ἢ ἐν διπλασίῳ χρόνῳ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀνύτουσι πλοῦν. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἰδροῦντες καὶ ἐπαινοῦντες ἀλλήλους, ὃ τε κελεύων καὶ οἱ εἰθόμενοι, ἐκβαίνουσιν, οἱ δὲ ἀνιδρωτὶ ἤκουσι, μισοῦντες τὸν ἐπιστάτην καὶ μισοῦμενοι.

Athenian prows may have been lessened (Thuc. 7.62.3). The Athenians were disadvantaged either way, because they likely suffered a lack of supplies to repair their ships owing to the capture of the Athenian storehouse by Gylippus (Thuc. 7.23.1-2; Diod. 13.9.4). The carpenter of the ship (*naupegos*) made repairs to the ship. Morrison argues that the carpenter spent most of his time below the deck, where there would be a place for him to store his tools.¹⁷⁹ He would attempt to make immediate repairs during sail,¹⁸⁰ and when the ship was beached, he would perform further maintenance.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, the Syracusans, having come from the city, were fully supplied and capable of fixing holes in the hulls of the triremes.

Missile Infantry

Once the Syracusan ships approach the Athenian triremes,

The men attacked the opposing ship plentifully with darts and arrows and stones from the decks of their ships (Thuc. 7.70.5).¹⁸²

In this moment, the javelin throwers, bowmen, and likely also the deckhands were engaging. The bowmen (*toxotai*), like the hoplites, were on the ship for offensive and defensive purposes. On an Athenian trireme, there were usually four archers.¹⁸³ The archers stood at the stern of the ship in order to protect the helmsman.¹⁸⁴ When their own

¹⁷⁹ Morrison (2000), 129.

¹⁸⁰ Hanson (2005), 243.

¹⁸¹ Harrison (1999), 169.

¹⁸² Thuc. 7.70.5. οἱ ἀπὸ τῶν καταστροφμάτων τοῖς ἀκοντίοις καὶ τοξεύμασι καὶ λίθοις ἀφθόνως ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἐχρῶντο

¹⁸³ Fields (2007), 14.

¹⁸⁴ Fields (2007), 16. This is based on a reading of *paredroi* (sitting beside) from IG II² 950.137. It is strengthened by Eur. *IT*, 1377. While the archers could certainly be bodyguards, how exactly they protect

hoplites attempted to board an enemy ship, the archers could fire arrows toward the enemy in order to assist the hoplites in boarding. Conversely, the archers could send volleys at hoplites who were attempting to board their own ship. If an enemy ship failed to cover the outriggers of the ship, archers could attack the *thranitai*.

In the naval battle that preceded the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Syracusan navy was able to strike the *thranitai* with projectiles (Thuc. 7.40.5).¹⁸⁵ Not only did this create panic amongst the oarsmen, it also could throw off the balance of the rowers because there would be a disparity in the number of rowers on each side of the ship if enough oarsmen were incapacitated. Also, a dead or severely injured oarsman could impede other rowers if his oar was in the way of the other oars, or if the oarsman should collapse onto other rowers. In the Battle in the Great Harbour, it seems that the Athenians placed more archers than usual on the ship, which gave the helmsman more protection, and also allowed the Athenians to overwhelm the enemy decks with projectiles.

the helmsman other than essentially being human shields is a topic for debate. The best that they could do was keep a watchful eye and shoot at potential attackers.

¹⁸⁵ It seems that the Syracusans used much smaller boats to achieve this. Thucydides calls them 'light ships' (perhaps something like a skiff) and they were able to sail under the oar banks of enemy ships and toss javelins into the outrigger and thus incapacitate some of the *thranitai*. Diodorus says that the Syracusans attacked the men on the decks with javelins, but makes no mention of the specific targeting of oarsmen (Diod. 13.10.5).

The deckhands, of which there were normally ten, seem to have been broken into two parties.¹⁸⁶ One group followed the orders of the helmsman, while the other group obeyed the bow officer.¹⁸⁷ Thus, half of the deckhands were stationed at the stern and the other half were stationed at the bow.¹⁸⁸ On voyage, the deckhands were responsible for raising and lowering the two sails of the trireme.¹⁸⁹ The deckhands could also be used as spare oarsmen, bailing water from the ship, and taking control of the rudder when necessary.¹⁹⁰ In this part of the battle, the deckhands were certainly throwing stones at the enemy. The javelin throwers were a new addition to the Athenian ships. As Gylippus pointed out, these men had no experience fighting on a naval vessel (Thuc. 7.67.2). Their throws would have certainly suffered from inaccuracy. The missile troops had the same issues that the Athenian hoplites had in this battle. The mass of men on the trireme deck would have made it more difficult to position oneself in a way that was conducive to one's needs, since the Athenian archers were not used to this level of crowding on their triremes. Unlike the hoplites and rowers, archers did not need as much energy to function effectively, and thus the lack of provisions was far less damaging to them. The deckhands should have been roughly as effective as they normally were. They were used to walking about a trireme, and had likely thrown rocks from the deck of the ship in the past. An issue that was unique to the missile troops involved their equipment. The Athenians did not have an unlimited supply of javelins, arrows, and stones. Since the Athenians had

¹⁸⁶ Morrison (2000), 113. This is based on an interpretation of Xen. *Anab.* 5.8.20), where the helmsman becomes angered at the men at the bow and the bow officer is angry at the men at the stern of the ship.

¹⁸⁷ Morrison (2000), 113.

¹⁸⁸ Morrison (2000), 113.

¹⁸⁹ Morrison (2000), 113.

¹⁹⁰ Morrison (2000), 113.

completely changed their tactics in this particular battle, it is possible that they were ill-prepared to engage in missile attacks for a prolonged period of time. Once these men ran out of missiles, they became a detriment to the trireme. Their added weight made the trireme more sluggish. Additionally, their movement on the ship caused the oarsmen to have greater difficulty in regard to efficient rowing. Further, they took up large amounts of space which the hoplites would require to defend the ship.

Hoplites

Once the ships came into close contact, both sides began to attempt to board and commandeer the enemy ships. This duty was left to the hoplites on board. The hoplites on the ship were used as either a boarding party or to prevent enemies from boarding their own ship. While the oarsmen were rowing, the hoplites remained seated in order that the ship did not roll.¹⁹¹ The Athenians usually kept around 10 hoplites on board while other Greek navies tended to have around 40 of them.¹⁹² The Athenians used fewer hoplites for a few reasons. First, less weight meant that the ship was lighter and therefore easier to maneuver.¹⁹³ Second, the Athenians focused on ramming rather than boarding, so the hoplites on board were only necessary for defending the ship from enemy boarding parties in case their ship became stuck after a successful ram.¹⁹⁴ Since the hoplites wore their full armour, falling into the water was incredibly dangerous. The weight of the armour would make it difficult for the hoplite to swim to safety. In the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians more likely had 40 hoplites on board, much like their Syracusan

¹⁹¹ Fields (2007), 15.

¹⁹² Fields (2007), 15.

¹⁹³ Fields (2007), 15.

¹⁹⁴ Fields (2007), 15-16.

counterparts, since they intended to fight in the same manner as the other navies of Greece. It is quite possible that only 10 of the hoplites on each of the 110 Athenian triremes had any experience as marines (*epibatai*) when it came to fighting on ships.¹⁹⁵ Regardless of the actual general training and skill of the hoplites, it seems that around 3/4 of the Athenian hoplites had no boarding experience.¹⁹⁶ We can infer from Xenophon that Athenian hoplite training was particularly lax. Xenophon wrote:

(When) will the Athenians train (just as the Spartans do),
(the Athenians) who not only neglect good health, but
mock those who cultivate their bodies? (Xen. *Mem.*
3.5.15)¹⁹⁷

Later, Xenophon's Socrates says:

Because the city does not train (men) publicly for war, on
account of this, one ought not to be negligent in private, but
rather to take care (of his training) not any less (Xen. *Mem.*
3.12.5)¹⁹⁸

This is not to say that the Athenians did not have skilled hoplites, but if the men were not training fully for land combat, the expectation that they would be acclimated to naval combat is quite unlikely. This would certainly lead to an increase in mistakes on the Athenian side. Some men would fail to board the ship properly and fall into the sea. Unless the soldier fell near the shore, his fate was surely sealed. Other hoplites who did successfully board the enemy ship were still disadvantaged. Those without experience

¹⁹⁵ As per standard Athenian custom. See Fields (2007), 14.

¹⁹⁶ If we assume that the Athenians had put 40 hoplites on the deck, and the Athenians usually only used 10 hoplites per trireme, it stands to reason that 30 out of the 40 hoplites have had little to no naval experience.

¹⁹⁷ Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.15. σωμασκήσουσιν οὕτως, οἱ οὐ μόνον αὐτοὶ εὐεξίας ἀμελοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐπιμελομένων καταγελῶσι;

¹⁹⁸ Xen. *Mem.* 3.12.5. χρῆ, ὅτι οὐκ ἀσκεῖ δημοσίᾳ ἡ πόλις τὰ πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἰδίᾳ ἀμελεῖν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲν ἦττον ἐπιμελεῖσθαι.

were not used to fighting on an unstable platform. The stability of the ship would become even more compromised when there were a number of hoplites attempting to board simultaneously. The inexperienced hoplites might lose their balance and simply fall to the deck, putting them in a dire situation, or fall off the trireme entirely and perish.

Another issue was the ineffectiveness of the grapnels used by the Athenians. Since the Syracusans witnessed the Athenians preparing grapnels, they equipped their ships with animal hides. This made it more difficult for the grapnels to hook onto the outrigger of the Syracusan triremes. Thus, boarding the enemy ship became a more hazardous affair. The Athenians had to rely on the boats being locked together by ramming. Thucydides never clarifies whether the Athenians used animal hides to protect their own outriggers and the *thranitai*. In the previous naval battle, the Athenians did not have this protection (Thuc. 7.40.5). After the capture of the storehouse, it stands to reason that the Athenians were not using animal hides. If the Athenians did not have animal hides, this means that the Syracusans could use their grapnels and link to the Athenian ships on their terms.

A final issue for the Athenians, which would likely have the greatest effect on the hoplites and oarsmen, was the lack of provisions. The famous maxim that “an army marches on its stomach”¹⁹⁹ was no less true here. Fatigue would set in quickly and the troops would be less effective overall. Conversely, the Syracusans were almost certainly well fed, and thus they would not suffer fatigue as quickly. From the trials of the

¹⁹⁹ Jacob (2006). A maxim attributed to either Napoleon Bonaparte or Friedrich the Great.

Olympias, we have learned that the rowers would drink roughly 1 litre of water per hour of rowing.²⁰⁰ However, this amount could be reduced if sodium was included in the water.²⁰¹ It is possible that the ancient triremes kept salt on board for this purpose.²⁰² Owing to the dire position of the Athenians, it is unknown whether they would have been able to supply their rowers and other troops with sufficient amounts of water. It is almost certain that the Syracusans would have had far more access to safe drinking water, and would be less likely to become dehydrated. Thus, the longer the battle continued, the more disadvantaged the Athenians became. Both Thucydides and Diodorus point out that the battle raged for a very long time (Thuc. 7.71.5; Diod. 13.16.17). The Athenians were attempting to win a quick victory in order to escape the harbour. The Syracusans simply needed to block the Athenians from succeeding to obtain their objective. With the Athenians' lack of provisions, they would quickly begin to suffer the effects of dehydration, and their effectiveness as a fighting unit would degrade. On the other hand, the well fed Syracusans could certainly maintain their energy for a longer period of time.

After describing the efforts of the hoplites on the deck, Thucydides writes a perplexing sentence:

In many places, it happened that – on account of the narrow space to ram against others, and on the other hand, to be rammed by others, two ships and – and it is possible that it is more than two ships – become entangled around one ship by constraint. And it is for the helmsmen to attend to guard

²⁰⁰ Morrison (2000), 238.

²⁰¹ Fields (2007), 41.

²⁰² Fields (2007), 41.

here and attack there, not in one place, but rather in many places from all sides (Thuc. 7.70.6).²⁰³

How are we supposed to imagine this? The statement illustrates the absolute chaos unfolding in the harbour. However, the actual mechanics described in this sentence are quite confusing. Triremes would certainly become entangled during combat. It seems that hoplites on a single trireme were both boarding another ship while having their own ship boarded. Utter confusion would take hold of hoplites who were inexperienced with respect to boarding enemy ships. It is difficult to determine whether this would have been a greater issue for the Athenians or the Syracusans. However, I would argue that the Athenians would have come off worse from these confrontations. For the Athenians, since their hoplites were used to defending against boarding parties, they might have had more success preventing their ship from being overtaken. On the other hand, the vast majority of Athenian hoplites were unfamiliar with boarding an enemy ship, and many had no experience fighting on a trireme at all. These men would be in a state of confusion and may have even been more of a detriment to the Athenian cause than a benefit. The Syracusans, living in Magna Graecia, would be used to both the attacking and defending in this form of naval combat. Their overall experience in this form of warfare would lead to a more organized and thus a more effective force.

²⁰³ Thuc. 7.70.6. *ξυνετύγγανέ τε πολλαχοῦ διὰ τὴν στενοχωρίαν τὰ μὲν ἄλλοις ἐμβεβληκέναι, τὰ δὲ αὐτοῦς ἐμβεβλησθαι, δύο τε περὶ μίαν καὶ ἔστιν ἢ καὶ πλείους ναῦς κατ' ἀνάγκην ξυνηρτῆσθαι, καὶ τοῖς κυβερνήταις τῶν μὲν φυλακῆν, τῶν δ' ἐπιβουλήν, μὴ καθ' ἓν ἕκαστον, κατὰ πολλὰ δὲ πανταχόθεν, περιεστάναι.*

The Din of Battle

Next, Thucydides points out that:

The great din from many ships crashing together caused consternation and at the same time caused a deprivation of the hearing of orders which the helmsmen uttered (Thuc. 7.70.6).²⁰⁴

Therefore, it became an exercise in futility for the oarsmen to follow orders because they were unable to hear the commands. It is possible that the other members of the ship who were not engaged in battle became message runners for the helmsman. The only people left on the ship who were not actively involved in either repairs, fighting, or maneuvering were the trierarch, bow officer and the double-pipe player; these men could be used as messengers for the *kubernetes*. The trierarch was the man who paid for the maintenance and outfitting of the ship.²⁰⁵ This was a liturgy and thus the trierarch was of the Athenian elite.²⁰⁶ While the name trierarch suggests that he was the legitimate commander of the ship, this was not accurate. The helmsman was the individual who was really in control of the trireme. The trireme double-pipe player (*auletes*) was used to keep timing for the rowers.²⁰⁷ However, Aristophanes mentions that the oarsmen also kept time with their own chants, specifically ‘*o op op op op*’ (Aristoph. *Frogs*, 208) and ‘*rhyppapai*’ (Aristoph. *Frogs*, 1073). Thus, well-trained rowers could function under the orders of the *thranitai* who could still see the water. The *auletes* was essentially an assistant to the helmsman, and kept time based on the decisions of the helmsman. He would likely

²⁰⁴ Thuc. 7.70.6. καὶ τὸν κτύπον μέγαν ἀπὸ πολλῶν νεῶν ξυμπιπτουσῶν ἔκπληξιν τε ἅμα καὶ ἀποστέρησιν τῆς ἀκοῆς ὧν οἱ κελευσταὶ φθέγγονται παρέχειν.

²⁰⁵ Morrison (2000), 109.

²⁰⁶ Morrison (2000), 109.

²⁰⁷ Morrison (2000), 113.

remain under the deck with the rowers.²⁰⁸ The bow officer (*prorates* referring to the bow of the ship, not the archery weapon) was a lookout while the ship was sailing.²⁰⁹ A vase²¹⁰ shows the *prorates* looking sternwards, which suggests that he kept in communication with the helmsman, in order to keep him informed of potential dangers (both from enemies and nature).²¹¹ It stands to reason that these men could also communicate with each other through hand signals, not unlike soldiers in a fire fight in modern times. Thus, even when the sounds of battle were at their loudest, orders could still be followed. One can assume that either side had a particular natural advantage in this situation. The Athenians' better trained rowers could still perform their duties to some degree owing to their sailing experience. The Syracusan hoplites could act autonomously because of their knowledge of boarding. Also, the ability to hear orders was likely more difficult for rowers due to their position in the confined hull of the ship. On the other hand, the hoplites standing in the open air had a better chance of hearing direct orders. Thucydides says that the men could not hear the orders of boatswains (Thuc. 7.70.6; Diod. 13.16.5).²¹² This suggests that he means that particularly the rowers had trouble hearing commands, since it was the duty of a boatswain to be a medium between the helmsman and the rowers. The rowers were in a semi-enclosed space and thus the sound of the water splashing, the crashing of ships, and the various yells of men, allied and hostile, would have merged into a grand cacophony that would have drowned out any clarity of orders. Since the Great Harbour did not allow for advanced naval

²⁰⁸ Morrison (2000), 129.

²⁰⁹ Morrison (2000), 112.

²¹⁰ See Figure 10: An Attic Black Figure vase showing the position of the helmsman and the bow officer.

²¹¹ Morrison (2000), 256.

²¹² Plutarch does not include this detail.

maneuvers owing to space constrictions, any advantages that the Athenian oarsmen might have had were nullified. Though the Athenians were more likely to be able to keep time while rowing, it was not really important when collision with other ships was a certainty in such a small space.

Generals

Thucydides mentions the actions of the generals of either side (Thuc. 7.70.8).²¹³

He states:

Moreover, the generals of either side, if they were to see any ship anywhere backing water not by necessity, calling again and again the trierarch by name, the Athenian generals asked if they withdraw, because they believe the land to be of the most hostility now more their own than the sea which Athens procured for itself through no little toil. On the other hand the Syracusan generals asked if the men knew clearly that the Athenians were eager to flee in any manner, they would flee these ones who were fleeing (Thuc. 7.70.8).²¹⁴

The exhortations of the generals played a large role in the overall morale of the troops, as well as enforcing bravery. While the remarks are generic encouragement that would persuade the soldiers to carry on the fight, I think the aspect of shaming was far more important for the battle. When a general saw his own ships being routed, he called out the name of the trierarch and chastised him for cowardice (Thuc. 7.70.8). Calling out the

²¹³ Diodorus' account is far more ambiguous. There is the same chastisement of wavering triremes, but it is not clear which people are shouting this abuse (Diod. 13.17.1). Plutarch only speaks about the emotions of the spectators (presumably from both the Athenians and Syracusans (Plut. *Nic.* 25.1).

²¹⁴ Thuc. 7.70.8. καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ προσέτι ἐκατέρων, εἴ τινά που ὀρῶεν μὴ κατ' ἀνάγκην πρύμναν κρούμενον, ἀνακαλοῦντες ὀνομαστί τὸν τριήραρχον ἠρώτων, οἱ μὲν Ἀθηναῖοι εἰ τὴν πολεμιοτάτην γῆν οἰκειότεραν ἤδη τῆς οὐ δι' ὀλίγου πόνου κεκτημένης θαλάσσης ἡγούμενοι ὑποχωροῦσιν, οἱ δὲ Συρακόσιοι εἰ οὗς σαφῶς ἴσασι προθυμωμένους Ἀθηναίους ἀντὶ τρόπῳ διαφυγεῖν, τούτους αὐτοὶ φεύγοντας φεύγουσιν.

name of the trierarch was simply a way to identify the ship in question. We know in Greek society that shaming someone was the primary means for maintaining social control and cohesion.²¹⁵ When a trierarch was shamed, by extension the bravery of every man on the ship was questioned. Thus, the men were compelled to continue fighting lest they dishonoured themselves and the other men aboard the ship in the eyes of the other allied ships. While shaming undoubtedly stopped ships from being routed, there was a limit to how long a crew could fight in losing circumstances. Eventually, no amount of shaming or encouragement would prevent a crew from refusing to follow orders.

Troops on the Shore

The troops on the shore seem to have provided the same benefits to the triremes at sea as the generals, but at the same time, could also be damaging to morale. Thucydides reports that the men on the shore shouted statements of joy when they saw their side winning (Thuc. 7.71.3). On the other hand, when the men on the shore witnessed their side faring badly, they started to proclaim that all hope was lost (Thuc. 7.71.3). Surely, this would have had a negative effect on the morale of the men on the trireme. Again, it must be questioned whether the men on the ships could hear the laments and cheers of the men on the shore. One could conjecture that the men on the decks could hear but the rowers would be oblivious to any comments owing to the aforementioned din that drowned out the sound.²¹⁶ Thucydides' statement at 7.70.6 suggests that it was only the rowers who could not hear anything. The men on the shore provided other benefits

²¹⁵ Lyons (2011), 358.

²¹⁶ See the Din of Battle section in Chapter 2: The Battle in the Great Harbour.

though. As stated in the Forced Beaching section, the men could push friendly triremes back into the water. They could also attack enemy ships that beached near them. This gave the Syracusans a distinct advantage. The Syracusans controlled a larger section of the harbour, and based on that information alone, it was more likely that ships would beach in areas that they control. Since the Syracusans held the mouth of the harbour and the areas closest to the mouth, and the Athenians only possessed the area farthest from the mouth of the harbour, some assumptions can be made. The battle began at the mouth of the harbour where the blockade had been established and the Corinthian, Pythen, was in position with his triremes and it moved back into the harbour as time progressed (Thuc. 7.70.2). It was far more likely that ships would beach in areas that were occupied by Syracusan forces. We can conclude that there was a higher instance of ships beaching in Syracusan territory, and the advantages that came with this gave the Syracusans an edge in regard to the outcome of battle.

Unanswered Questions

The Athenian objective, while seemingly clear, was actually quite troublesome and was never actually spelled out in our sources. At the most basic level, the Athenians intended to escape the Great Harbour of Syracuse and to come to the port of Catane. However, what was planned for the troops who remained on the shore at Syracuse? The distance from Syracuse to Catane is between 60 and 70 kilometers.²¹⁷ Thus, even at a full

²¹⁷ See Figure 11: The distance between Syracuse and Catane.

sailing speed, the journey would take at least 4-5 hours.²¹⁸ However, when we factor in the added weight of the extra troops on the deck, the weakened state of the oarsmen, and the waterlogged ships, the progress would have been much slower. It seems that the best course of action would be to collect the Athenians on the shore before the triremes left the Great Harbour, provided that the Athenians did not plan to abandon the troops to a grizzly fate. To do this successfully, the Athenians would have had to obtain a total victory. They would have needed to keep as many ships in working order as possible to transport the troops. They must have hoped to break the blockade and hold the entry of the harbour open. They must have planned to win a decisive victory and control the entire harbour which would have allowed ships to come to the Athenian controlled section of the Great Harbour and load up the troops to sail away.

Conclusion

While one cannot say for certain why the Athenians lost the battle in the Great Harbour, I believe that using the *Face of Battle* approach, I have given a reasonable explanation for the defeat. When the battle ended, the Athenians still had more triremes than the Syracusans, but the rate of loss was far higher for the Athenian navy. The Athenians saw that there was no chance to reach the objective of breaking the blockade and controlling the Great Harbour. If the battle had continued, it is safe to assume that the Athenians would have been utterly destroyed. Certainly there are many issues that can never be resolved simply because we do not have the necessary source material. Yet,

²¹⁸ If we assume a speed of 8 knots and the distance covered is roughly 37.8 nautical miles, then the journey would take 4.7 hours.

when we bring to bear the knowledge that we have regarding ancient naval warfare, it becomes clearer how the preeminent navy of Greece was soundly defeated by the Syracusans. The Athenians were disadvantaged by a few factors. First, the narrow space of the harbour nullified the superior ability of the Athenian oarsmen. Second, the Athenians were forced to fight in a manner that went against their standard practice. Third, the lack of provisions left the Athenians in a weaker state. Fourth, the quick modifications made by the Syracusans counteracted the Athenian preparations. Finally, when ships were beached by the enemy, there was a greater chance that a ship would land on an area of the shore controlled by the Syracusans. When we consider these factors, it is clear why the Athenians were completely outclassed by the Syracusans.

Chapter 3: The Athenian Retreat

Οὐδείς γὰρ οὕτω ἀνόητός ἐστι ὅστις πόλεμον πρὸ εἰρήνης αἰρέεται· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ οἱ παῖδες τοὺς πατέρας θάπτουσι, ἐν δὲ τῷ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας (Hdt. 1.87).

Aftermath of the Naval Defeat

The Athenians were utterly demoralized after the crushing victory of the Syracusans in the Great Harbour. The decision was made to march through the Sicilian hinterlands (Thuc. 7.72.5).²¹⁹ However, they did not arrive at this decision easily. Demosthenes thought it would be best to man the ships immediately and reattempt to escape the harbour (7.72.3). In Thucydides' account, Nicias agreed with Demosthenes, but the troops refused the orders (Thuc. 7.72.4).²²⁰

At this point, the Athenian oarsmen were about to mutiny. Jordan argues that the fleet mutinied, but not the army.²²¹ However, I would think that it would be more than sailors that were refusing the orders. Since the triremes were packed with hoplites and light infantry, it stands to reason that these men would be weary of attempting to flee by ship a second time as well. Ultimately, the threat of a mutiny was enough to convince Nicias that the soldiers must march inland. Hornblower makes the astute observation that sailors were considered to be anarchic and prone to mutiny, citing Thuc. 8.84.3, where Thucydides says the following:

²¹⁹ Diodorus, while at first suggesting a vague location of “an allied city” (18.2), later clarifies that the goal is to reach Catane (18.6).

²²⁰ Diodorus says, conversely, that it was the idea of Nicias to march instead of manning the ships, and the troops and presumably, Demosthenes, assented to this plan (13.18.2). Plutarch makes no mention of this exchange.

²²¹ Jordan (2000), 74.

The multitude of the soldiers, when they saw, just as sailors (do), they rushed, dashing forth toward Astyochos so as to throw (missiles at him).²²²

This suggests that sailors are perceived to be more mutinous than other unit types. This might, of course, simply reflect the bias of the aristocratic Thucydides against the lower-class oarsmen. The other issue to consider is that the Athenians were using a multi-national force, and thus there are bound to be problems - especially from men who had lost faith in the Athenian cause and were forced by the Athenians to join the expedition in the first place. This is also important when we consider the retreat, as some men had essentially become hostile to the Athenians, and thus would have been less likely to assist an Athenian when necessary.

The historian, Diodorus, claims that the blockade had been broken, and thus it was simply a matter of sailing through the harbour and avoiding enemy ships. However, if the Syracusans saw the Athenians outfitting their ships once again, they would have certainly followed suit, and the Athenians would have been forced to engage in another naval battle where the numerical advantage that they previously maintained would have been largely diminished. The Athenians would have had 60 ships and would have come against nearly 50 Syracusan triremes. In the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians had outnumbered the Syracusans 110 to 76 in terms of the number of triremes and were still soundly beaten. It stands to reason that if another naval battle had ensued, the Athenians would again have suffered defeat.

²²² Thuc. 8.84.3 τὸ δὲ πλῆθος τῶν στρατιωτῶν ὡς εἶδον, οἷα δὴ ναῦται, ὄρμησαν ἐκτραγέντες ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀστυόχον ὥστε βάλλειν·

The decision to march, however, forced the Athenians to destroy their ships or to cede them to the Syracusans, which greatly lessened their chances of ever escaping Sicily and returning to the Greek mainland. The sick and injured begged not to be left behind by their comrades (Thuc. 7.75.3-4; Plut. *Nic.* 25.3).²²³ This fact can help to explain why the Athenians spent the entire day after the battle at the shore. Men did not want to abandon their wounded comrades and relatives.²²⁴ The issue was that the Athenians could not afford to carry the wounded for the entire march. As Sternberg notes, their number of pack animals and carts were likely severely limited because the attack on Sicily began as a naval expedition.²²⁵ Therefore, animals or carts could not really be used to carry the injured at an acceptable pace, especially when the rough terrain ahead was considered. It is certainly possible that some of the sick or wounded pushed on and travelled with the retreating army. Further, the dead were not collected from the harbour (Thuc. 7.75.3; Plut. *Nic.* 25.3).²²⁶ The standard Greek practice was to send a herald to ask the victors to allow the defeated to collect their dead (Thuc. 4.44.5).²²⁷ A comparison can be made with this situation and the events at Athens during the plague. Thucydides says:

For, the plague pressing exceedingly heavily, the men turned themselves toward indifference to religious customs and sacred things alike, not having control of what would come to pass. All customs concerning burial which they used before were thrown into disorder and they buried the dead as they were able. Many, by lack of necessary (means

²²³ Diodorus does not mention this point, but, he is less interested in the *pathos* of the Athenian army than Thucydides is.

²²⁴ Sternberg (1999), 196-99.

²²⁵ Sternberg (1999), 197.

²²⁶ Again, Diodorus does not report this event.

²²⁷ Thucydides' comments at 4.44.5 suggest that it was common practice to send a herald to form a truce so that the defeated party could collect their dead.

of burial) on account of many of their own that had died already, turned toward shameful methods of burial. For having first come toward pyres which belonged to others who heaped it, they, having placed the corpse of their own upon (the pyre of another), light it from underneath. Having cast the body - which they carried - of their own from above upon the other one that was burning, they departed (2.52.3).²²⁸

Thucydides paints this event at Athens as a disgrace to Athenian moral character. He notes that people became greedy and dishonourable (Thuc. 2.53.1). It indicates that improper treatment of corpses was a sign of decline both during the plague and after the Battle in the Great Harbour. Ultimately, it speaks to the complete demoralization of the Athenian troops.

Both Thucydides and Diodorus recount that the Athenians delayed their march due to a trick employed by the Syracusans (Thuc. 7.73.3-4; Diod. 13.18.3-5).²²⁹ The Syracusans, specifically Hermocrates, sent men to the Athenian camp and told them not to march because the Syracusans were already blocking the roads. Hermocrates had insisted that the Syracusans begin to fortify the major roads immediately, but his request was denied with the explanation that the Syracusan soldiers would refuse (Thuc. 7.73.1-2). We see the Syracusans and Athenians on opposite ends of the spectrum – one group

²²⁸ Thuc. 2.52.3. ὑπερβιαζομένου γὰρ τοῦ κακοῦ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένωνται, ἐς ὀλιγωρίαν ἐτράποντο καὶ ἱερῶν καὶ ὁσίων ὁμοίως. νόμοι τε πάντες ξυνεταράχθησαν οἷς ἐχρῶντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς, ἔθαπτον δὲ ὡς ἕκαστος ἐδύνατο. καὶ πολλοὶ ἐς ἀναισχύντους θήκας ἐτράποντο σπάνει τῶν ἐπιτηδείων διὰ τὸ συχνοῦς ἤδη προτεθνάναι σφίσιν· ἐπὶ πυρᾶς γὰρ ἀλλοτρίας φθάσαντες τοὺς νήσαντας οἱ μὲν ἐπιθέντες τὸν ἑαυτῶν νεκρὸν ὑψῆπτον, οἱ δὲ καιομένου ἄλλου ἐπιβαλόντες ἄνωθεν ὃν φέροισεν ἀπῆσαν.

²²⁹ Diodorus differs from Thucydides' account in a small way. In Thucydides, Gylippus urged the Syracusans to block the passes, but the Syracusans were celebrating a festival of Heracles and thus, Hermocrates came up with the idea of tricking the Athenians. In Diodorus, Hermocrates was the man who both urged the Syracusans to act and when denied employed the deception. Further, Diodorus does not mention the celebrations. Instead, he reasons that the generals would not agree to send out the armies because they had been exhausted by the day of fighting. In reality, both authors' reasons likely played a part in the decision, and both are valid explanations.

drunken with victory, the other group utterly depressed in defeat – but both unwilling to follow orders. The Athenians were fooled into believing that the men sent by Hermocrates were friends of Athens and were speaking with the best interest of the Athenians in mind. In reality, the Syracusans were engaged in a drunken revelry to celebrate Hercules and also their recent victory in the Great Harbour (Thuc. 7.73.2). Diodorus claims that the Athenians would have escaped safely had the deceit not taken place.

This statement may seem exaggerated when we consider some of the factors. Diodorus states that the Athenians were heading towards Catane, north of Syracuse. In order to reach Catane, the Athenians would have to march west and then head north either through or around *Monte Climiti* to avoid Syracusan detection. If they attempted to march directly north, the Athenians would pass directly beside Syracuse. The path directly north would have required a march that is greater than 50km. Can one expect that the Athenians could have made such a march in the darkness in any reasonable length of time? The Athenians were hungry, some were sick, and the soldiers were weary from the naval battle. Xenophon's *Anabasis* claims that a march of 360 stades is a three day journey. Depending on the measurement used, this is roughly 60 km. Thus, an army would travel around 20 km per day. The Athenians would require 3 days of marching simply to reach Catane. One would think that the Syracusan cavalry would have been able to catch up and harass the Athenians long before they could reach their destination. The Syracusan cavalry could harass the Athenian troops in order to slow their progress. This would have allowed infantry units to catch up to the fleeing army. While these factors make it seem unlikely that the Athenians could have avoided the Syracusans

completely, there are a few reasons why Diodorus may be correct in his claim. First, the Athenians would have begun their march during the night while the Syracusans were celebrating in a drunken revel. We know that on the fifth night of the retreat, the Athenians were able to escape during the night and left the Syracusans completely unaware. Thus, if the Athenians had left on the evening of the naval battle with due care, they might have been able to march without Syracusan detection. Further, the geography of Sicily provides some advantages for the Athenians. If they could have made it to the Acraean heights, they would have found themselves on a plateau that was difficult for cavalry to access without traveling far north of Syracuse and then heading east and south. The Syracusans would have had their speed advantage somewhat negated by this. Moreover, the Athenians would have become more difficult to track. An early start may have provided unforeseen advantages in the days to come. As we will see on the first day of the march when the Athenians came into contact with Syracusan hoplites who had already drawn up into battle and thus presumably in a phalanx, their progress was delayed (Thuc. 7.78.3). If the Athenians had left during the night, would they have been able to bypass this confrontation entirely? To compound matters, the Athenians remained at the harbour for two more days, which gave the Syracusans time to set up defensive points along strategic routes. The delay was for a few reasons. While Hermocrates' successful ruse was what prevented the Athenians from leaving during the night, the entire next day and evening were wasted by the Athenian army. Thucydides lays out the issues quite clearly.

First, it is evident that the Athenians feared what was ahead, knowing that the march would involve fighting their way through Syracusan forces (Thuc. 7.75.4; Plut.

Nic.26.3), and thus would have had feelings of despair considering how the Syracusans had completely turned the tides of the war after the arrival of Gylippus. Second, many soldiers did not want to abandon friends or relatives who were not physically able to join the retreat (Thuc. 7.75.3-4; Plut. *Nic.* 26.3). Third, the Athenians were in great need of food (Thuc 7.75.5; Plut. *Nic.* 26.3). Thucydides focused on the mourning of the Athenians in regard to the loss of their comrades (which certainly played a large role in the collective mental state and furthers Thucydides' concentration on *pathos*). However, the lack of provisions is the most damning for the Athenians. Considering that the hoplites would have to march in full gear because of the necessity to be prepared for Syracusan assaults, they would be marching in the hot Syracusan sun, which would require a great amount of energy, especially when the hoplites had to attack and defend. Further, the Athenians were forced to watch the Syracusans gather the Athenian ships (Thuc. 7.74.2), and saw that the corpses of their companions lay unburied on the shore. Thucydides explains that the Athenians were so distraught by their defeat that they did not even bother to ask for permission to bury their corpses (Thuc. 7.72.2). Both of these events would have certainly increased the despair of the army, since the loss of ships made it clear that the Athenians' chances of escaping Sicily were limited, and the unburied dead were an affront to Greek religious sensibilities.

Athenian Troop Numbers

The main point of this section is to gain a better understanding of what the actual body of men would look like marching through the Sicilian hinterlands. To do this,

however, we need a solid estimate of the number of hoplites, since the hoplites were the troops within which the rest of the men were contained. Thucydides writes:

The army marched, ordered in a hollow rectangle, the army of Nicias leading and the army of Demosthenes following. The hoplites held the baggage-carriers and the majority of the throng within (Thuc. 7.78.2).²³⁰

The size of the 2 hollow boxes is tied to the body of hoplites which create the ‘outside’ of the box.

At the beginning of the march, Thucydides claims:

They looked like nothing other than a city either having been forced to surrender or having retreated, and this was not a small city, for the number of the whole throng that was marching was no less than 4 myriads (40 000) (Thuc. 7. 75.5).²³¹

While Thucydides is rather thorough in terms of the original expeditionary corps sent in 415 BC, he is not straightforward in regard to the number of casualties, the number of camp followers, the number of slaves, or the number of troops gathered as Athenian allies in Sicily. Thucydides concerned himself with actual combatants rather than the massive number of support personnel that would be required to assist the combat force. This has been an issue that has troubled scholars, and I have attempted to come to a suitable figure.²³² First, it is necessary to tally the number of troops that joined the expedition according to Thucydides, while subtracting the number of casualties that are provided.

²³⁰ Thuc. 7.78.2. τὸ δὲ ἐχώρει ἐν πλαισίῳ τεταγμένον, πρῶτον μὲν ἡγούμενον τὸ Νικίου, ἐφεπόμενον δὲ τὸ Δημοσθένους· τοὺς δὲ σκευοφόρους καὶ τὸν πλεῖστον ὄχλον ἐντὸς εἶχον οἱ ὀπλίται.

²³¹ Thuc. 7. 75.5. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο ἢ πόλει ἐκπεπολιορκημένη ἐώκεσαν ὑποφευγούση, καὶ ταύτη οὐ σμικρᾶ· μυριάδες γὰρ τοῦ ζύμπαντος ὄχλου οὐκ ἐλάσσους τεσσάρων ἅμα ἐπορεύοντο.

²³² See Appendix A for a chart that gives a breakdown of Athenian and allied troop numbers.

After this point, all numbers become conjecture, but some estimates can be made. In Appendix A, I have noted a figure of 34179 men for the retreat plus the uncounted light armed troops , hoplites, cooks, masons, carpenters, merchant ship crews, merchants and traders that may have become trapped with the Athenians, minus the unaccounted number of light armed and cavalrymen casualties, deserters, captives and deaths caused by illness. Of course, large amounts of conjecture are required. However, many scholars fail to include the vast number of men required to support such a large body of troops. It seems quite possible that the number of troops could have ranged between 30 and 40 thousand.

To begin, even in the most recent commentary on book VII of Thucydides,²³³ there is no attempt to include the number of men for the 130 ships and the uncounted merchant ships that sail with the expedition (Thuc. 6.44.1). The crews of the ships as well as the cooks, masons and carpenters must be included. While certainly most merchants would have left long before the situation became so dire, it is possible that some merchants remained stuck with the Athenians and were forced into the retreat.

Second, the number of slave runaways seems to be exaggerated. Thucydides says that attendants had abandoned the Athenians before the Battle in the Great Harbour, and the majority after the defeat (Thuc. 75.5). However, there are no clear numbers for desertions. Moreover, Thucydides' account can be interpreted to mean that the majority of those who deserted left at this time (during or after the naval defeat), not necessarily

²³³ Hornblower (2010).

that the majority of attendants had fled. It is clear that hoplites and cavalry still had slaves since directly before mentioning the desertions, Thucydides reports that:

The hoplites and cavalrymen, contrary to their custom, (carried) their own food, some for lack of attendants, and others for distrust of their attendants. (Thuc. 7.75.5)²³⁴

Thus, it is clear that some hoplites and cavalry men still had attendants. I would assume that many of the slaves that fled had been owned by hoplites who died in the Battle in the Great Harbour or who were engaged in the naval battle. During this time, the slave could have planned his escape and ran away. However, the Athenians still had many hoplites on the shore, and these men would have certainly tried to prevent their own slaves from abandoning them, and might also have helped to prevent the slaves of others from fleeing. It is apparent that nearly every hoplite would have travelled with at least one slave in order to carry his arms.²³⁵ Thucydides (3.17.3) says that each hoplite in the garrison at Potidaea was paid two drachmae; one for himself and one for his servant. This suggests that each hoplite had an attendant and this was standard Athenian practice. If each hoplite and cavalryman had an attendant on the Sicilian Expedition, there would be more than 10000 slaves in Sicily, and it is very difficult to believe that the vast majority of these slaves completely disappeared from the Athenian camp.²³⁶ Further, trierarchs, being of the Athenian elite, would certainly have had a slave and likely more than one slave.

²³⁴ Thuc. 7.75.5. οἱ ὀπλίται καὶ οἱ ἵππῆς παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς αὐτοὶ τὰ σφέτερα αὐτῶν σιτία ὑπὸ τοῖς ὄπλοις, οἱ μὲν ἀπορία ἀκολούθων, οἱ δὲ ἀπιστία·

²³⁵ Hanson (1989), 62. Pritchett (1971), 49-51.

²³⁶ Hornblower (2010), 1064 cites van Wees number of 10000 slaves. This number is likely based on the number of hoplites as I have done in my estimation.

Another issue with the troop estimate is the argument in regard to exactly how many men could fit on either a fast trireme or a troop trireme. The general argument is that troop-carrying triremes were probably triremes that were undermanned in terms of rowers.²³⁷ I agree with this idea. Beloch believed that these triremes would have used 60 oarsmen. I argue that 62 oarsmen would have been used (a full set of *thranitai*), and in this way, the top level of the hull would have been filled with rowers who would have been able to see the water. The estimated number of hoplites that could have been carried on these troop carrying transports varies from 30²³⁸ to 85²³⁹ to 100²⁴⁰ men. If the trireme was only manned by *thranitai* as oarsmen, there would have been 108 available seats inside the trireme alone.

I think the one issue with these interpretations in regard to the Sicilian Expedition is that scholars would like to have every man seated comfortably. The Athenian objective was not to sail in comfort, but rather to get as many boots on the ground in Sicily as possible. Thus, it would be reasonable to have men on the deck that were not part of the standard crew. There were already 10 hoplite marines who were stationed on the deck at all times, so it is certainly feasible that other hoplites could have shared this burden. Further, other soldiers could have been sent on some of the other 130 *ploia* that sailed along with the triremes (Thuc. 6.44.1). Hornblower claims that 40 000 is “close to the

²³⁷ Hornblower (2010), 1063.

²³⁸ Morrison (2000), 226. However, Hornblower (2010), 1064, misinterprets this statement. Morrison is arguing that there would be 30 extra hoplites on the deck, in addition to the 10 *epibatai*. This does not account for the men that could be stationed within the hull of the ship.

²³⁹ Casson (1971), 93.

²⁴⁰ Böckh (1886), 348; Busolt (1904), 868f.; Van Wees (2004), 221f.

maximum which could have been conveyed on the 220 or so triremes”²⁴¹ However, this fails to account for the allies gathered in Italy and Sicily and also he does not seem to include the vast number of deck crews that were involved. Essentially, each ship had 16 men that are not accounted for by Hornblower.²⁴² I would think that even the fast trireme with a full complement of oarsmen (170), would still have added hoplites on the deck. There is no reason why each trireme could not have been carrying around 250 men (either citizens or slaves). This is likely how many men were on the ships in the Battle in the Great Harbour, and that was with the expectation of being rammed. When the Athenians were sailing to Sicily, they traveled near to the coasts in order to avoid rough waters. Thus, they sailed north up the eastern side of the Adriatic Sea, then west to the western side of the Adriatic Sea. Then, they would have sailed down the east coast of Italy in order to arrive at Sicily. Thus, the chances of men falling off the ship were quite low. Further, when we consider the attendants of the hoplites, there is no way that all of these men could have been sailing in comfort. Ultimately, I conclude that when we attempt to account for all of the variables, the total number of the men involved in the march could indeed have been between 30000 and 40000 men.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Hornblower (2010), 1065.

²⁴² Hornblower (2010), 1061-66. Hornblower does not mention the ship crews which would add around 3500 men in total.

²⁴³ Hornblower (2010), 1066. Van Wees argues that the number of 40 000 “might just be right, but only assume that around 10 000 Sicel allies...are to be included in the final *ochlos*.” Certainly some Sicels would remain with the Athenians, however, probably not a number of 10000. Based on my estimation, the number of Sicel troops does not need to be that large. See Appendix A for troop number calculations.

Logistics of the March

How are we to imagine the sight of such a massive force wandering through the roads and fields of Sicily? First, it is necessary to reflect on standard Greek marching procedure in order to see how the Athenian marching formation differed. Generally, the Greeks kept their forces split by unit type.²⁴⁴ However, what troops were in the van and in the rear was dependent upon the situation. For night marches, the troops tended to be organized from slowest to fastest, in which case, the hoplites would have led.²⁴⁵ In any situation, regardless of what troops led the army, baggage carriers tended to be kept between formations of armed men.²⁴⁶ In the Athenian retreat, we are dealing with a mob that was larger than the citizen population of most Greek poleis. The force was composed of hoplites, bowmen, slingers, javelin men, oarsmen and other naval units, slaves, and other miscellaneous units such as cooks and masons. When the Athenians were marching without fear of attack, the soldiers would have traveled in a loose formation that still allowed for quick maneuvering into a defensive formation. Thus, the largely unarmed oarsmen, other naval units, and slaves (baggage carriers) would have marched in a box of hoplites. This was standard military practice, where the weaker troops were surrounded by the stronger troops (Thuc. 7.77.2). Brasidas, in 423 BC, was the first general to use this formation (at least in our written records).²⁴⁷ Brasidas placed the hoplites on the outside of the box with his light armed troops within the box. He then had his youngest and fastest men charge out at the enemy when the enemy neared the ranks (Thuc.

²⁴⁴ Krentz (2007), 159.

²⁴⁵ Krentz (2007), 159.

²⁴⁶ Krentz (2007), 159.

²⁴⁷ Krentz (2007), 159.

4.125.2-3). Any hoplite was a stronger soldier, as he was one of the few with proper arms and armour. Much like Brasidas, the Athenians would certainly have kept their light armed troops closest to the hoplites with the rest of the throng enclosed within the box formation. The other men had limited or no protection and had to rely on the hoplites for their safety.

The army was split into two contingents; the van led by Nicias and the rear headed by Demosthenes. However, this formation was not conducive to fighting against cavalymen armed with javelins (or in fact any highly maneuverable troops armed with missiles) since it was difficult for the hoplites to engage with these fast moving troops. On the other hand, it was much better than marching in a thin column or having the men split up by unit type. In that case, the baggage carriers could have been targeted and harassed, making survival even more difficult. While the danger of quick javelin throwers, slingers, and archers is apparent for a squadron of heavy armoured hoplites (as the Spartans learn at Leuctra in 372BC), it is especially apparent in an army that was largely composed of men with improper defensive equipment. Javelins that were thrown over the heads of the defending hoplites would wreak havoc on the men in the centre of the box formation.

First, we must consider the number of hoplites that were involved in the march. Overall, 10950 hoplites joined the expedition along with an unspecified number of Thourian and Corcyrean hoplites and Sicel infantry.²⁴⁸ Using Ray's numbers, 3375

²⁴⁸ See Appendix A

hoplites were killed in land engagements.²⁴⁹ In the first 3 naval battles of the war, if we assume that the 10 *epibatai* were killed on each ship that was destroyed, 280 men were lost.²⁵⁰ However, in the Battle in the Great Harbour, if we suppose that there were 40 hoplites upon each ship and every hoplite on a destroyed ship was slain, there would have been 2000 Athenian hoplite casualties.²⁵¹ There were also an unspecified number of casualties caused by illness. In terms of the numbers however, there were 5655 hoplite deaths.²⁵² Thus, the Athenians would have been marching with roughly 5295 hoplites. Now, since these men were said to have formed two boxes, if each box employed the same number of hoplites, the number can be cut in half, with one half representing one hollow box. Thus, each box was composed of roughly 2647 hoplites. If I use the lower estimate of total troops on the march, there were 30000 men. Now, the number of hoplites must be subtracted, leaving 24705 men inside the boxes. Demosthenes had a greater number of men in his formation (Thuc. 7.80.4), so it is possible that Nicias' contingent had roughly 11500 troops while Demosthenes' formation held the rest. If the box is imagined to be 100 men wide, some assumptions can be supposed.²⁵³ For Nicias' group, his 11500 miscellaneous troops would have taken up exactly 125 rows.²⁵⁴ It is likely that the entirety of the box would have had hoplites stacked a few men deep. I am going to suppose that the Athenians would have kept 8 rows of hoplites at the front and

²⁴⁹ Ray (2009), 303.

²⁵⁰ See Appendix A.

²⁵¹ See Appendix A.

²⁵² See Appendix A.

²⁵³ Lee (2007), 155-159. Lee imagines that Xenophon's 10000 hoplites marched with a front of roughly 300 men wide. I think that this is simply too wide for Athenian purposes. Their front would be 600 m wide during standard marching. The rocky terrain during the march would cause many headaches when attempting to keep the march ordered and require constant shifting of men.

²⁵⁴ This is assuming 92 non-hoplites per row, with 4 hoplites on each side making a total of 100 men wide.

rear.²⁵⁵ Thus, in each box, 1600 hoplites can be counted in the front and rear. This still left roughly 1000 hoplites to cover the flanks of the box. If the sides were also covered by 4 columns of hoplites, the men in the middle would have had uniform coverage (as it would require about 1000 men to cover the 125 rows of men). Now, if we assume during normal marching that the men kept roughly two metres of both breadth and depth between them, each box would have been roughly 200 metres wide.²⁵⁶ In terms of depth, Nicias' contingent would have been roughly 282 metres in length. Demosthenes, on the other hand, needed to fit 13205 non-hoplites in his formation. Again, the width of the box would have probably been 100 men with 2 metres of breadth between each one. The depth of the formation would have probably included 8 rows of hoplites at the front, 8 rows of hoplites at the back and roughly 144 rows of men inside the box. Demosthenes' box would have needed 1152 hoplites to guard the side, which would have left him about 100 men short of uniform coverage. Demosthenes' contingent would have thus been roughly 200 metres wide by 320 metres deep. Once a threat was perceived, each box would have closed in a way that would leave 1 metre of space in circumference around each man. Thus, each box was effectively cut in half. Thus, each box would have been roughly 100 metres wide. Nicias' formation would have been 141 metres deep and Demosthenes' would have been 160 metres deep. What I have described is one

²⁵⁵ John Lee (2007), 155. Lee makes the same suggestion of an 8 rank front and rear in a hollow box formation for Xenophon's '10 000'. Lendle (1995), 163 also comes to this conclusion. Lee further argues that the flanks of the box are also stationed with 8 rows of men. However, Xenophon's '10 000' is referring strictly to hoplites. Nicias and Demosthenes simply do not have the man power to cover all of the unarmed troops with roughly half the number of hoplites. Therefore, I have argued that the flanks are only covered by 4 columns of hoplites or less. Further, Thucydides describes an Athenian hollow box (6.67.1) and it seems that the hoplites were also stacked 8 shields deep.

²⁵⁶ Lee (2007), 161. Lee imagines that there would be 2m of space in terms of depth in between each man, but only 1m in terms of lateral space between soldiers. I think when the men are not under direct assault, the men would also be spaced 2m apart laterally.

possibility. Since Thucydides and our other sources do not provide any specific information regarding either the width or the length of the boxes, this is strictly a conjecture. Ray believes that the two boxes combined would cover roughly 1km while marching.²⁵⁷ Imagining any sense of normal military order seems useless given the Athenian situation. At this point, the Athenians were simply trying to survive, so the box formations should be viewed as more of a mob than a disciplined military unit. Either way, such a vast mass of men would have been an impressive and intimidating sight.

How much food and water would have been required to nourish the retreating army? Ultimately, each man would have probably required roughly 2 litres of water per day in order to prevent dehydration. Thus, between 60 and 80 000 litres of water would have been consumed by the army on a daily basis. Water could be gathered at the rivers that the Athenians often pass (Anapus, Cacyparis), and also collected during the rain.

The amount of food required is a little bit tricky. Given the lack of supplies, the Athenians would likely be marching on a starvation diet. I think the amount of food offered by the Syracusans in the stone quarries is a good starting point. In the quarries, each man was given a pint of grain per day (Thuc.7.87.2). This seems to be the absolute minimal amount required. Thus, the Athenian army would consume 30 to 40000 pints of grain per day at the very minimum. When the Spartans were captured at Sphacteria, they were given 2 quarts (4 pints) of food per day (Thuc. 5.15.1). I think the Athenian diet

²⁵⁷ Ray (2009), 229. However, Ray uses the number of 40 000. I have chosen to go with a lower number. On the other hand, Ray provides each man with more space.

would be somewhere between these numbers. Food would be collected by foraging and by requisitioning supplies from houses and farms in Sicily.

Syracusan Strategy

For the Syracusans, the main goal was to either destroy or capture the Athenians. However, the latter was preferred because, in this way, they would encounter less risk and would profit from selling captives. In order to achieve this, the Syracusans simply needed to hinder the Athenians from reaching their destination through both shows of force and general harassment. The desired effect was to delay the Athenians until the point of starvation so that they would surrender. In this way, the Syracusans could obtain victory at low risk to their own lives. The Syracusans could not leave the Athenians to their own devices since this would have put their city in danger. If the Athenians arrived at a friendly polis, such as Catane, they could have potentially resupplied and attempted to besiege the Syracusans once again. Seeing how the Syracusans had been nearly forced to capitulate before the arrival of Gylippus because of the Athenian siege, the Syracusans must have realized that it was not in their best interest to allow a massive group of enemies to wander throughout Sicily. Thus, the only real options for the Syracusans were either to destroy the Athenian army or to force it to surrender. In terms of a cost-benefit analysis, the hardships and loss of life for the Syracusans would be greater bear if they were forced to engage with a refreshed Athenian coalition. Keeping these general strategies in mind, I will now lay out the essentials of land combat.

Essentials of Land Combat

In this section, I shall provide the information that is necessary to understand the engagements that take place during the Athenian retreat. Therefore, I intend to focus on the general equipment and tactics of hoplites, cavalry, and missile troops. Furthermore, I aim to elucidate the concerns that both armies would have in the current situation.

Hoplites

The hoplite panoply generally consisted of a breastplate, helmet, greaves, a spear, a shield, and a short sword.²⁵⁸ The actual make-up of the panoply differed in practice. Since hoplites were required to purchase their own gear, there would have certainly been differences in quality.²⁵⁹ The breastplate could be composed of either bronze, leather, or linen reinforced with leather and hides.²⁶⁰ The bronze breastplate was created by making a front half and a back half and then binding these two pieces together.²⁶¹ The breastplate provided suitable protection of the chest and stomach - and in some variations the groin - but seems to have left the neck largely exposed.²⁶² The purely bronze breastplate could have weighed over 15 kg depending on the materials added to reinforce the bronze.²⁶³ Not only was this cumbersome, but it caused increased heat in the summer and decreased warmth in the winter.²⁶⁴ On the other hand, the bronze breastplate was essentially impenetrable by any weapons employed on the battle field when we assume a thickness

²⁵⁸ Schwartz (2010), 95. See Figure 16: The Greek hoplite.

²⁵⁹ Lee (2007), 112.

²⁶⁰ Schwartz (2010), 66, 70-71. Lee (2007), 112.

²⁶¹ Schwartz (2010), 68. Lee (2007), 112.

²⁶² Schwartz (2010), 69-69. Lee (2007), 112.

²⁶³ Schwartz (2010), 95-96.

²⁶⁴ Schwartz (2010), 73-74.

of 2mm.²⁶⁵ Since the other breastplates were made of materials that decompose, it is impossible to know accurately the weight or protective capacity. However, it is safe to assume that the leather and linen cuirasses weighed less but provided less protection.

The hoplite shield (the *hoplon* or *aspis*) was a circular shield roughly 1m in diameter.²⁶⁶ The shield was made of thin wooden planks that were lathed and bound.²⁶⁷ The wood was generally covered with a thin layer of bronze (ca. 0.5 mm) in order to prevent the wood from splitting.²⁶⁸ Moreover, the bronze was effective for both stopping and deflecting arrows, especially with the concave nature of the shield. Much like the breastplate, the *hoplon* was basically impossible to pierce with conventional Greek weaponry.²⁶⁹ The soldier rested the shield on his arm and shoulder through two bands of bronze.²⁷⁰ One band was placed in the middle (*porpax*) while the other was placed on the far right (*antilabe*) of the shield in order to maximize control.²⁷¹ The shield likely weighed between 8 or 9 kg.²⁷²

The helmet was made of bronze.²⁷³ Some helmets provided some protection for the sides of the neck and face (such as the Corinthian helmet),²⁷⁴ while others were more like a metal cap (such as the Spartan *pilos*).²⁷⁵ The roundness of the helmet caused

²⁶⁵ Schwartz (2010), 80.

²⁶⁶ Schwartz (2010), 28. Lee (2007), 111.

²⁶⁷ Schwartz (2010), 29.

²⁶⁸ Schwartz (2010), 30.

²⁶⁹ Schwartz (2010), 35.

²⁷⁰ Schwartz (2010), 32.

²⁷¹ Schwartz (2010), 32.

²⁷² Schwartz (2010), 96. Lee (2007), 111. Lee argues the shield would weigh around 7kg.

²⁷³ Schwartz (2010), 55. Lee (2007), 113.

²⁷⁴ See Figure 12: The Corinthian helmet. Lee (2007), 113.

²⁷⁵ See Figure 13: The Pilos helmet. Lee (2007), 114.

weapons to glance off, and thus, the helmet did not need to be as thick as the breastplate.

The helmet weighed between 1 and 2 kg.²⁷⁶

The greaves weighed between 1.2 and 2.2 kg.²⁷⁷ The bronze was so thin that it was simply bent and placed around the shin with no need for binding.²⁷⁸ Some greaves only covered the shins while others covered the knees as well.²⁷⁹ The flanges of the greave would nearly meet at the back of the calf.²⁸⁰

The main offensive weapon of the hoplite was the spear (*dory*).²⁸¹ It had a spear head and a butt spike.²⁸² In this way, if one side of the spear were to shatter, the spear could simply be turned and used. Spears seem to have ranged from 6-10 feet²⁸³ and weighed less than 2.5 kg.²⁸⁴ The spear could be wielded in either an overhand or underhand fashion.²⁸⁵ Performing an underhanded stab provided less force, but the area of unprotected flesh was larger.²⁸⁶ The attacker would have attempted to pierce the enemy in the thigh or groin. This injury could very quickly lead to death.²⁸⁷ An overhand thruster would have tried to stab the enemy in the neck, which would have certainly been fatal.²⁸⁸

²⁷⁶ Schwartz (2010), 96 Lee (2007), 114.

²⁷⁷ Schwartz (2010), 96 Lee (2007), 114.

²⁷⁸ Schwartz (2010), 75-76. Lee (2007), 114.

²⁷⁹ Schwartz (2010), 77.

²⁸⁰ Schwartz (2010), 76.

²⁸¹ Lee (2007), 115.

²⁸² Matthew (2012), 1. Lee (2007), 115.

²⁸³ Matthew (2012), 1. Lee (2007), 115.

²⁸⁴ Schwartz (2010), 96. Lee (2007), 115.

²⁸⁵ Hunt, 115.

²⁸⁶ Hunt, 115.

²⁸⁷ Hunt, 115.

²⁸⁸ Hunt, 115.

A hoplite also carried a small sword used for slashing.²⁸⁹ The sword would have been used if the hoplite lost or broke his spear. A sword-wielding hoplite would have been at a great disadvantage against a man with a spear which had a much greater range.

One can see that the hoplite presented a nearly impenetrable front. However, the flanks and the backs of the hoplite provided larger areas of flesh to attack. Further, the weight²⁹⁰ of the hoplite armour made the hoplite incredibly slow in comparison to light armoured troops and also impeded his maneuverability. Thus, during the general harassments that took place during the Athenian march, the hoplites were most effective in providing defense by use of their shield, but in terms of offense, failed to impact the enemy in any meaningful way.

A scholarly debate rages regarding the fighting style of the Classical hoplite formation. The traditional orthodoxy has been that the hoplites fought in an extremely close formation with shields nearly touching or overlapping which essentially created an impenetrable wall of shields.²⁹¹ However, this description of combat has come under attack by scholars such as Hans van Wees, who questions how these mechanics could actually work while providing sufficient room for the hoplites to wield their weapons effectively.²⁹² In the traditional view, hoplite battles were largely decided by the ‘*othismos*’ (shoving).²⁹³ Here, the hoplites in close formation would push with their

²⁸⁹ Hunt, 115. Lee (2007), 115.

²⁹⁰ Schwartz (2010), 95-96. Schwartz calculates the full panoply as being at a minimum of 15kg and a maximum of 30kg. Lee (2007), 126. Lee claims a weight of 21kg.

²⁹¹ Hanson (1989), 28-29. See also Pritchett (1991), Lazenby (1993), Luginbill (1994).

²⁹² Van Wees (2004), 85.

²⁹³ Krentz (1985), 50.

shields against the back of the man in front of them and try to push the enemy back and break their balance, eventually forcing the enemy to retreat.²⁹⁴ Van Wees questions this with a few observations. First, he wonders how a deep formation could ever have been defeated by a shallow formation.²⁹⁵ If the shoving was the most important aspect of a hoplite battle, then the side with the greatest mass would always have had more force and thus would have been able to push the enemy army with ease. The Thebans used formations that ranged between 25 and 50 men deep.²⁹⁶ If this is the case, then how could they be defeated by Spartans in a rank that was 12 shields deep?²⁹⁷ On the other hand, why would a deep formation be used at all? Since the men in the backs of the ranks would have been essentially useless in battle, it makes sense that they would have been pushing the men in front of them.

Goldsworthy argues that the use of deep formations was mainly for marching purposes.²⁹⁸ He argues that a shallow formation would have covered exceptionally wide tracts of land that would have negatively affected the phalanx's attempt to march at the same pace.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, the use of deep formations could also have been used for intimidation purposes. A long column of hoplites might seem impenetrable to the enemy, and thus, have a psychological factor. Hanson, in *The Western Way of War*, concludes that the concavity of the hoplite shield was conducive to the idea of shoving

²⁹⁴ Krentz (1985), 50.

²⁹⁵ Van Wees (2004), 190.

²⁹⁶ Van Wees (2004), 185.

²⁹⁷ Van Wees (2004), 185.

²⁹⁸ Goldsworthy (1997), 5.

²⁹⁹ Goldsworthy (1997), 8.

the enemy army.³⁰⁰ Goldsworthy rebuts this by stating that the Macedonians did not use these concave shields. However, Polybius states that the back ranks in these armies pushed (Plb. 18.30.4).³⁰¹ Krentz concludes that the term '*othismos*' is taken too literally and should be considered more metaphorical in sense.³⁰² Goldsworthy also argues that the 'pushing' of the rear rank should be regarded as a use of force to keep the weaker forces in the middle from attempting to flee the battle.³⁰³

Recently, Matthew has argued that the stance of the hoplite should not be thought of facing forwards or sideways, but rather, standing at a 45 degree angle. In this way, he is able to strike a middle ground between scholars who favour the '*othismos*' and those who prefer the looser formation.

For the Athenian retreat, it is apparent that both interpretations of hoplite warfare could apply. The Athenians used a tight formation and the men in the back rows of the phalanx provided psychological 'weight'. The battles could have certainly ended in a shoving match. However, in the beginning of combat, enough room must have been provided for the hoplites to wield their weapons freely in the first 4 ranks. Athenians would have used the phalanx to force fords and in the attempt to break through the Syracusan defences at the Acraean Heights.

³⁰⁰ Hanson (1989), 66.

³⁰¹ Goldsworthy (1997), 12.

³⁰² Krentz (1985), 55.

³⁰³ Goldsworthy (1997), 12-13.

Cavalry

Horses seem not to have been used as a primary fighting force, but rather in support roles such as scouting, attacking flanks, pursuing fleeing hoplites, protecting their own hoplites while in retreat and harassing marching columns. This is largely because a cavalry rush against a line of prepared hoplites would have ended in disaster for the cavalry.³⁰⁴ A phalanx was equivalent to a line of pike men during the medieval period. Further, a horse would have instinctively avoided charging into a solid phalanx as John Keegan has argued convincingly in regard to the Battle of Agincourt in AD 1415.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, cavalry remained effective for attacking the flanks of an enemy as well as for pursuing fleeing combatants.

First, it is necessary to note the importance of cavalry in terms of the geography of Sicily. While the centre and northeast of Sicily are largely mountainous, the remainder of the island is filled with large plains.³⁰⁶ These areas were conducive to the fast movement afforded by horses. Thus, cavalry did not need be forced into narrow passages or rocky crags, but rather, could engage the enemy on smooth ground and used to their full advantage. However, “hilly or rough ground had the potential either to damage the horse or to reduce the security of the rider’s seat.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Spence (1993), 110.

³⁰⁵ Keegan (1976), 95-97.

³⁰⁶ See Figure 15: Map of the Athenian Retreat.

³⁰⁷ Spence (1993), 40-41.

The ancient Greek horse was protected by light cloth over the face, thighs, and chest.³⁰⁸ There were no stirrups,³⁰⁹ so the rider could not use a lance or stand up for greater leverage when hurling projectiles.³¹⁰ Further, in antiquity, horses were not shod. Xenophon recommended that a horse trainer has the equine step on small rocks to round the hooves (*Xen. Cav.* 1.16). However, like modern horse-riding, the ancient horse was outfitted with a saddle, albeit made of cloth.³¹¹

The rider wore a helmet, a breastplate, and knee-high boots.³¹² The cavalryman forwent a shield, but carried a sword, a spear, and javelins.³¹³ The shield, being between 7 and 9 kg, would likely have made it too difficult for a soldier to be able effectively to employ their weapons while also controlling the reins. The lack of stirrups compounded this issue since it required greater leg strength in order to maintain balance. The javelin could be used as a missile weapon, while the cavalryman also had a shorter spear to use as a lance.³¹⁴ However, when using a spear as a lance, the rider had to let go of the spear upon impact in order to prevent himself from falling off of his own horse due to the impact. This was because of the lack of stirrups which would have allowed the rider to

³⁰⁸ Hanson (2005), 223.

³⁰⁹ Hanson (2005), 223. Spence (1993), 104.

³¹⁰ Spence (1993), 104.

³¹¹ Sidnell (2006), 31.

³¹² Sidnell (2006), 30. Spence (1993), 31. Spence notes that by 399 BC, Syracusan cavalry was certainly equipped with at least a breastplate. It is quite possible that 14 years prior, this would have also been common.

³¹³ Hanson (2005), 223. Spence (1993), 49. However, Spence is quick to note that every cavalryman did not necessarily carry the same weapons, so some would not have a sword, etc.

³¹⁴ Hanson (2005), 223.

remain firmly in place. The sword was meant for close-quarters combat, where the rider could slash an enemy from the flank or from behind.³¹⁵

Rarely, Greek armies contained horse archers.³¹⁶ One can imagine the difficulty of attempting to draw a bow and fire an arrow accurately while riding a horse without stirrups. Only a highly trained horseman would have been capable of such a feat unless the horse came to a complete stop, which is unlikely. Halting the horse would have made the cavalry an easier target as well.

While pursuing the Athenians through Sicily, the Syracusan cavalry excelled at the harassment of Athenian forces. Since each cavalry unit only had a few javelins, their main effect was the causation of panic and delay since they were not able to attack the Athenians head-on and could not cause mass casualties owing to their limited projectiles. Further, cavalry was highly effective in terms of preventing the Athenians from foraging.³¹⁷ The Athenians could not split into small gathering parties because of the threat of cavalry (Thuc. 7.78.7). Small groups out of formation would be cut down by cavalry. Those who fell behind the main group of Athenians would also suffer a cruel fate at the hands of the cavalry. Thus, the Athenians were forced to remain in a relatively close formation. This in turn, made it difficult for the army to feed itself and allowed the Syracusans to easily keep track of the enemy.

³¹⁵ Hanson (2005), 223.

³¹⁶ The Athenians send 30 horse archers to Sicily at the beginning of 414BC (Thuc. 6.94.4).

³¹⁷ . Spence (1993), 31.

The Syracusans maintained roughly 1200 cavalry units,³¹⁸ but none of our sources state how many cavalrymen would be sent out on these missions. Regardless, we know that the Syracusans were able to keep the Athenians at bay in Catane by the mere threat of the cavalry during the early stages of the war.³¹⁹ It was only through trickery (and by sea) that the Athenians were able to approach the city of Syracuse (Thuc. 6.64.1).

Later, the Athenians were sent 250 cavalrymen from Athens as well as money to purchase horses in Sicily (Thuc. 6.94.4).³²⁰ The Athenians managed to acquire between 600 and 800 horses.³²¹

At this point in Greek history, the effective use of horses in combat had not quite been perfected. While the Thessalians had been effectively training cavalrymen and employing them in combat,³²² the rest of Greece was using horses as either defensive troops, as flanking troops, or as pursuers of routed hoplites.³²³ Therefore, cavalry usually remained to the sides of the hoplite battle lines in order to protect their own flanks. During combat, the side with the superior cavalry (or any cavalry) could attack the flanks of hoplites that had engaged.³²⁴ Finally, if the enemy hoplites were routed, the cavalry would be used to chase them down quickly and either capture or slaughter fleeing troops.

³¹⁸ Worley (1994), 100. Spence (1993), 30.

³¹⁹ Worley (1994), 104.

³²⁰ Worley (1994), 107.

³²¹ Worley (1994), 107.

³²² Sidnell (2006), 29.

³²³ Spence (1993), 115.

³²⁴ Spence (1993), 110.

The Syracusan cavalry, like that of most other Greek poleis, probably tended to use rectangular formations both while marching³²⁵ and while fighting.³²⁶ Depending on the space available, the Syracusans would use an 8 X 10 or a 16 X 5 formation.³²⁷ A squadron leader marched in front of the rectangle in both formations. The 8 X 10 formation would have had three file leaders in a row at the front of the column of the formation and a troop leader would be adjacent to him.³²⁸ From the 8 X 10 formation, the squadron could quickly form into the 16 X 5 formation where the section leaders would move up to the front of a column and alternate with the file leaders.³²⁹ The 16 X 5 formation would have taken up roughly 31 yards in length and 27 yards of depth, allowing nearly 6 feet for each horse in width and slightly more than 16 feet per horse in terms of depth.³³⁰ Conversely, the 8 X 10 formation would have taken up roughly 47 feet in width and 162 feet in depth.³³¹ Here, we see that these cavalry squadrons were more malleable than hoplite formations and could quickly change their positioning as the situation required.³³²

Not only were the horses more flexible than the hoplites in terms of formation, but also in combat as they possessed both missiles and hand-to-hand weapons.³³³ For cavalry charges at the flanks, the Syracusans would have wanted to use the wider

³²⁵ See Figure 14: Syracusan cavalry formations. Worley (1994), 100.

³²⁶ Spence (1993), 118.

³²⁷ Worley (1994), 100-101. Thus, the formation would be either 8 horse wide by 10 horses deep or 16 horses wide by 5 horses deep. In each case, a Syracusan cavalry formation uses 80 horses.

³²⁸ See Figure 14: Syracusan cavalry formations. Worley (1994), 101.

³²⁹ See Figure 14: Syracusan cavalry formations.

³³⁰ Worley (1994), 102.

³³¹ Worley (1994), 102.

³³² Spence (1993), 87.

³³³ Spence (1993), 87.

formation in order to cause as much chaos and damage in the enemy units. Further, the formation had less depth, and the horses in the back rows would not have been able to force themselves against the enemy flanks anyways. When marching, the shorter width was preferable, so that the horses could march on the roads. When the cavalry squadrons would reach the Athenians during the march, it seems that they would have broken formation in order to attack from all angles. Upon hurling their javelins, they would have retreated into a standard formation. Our sources do not mention the Athenian cavalry during the march. It is possible that the Athenians ate the horses owing to their lack of provisions.³³⁴ This suggests that cavalry numbers were so few as to be ineffective in combat. In the grand scheme of Classical Greek warfare, the cavalry must be regarded as an afterthought for most Greek poleis. The main focus of combat was the hoplite.

Peltasts

The peltast was a javelin throwing soldier.³³⁵ He was named after his shield, the *pelte*.³³⁶ The *pelte* was a crescent shaped shield of Thracian origin that was likely composed of wicker covered with skins.³³⁷ While this shield did not provide the level of protection provided by the *hoplon*, it did not have the same function. The *hoplon* had to contend with both hurled weapons, the thrusts of opposing hoplites, and pushing. The peltast, as an auxiliary troop meant for harassment and ambushes, was not meant to come into direct hand to hand combat with the enemy (though some did carry a small sword in

³³⁴ This is what happened similarly in Stalingrad when the German army had run low on supplies.

³³⁵ Hunt (2008), 120. See Figure 17: Peltast. See Figure 18: Peltast.

³³⁶ Hunt (2008), 120.

³³⁷ Blumberg, 90.

case of such a circumstance).³³⁸ Thus, the shield was meant to deflect missiles, of which it was surely capable. The advantage of this smaller shield was that it was lighter than a *hoplon* which allowed the peltast greater mobility. The greater speed of the peltast ensured that he could avoid direct conflict with the superior armoured hoplites.

The peltast spear had a throwing strap which gave a hurled spear better accuracy and power owing to the spin provided.³³⁹ Generally, the peltast would have carried two javelins.³⁴⁰ However, in the Syracusan assault on Athenian troops, I would conjecture that the peltasts carried more spears or perhaps slaves would have been used to carry more spears so that the peltast could have carried on an assault for a greater amount of time.

Peltasts, like the cavalry, tended to stay at the flanks or rear of the hoplite phalanx. They usually skirmished with their opponents while both phalanxes deployed.³⁴¹ Peltasts, while obviously not as fast as cavalry, held some advantages. First, the peltast was not inhibited by rough terrain.³⁴² As we will see in the Battle at the Acraean Bald, the peltasts were able to harass the Athenians from high above on a rock.³⁴³ Second, a horseman was at the will of the horse. A horse might react unexpectedly to various stimuli that would not have hindered a peltast with complete bodily autonomy. The *modus operandi* of the peltast was to assault the enemy quickly

³³⁸ Blumberg, 90.

³³⁹ Hunt (2008), 120.

³⁴⁰ Hunt (2008), 120.

³⁴¹ Thuc, 6.69.2 makes it clear that it was standard procedure for the light-armed troops to engage each other at the beginning of a battle.

³⁴² Hunt (2008), 120.

³⁴³ See Day Four in the section The Athenian March.

and - if the enemy approached – to retreat. When the enemy hoplites stopped the chase and began to withdraw, the peltast moved in to attack again.³⁴⁴ Thus, like cavalry, these troops excelled at harassment and demoralization.

Ultimately, the peltast could not stand toe to toe with the hoplite, and thus the tactics of the peltast reflected this. Since the peltast was the only unit other than the hoplite that carried a shield, it was likely that the peltast would have marched directly behind and beside the hoplites in the Athenians' hollow box formation that they employed during the retreat because the Athenians would have positioned the box from the most well-protected men to the least protected men in the middle.

Archers

The archer was a light armoured soldier and possibly wore no armour at all.³⁴⁵ The necessity of using two hands to draw and fire a bow meant that the Greek archer did not carry a shield. However, the use of tension in the bow permitted a greater effective range than that of the peltast's javelin and thus he stood further away from the enemy. Therefore, the archer did not require the same protection as a peltast. Like the peltast and cavalry, the archer did not fight with hoplites head on. The shield and armour available to the hoplite made it difficult for an enemy arrow to be lethal. Instead, the archer attacked the flanks of a hoplite formation. Upon the approach of the enemy, the archer retreated and attacked when the enemy turned away in the same manner as the peltast. Another major use of archery was to combat other missile troops. The archer could fire an arrow

³⁴⁴ Blumberg, 91.

³⁴⁵ See Figure 19: Archer.

up to 150 m,³⁴⁶ which was certainly farther than a peltast could hurl a javelin. However, the lack of a shield or armour made the archer susceptible to other archers and of course any other missile troop provided that the enemy could bring within range of the Bowman. Also, archers were especially vulnerable to cavalry. The Greek archer used a composite bow.³⁴⁷ Composite bows are easily damaged by submersion which could be a factor when the Athenians crossed fords.³⁴⁸ An issue that arose for both the peltasts and archers (at least on the Athenian side) was that there was a limit as to how many projectiles were available for use. Eventually, the men would run out of arrows and become another unarmed unit during the Athenian march.

Slingers

The sling consisted of a leather pouch attached to two strings made of sinew on either side.³⁴⁹ The slinger loaded a projectile which could be a ball of lead or a rock or even clay.³⁵⁰ Then, the slinger held both strings and spun the pouch horizontally.³⁵¹ When the slinger was ready, he let go of one of the strings and the projectile was hurled a great distance owing to the momentum acquired by the spinning of the pouch.³⁵² It is claimed that a trained slinger could hurl a projectile farther than an archer could fire an arrow (200 m vs. 150 m).³⁵³ The slinger could not engage hoplites from the front. Thus, the slinger was another harassment soldier who engaged the enemy in the same way as

³⁴⁶ Hunt (2008), 122.

³⁴⁷ Hunt (2008), 122.

³⁴⁸ Hunt (2008), 122.

³⁴⁹ Hunt (2008), 123.

³⁵⁰ Hunt (2008), 123.

³⁵¹ Hunt (2008), 123.

³⁵² Hunt (2008), 123. See Figure 20: Slinger.

³⁵³ Hunt (2008), 123.

archers. The slinger needed a greater amount of space than the other missile troops in order to use his sling properly so that he did not injure his own men.³⁵⁴ The advantage of the sling was its simplicity. Ammunition could be acquired nearly anywhere. So, unlike the cavalry and the other missile troops, the slinger could maintain an assault for as long as necessary.

Non-Military Forces of the Athenians

The unarmed men in the Athenian retreat includes slaves, oarsmen who were unable to arm themselves with any weapon, cooks, masons, carpenters, and men who played a role on the ships that were unnecessary for infantry combat such as the deckhands and the *keleustes*. These men would have had little or no protection and would have had to rely on the other forces for their safety. However, this does not imply that they had no way to attack. They could gather rocks and hurl them at the enemy, much like the deckhands would in a naval battle.³⁵⁵ A large number of this group would have essentially been carriers of supplies. However, by this point there were little provisions to be carried. As Thucydides states, these men were kept within a box formed by the hoplites (Thuc. 7.78.2). This way, the Athenians could keep their supplies safe from cavalry harassment. The major issue with such a large body of men who did not necessarily contribute to the Athenian advance was their use of resources on the march. The men needed to eat, and those who could not contribute offensively simply became a hindrance to the overall survival of the force.

³⁵⁴ Hunt (2008), 124.

³⁵⁵ See the Missile Infantry in the section The Battle in Chapter 2: The Battle in the Great Harbour.

The Athenian March

The Athenian march took place over 8 days (Thuc. 7.75-86), ending with the complete surrender of all Athenian forces who had survived the persistent attacks during the march and the slaughter at the River Assinarus. In the ensuing sections, I, following Thucydides, separate the narrative in terms of daily events,³⁵⁶ starting with the affairs immediately following the defeat of the Athenians and their allies in the Battle in the Great Harbour.

Diodorus merely summarizes the march (13.19.1-3). He notes that the Athenians were attempting to reach Catane. He claims that the Syracusans harassed the Athenians over three days and successfully blocked a direct route toward Catane. This slightly contradicts Thucydides, wherein the Athenians attempted the direct route to Catane on the fourth day and a slightly less direct route on the fifth day. Similarly, Plutarch gives scant details regarding the march (27.1-5); however, this is reasonable given that his topic was the life of Nicias. Thus, Plutarch focuses on the energy displayed by Nicias at the beginning of the march in order to give confidence to his troops (26.4-6). Then, he states how the Athenians were constantly assaulted (27.1). His main attention is placed on the eventual surrender of Nicias (27.3-5), which he suggests was caused by the surrender of Demosthenes (27.1-2). Notable differences in accounts will be noted in the appropriate sections of this thesis as those differences arise.

³⁵⁶ This is the manner in which Thucydides narrates the retreat march (7.78-85), and this is the most logical way to organize the proceeding events. Thucydides is the only extant source (and of course, the only extant contemporary source) that covers the more minute details of the march, and thus, just as in the previous chapter, I will use Thucydides primarily while supplementing Thucydides with other authors; namely Plutarch and Diodorus.

Day One

On the first day of the march, which was the second day after the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians began the march from the western side of the harbour, heading west.³⁵⁷ The army was extremely disheartened by the recent setbacks. The men were roused by a speech from Nicias (Thuc. 7.77). In the speech, Nicias argued that the situation could not possibly get any worse, for the gods must take pity on the Athenians (Thuc. 7.77.3).³⁵⁸ He also claimed that the Sicels had been contacted (likely by cavalry) and told to meet the Athenians with supplies (Thuc. 7.77.6). This is the first time that it is mentioned that another group had already been contacted to resupply the Athenians. The last instance of the Athenians sending messages to Sicilian allies was to tell the men of Catane before the eclipse not to bring further provisions because the Athenians would have already departed (Thuc. 7.50.2). Athenian food supply was limited and was carried by the baggage handlers in the middle of the hollow box formations made by the Athenian hoplites (Thuc. 7.78.2). Contrary to standard practice, some hoplites and cavalry carried their own provisions, which Thucydides claims was because the hoplites and cavalry were lacking attendants, or the baggage carriers were not to be trusted (Thuc. 7.75.5). This is because the Athenians had lost many servants through desertion during

³⁵⁷ Nicias was attempting to escape Syracusan territory, but the plan was to essentially head west and find a way to head north and reach Catane.

³⁵⁸ Scholars are uncertain as to why the gods are said to have punished the Athenians. Furley (1996), 4, suggests that Nicias is claiming that the Athenians were punished because of the destruction of the Herms in 415 BC. Hornblower (2010), 718, argues that Nicias was referring to attacking Sicily in general. This is almost certainly what Nicias meant in this passage as he immediately states that many others have attacked their neighbours in the past. Thus, Nicias is stating that it is unjust that the Athenians are being punished so fiercely by the gods when others have went to war before and were not punished in such a severe fashion.

the campaign, but especially after their defeat in the Great Harbour (Thuc. 7.75.5).³⁵⁹

Thus, the cavalry and hoplites did not want to entrust their minimal supplies to a person who may very well have abandoned them and took their provisions. It is reminiscent of the breakdown of morale after the defeat at the Great Harbour. While some men on the shore ran to help their comrades, others simply ran to the remainder of the Athenian wall. These men, according to Thucydides, were only thinking of themselves (Thuc. 7.71.6). In the present situation, essentially, every man was thinking only of himself, and this was dangerous for an army that had to act as a cohesive unit. Further, this lack of trust in the army was damaging to morale and overall performance. Xenophon states that:

A disorderly army... is most confused and easiest to master for enemies and most useless and inglorious thing for friends to witness – donkey, hoplite, baggage carrier, light-armed troop, cavalry, and chariot together – for how could they march, if they should hinder each other in this way, one walking while another runs, one running while another stands still, chariot interfering with cavalry, ass with chariot, baggage carrier with hoplite? (Xen. *Oec.* 8.4)³⁶⁰

Distrust and animosity in the ranks of the army could have startling repercussions for both the speed in which the army could travel, and even their effectiveness in combat.

Moreover, there was another complication posed by a lack of trust for attendants or a lack of attendants in general. If a hoplite was forced to carry his own gear, he could be

³⁵⁹ The deserters are almost certainly Sicel allies and slaves. Thucydides mentions that the cavalrymen and hoplites that were carrying their own provisions were lacking an attendant or were distrusting of them. This implies that some slaves died, while others simply left. The other allies of the Athenians have no other means of escape, so desertion isn't really an option.

³⁶⁰ Xen. *Oec.* 8.4. καὶ στρατιά γε, ἔφην ἐγώ, ὃ γύναι, ἄτακτος μὲν οὔσα ταραχωδέστατον, καὶ τοῖς μὲν πολεμίοις εὐχειρωτότατον, τοῖς δὲ φίλοις ἀκλεέστατον ὄραν καὶ ἀχρηστότατον, ὄνος ὀμοῦ, ὀπλίτης, σκευοφόρος, ψιλός, ἱππεύς, ἄμαξα· – πῶς γὰρ ἂν πορευθεῖσαν, <ἐάν> ἔχοντες οὕτως ἐπικωλύσωσιν ἀλλήλους, ὁ μὲν βαδίζων τὸν τρέχοντα, ὁ δὲ τρέχων τὸν ἐστηκότα, ἢ δὲ ἄμαξα τὸν ἱπέα, ὁ δὲ ὄνος τὴν ἄμαξαν, ὁ δὲ σκευοφόρος τὸν ὀπλίτην;

carrying up to 31 kg of gear for the entire day.³⁶¹ However, with this mass of men, it was pertinent that the Athenians eventually foraged for resources.

Thucydides reports that the Athenian army came into contact with the enemy at the Anapus river (Thuc. 7.78.3), which was directly west from the Athenian camp. Here, a minor skirmish ensued. If Thucydides' distances are accurate, the point of contact must have been at or near the modern *ponte di Capocorso*, which crosses the Anapus river about 6 km from Syracuse.³⁶² Since the Syracusans were forced to consider many possible trajectories for the Athenian forces, they had to split their troops up in order to guard the various passageways. However, it would have required a massive force to defeat the Athenian army completely because it was so large. This Syracusan detachment had to fulfill two functions.

The first purpose was to provide intelligence for the Syracusans in order to predict the intended path that would be taken by the Athenians. This would give the Syracusans the opportunity to shift troops to areas where they would be more effective. The second was to slow down the Athenian march by forcing them to engage.

This would allow the Syracusan cavalry and light armed troops to catch up to them. Thucydides summarizes the battle in a single line, saying “having routed them

³⁶¹ Lee (2007), 126. Lee includes the following items above and beyond the standard panoply: basic mess kit, rations, water, a portion of tentage, possibly an axe, and miscellaneous personal effects. If the hoplites were only carrying food – as suggested by Thucydides – this would only add a few pounds to their overall weight. Further, the Athenians abandoned many personal effects after the Battle in the Great Harbour.

³⁶² Green (1970), 321.

(Syracusans) and having held sway over the ford, they marched forth (Thuc. 7.78.3),³⁶³ so it seems that the Syracusan resistance was easily countered. Perhaps the Syracusans were routed without even fighting, given that the vast numbers of Athenians made the resistance futile. Regardless, the presence of Syracusan troops would have given the Athenians pause and slowed their march. Having crossed the river, the Athenians were assaulted by Syracusan cavalry and light infantry (Thuc. 7.78.3). This would be the *modus operandi* of the Syracusans for the majority of the march. It seems likely that the Syracusans who had been guarding the river crossing sent a messenger to inform the other Syracusan troops where the Athenians were located. Then the Syracusans hurried to that location in order to harass the Athenians. We are given some information in other sections of Thucydides' work about how the light infantry engaged the enemy in these situations. Narrating a battle between the Aetolians and the Athenians in 426 BC, he says:

They (The Aetolians) withdrew a little and stationed themselves upon a hill above the city, for the city was on a high spot, about 80 stades away from the sea. The Aetolians (who were already near to Aegyption, having come to their aid), running down from the hills from one place or another, struck against the Athenians and their allies and they hurled javelins, and when the infantry of the Athenians would come upon them, they retired, but when the Athenians withdrew, they attacked. The battle was such for a long time – pursuit and withdraw, and in both pursuing and withdrawing, the Athenians were the weaker party. But as long as the Athenian archers had arrows and were able to use them, they withstood (for the Aetolian men, being light armed, withdrew when being shot at with arrows. When the captain of the archers was slain, the archers dispersed, but the soldiers were worn out, struggling for a long time with the same exertion and the

³⁶³ τρεψάμενοι αὐτοὺς καὶ κρατήσαντες τοῦ πόρου ἐχώρουν ἐς τὸ πρόσθεν·

Aetolians pressed hard and threw many javelins at them, in this way, the Athenians fled. Having been routed, and falling into gullies without outlet, and into the regions of which they were inexperienced, they perished... The Aetolians, hurling javelins, seizing many men in the rout on foot and the Aetolians being swift-footed and light armed destroyed the Athenians utterly (Thuc. 3.97.2-98.2).³⁶⁴

The engagements with the light infantry during the retreat seem to have followed this same pattern. The men would approach the Athenian hoplites, hurl their weapons and retreat if they were approached. Once the Athenian pursuers attempted to return to their ranks, they would be harassed again. A similar event occurred in 425 BC at Sphacteria, but this time, the Athenians were on the winning side and the Spartans were overwhelmed by missiles (Thuc. 4.32.2-35.1).

Thucydides and the other historians do not tell us exactly how these skirmishes unfolded in regard to the cavalry, but we can make some assumptions based on our knowledge of Greek military tactics. Thucydides notes:

Syracusans, riding alongside, and the light infantry, hurling javelins at them, pressed them hard (Thuc. 7.78.3).³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴Thuc. 3.97.2-98.2. ὑπέφευγον γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἐκάθηντο ἐπὶ τῶν λόφων τῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως· ἦν γὰρ ἐφ' ὑψηλῶν χωρίων ἀπέχουσα τῆς θαλάσσης ὀγδοήκοντα σταδίου μάλιστα. οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοὶ (βεβοηθηκότες γὰρ ἤδη ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ Αἰγίτιον) προσέβαλλον τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις καὶ τοῖς ξυμμάχοις καταθέοντες ἀπὸ τῶν λόφων ἄλλοι ἄλλοθεν καὶ ἐσηκόντιζον, καὶ ὅτε μὲν ἐπίοι τὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων στρατόπεδον, ὑπεχώρουν, ἀναχωροῦσι δὲ ἐπέκειντο· καὶ ἦν ἐπὶ πολὺ τοιαύτη ἡ μάχη, διώξεις τε καὶ ὑπαγωγαί, ἐν οἷς ἀμφοτέροις ἴσους ἦσαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι. μέχρι μὲν οὖν οἱ τοξόται εἶχόν τε τὰ βέλη αὐτοῖς καὶ οἷοί τε ἦσαν χρῆσθαι, οἱ δὲ ἀντείχον (τοξευόμενοι γὰρ οἱ Αἰτωλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ψιλοὶ ἀνεστέλλοντο)· ἐπειδὴ δὲ τοῦ τε τοξάρχου ἀποθανόντος οὗτοι διεσκεδάσθησαν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐκεκμήκεσαν καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ τῷ αὐτῷ πόνῳ ξυνεχόμενοι, οἱ τε Αἰτωλοὶ ἐνέκειντο καὶ ἐσηκόντιζον, οὕτω δὲ τραπόμενοι ἔφευγον, καὶ ἐσπίπτοντες ἕξ τε χαράδρας ἀνεκβάτους καὶ χωρία ὧν οὐκ ἦσαν ἔμπειροι διεφθείροντο· καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἡγεμὼν αὐτοῖς τῶν ὁδῶν Χρόμων ὁ Μεσσηνίος ἐτύγχανε τεθηκώς. οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοὶ ἐσακοντίζοντες πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ τροπῇ κατὰ πόδας αἰροῦντες ἄνθρωποι ποδώκεις καὶ ψιλοὶ διεφθείρον.

³⁶⁵ Thuc. 7.78.3. οἱ δὲ Συρακόσιοι παριπιδούντες τε προσέκειντο καὶ ἐσακοντίζοντες οἱ ψιλοί.

The Syracusan cavalry would break from their standard formations (an 8 X 10 or 16 X 5 rectangle) and form in a line. Upon the approach of the enemy, the Athenian hoplites would gather closely in order to provide as much protection with their shields as possible, both for themselves and their comrades.³⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the Athenian light infantry would hurl their weapons from within the ranks in an attempt to cause casualties on the Syracusan side. The less disciplined of the hoplites might step forward and attempt to engage the light infantry or cavalry. This would have been advantageous for the Syracusans. The Athenian hoplite simply could not match the speed of the Syracusan light armed troops or cavalry. When the Athenians broke their ranks in order to chase the light infantry or cavalry, it was possible for the Syracusan light armed troops and cavalry to pick off the men who had become separated from the main mass of troops. Since the Athenians were being assaulted from every side, both confusion and panic would have taken hold. Inexperienced hoplites would have had great difficulty in holding their position. The Syracusan cavalry and light infantry could not expect to cause massive casualties among the Athenians. For certain, many projectiles would miss their mark or be blocked by the shield of a hoplite. Further, the number of missiles that each man had was limited,³⁶⁷ so the offensive could only be maintained for a short time, but many light wounds would have resulted regardless.

³⁶⁶ However, it seems unlikely that the march comes to a complete halt. Instead, the marching becomes slower as the Athenians become bunched together. I posit that Thucydides would mention if the army completely stopped, since he says this when Demosthenes makes his final stand on the sixth day of the march (Thuc. 7.81.4).

³⁶⁷ See Cavalry in Essentials of Land Combat in Chapter 3: The Athenian Retreat. However, if the Syracusan cavalry and light infantry know that their mission is to harass the Athenians, it stands to reason that they may bring more javelins for this purpose.

And yet, these harassments allowed the Syracusans to control the pace and direction of the Athenian march, while also demoralizing the Athenians. The only way for the Athenians to avoid confrontation with the cavalry was to travel into rocky regions which were not suitable for horses.³⁶⁸ This would not prevent the assault from light infantry, but the lack of cavalry support would have made such an attack manageable for the Athenians and riskier for the Syracusans. The lack of horseshoes made the movement of cavalry troublesome on uneven terrain.

Thucydides informs us that the Athenians managed to travel 40 stades (between 5.2 and 6.8 km)³⁶⁹ and encamped on a hill (Thuc. 7.78.4). Presumably, this was a hill that was not suitable for cavalry to climb and was easily defensible. The camp was almost certainly protected by palisades built upon arrival.³⁷⁰ We can infer from other instances that building palisades was common practice. The Athenians built similar defences in a few places; at their camp at Catane (Thuc. 6.64), and in front of their ships (Thuc. 7.38.2 and again 7.53.1).³⁷¹ It seems that these palisades would have been carried during the march and quite possibly taken from their fortifications at the Great Harbour.

Day Two

On the second day, the Athenians continued their march beginning early in the morning (Thuc. 7.78.4). The Athenians were granted a reprieve since the Syracusans

³⁶⁸ Green (1970), 324.

³⁶⁹ Dover, (1965), 2. Dover argues that for Thucydides' distances to make sense, Thucydides' understanding of a stade must range between 130 and 170 metres.

³⁷⁰ Dover (1965), 342.

³⁷¹ Pritchett (1974), 144. Pritchett believes that slaves were used to build these palisades, but there is no written evidence about this matter.

chose not to confront them, but instead had decided to forge ahead in order to make a wall within the upcoming pass at the Acraean Bald (Thuc. 7.78.5). Thus, the Athenians were able to take the time to gather supplies which they required from the houses in the area (Thuc. 7.78.4). This suggests that the Athenians both foraged in farmers' fields and took food from the houses in the area. The Athenians seem to have picked this area for encampment because of the houses and farms that would provide easy access to provisions. Therefore, the Athenians were reenergized to some degree. They had collected water from the river which would prevent dehydration in the blazing Sicilian sun (Thuc. 7.78.4). Meanwhile, the Syracusans were fortifying the pass at the Acraean heights (Thuc. 7.78.5). We are told that the Athenians had travelled 20 stadia (2.6 to 3.4 km) (Thuc. 7.78.4). Green suggests a location for the camp roughly 3km NNE from modern *Floridia* based around the Anapus River in a valley.³⁷² Directly north of the Athenian position was a pass through a mountain (the Acraean Bald). This pass was the next objective for the Athenians. If the Athenians could travel through the pass, they would arrive on a plateau that would allow them to march without cavalry harassment since the ancient cavalry had much difficulty moving on rough terrain.³⁷³ While this would not grant complete safety for the troops, it would greatly increase their chances of arriving at Catane,³⁷⁴ since the army would only have to contend with Syracusan hoplites and light armed troops.

³⁷² Green (1970), 323. See Number 2 in Figure 15: Map of the Athenian Retreat.

³⁷³ Green (1970), 324.

³⁷⁴ Diodorus claims that the original destination was Catane (Diod. 13.18.6). In the following section for the third day of the march, I will argue that the Athenians attempted to head north and that their ultimate destination must have been Catane.

Day Three

The location of the ‘Acraean Bald’ has been a matter of scholarly debate.

However, the reigning *communis opinio* is now that this site is on the southwest side of *Monte Climiti*.³⁷⁵

Earlier, many scholars felt that the Acraean Bald must refer to an area that is near modern *Acrae*, 20 km west of Syracuse.³⁷⁶ However, there is nothing in the area that accurately represents the topographical requirements as set forth by Thucydides.³⁷⁷ According to Thucydides, the area in question had a steep hill with a ravine on either side of the hill (Thuc. 7.78.5). Second, the distance required to reach *Acrae* is too far to be consistent with Thucydides’ narrative. At this point, the Athenians had travelled 10.2 km at the absolute maximum³⁷⁸ which is roughly 10 km short of *Acrae*. *Monte Climiti* on the other hand is 12.8 km northwest of Syracuse.³⁷⁹ When we consider that the Athenians first headed almost directly west and then north, the distances stated by Thucydides are essentially accurate. Thus, Green’s finding is the most likely candidate for the Acraean Bald. Green has identified the pass as *Cava Castelluccio*.³⁸⁰ One problem with this identification is that it seems to contradict Thucydides’ statement that the army was marching in the direction of Camarina and Gela (Thuc. 7.80.2). While Gela is almost exactly west of Syracuse, Camarina is southwest of Syracuse. After the failure to take the

³⁷⁵ Green (1970), 323. Hornblower (2010), 723. Hornblower and Dover have been persuaded by Green.

³⁷⁶ Lazenby (2004), 163.

³⁷⁷ Green (1970), 322-23.

³⁷⁸ Roughly 60 stades. On the first day they travelled 40 stades (Thuc. 7.78.4). On the second day they marched 20 stades (Thuc. 7.78.4).

³⁷⁹ Green (1970), 323.

³⁸⁰ Green (1970), 323.

pass, the Athenians, according to Thucydides, decided to march in the opposite direction.

Thucydides continues with the following sentence:

ἦν δὲ ἡ ξύμπασα ὁδὸς αὕτη οὐκ ἐπὶ Κατάνης τῷ
στρατεύματι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τῆς Σικελίας τὸ
πρὸς Καμάριναν καὶ Γέλαν καὶ τὰς ταύτη πόλεις καὶ
Ἑλληνίδας καὶ βαρβάρους.

The entire way for the army was not [no longer] toward
Catane, but rather toward the other part of Sicily, toward
Camarina and Gela and to cities either Greek or Barbarian
(Thuc. 7.80.2).³⁸¹

Many scholars have taken this sentence as an explanation of the previous line of march (i.e. the original objective of the march was toward Camarina and Gela).³⁸² Their interpretation of this sentence rests largely on the meaning of ‘οὐκ’. We would expect ‘οὐκέτι’ to give a meaning of ‘no longer’. However, just before this, Thucydides employs the word ‘μηκέτι’ and thus the ‘οὐκ’ used here is meant to be inferred from the earlier line as meaning ‘no longer’.³⁸³ The original plan, had the Athenians won the Battle in the Great Harbour, was to head to Catane (Thuc. 7.60.2), so it would be bizarre if the plans for the land march had changed and Thucydides did not inform the reader. When the Athenians later attempted to avoid the pass at the Acraean Bald and to go around *Monte Climiti*, they would have essentially been heading west.³⁸⁴ The interesting implication of Green’s finding that the Acraean Bald is *Monte Climiti* is the confirmation that the

³⁸¹ Thuc. 7.80.2. ἦν δὲ ἡ ξύμπασα ὁδὸς αὕτη οὐκ ἐπὶ Κατάνης τῷ στρατεύματι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τῆς Σικελίας τὸ πρὸς Καμάριναν καὶ Γέλαν καὶ τὰς ταύτη πόλεις καὶ Ἑλληνίδας καὶ βαρβάρους.

³⁸² Incidentally, this fits to the older identification of the Acraean Heights with Acrae. Smith (1958), 165, in this Loeb translation, seems to follow this line of argument.

³⁸³ Hornblower (2010), 725-26.

³⁸⁴ On the fifth day of the retreat (Thuc. 7.79.4).

original goal of the Athenian march was to reach Catane, as Diodorus states (Diod. 13.18.6).

This raises the question as to where the Sicels were to whom Nicias had sent a message. It is possible that these Sicels were people that were living south of Leontini in the mountainous regions rather than peoples living further east near Gela. While the attempt to force a way through the pass was daring and bold, the potential reward was huge. The Syracusan cavalry would have been rendered ineffective and the territory on the plateau above contained Sicels who were hostile to Syracuse.³⁸⁵ It would become difficult for the Syracusans to maintain their assault on the Athenians and their allies. They most certainly would not have had the freedom to harass the Athenians and control their movements without their cavalry.

On the third day of the march, the Athenians headed toward the pass. First, the Athenians had to cross the Anapus where there is a ford directly at the elbow of the river.³⁸⁶ While crossing, the Syracusans set upon them with their standard tactics. The Syracusan cavalry and light armoured troops rushed alongside the Athenian columns while hurling javelins into the ranks (Thuc. 7.78.6-7). Since the Syracusans had a full day to prepare themselves for the Athenians, their assault was far fiercer than at the river during the first day of the march and probably included a greater number of both cavalry

³⁸⁵ Green (1970), 324. The Syracusan cavalry would have to head back east toward Syracuse and the north. Once they were in reach of Leontini, they could head back west and arrive on the plateau where the Athenians would be marching north. However, the cavalry would encounter hostility with the Sicels in the region.

³⁸⁶ Green (1970), 324.

and light armed units.³⁸⁷ The Athenians were contending with a flurry of missiles while attempting to march into the pass. Casualties were certainly high, and only the most battle-hardened troops would be able to maintain their composure under such circumstances. Eventually the Athenians gave up and retreated to their camp from the previous day (Thuc. 7.78.7). The Athenians failed to even make it into the pass where the Syracusans' main defensive position was located and, thus, where the staunchest resistance would have been found. This suggests that the Athenians had little chance of actually breaking through the ravine, given that the Syracusans had built fortifications which the Athenians would have struggled to dislodge. This setback must have been devastating for the Athenians. Not only would the Syracusans have been able to send more forces into the area to assist with the defence, but it forced the Athenians to use up their recently acquired provisions without traveling farther. Thucydides claims that the Syracusan cavalry made it unsafe for the any Athenian troops to split from the main body of the army to forage for food (Thuc. 7.78.6).

Day Four

On the fourth day of the march, the Athenians attempted to force the pass again (Thuc. 7.79.1). One must question the decision of Nicias and Demosthenes. Considering that the army had been forced to retreat before even entering the ravine on the day before, it seemed nearly suicidal to try the same tactic a second time. It suggests that the benefit of making it to the plateau in order to avoid enemy cavalry and reach Catane was so

³⁸⁷ Thucydides claims that the Syracusans were in 'considerable force' which suggests that there were more troops than in earlier confrontations of the march (Thuc. 7. 78.6)

important that it seemed worth every sacrifice. The level of desperation in the Athenian camp must have been at its utmost. To further complicate matters, Gylippus was marching with troops toward the Athenian rear.³⁸⁸ If Gylippus could make his way around behind the Athenians, not only would the Athenians be effectively surrounded, they would also have to enter into a hoplite engagement with enemy troops on both sides.

The Athenian march passed through the valley with little incident and climbed up the pass. Here, they encountered Syracusan hoplites protected by a make-shift wall (Thuc. 7.79.1). Given that the troops were in a ravine, it is likely that the wall was composed of rocks stacked upon one another. The wall would have been high enough to make it difficult to step over, but low enough that the Syracusans could still use their spears and shields efficiently.³⁸⁹ Since the Athenians were coming from below, the wall was valuable for protecting the feet and legs of the Syracusan hoplites. The narrowness of the ravine allowed the Syracusans to be stacked many shields deep, making it even more troublesome for the Athenians to eject them (Thuc. 7.79.1-2).³⁹⁰ The Athenian hoplites would have marched into the ravine while the camp followers stayed near the entrance with a rear guard of hoplites to protect them from potential attacks.³⁹¹ Further, the rear

³⁸⁸ Gylippus arrives during this day and attempts to enclose the Athenians (Thuc. 7. 79.4). It seems that Gylippus was coming down from the heights, possibly from a different ravine, and marching around in order to encircle the Athenians.

³⁸⁹ Ray (2009), 230.

³⁹⁰ This battle has certain affinities with the battle of Munichia that is narrated by Xenophon. In this battle, taking place on the Piraeus, oligarchic and Spartan forces attempted to dislodge Athenian exiles from the hill. However, when the oligarchic forces tried to mount the hill, they were assaulted by the exiles. The exiles used missile infantry from behind the hoplites. Though the oligarchic forces were stacked 50 shields deep, they were still routed by the exiles who were a mere 10 shields deep (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.12-4.19). In the battle for the Acraean heights, the attacking forces were even more disadvantaged than the oligarchic troops, so it is not at all surprising that they were not able to force the pass.

³⁹¹ Green (1970), 325.

guard prevented the front-line men from becoming trapped in the ravine and crushed on both sides.³⁹²

When the Athenians had travelled a fair distance into the pass and began to engage with the Syracusan hoplites, the trap was sprung. Light infantry such as slingers and archers appeared from the heights above the ravine and began to pelt the Athenian army relentlessly (Thuc. 7.79.2). The height advantage and proximity to the enemy presented the opportunity for the Syracusan missile infantry to bombard the Athenians ruthlessly with great accuracy and with impunity. It was not impossible that the Athenians would have succeeded in this battle had it not been for the missile infantry of the Syracusans. The Athenians had proven themselves to be superior to the Syracusans in hoplite warfare in the earlier stages of the war.³⁹³ However, in the current situation, the Athenian hoplites were simply overwhelmed by missile infantry, and the use of the stone wall cemented the Syracusans in position. The Athenians in the first two or three rows were holding their shields in front desperately trying to dislodge the Syracusans from their position. Those in the rear must have been holding their shields above their heads in order to defend against the shower of missiles. It was unlikely that even the most well trained troops could have prevented themselves from panicking. Again, casualties on that day must have been extraordinarily high. What is more - albeit a more gory detail - troops that were killed or otherwise wounded would quite possibly have fallen into the men behind them, causing these soldiers to lose their balance. At this point, while the

³⁹² Green (1970), 325.

³⁹³ Ray (2009), 295. When it comes to heavy infantry as the major factor in battle, the Athenians almost always defeated the Syracusans.

Athenians were withdrawing, it began to rain (Thuc. 7.79.3). Thucydides relates that the soldiers became even more depressed (Thuc. 7.79.3). However, the rain provided both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, it allowed the Athenians to collect water in pots or possibly helmets, which would have allowed the men to quench their thirst. On the other hand, the muddy ground would have made marching more difficult, and wet feet could cause ailments for the men. Eventually the Athenians again retreated a short distance (Thuc. 7.79.2), probably just outside the pass in order to rest and regain their composure. At this point, Gylippus arrived from the rear with a small party and attempted to build a wall in order to shut in the Athenians (Thuc. 7.79.4). The rear guard of the Athenians (which, like the front-lines of a hoplite army, held experienced troops) moved quickly to prevent this from happening (Thuc. 7.79.4). Again, the Athenians retreated to level plains and encamped for the evening (Thuc. 7.79.5).

Day Five

Nicias was still set on making it to Catane, but decided to take a slightly different approach. Instead of marching into the same pass and ending up in the same quagmire as on the day before, he decided to march northeast, south of *Monte Climiti*, but north of the Anapus River in a northwest direction.³⁹⁴ Here, the land is very flat and thus an ideal location for cavalry attacks.³⁹⁵ The Athenians must have been trying to find another way to gain access to the plateaus above. The Athenians began their march in the morning, and again the Syracusans assaulted them from all sides with cavalry and missile troops

³⁹⁴ Green (1970), 326. Green identifies the area as the Massa Puglia.

³⁹⁵ Green (1970), 326.

(Thuc. 7.79.5). On this day, the Syracusans were particularly elusive. Thucydides relates that whenever the Athenians advanced against the enemy, the enemy retreated, but when they went to return to the main army, they were again attacked (Thuc. 7.79.5). Gylippus focused especially on the rear of the enemy in hopes that he could capture Athenian supplies, pick off stragglers, and create panic throughout the entire army (Thuc. 7.79.5). The army stopped their march after 5 or 6 stadia (less than a kilometer) (Thuc. 7.79.6). The Syracusans withdrew to their own camps as well (Thuc. 7.79.6). The Syracusan withdrawal allowed the Athenians to perform a trick that would help them escape from their current situation (Thuc. 7.80.1).

Nicias and Demosthenes decided that it was no longer feasible to travel to Catane.³⁹⁶ In order to escape under the cover of night and without arousing suspicion, the Athenians kindled many fires in their camps (Thuc.7.80.1). The Syracusans would certainly have kept watch on the Athenian camp from a distance, so a lack of fire or noise in the camp would have caused the Syracusans to investigate and to find that the Athenians had left. Ray makes the reasonable suggestion that some men were left behind to stoke the fires and to create noise that would suggest that the Athenians were still encamped.³⁹⁷ Thucydides points out that there were many injured men in the Athenian camp (Thuc.7.80.1). Much like the men who were left behind after the battle in the Great Harbour, it seems reasonable that those who were too injured to keep pace with the army would have been abandoned. These men would then have been useful to carry out the

³⁹⁶ See Day Three in The Athenian March.

³⁹⁷ Ray (2009), 231.

illusion that the entire Athenian army was remaining in the camp.³⁹⁸ Either, the men stoking the fires would have left before daybreak and escaped or were captured, or, more likely, they remained in the camp and were eventually killed or taken prisoner by the Syracusans. If they managed to flee and were never caught, they might have very well have made it to safety in Catane or in some other friendly territory. This is probably wishful thinking. If the soldiers in the camp were too injured to travel with the Athenians, it is unlikely they would have been able flee very far. This is especially clear given that the 300 men who rushed away on the night of the seventh day of the march were caught by the Syracusans the next evening (Thuc. 7.85.2). However, Thucydides says that many men who had fled both during the retreat and also after being in a state of servitude, found refuge in Catane (Thuc. 7.85.4). Therefore, there is the possibility, albeit unlikely, that some of the men who were stoking fires on the Athenian camp evaded the Syracusans and eventually reached Catane. On the other hand, if they were captured, either away from the camp or in the camp itself, they would have likely been taken as private slaves. Some would have been sold for profit while others would have been kept. Of course, this is simply conjecture since Thucydides does not mention if men were even left at the camp, but the ability to successfully carry out the ruse and the mention of the injured men suggests that some men likely remained in the camp. Regardless, the main body of the army marched out of the camp late at night.

³⁹⁸ Ray (2009), 231.

Day Six

The Athenians changed their direction. Instead of heading northwest, the troops headed in a southeast direction. The exact course is difficult to determine, but Thucydides provides some geographical features that allow us to get a general idea of the path taken. The army marched out in their customary two groups with Nicias in the van and Demosthenes commanding the rear (Thuc. 7.80.4). The march was taking place during the night, and the columns became separated (Thuc. 7.80.4). Earlier in Thucydides, we learn of the mass confusion that took place when the Athenians attempted to seize the heights of Epipolae at night (Thuc. 7.43). Demosthenes was delayed because he had inferior troops as well as injured soldiers traveling in his column.³⁹⁹ What is more, the food and water supplies of the men were low, so the soldiers were not properly fed (Thuc.7.80.1). It had been 4 days since the Athenians had resupplied their rations from the farms and houses on the second day of the march. Also, because the army was marching during the night, the Athenians were deprived of sleep. All of these factors would have had a negative effect on the marching speed of the troops. The columns marched back across the Anapus and likely travelled back southeast. The path likely started north of modern Floridia, and led down the *Strada Monesteri* to the *Strada Spinagallo* and passed through modern Cassibile. Thucydides claims that the men reached the sea (Thuc. 7.80.5), which must mean just south of Syracuse, and they followed the ‘Elorine Road’ (Thuc. 7.80.5), which still exists today. Thus, the men would

³⁹⁹ It seems, based on Thuc. 7.82.1, that Demosthenes was saddled with many of the islanders, while Nicias had a greater concentration of Athenian soldiers. Further, it stands to reason that some of the injured men marched with Demosthenes for they failed to keep up with the pace of Nicias.

have marched south toward the Cacyparis river (modern Cassibile),⁴⁰⁰ which is just under 2 km north of modern Gallina. Here, at dawn, Nicias' troops encountered a Syracusan guard blocking a ford (Thuc.7.80.6). The Syracusan guard had made a wall and a palisade (Thuc.7.80.5). The palisade, in Greek fashion, probably consisted of large wooden stakes that were placed slightly apart, while the wall was probably a short stone wall like the Syracusans employed at the Acraean Bald. Thucydides summarizes the battle in 3 words,⁴⁰¹ and thus it is likely that Athenians and Syracusan casualties were low and more in line with a minor skirmish. The Athenian troops likely uprooted the stakes of the palisade and quickly assaulted the Syracusan guard. The vast number of Athenians overwhelmed the Syracusans quickly and forced them to retreat. Following the Cacyparis River inland, the Athenians continued to head south. Thucydides says that this is because the guides told them to take this route (Thuc.7.80.7). Hornblower wonders if the guides were intentionally misleading the Athenians, or if there was another reason for this choice of direction.⁴⁰² Going south would have made the Athenians miss the meeting spot with the native Sicels,⁴⁰³ which went against the Athenian plans. Green theorizes that Athenian scouts had informed the Athenians that the path ahead (along the Cacyparis River) was heavily guarded;⁴⁰⁴ however, there is no information in Thucydides to suggest that this was the case. On the other hand, it is likely that the Syracusans would have guarded the routes along this river in order to intercept the Athenians from combining forces with

⁴⁰⁰ Green (1970), 328.

⁴⁰¹ Thuc. 7.80.6 καὶ βιασάμενοι αὐτήν.

⁴⁰² Hornblower (2010), 728.

⁴⁰³ If the Sicels were supposed to meet the Sicels along the Cacyparis river (to the west of the current Athenian position), then the Athenians heading would fail to make contact. This is mentioned in Thuc. 7.79.5.

⁴⁰⁴ Green (1970), 329.

native Sicels.⁴⁰⁵ Of course, the guides might have simply known an easier way to travel to their intended location either in terms of geography, or in terms of food and water that could be found along the route.

At this point, the Syracusans awoke near Cava Castelluccio and realized that the Athenians had already left the camp (Thuc.7.81.1). Gylippus was accused of purposely allowing the Athenians to escape (Thuc.7.81.1), which probably delayed matters further. The Syracusans followed the route that the Athenians had taken (Thuc.7.81.1). Thucydides relates that the Syracusans were able to catch up to Demosthenes' rear guard by dinner time which is a testament to the speed of the Syracusan vanguard. (Thuc.7.81.1).

Thucydides claims that Nicias' column was about 50 stades ahead of Demosthenes' unit (Thuc.7.81.3). While this seems exaggerated, and De Voto would like to read 30 stades,⁴⁰⁶ the distance is plausible. Nicias' army would have been between 6.5 km and 8.5 km ahead of Demosthenes. This suggests that Demosthenes' troops were either of a much lower quality than Nicias' or that Demosthenes was simply ineffective at keeping his troops on the move or perhaps the men in Demosthenes' contingent were more tired or encumbered. If we assume that at this point, Nicias' troops had crossed the river Erineus and were waiting for Demosthenes' troops to arrive at their new encampment, the distance between the two armies would mean that Demosthenes' army was around Gallina.

⁴⁰⁵ Green (1970), 329.

⁴⁰⁶ De Voto (2002), 65.

When the Syracusans approached the rear of Demosthenes' column, Demosthenes decided that it was best to make a stand rather than attempt to march while being assaulted as the Athenians had been on several occasions during the retreat (Thuc.7.81.4).⁴⁰⁷ Demosthenes positioned his army in a walled area within an olive grove (Thuc.7.81.4). It is said that this was the estate of Polyzelus at some time in the past (Plut. *Nic.* 27.1).⁴⁰⁸ If we consider the area to the direct east of modern Gallina, there are a large number of olive trees still standing today.⁴⁰⁹ It is likely that this was the place of battle and it strengthens the argument that Nicias' troops were in fact 50 stades ahead. The walls and the trees would have helped Demosthenes' men avoid projectiles from the Syracusans. Regardless, the Athenians could only try to hold their ground and to protect themselves. Slowly, casualties would have started to mount. The Syracusans avoided a direct assault and instead surrounded the walls and hurled missiles at Demosthenes' men (Thuc.7.81.5). The Syracusans would have employed both cavalry and light infantry to carry out this assault.

After the Athenians had become wearied from the attack, Gylippus attempted to break the army apart. He offered the islanders (the allies of the Athenians who were from the islands in the Aegean Sea) freedom if they were to come over to the Syracusan side (Thuc.7.82.1). Surprisingly, only a few states abandoned the Athenians (Thuc.7.82.1).

⁴⁰⁷ This is the only time that Thucydides mentions that the army made a complete halt. This suggests that the Athenians generally continued to march while under assault, albeit at a slower pace.

⁴⁰⁸ Polyzelus is said to have been the brother of Gelon, former tyrant of Syracuse. See: Smith (1870), 472. However, the exact location of this estate is unknown, which is unfortunate as it would allow us to obtain a better idea in regard to both the location of Demosthenes and Nicias.

⁴⁰⁹ It should be noted that olive trees are extremely hardy. The olive tree can survive for thousands of years, so it is possible that the olive trees in this area of Sicily may have existed in the time of the Expedition nearly 2500 years ago. If not, it is likely that olive trees were replanted in the same areas.

When we consider that many Sicilians left after the defeat of the Great Harbour, it suggests that the islanders did not trust Gylippus, especially since they were starving, sick, and tired. On the other hand, it is possible that the islanders maintained a great level of loyalty to the Athenians. A more cynical explanation is that the islanders did not defect from the Athenians out of fear. If word were to get to Athens that certain subject states betrayed the Athenians, the Athenians may have exacted vengeance on these islands.⁴¹⁰ I think the reactions of the various islanders would have followed one of these lines of thinking.

Soon after, Demosthenes succeeded in gaining a conditional surrender under the terms that if the Athenians and their allies should give up their arms, then no man in Demosthenes' army would suffer death by violence or imprisonment or by deprivation of the bare necessities of life (Thuc.7.82.2). Gylippus agreed to these terms (Thuc.7.82.2), but these conditions were not satisfied by the Syracusans. The Athenians placed all of their money in overturned shields (Thuc.7.82.3), and were marched back to Syracuse (Thuc.7.82.3) on the Elorine Road. Thucydides says that 6000 men were captured by the Syracusans on this day (Thuc.7.82.3). Meanwhile, Nicias' army encamped on a hill just south of the Erineus (Thuc.7.82.3), (likely a river just north of the Fiume di Noto).⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ This is hardly unreasonable given the manner in which the Athenians had treated the Melians in 416BC, where all men were put to death and the rest of the population was sold into slavery. The Athenians voted to do the same to the Mytilenians in 429 BC but the Athenians had a change of heart the next day. The Athenians sent to carry out the punishment were stopped just before they were to perform the executions.

⁴¹¹ Green (1970), 330, on the other hand argues that the Erineus is in fact the modern Fiume di Noto.

Day Seven

On the seventh day of the march, the Syracusans managed to catch up to Nicias' troops (Thuc.7.83.1). The Syracusans informed Nicias that Demosthenes had already surrendered (Thuc.7.83.1). Nicias was in disbelief and obtained a truce so that he could send a cavalryman to confirm the surrender (Thuc.7.83.1). When the messenger returned and affirmed that Demosthenes' men had capitulated, Nicias attempted to negotiate a conditional surrender under quite unrealistic terms for his men (Thuc.7.83.2). Nicias requested that his army be allowed their freedom, and in return he would have the Athenians reimburse the Syracusans for every talent they had spent on the war (Thuc.7.83.2). As collateral, Nicias would provide hostages, one man for each talent owed to Syracuse (Thuc.7.83.2). Not surprisingly, the terms were rejected by Gylippus and the Syracusans (Thuc.7.83.2).⁴¹² Gylippus might have been against the terms because they conceded no benefit to the Spartans. Further, many battle-hardened soldiers would have returned to Athens who would have been able to continue to wage war against the Spartans on mainland Greece. The Syracusans likely rejected the conditions owing to their enmity with the Athenians and would accept nothing less than a complete surrender. Further, the Syracusans might have been suspicious that they would ever actually be paid if they allowed the Athenians to leave freely. The Athenians had left many wounded behind after the battle in the Great Harbour, so there was also the chance that the Athenians would – in a similar way – abandon the hostages to their death and refuse to

⁴¹² This is completely reasonable on the part of Gylippus. Nicias' suggestion does not provide enough collateral for the Syracusans. For Nicias' treaty to work, he would have to exchange enough men so that if the Athenians were to fail to pay, then the Syracusans could sell the captives into slavery in order to recover their debts. Further, the Syracusans could instead capture an even greater number of men. In that way, they could recover the costs of the war and possibly make a profit.

pay. Ultimately, the best Nicias could hope for was the same treatment that Demosthenes had received, and thus his offer must have seemed insulting to the Syracusans. When the conditions were rejected, battle commenced (Thuc.7.83.2).

Unlike Demosthenes' army, Nicias' men had at least had some rest, but were certainly weary owing to the lack of provisions. Moreover, unlike Demosthenes, Nicias did not make a final stand, but decided to keep marching at all costs until the Athenians could reach safety. Nicias' men were of higher quality than Demosthenes', and thus it would take a greater amount of effort to force them to surrender. The Syracusans hurled projectiles at the Athenians from all sides, while the Athenians continued to march (Thuc.7.83.2). While the panic in the Athenian ranks would have been high, casualties probably remained low, as the Athenians had become used to Syracusan tactics at this point and they would have concerned themselves with their own defence by creating a wall of shields rather than trying to launch an offensive. Eventually, the Syracusans gave up the attack and retreated for the evening. Nicias attempted to use the same ruse as he had on the fifth night of the march by escaping the area during the night (Thuc.7.83.4). However, the Syracusans had been keeping an eye on the Athenian camp and immediately raised the paeon for battle when they witnessed the Athenians preparing to march (Thuc.7.83.4). The Athenians, realizing that the plan would fail, dropped their arms and returned to camp (Thuc.7.83.5). Three hundred men of the Athenians did not put down their arms and fled, forcing their way through the guards (Thuc.7.83.5). These

men were rounded up the next day and taken into captivity.⁴¹³ The Athenians and Syracusans rested in preparation for the next day.

Day Eight

Nicias' army continued to march south under constant missile harassment from the Syracusans (Thuc.7.84.1). The Athenians eventually reached the river Assinarus (Thuc.7.84.2). The identification of this river has been troublesome. The most obvious explanation is that the river Assinarus is the modern Asinaro, yet Green proposed that the river changed its name and that the Assinarus River is the modern Tellaro River. Pais points out that the locals of Noto call the Tellaro River the Attidatu and believes that this is a corruption of Assinarus.⁴¹⁴ This is not a satisfying conclusion.⁴¹⁵ Today, the River Asinaro is also called the Fiume di Noto,⁴¹⁶ and must be the Assinarus. However, there are a few other possible explanations.

The first is that Thucydides' distances are incorrect, and Nicias' army was not 50 stades ahead of Demosthenes' troops. The second is that Thucydides measurements are correct, and Demosthenes' troops had yet to cross the Cacyparis and the estate of Polyzelus was farther north. The third option is that the Erineus was a waterway that no longer exists in its expected form. What is attractive about this hypothesis is that we know that the Athenians were desperate for water when they reached the Assinarus River.

⁴¹³ A nice narrative technique employed by Thucydides. Instead of mentioning straightaway that the 300 men were captured, he gives the reader hope that these men may have successfully escaped and only later does he mention their capture as an afterthought.

⁴¹⁴ Pais (1894), 225. This is also the feeling of Green who surveyed the areas of the march in Sicily.

⁴¹⁵ Hornblower (2010), 729.

⁴¹⁶ Hornblower (2010), 729.

If the Erineus River was the modern Asinaro, it seems that the Athenians would have been able to resupply their water, since this is a rather large waterway. However, if the Erineus was a waterway that does not have a heavy flow, it would explain why the Athenians were so overcome by thirst. Dover has identified the Erineus as the 'Cava Mammaledi' but he notes that there are no less than seven possible candidates that could be the Erineus.⁴¹⁷ However, this is an issue that cannot easily be settled. I would like to argue the most obvious solution that the Assinarus is in fact the modern Asinaro (Fiume di Noto). Another possibility is that the Erineus was very close to the Assinarus (within a kilometre) so in this way, the distance mentioned by Thucydides would still be accurate. We have seen that under heavy assault, the Athenians failed to make much progress. For example, on the fifth day of the retreat, the Athenians failed to travel more than a kilometre. To conclude this discussion, the modern Asinaro makes the most sense of being the Assinarus based on the name. However, in order to vindicate Thucydides' explanation, we must assume that the Erineus was a river that was near the Assinarus and no longer exists in any noteworthy form today. For the rest of these events, when I refer to the Assinarus River, I will be speaking of the modern Asinaro rather than the Tellaro. It is unfortunate that Thucydides does not give the reader the marching distance for the day, as this would easily resolve this issue. For example, if Thucydides noted that Nicias' army had travelled 5 km over day 7 and 8, we could be sure that the Assinarus was in fact the modern Tellaro. Unfortunately, this problem must be left to conjecture.

⁴¹⁷ Gomme (1970), 456.

Regardless, the Athenians continued to march, having defied the expectations of the Syracusans. The Athenians approached the River Assinarus, and here we see how great the desperation of the Athenian really was. Thucydides narrates it as follows:⁴¹⁸

And the Athenians pressed hard toward the Assinarus River, partly because being constrained on all sides from the assault of many cavalry and of another mob of soldiers, partly from their distress and their yearning to drink, they think that it would be somewhat easier for them if they should cross the river. When they come upon it, they rush upon the river, no longer in order, but rather, everyone was wishing for himself to be the first to cross and now the enemy, pressing upon them, was making it difficult for them to cross. For since they were being forced to advance crowded together, they fell upon one another and were trampled underfoot. Some were destroyed straightaway, transfixed by their own spears and equipment and others, having become entangled, were swept down the river. The Syracusans, having stood on the other bank of the river (which was precipitous), from above, struck the Athenians; many of whom were greedily drinking and were in disorder in the hollow riverbed. And the Peloponnesians, going down against them, slaughtered them, especially those in the river. The water was spoiled straightaway, but they were drinking the water not at all less, and though it had

⁴¹⁸ Many have questioned how realistic this passage is. Thucydides seems to be exaggerating the brutality of the slaughter. Pseudo-Longinus in *On the Sublime*, claims that this is a narrative technique by Thucydides and has little to do with the actual reality. Instead, he uses this passage as an example of hyperbole (38.3). Of course, Thucydides may be relying on eye witness testimony of captured Athenians who managed to return to Athens. If this is the case, Thucydides account may be truthful, but based on the exaggerations of another party. It is certainly not impossible that the events that Thucydides describes are accurate. In the dash to the river hoplites may have fallen and gored themselves on their own spears, especially given that the hoplite's spear had a point on both ends. We should not read the account as completely false. However, the suggestion that many men were accidentally killing themselves by falling on their own weapons is likely exaggerated, but quite possibly some men did. Connor (2004) sees echoes of Orphic fragments in regard to the thirst for water. Hornblower (2010), 734 states that Thucydides account should not be dismissed as narrative flourishing. Plutarch's account tones down Thucydides narrative. Though far less vivid than Thucydides' report, it provides a more reasonable narrative that shows no signs of hyperbole (Plut. 27.3-4).

become bloodied and loaded with mud, it was being fought over by most (Thuc. 7.84.2-5).⁴¹⁹

Here, Thucydides clearly outlines the effect of dehydration on the Athenian soldiers (Thuc. 7.84.2). They failed to defend adequately themselves in any serious manner while being heavily assaulted by Syracusan missile infantry (Thuc. 7.84.4). Thucydides says that the corpses of Athenian men were heaped upon one another in the river (Thuc. 7.85.1), while others who managed to cross the river were cut down swiftly by the Syracusan cavalry waiting on the opposite bank (Thuc. 7.85.1). The width of the ford must have been quite narrow, and this is why the Athenians became so heaped together, for if they were to go out of the shallows, they were swept away by the current. At this point, witnessing such carnage, Nicias was willing to surrender in order to stop the slaughter (Thuc. 7.85.1). Nicias chose to surrender himself to Gylippus, apparently trusting him more than the Syracusans (Thuc. 7.85.1). This was because he felt that Gylippus would be less harsh with him because he was the man who procured the peace with the Spartans in 421 BC and helped to release Spartan prisoners at Sphacteria (Thuc. 7.86.4). Nicias told Gylippus to do with him what he wished, but to stop the killing of his men (Thuc. 7.85.1). Many Athenians and their allies were taken as private slaves (Thuc.

⁴¹⁹ Thuc. 7.84.2-5. καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἠπεύγοντο πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσίναρον ποταμόν, ἅμα μὲν βιαζόμενοι ὑπὸ τῆς πανταχόθεν προσβολῆς ἰπέων τε πολλῶν καὶ τοῦ ἄλλου ὄχλου, οἰόμενοι ῥᾶόν τι σφίσιν ἔσεσθαι, ἢν διαβῶσι τὸν ποταμόν, ἅμα δ' ὑπὸ τῆς τάλαιπωρίας καὶ τοῦ πιεῖν ἐπιθυμία. ὡς δὲ γίνονται ἐπ' αὐτῶ, ἐσπίπτουσιν οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ἔτι, ἀλλὰ πᾶς τέ τις διαβῆναι αὐτὸς πρῶτος βουλόμενος καὶ οἱ πολέμιοι ἐπικείμενοι χαλεπὴν ἤδη τὴν διάβασιν ἐποίουν· ἀθρόοι γὰρ ἀναγκαζόμενοι χωρεῖν ἐπέπιπτόν τε ἀλλήλοις καὶ κατεπάτουν, περὶ τε τοῖς δορατίοις καὶ σκεύεσιν οἱ μὲν εὐθὺς διεφθείροντο, οἱ δὲ ἐμπαλασσόμενοι κατέρρεον. ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ θάτερα τε τοῦ ποταμοῦ παραστάντες οἱ Συρακόσιοι (ἦν δὲ κρημνῶδες) ἔβαλλον ἄνωθεν τοὺς Ἀθηναίους, πίνοντάς τε τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀσμένους καὶ ἐν κοίλῳ ὄντι τῶ ποταμῶ ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ταρασσομένους. οἱ τε Πελοποννήσιοι ἐπικαταβάντες τοὺς ἐν τῶ ποταμῶ μάλιστα ἔσφαζον. καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ εὐθὺς διέφθαρτο, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἐπίνετό τε ὁμοῦ τῶ πηλῶ ἡματωμένον καὶ περιμάχητον ἦν τοῖς πολλοῖς.

7.85.4), while only about 1000 troops were captured to join Demosthenes' 6000 troops at Syracuse. At this point, other than some men who had fled, the entire Sicilian Expedition Corps had been killed or captured.

Aftermath of the Capture

Upon the surrender of Demosthenes and Nicias, there was a debate as to what should be done with the two generals.⁴²⁰ Ultimately, Nicias and Demosthenes were put to death (Thuc. 7.86.2). The captives of the Athenians and the allies were put in the stone quarries at Syracuse (Thuc. 7.86.2).⁴²¹ The particular quarry is the modern *Latomia dei Cappuccini*. Here, the 7000 captives were huddled together and forced to defecate, urinate, sleep, and eat in the same place (Thuc. 7.87.2). What is more, men who died in the quarry were simply stacked on top of one another (Thuc. 7.87.2). Illness spread

⁴²⁰ This 'debate' has the greatest inconsistencies between our extant authors in terms of the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition. Thucydides does not say much about this debate. In his account, Gylippus wanted Nicias and Demosthenes alive to take them to Sparta. However, the Syracusans and Corinthians refused, fearing that Nicias' immense wealth would allow him to escape Syracuse via bribery (Thuc. 7.86.2-4). Diodorus, on the other hand has a lengthy debate at Syracuse as to what should be done with the generals and the captives. A Syracusan statesman, Diocles, demands that the generals be executed and the captives are thrown in the quarries (Diod. 13.19.4). Diocles' speech essentially follows Thucydides' account of events. However, Hermocrates says that it would be best to treat the captives with moderation (Diod. 13.19.4). Then, Nicolaus, an old man who had lost 2 sons during the war, gives an incredibly lengthy speech. He feels that treating the Athenians inhumanely is barbarous, and acting without mercy would show a decline for Syracuse. He pleads for Nicias to be spared, declaring him a man who had shown goodwill to Syracuse. (Diod. 13.20-27). Gylippus responds to Nicolaus' speech, by appealing to the people who had lost sons in the war. He reminds the Syracusans of the crimes of the Athenians and concludes that they must be shown no mercy (Diod. 13.28-32). The crowd, although nearly having been swayed by Nicolaus, approves Gylippus' speech and adopts the plan of Diocles. In Plutarch's account, Eurycles, a statesman, proposes that the Athenians and their close allies are sold into slavery and the Sicilian Greeks who had joined them be sent to the stone quarries. He felt the generals should be put to death. Hermocrates attempts to persuade the Syracusans to show clemency, but is shouted down. Gylippus, like in Thucydides' account, wants the generals to be taken to Sparta, but is abused by the Syracusans. Plutarch further claims that Nicias and Demosthenes committed suicide, because Hermocrates had got a message to them in secret that the Syracusans were going to have them killed. Plutarch says that this account is from Timaeus, but in Philistus and Thucydides, the Syracusans had them executed (Plut. *Nic.* 28.2-4). This event provided later historians with a great opportunity for dramatic set speeches, likely invented, and also showing bias. This would explain the large amount of inconsistency in this pivotal moment for the Expedition Corps.

⁴²¹ This is quite possibly the first recorded concentration camp.

throughout the quarry (Thuc. 7.87.1). Further, the Athenians were only given a half-pint of water and a pint of food each day (Thuc. 7.87.2). Thucydides reports that this amount of rations lasted for 8 months (Thuc. 7.87.2), and it seems that after this the size of the rations was increased. I question how many men would still have been alive at this point. They also had no shelter from the heat of the sun or the cold weather that would come during the nights or in the winter (Thuc. 8.87.1). After 70 days, Thucydides says that all peoples except the Athenians, Sicels, and Italians, were sold into slavery (Thuc. 87.3). This seems to be a roundabout way of saying that the Greek islanders and Peloponnesians were sold.

Athenian Troop Numbers Revisited

With only 7000 men taken to the quarry as property of the Syracusan state, how can we explain the loss of men from the beginning of the retreat until the final surrender of Athenian forces? Based on my estimations, we must account for between 23 and 33000 men. Thucydides states that:

The (number) of the army having been collected into the common stock was not many, the (number) stolen and dispersed (by the army) was large, and all Sicily was filled with these men, inasmuch as they were not part of a treaty such as those having been taken with Demosthenes. Also, not any small number had been slain; for this greatest slaughter (at the River Assinarus) was not in any way lesser than any in this war in Sicily. And in the other attacks in the march, which came to pass often, not a few men (but rather many) were killed. Nevertheless, many men fled, some at the time (during the march), others, afterwards,

having become slaves and escaping; for these men, the place of retreat was Catane (Thuc. 7.85.3-4).⁴²²

We learn a few things from this passage. First, while there were 7000 men taken as state slaves, a greater number than this was taken as private slaves. This accounts for a number greater than 14000. Further, Thucydides notes that casualties were constant and high throughout the march.⁴²³ Finally, many men had fled during the march and managed to escape to Catane. These would likely have been small groups of men who felt that the retreat was hopeless and left in small parties, probably taking a roundabout way to reach their destination in order to avoid capture by the Syracusans. Thus, it seems plausible that over the eight days of marching that a body of 30 to 40000 men were reduced to a mere 7000 men captured and taken to Syracuse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has become clear that the Athenians were hindered by a few factors. First, the delay after the Battle in the Great Harbour was extremely costly for the success of the retreat because it provided the Syracusans with the time to make adequate preparations. Second, distrust amongst the ranks was allowed to fester. Third, the lack of provisions for the Athenians was absolutely devastating and led to the desperation and slaughter at the River Assinarus. Fourth, the Syracusans' effective use of cavalry and

⁴²² Thuc. 7.85.3-4. τὸ μὲν οὖν ἀθροισθὲν τοῦ στρατεύματος ἐς τὸ κοινὸν οὐ πολὺ ἐγένετο, τὸ δὲ διακλαπὲν πολὺ, καὶ διεπλήσθη πᾶσα Σικελία αὐτῶν, ἅτε οὐκ ἀπὸ ξυμβάσεως ὥσπερ τῶν μετὰ Δημοσθένους ληφθέντων. μέρος δὲ τι οὐκ ὀλίγον καὶ ἀπέθανεν· πλεῖστος γὰρ δὴ φόνος οὗτος καὶ οὐδενὸς ἐλάσσων τῶν ἐν τῷ [Σικελικῷ] πολέμῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο. καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις προσβολαῖς ταῖς κατὰ τὴν πορείαν συχναῖς γενομέναις οὐκ ὀλίγοι ἐτεθνήκεσαν. πολλοὶ δὲ ὅμως καὶ διέφυγον, οἱ μὲν καὶ παραυτίκα, οἱ δὲ καὶ δουλεύσαντες καὶ διαδιδράσκοντες ὕστερον· τούτοις δ' ἦν ἀναχώρησις ἐς Κατάνην.

⁴²³ This is not surprising. Consider the Massacre of Elphinstone's Army in 1842 where a combined British and Indian army was almost completely destroyed by Afghani forces while making a 90 mile retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad. See Macrory (2002), 197-237.

light armed infantry both slowed Athenian progress and lessened casualty rates in the Syracusan ranks by avoiding hoplite engagements whenever possible. This is seen most clearly in the final engagement with Demosthenes' column where the Syracusans simply pelted the Athenians with projectiles, but never actually engaged with the Athenian hoplites. Finally, the disastrous difference of pace between the contingents of Demosthenes and Nicias made it possible for the Syracusans to surround each formation individually and force both generals into submission. When these issues are combined with the lack of resources available to the Athenians both in terms of weapons and food, it is clear why the Athenians failed to make the retreat to Catane or any other city that was friendly to the Athenians.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

In my reading of Thucydides' account of the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition, I was amazed that Thucydides does not really answer how and why the Athenians failed to complete their objectives in both the Battle in the Great Harbour and in the retreat through Sicily. Thus, I set out to explicate Thucydides' narrative by combining his emphasis on the psychological state of the Athenians with Greek military tactics which he tends to gloss over. I have suggested that Thucydides passes over the more minute details of both naval and infantry combat since his readers would certainly be familiar with the mechanics of warfare.

In order to explain the failure of the Athenians, I applied the *Face of Battle* approach to the final phase of the Sicilian Expedition which I felt was suitable to answer the question of how and why the Athenians were unsuccessful in their goals. The *Face of Battle* approach gave me the opportunity to reconstruct the Battle in the Great Harbour and the ensuing Athenian retreat with a close consideration of the experience of individual units in these engagements. In this investigation, I found that the Athenian troops were outclassed by the Syracusans at nearly every level, which is not apparent in Thucydides and would not be clear in a more general military history.

I used Thucydides as my primary source and complemented his account with the later sources of Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch. Though scholars have questioned the reliability of Thucydides (and all other Greek historians), I have made the case that Thucydides is a trustworthy source. It is clear that Thucydides had literary ambitions based on the stylistic techniques that he employed. I agree that Thucydides uses various

narrative techniques in his writing, but I have argued that Thucydides necessarily employed the narrative techniques established by his predecessors (Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus) for crafting a linear historiographical account of complex historical realities. Further, the agonistic nature of Greek society also permeated Greek historiography, and thus, Thucydides would have used the narrative techniques of his predecessors and tried to surpass them with his prose. Ultimately, I concluded that Thucydides had literary goals, but at the same time, his account can be considered reliable. There does not need to be a dichotomy between literature and fact.

In investigating the sources available to Diodorus and Plutarch, I found that both authors had access to Philistus, either his original work or through the lens of Ephorus or Timaeus. Since Philistus was a Syracusan who was contemporary to the events, and our later sources do not contradict Thucydides' narrative on any major points, I think that it is safe to conclude that Thucydides' account is fairly accurate.

In my reconstruction of the Battle in the Great Harbour, I discovered several reasons for the Athenian defeat. The Athenian failure to confront the Syracusans immediately while the Syracusans were building the blockade was the first mistake. The very area in which the battle took place was not conducive to general Athenian naval strategy. The narrow space did not allow the Athenians to take advantage of their superior oarsmen. Thus, the Athenians decided to mimic the fighting styles that the other navies of Greece employed. However, the Athenian hoplites were unfamiliar with engaging on a ship, and, therefore, were overcome by the Syracusan heavy infantry. Furthermore, the modifications that the Athenians made to their ships were not made in

secrecy and were successfully counteracted by the Syracusans. This lack of secrecy led to the Syracusans using of animal hides which they attached to their outriggers. These hides protected their rowers from missiles and prevented Athenian grapnels from hooking onto Syracusan triremes. Moreover, the Syracusans controlled a larger portion of the harbour – and most importantly – the areas around the exit. Because of this, when a ship was forced to beach, it was more likely to land at an area of the shore that was occupied by Syracusan heavy infantry. If it was an Athenian trireme, the men would be slaughtered. If the ship was Syracusan, it would be pushed back into the water to continue the fight. The lack of provisions for the Athenians caused the Athenian troops to be less effective than their Syracusan counterparts who certainly came to the battle well-fed. Another factor was that the Athenians were forced to leave their ships in the water because of the fear of Syracusan attack and limited space in the Athenian stockade. Therefore, the Athenian triremes were waterlogged and therefore sluggish in the water, which further nullified any advantages the Athenians would have had in terms of maneuvering their triremes. Finally, Gylippus' capture of the Athenian storehouses at Plemmyrium left the Athenians without proper supplies to make repairs to their ships either before or during the battle. When all of these issues were considered, it became clear how and why the Athenians failed to defeat the Syracusans in the Battle in the Great Harbour and escape Sicily.

In my reconstruction of the Athenian retreat, I again applied the *Face of Battle* approach. First, I argued that it was possible for the Athenians to make it to a safe haven in Sicily by citing the accomplishment of Xenophon as described in his *Anabasis*. Second, I have shown that Thucydides statement that 40 000 men were involved in the

final march is plausible. Again, I uncovered several reasons for the total annihilation of the Athenian Expeditionary Corps. First, the Athenians delayed their march after their defeat in the Great Harbour. The delay was at first caused by the trick employed by Hermocrates, but was extended because of the sorry state of the Athenian army. The delay gave the Syracusans the opportunity to set up defences along the major marching routes so that they could hinder Athenian progress. The mutiny of the oarsmen and the abandonment of the army by Sicels and slaves caused the soldiers to become distrustful of one another and hindered the hoplites and cavalrymen because they were forced to carry all of their own gear. Similar to the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians were lacking provisions, which made the Athenians less effective in battle, and furthermore, led to the disastrous encounter at the River Assinarus. The Syracusans used their cavalry and light-armed troops in a very effective manner. The Athenians were constantly slowed by Syracusan assaults, and these attacks caused far more casualties for the Athenians since the Syracusans did not openly engage the Athenians in hoplite combat except when trying to block fords and passages. Not only were the Athenians delayed by these constant attacks, their inability to counteract the Syracusans was certainly damaging to the morale of the army. Finally, Demosthenes' slow march on the 6th day of the retreat had devastating consequences. Since Nicias had gotten so far ahead, it was impossible for his contingent to march back and relieve Demosthenes' men in the battle at the estate of Polyzelus. Thus, both Demosthenes' and later Nicias' forces could be singled out and surrounded by the Syracusans and forced into surrendering. The disadvantages faced by the Athenians were simply insurmountable, and it becomes apparent why the Athenians failed to make the journey to Catane. After the complete Athenian surrender, I explained

how it was possible for the Athenians to have so many troops on the march, but end up with only 7000 men in Syracusan captivity. I argue – based on Thucydides’ description – that more men were taken as private slaves, many men actually did escape during the retreat and made their way to Catane, and finally, Athenian casualties were high during the retreat, especially during the attempt to seize the Acraean Heights, Demosthenes’ final stand, and the slaughter at the River Assinarus.

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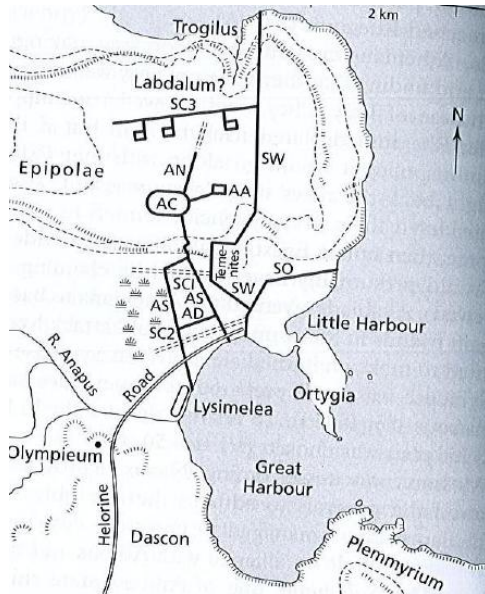
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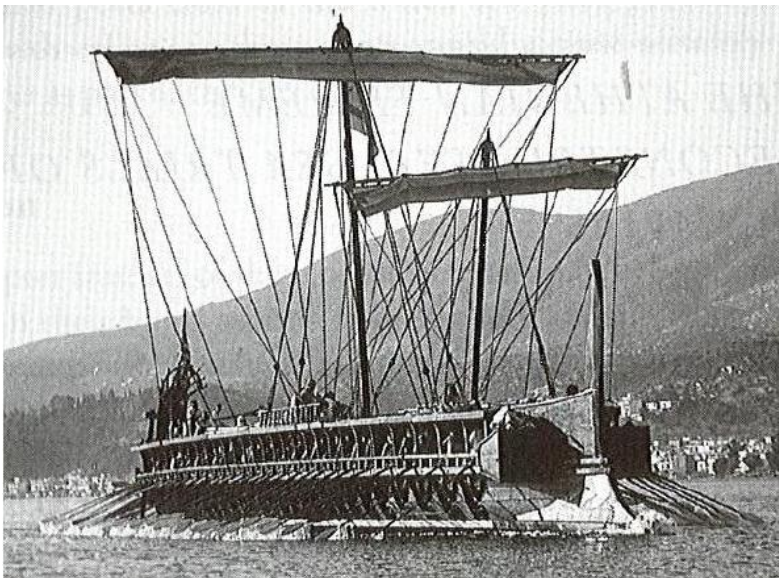
Figures

Figure 1: Map of the Great Harbour and the position of the Syracusan walls.



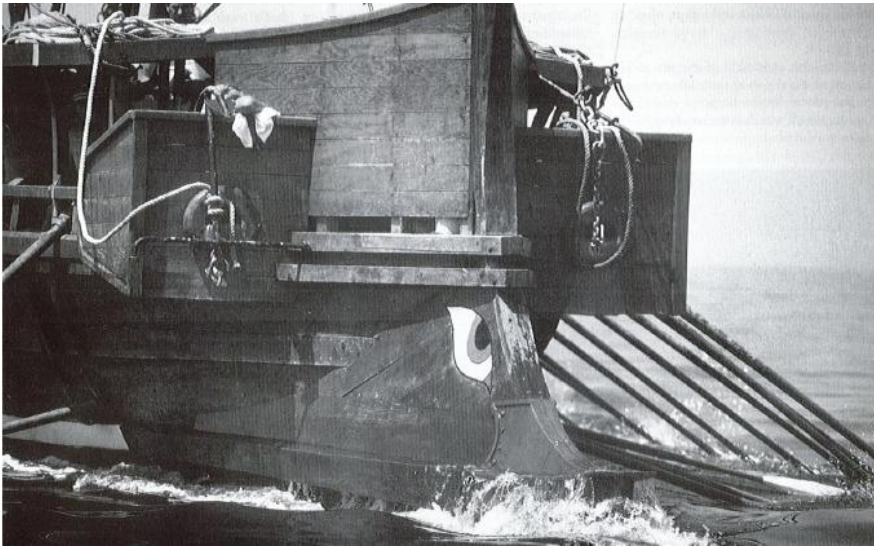
Source: Rhodes (2010), 142.

Figure 2: The reconstructed trireme, *Olympias*.



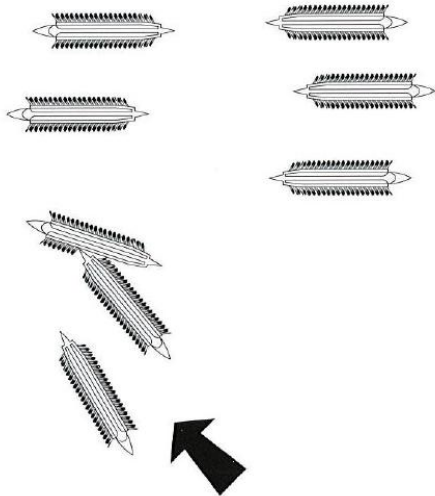
Source: Morrison (2000), 232.

Figure 3: The position of the ram on the bow of an Athenian trireme.



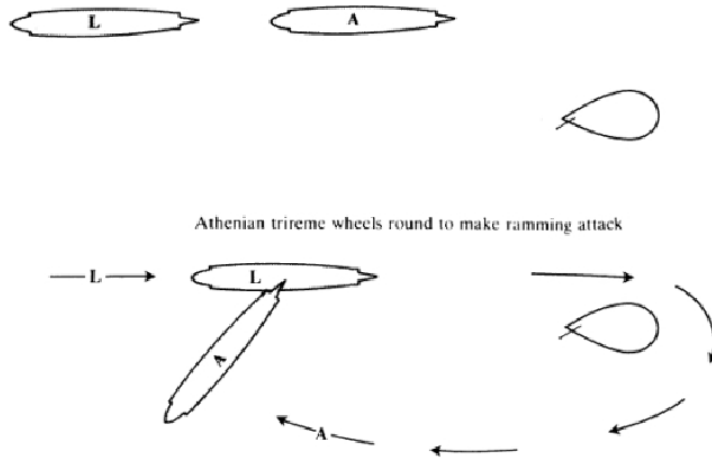
Source: Gardiner (1995), 49.

Figure 4: The standard interpretation of the *periplous*.



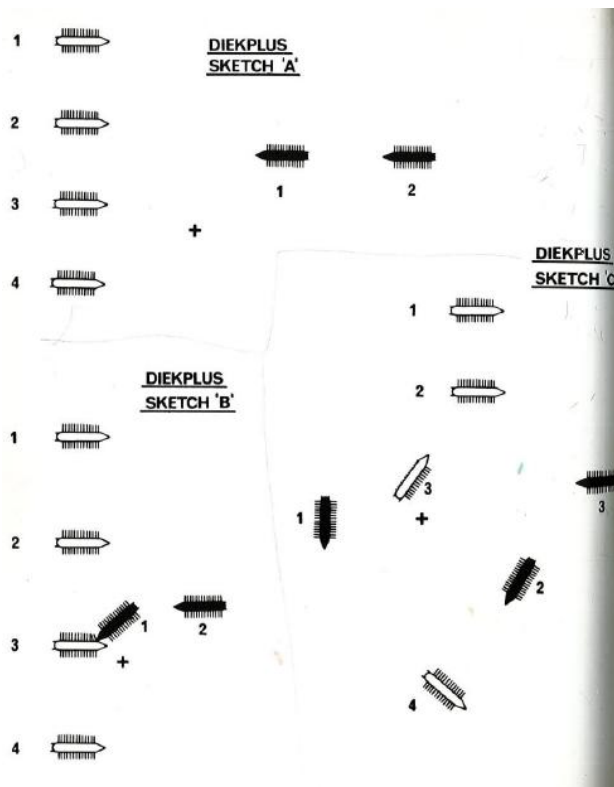
Source: Anglim (2001), 228.

Figure 5: Whitehead's interpretation of the *periplous*.



Source: Whitehead (1987), 181.

Figure 6: The *diekplous*.



Source: Nelson (1973), 56.

Figure 7: The *kuklos*

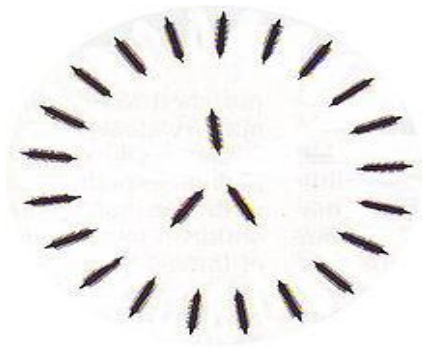
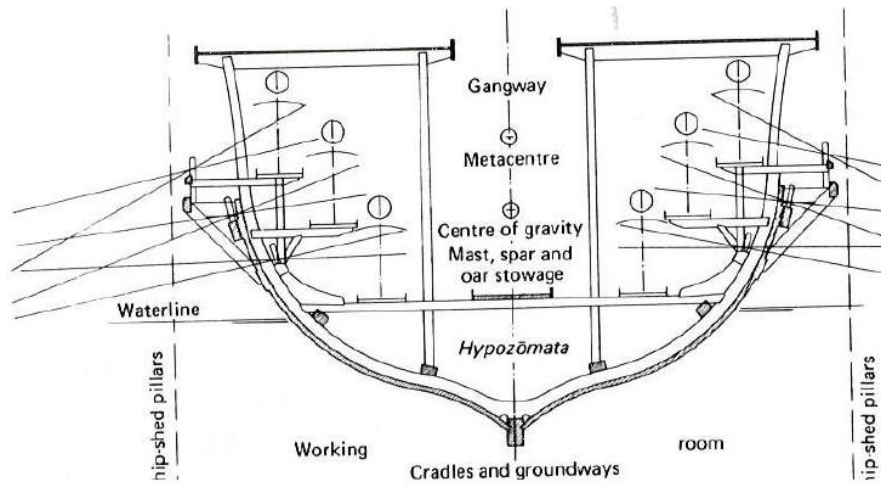
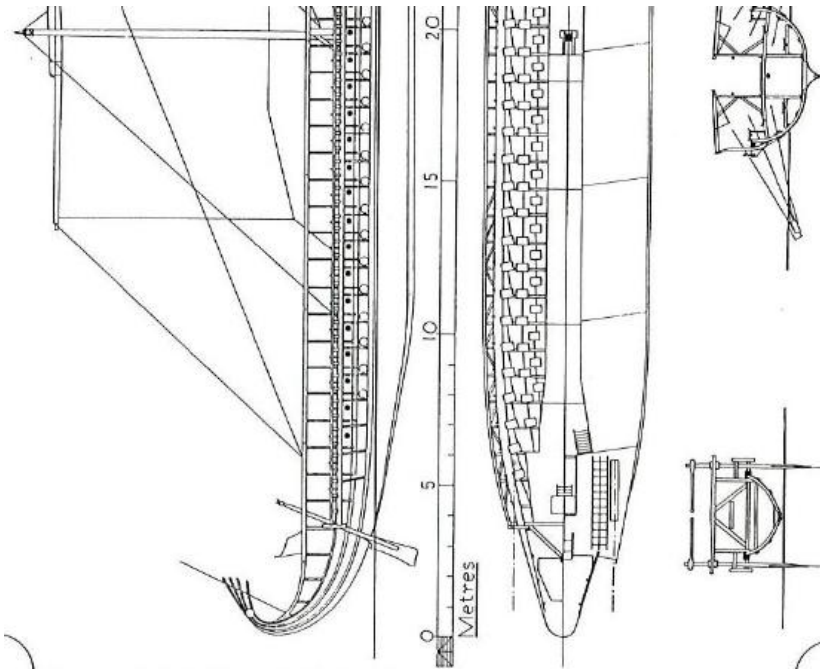


Figure 8: The position of the seats for the oarsmen



Source: Morrison (2000), 194.

Figure 9: The position of the rudder (and thus the position of the *kubernetes*) at the stern of the ship.



Source: Morrison (2000), 208

Figure 10: An Attic Black Figure vase showing the position of the helmsman and the bow officer.



Source: Morrison (2000), 113.

Figure 11: The distance between Syracuse and Catane.

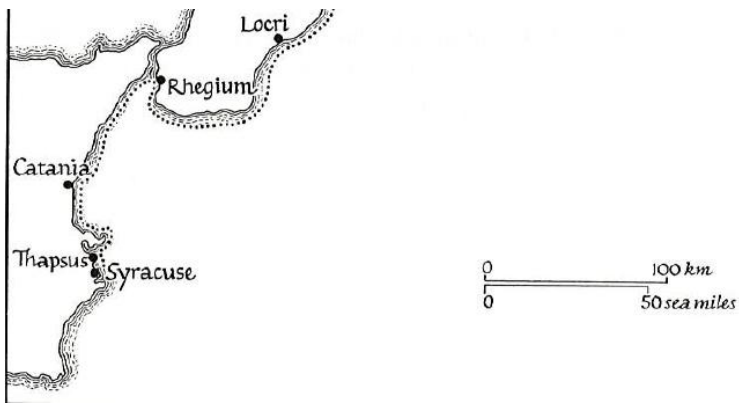
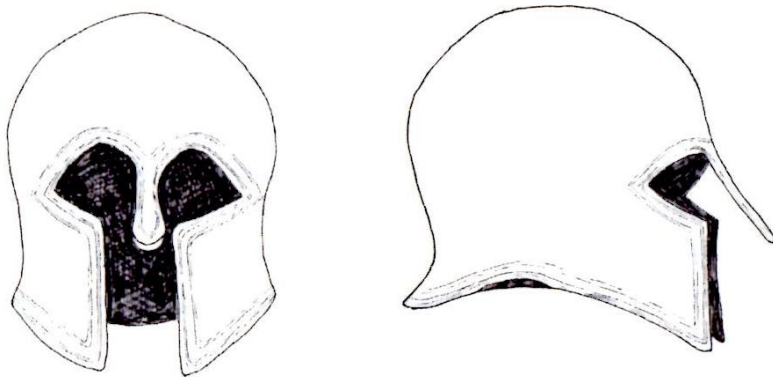
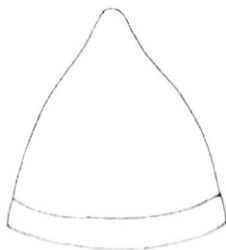


Figure 12: The Corinthian helmet.



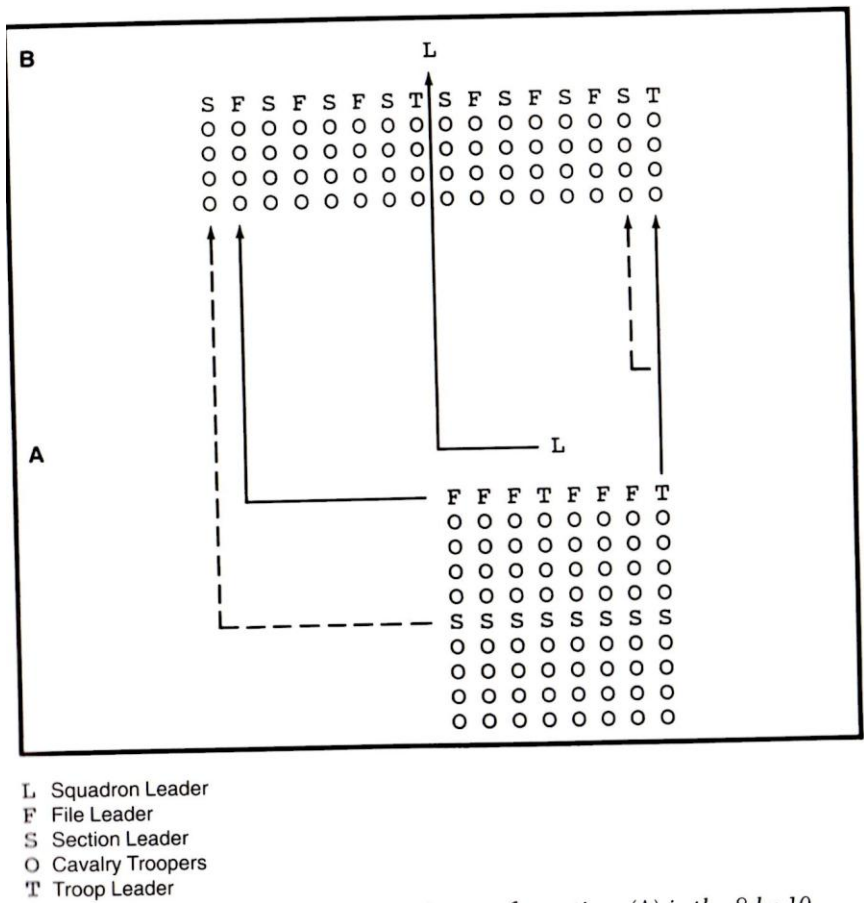
Source: Schwartz (2009), 58.

Figure 13: The Pilos helmet.



Source: Schwartz (2009), 58.

Figure 14: Syracusan cavalry formations



Source: Worley (1994), 101.

Figure 15: Map of the Athenian Retreat



Legend:

- AC: Athenian Camp (Starting point of the march)
- 1: Athenian Campsite at the end of the first day of the march
- 2: Athenian Campsite at the end of the second and third day of the march
- 4: Athenian Campsite at the end of the fourth day of the march
- 5: Athenian Campsite at the end of the fifth day of the march
- 6: Athenian Campsite at the end of the sixth day of the march (Nicias' contingent only)
- 7: Athenian Campsite at the end of the seventh day of the march (Nicias' contingent only)
- A: Battle at the Anapus River crossing (*Ponte Di Capocorso*) (Athenian victory)
- B: Battle at the Acraean Bald (Syracusan victory)
- C: Battle at the Cacyparis River (Athenian victory; only Nicias' forces)
- D: Battle at the Estate of Polyzelus (Syracusan victory; Demosthenes surrenders)
- E: Battle at the River Assinarus (Syracusan victory; Nicias surrenders)

Figure 16: The Greek hoplite



Figure 17: Peltast



Figure 18: Peltast



Figure 19: Archer



Figure 20: Slinger



Appendices

Appendix A: Athenian Troop Numbers

At the beginning of the retreat, Thucydides mentions that there were no less than 40 000 men among the Athenians and their allies (Thuc. 7.75.5). Hornblower claims that such a number is impossible and states further that Thucydides has become “carried away by the emotion.”⁴²⁴ Rubincam states that the number of 40 000 must be a rough estimate.⁴²⁵ I agree with Rubincam, but I believe that the number is probably closer to 40 000 than Hornblower admits. Much like our own estimations, Thucydides must make a guess in regard to the number as it is impossible to keep track of various casualties and deserters. Thucydides gives a summary of the troops sent from the Greek mainland to Sicily in 415 BC. He states:

After these things, the Athenians, having gone under sail, sailed from Corcyra toward Sicily in sufficient preparation with 134 triremes in all, and 2 Rhodian fifty-oared ships (of which 100 (triremes) were Athenian, of these there were 60 swift ships and the others were troop carrying ships, the other part of the fleet were from Chios and the other allies), and with 5100 hoplites all together (and of these, 1500 were from the Athenians themselves from the register and 700 *thetes* as marines, but the rest of the allies shared in the expedition, some of these men were subjects of the Athenians, but 500 Argives also, and 250 Mantineians were serving for pay (mercenaries), and with 480 archers in all (of these, 80 were Cretans), and with 700 Rhodian slingers, and with 120 light-armed Megarian exiles, and with 1 horse-transport ship, carrying 30 cavalry (Thuc. 6.43.1).⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Hornblower (2010), 714.

⁴²⁵ Rubincam (1979), 85.

⁴²⁶ Thuc. 6.43.1. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τοσῆδε ἤδη τῆ παρασκευῆ Ἀθηναῖοι ἄραντες ἐκ τῆς Κερκύρας ἐς τὴν Σικελίαν ἐπεραιούοντο, τριήρεσι μὲν ταῖς πάσαις τέσσαρσι καὶ τριάκοντα καὶ ἑκατόν, καὶ δυοῖν Ῥοδίον πεντηκοντόρου (τούτων Ἀττικαὶ μὲν ἦσαν ἑκατόν, ὧν αἱ μὲν ἐξήκοντα ταχεῖαι, αἱ δ' ἄλλαι στρατιώτιδες,

So, looking at this catalogue of troops, an initial count can be made. There are 5100 hoplites which include 2200 Athenians, 500 Argives, 250 Mantineians, and the remaining 2150 hoplites were provided by the subjects of the Athenian empire. Further, there were 480 archers, 700 slingers, 120 light armed Megarians, and 30 cavalrymen. The total so far is 6420 troops. However, now the rowers must be included. The 2 Rhodian penteconters would add 100 oarsmen. The 60 fast Athenian triremes would add 10200 rowers (assuming each ship was powered by the standard 170 oarsmen). In addition, there would be the standard 30 support units on each one of these ships (i.e. 10 hoplite marines, 4 archers, a helmsman, a flute player, a trierarch, a bow officer, a boatswain, a ship carpenter, and 10 deckhands). However, the archers and hoplites must be subtracted from the total so they are not counted twice. Each fast trireme would include 10 hoplites and 4 archers, leaving 16 support units (a helmsman, a flute player, a trierarch, a bow officer, a boatswain, a ship carpenter, and 10 deckhands) that are added to the total number of troops. Thus, there are 960 men accounted for on the fast triremes. The 40 troop carriers are more difficult to nail down in terms of the number of rowers. Certainly, the number of rowers was reduced on these ships in order to make space for a greater amount of

τὸ δὲ ἄλλο ναυτικὸν Χίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ξυμμάχων), ὀπλίταις δὲ τοῖς ξύμπασις ἑκατὸν καὶ πεντακισχιλίους (καὶ τούτων Ἀθηναίων μὲν αὐτῶν ἦσαν πεντακόσιοι μὲν καὶ χίλιοι ἐκ καταλόγου, ἑπτακόσιοι δὲ θῆτες ἐπιβάται τῶν νεῶν, ξύμμαχοι δὲ οἱ ἄλλοι ξυνεστράτευον, οἱ μὲν τῶν ὑπηκόων, οἱ δ' Ἀργείων πεντακόσιοι καὶ Μαντινέων καὶ μισθοφόρων πενήκοντα καὶ διακόσιοι), τοξόταις δὲ τοῖς πᾶσις ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ τετρακοσίους (καὶ τούτων Κρήτες οἱ ὀγδοήκοντα ἦσαν) καὶ σφενδονήταις Ῥοδίων ἑπτακοσίους, καὶ Μεγαρεῦσι ψιλοῖς φυγάσις εἴκοσι καὶ ἑκατὸν, καὶ ἵππαγωγῶ μὲν τριάκοντα ἀγούση ἱπέας.

hoplites. However, how great the reduction is a matter of debate. In terms of hoplites, of the 5100, 600 are included on the 60 fast triremes. Therefore, 4500 hoplites, 240 archers (240 archers are on the fast triremes), 700 slingers, and 120 light armed troops must have a space on the remaining 74 triremes and 2 penteconters. Thus, not including the rowers or the support troops, 5560 soldiers are on 76 ships, leaving an average of roughly 73 soldiers per ship. However, it is impossible to ascertain how many of the 34 ships provided by the allies would be fast triremes or troop transports. Thus, for the sake of calculation, I split the number of triremes in half, so there are 17 fast triremes and 17 troop transports. This would add 3944 oarsmen and 544 crewmen. The penteconter seems to have had the same number of crew on deck as the fast trireme, so another 60 men are counted. What seems attractive is that only the top row of the trireme was composed of actual oarsmen. Thus, there would be 62 rowers per transport trireme.⁴²⁷ If this is correct, all of the soldiers could be sitting comfortably in the seats of the absent rowers. In this way, only the standard number of soldiers needs to be on the deck of the ship. Of course, these ships will also have the 16 men involved in the running of the ship. The remaining ship is the horse transport. This ship would include probably 62 rowers (top row), the 30 horses, the 10 hoplites, the 4 archers and the 16 deck crew, plus a few men to care for the horses during sail. In terms of certain numbers, we obtain the following totals: 5100 hoplites, 480 archers, 700 slingers, 120 light-armed troops, 30 cavalymen, 16786 oarsmen (10200 on fast triremes [170 men X 60 triremes], 2480 on

⁴²⁷ Beloch believed that there were 60 rowers on a troop transport. I think that this is nearly accurate, but I would presume that the top level of oar stations would be filled, making it 62 rowers per ship. This way, the legitimate oarsmen can also see the water. This is not to say that the additional men sitting in the *zugioi* and *thalamioi* seats did not provide assistance in the rowing, but they would certainly not have the expertise as the other oarsmen.

troop carriers [62 men X 40 triremes], 3944 men provided by the allies, 62 men on the horse transport and 100 men on penteconters [50 X 2], and 2192 miscellaneous naval units (deckhands, etc.). For the slaves, we can make a rough estimate. If we assume that each hoplite had one slave attendant and each trierarch had 2 slaves,⁴²⁸ the total number of slaves would be 5372. This gives a total of 30780 men, not including the number of army support units such as cooks or engineers. Now, this number covers the first segment of the expedition. However, the Athenians gain allies amongst the Italians and Sicilians.

We are told that there were 3 Etruscan penteconters (Thuc. 6.103.3), 300 Egestaian cavalymen, 100 Naxian and Sicel cavalymen (Thuc. 6. 98.1), and 800 Campanian cavalymen (Diod. 13.44.1) and an unspecified number of Sicel troops (Thuc. 6.103.3). The penteconter crew and rowers would add 198 men. Thus, 1398 men are added to the Athenian ranks, plus an unspecified number of Sicels. In the spring of 414BC, the Athenians decided to send cavalry troops to Syracuse which the expeditionary corps desperately needed (Thuc. 6.94.4). I assume that these men were sent in 4 troop transports. This adds 368 men from the ship crews plus 250 cavalymen and 30 mounted archers.

In the winter of 414/413 BC, Eurymedon arrived with 10 triremes in order to tell the expeditionary corps that a new contingent was being sent (Thuc. 7.16.2). I assume that the Athenians used fast triremes for this purpose so that Nicias could receive the

⁴²⁸ Sargent (1927), 273-74. Hanson (1989), 62. Pritchett (1971), 49-51.

news as quickly as possible. Thus, there would be a grand total of 2000 men being sent (assuming the standard 200 men per trireme).

Finally, in 413 BC, Demosthenes' navy arrived with 73 triremes (which includes Eurymedon's original 10 triremes). With Demosthenes were 60 Athenian triremes and 5 Chian triremes (Thuc. 7.20.2). Here, I have used a 50/50 split in terms of fast triremes and troop transports. Thus, there would be 37 fast triremes and 36 troop transports, but with 10 fast triremes missing in order to assist Naupactus (Thuc. 7.31.5). However, 15 more triremes are added by the Corcyrans (Thuc. 7.31.5) and 2 by the men of Metapontum (Thuc. 7.33.5). I assume that these are troop transports. In this case, there would be 8532 rowers and deck crew (not including hoplites and archers). In terms of the other troops, there were 5000 hoplites from Athens and her allies (Thuc. 7.42.1), with 700 more provided by the Thourians (Thuc. 7.35.1), plus an unspecified number from the Corcyrans (Thuc. 7.31.5). There were 150 javelin throwers from Iapygia, 300 from Metapontum (Thuc. 7.33.4-5), and 300 from the Thourians (Thuc. 7.35.1) plus unspecified numbers from the Athenians and her other allies (Thuc. 7.42.1). There were also an unknown numbers of cooks, masons, carpenters, slingers, and archers. If we make the same assumption in regard to the slaves as with the original expeditionary corps, there would be 5846 slaves. In total, there would be 21578 men sent in the second expedition plus the vast number of unspecified men. Thus, the final tally of men on the Athenian side involved in the Sicilian Expedition was 55654 plus many other unspecified support personnel. The number 55654 is broken into 10800 hoplites, 480 archers, 700 slingers,

1480 cavalymen, 30 horse archers, 120 light infantry, 750 javelin throwers, 26264 oarsmen, 3812 deck crew, and 11218 slaves.

Of course, we must factor in the number of casualties incurred during the expedition. Here, we are given even less information than for the number of troops involved. Ray estimates a total of 3375 hoplite deaths in land battles in the expedition.⁴²⁹ However, there were an unknown number of cavalymen and light armed troops killed. In the naval battles, slightly more accurate estimates can be made based on the number of ships destroyed. For these calculations, I have assumed that all men die on a sunken trireme. This is not necessarily the case, but certainly other men would be slain on ships that were not destroyed. If we assume that a similar number of men escaped a sunken trireme as the number of men who were killed on the ships that were not sunk, we can base the number of casualties on the number of troops on a standard trireme. Four major naval battles took place during the expedition. For the first 3 battles, it seems that the Athenians used the standard 200 men per trireme. During these first 3 battles, 28 Athenian triremes were lost.⁴³⁰ Thus, we can estimate that 5600 men died. However, in the Battle in the Great Harbour, the Athenians likely used around 250 men per ship.⁴³¹ Since the Athenians lost 50 ships (Thuc. 7.72.3), it is possible that 12500 men were killed in this battle. Further, there were large numbers of deserters which would largely include slaves and Sicel allies that had lost faith in the potential success of the expedition (Thuc. 7.75.5). Moreover, Thucydides mentions the illness running through the Athenian camp

⁴²⁹ Ray (2009), 303. I have added the number of casualties provided by Ray on the Athenian side for every battle in Sicily before the Battle in the Great Harbour.

⁴³⁰ Thuc. 7.23.4, 7.34.6, 7.52.3.

⁴³¹ See Hoplites in the section Essentials of Naval Combat in Chapter 2: The Battle in the Great Harbour.

and this would have certainly caused many casualties (Thuc. 7.50.3, 7.60.2). Thus, I conclude that during the course of the expedition, the Athenians lost up to 21475 men plus an unspecified number of cavalymen, light armed troops, deserters and deaths caused by illness.

Thus, for the Athenian retreat, the grand total was 34179 plus the uncounted light armed troops , hoplites, cooks, masons, carpenters, merchant ship crews, merchants and traders that may become stuck with the Athenians, minus the unaccounted number of light armed and cavalymen casualties, deserters, captives and deaths caused by illness. Therefore, the total number of men involved in the Athenian retreat might be closer to 40000 than commentators have assumed.

Original Expeditionary Corps		
Military Troops		
Troop Type	Number	Notes
Hoplite	5100	2200 Athenians, 500 Argives, 250 Mantinean Mercenaries
Archer	480	Including 80 Cretan Archers
Slinger	700	Rhodian
Light Infantry	120	Megarian exiles
Cavalrymen	30	Athenian
Naval Units		
60 Fast Triremes		
Oarsmen	10200	170 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	960	16 Deck Crew per ship

40 Transport Triremes		
Oarsmen	2480	62 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	640	16 Deck Crew per ship
34 Allied Triremes		
If All Fast Triremes		
Oarsmen	5780	170 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	544	16 Deck Crew per ship
If All Transport Triremes		
Oarsmen	2108	62 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	544	16 Deck Crew per ship
If A 50/50 Mix of Fast and Transport		
Oarsmen	3944	170 Rowers on 17 triremes and 62 rowers on the other 17 triremes
Deck Crew	544	16 Deck Crew per ship
2 Rhodian Penteconters		
Oarsmen	100	50 rowers per ship
Deck Crew	32	16 Deck crew per ship
Horse Transport		
Oarsmen	62	62 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	16	16 Deck Crew per ship
Miscellaneous Units		
Slaves	5372	If we assume that each hoplite has 1 slave and each trierarch has 2 slaves
Cooks	???	

Masons	???	
Carpenters	???	
130 Merchant Ship Crews	???	
Grand Total of Troops Launched at the Beginning of the Expedition		
30780 + the uncounted cooks, masons, carpenters + merchant ship crews+ merchants and traders that may become stuck with the Athenians		Assuming the average where exact numbers are not variable.
Sicilian and Italian Allied Troops		
3 Etruscan Penteconters		
Oarsmen	150	50 Rowers per Ship
Deck Crew	48	16 Deck Crew per ship
Cavalrymen	1200	300 Egestaian, 100 Naxian, 800 Campanian
Sicel Troops	???	Thucydides simply says “many of the Sicel allies” (Thuc. 6. 103.2). Beloch argues a grand total of 10000 troops added.
Grand Total of Sicilian and Italian Allies		
1398 + unspecified number of Sicel allies		

Cavalry Supplement in Spring 414 BC		
Possibly 4 Troop Transports		
Oarsmen	248	62 Rowers per Ship
Deck Crew	120	16 Deckhands, 10 Epibatai, 4 Archers per ship

Cavalrymen	250	From Athens
Mounted Archers	30	From Athens
Grand Total	648	

Eurymedon's Reinforcements Winter 414/413 BC		
10 Athenian Triremes		
Oarsmen	1700	170 Rowers per ship
Deck Crew	300	16 Deck crew + 10 hoplites + 4 archers per ship
Grand Total of Eurymedon's reinforcements		
2000		This number assumes fast triremes were used. This makes sense because Eurymedon was sent to get to Sicily as quickly as possible to inform the Athenians that help was being sent.

Demosthenes' Contingent in 413BC		
27 Fast Triremes		If we assume 37, but 10 were sent to aid Naupactus.
Oarsmen	4590	170 Rowers per Ship
Deck Crew	432	16 Deck Crew per Ship
45 Troop Transports		36 from Athens and her Allies with 15 taken from Corcyra and 2 taken from Metapontum.
Oarsmen	2790	62 Rowers per Ship
Deck Crew	720	16 Deck Crew per Ship
Military Troops		

Hoplites	5700 + ???	From both Athens and her Allies with 700 picked up from the Thourians. An unspecified number of hoplites are taken from Corcyra.
Javelin Throwers	750 + ???	150 from Iapygia and 300 from Metapontum and 300 from the Thourians and an unspecified amount in the original sailing from Athens
Slingers	???	Both with the original sailing from Athens and picked up from the Acharnanians
Archers	???	
Miscellaneous Units		
Slaves	5846	If we assume one slave per hoplite and 2 slaves per trierarch on each of the 73 triremes from Athens and her Allies.
Cooks	???	
Mason	???	
Carpenters	???	
Grand Total		
20828		This assumes that of the 73 triremes sent by Athens were divided nearly 50/50 between troop carrying and fast triremes at the beginning. However, 10 fast triremes were sent to aid Naupactus. I assume that the ships from the other poleis were largely troop transports.

Final Tally of men in Syracuse: 55654 + an unspecified number of other men.

List of Casualties and Deserters

Land Battles	Hoplite Casualties
Anapus River	50
Terias River	25
Euryelus	50
Syca	0
Lysimeleia	200
Epipolae	100
Epipolae II	400
Epipolae III	2500
Lysimeleia II	50
Total Estimated Land Battle Casualties of Hoplites + an unknown number of light armed troops and cavalry	3375* These are estimates provided by Fred Eugene Ray

Naval Battles	Casualties
Sea Battle in the Harbour I	3 Athenian Triremes (possibly up to 600 men)
Arrival of Demosthenes Battle	7 Athenian Triremes (possibly up to 1400 men) certainly too high of a number of casualties since the ships were not actually sank, but 7 were highly damaged.
Naval Battle after the Eclipse	18 Athenian Triremes (possibly up to 3600 men)
Battle in the Great Harbour	50 Athenian Triremes (possibly over 12500 men)
Total Estimated Naval Battle Casualties	Possibly 18100

Deserters and Other Casualties

Deserters	Number
Large Numbers of Sicel Allies and Slaves after the Defeat at the Great Harbour	???
Illnesses	??? + the men abandoned at Lysimeleia before the march.
Impossible to estimate the number of deserters and casualties caused by illness, but the numbers are presumably large.	

Total Casualties and Deserters: 21475 + an unknown number of deserters and death owing to illness.

Grand Total for the Athenian Retreat: 34179 + the uncounted light armed troops , hoplites, cooks, masons, carpenters + merchant ship crews+ merchants and traders that may become stuck with the Athenians – the unaccounted number of light armed casualties and deaths caused by illness. Thus, the 40 000 mentioned by Thucydides is certainly plausible.

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The University of Western Ontario
2010-2011

Ontario Graduate Scholarship
The University of Western Ontario
2012-2013 (Declined)

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Master's Competition
2012-2013

Related Work Experience Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2009-2010

Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2011-2013