12
The Peloponnesian War 421–413

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421	Peace of Nicias
420	Athenian alliance with Argos and other Peloponnesian states
418	Spartan victory in battle of Mantinea
416	Athenian capture of Melos
415–413	Athenian expedition to Sicily
413	Spartan occupation of Decelea in Attica

The Unstable Peace

In 421 the Peloponnesian War appeared to be over. Athens and Sparta had made a fifty-year peace and alliance by which Sparta had given up its hope of breaking the Athenian empire. But a peace which resulted from Sparta's failure rather than Athens' success might in any case not have been long-lasting; and, as we have seen (cf. p. 120), the terms of the peace were not fully implemented and several of Sparta's allies refused to swear to it. Thucydides, it seems, hoped that the peace would last, but he came to see that it had not lasted, and to regard the whole conflict from 431 to 404 as a single war: in V. 25–6 he gives us his 'second preface', linking what followed to the Archidamian War.

The Peloponnese was now seriously divided, and Corinth set about building up an alliance of states which had not accepted the peace. Corinth was not to regain cities in the north-west to which it laid claim (V. 30. ii: Acarnania may not have been a party to the peace). It was joined by Mantinea, which had recently subdued some of its neighbours and had fought inconclusively against

Tegea (V. 29. i, cf. 33, IV. 134), Elis, which resented Sparta's support of Lepreum against it (V. 31. i–v, 34. i: cf. p. 105), and the Chalcidians based on Olynthus, not wishing to become tributary to Athens once more (Olynthus was one of the cities made tributary but allowed to be neutral, V. 18. v; in general the Thraceward cities not in Athenian hands did not accept the peace, V. 21. i–ii), in making a defensive alliance with Argos, whose thirty-year peace with Sparta was now expiring (V. 27–31). The allies seem to have had no common purpose beyond unwillingness to be aligned with Sparta. Megara, which was not to regain Nisaea, and Boeotia, which was to lose Panactum (V. 17. ii, 18. vii), refused to join, claiming to find oligarchic Sparta a more congenial partner than democratic Athens (V. 31. vi: contrast the attraction of Athens' democracy for Mantinea and Argos, V. 29. i, 44. i); Mantinea's enemy Tegea also was approached but refused (V. 32. iii–iv). The Boeotians made their own, separate 'ten-day' truce with Athens (V. 26. ii, 32. v), perhaps one that could be ended at ten days' notice, and at some point the Chalcidians did likewise (VI. 7. iv). Corinth tried to get the same terms, but was unsuccessful and had to remain in a state of 'treatyless ceasefire' (V. 32. v–vii).

Because of Sparta's failure to enforce the peace in the north-east and on all its allies (in particular, the Boeotians still held Panactum), Athens, while withdrawing the Messenians of Naupactus from Pylos (and finding a home in Cephallenia for the helots who had deserted to them), retained the site and other places which it was supposed to give up (V. 35. ii–viii). Sparta meanwhile intervened in Arcadia to liberate the communities taken over by Mantinea, sent a garrison of liberated helots to Lepreum, and for a time subjected to partial disfranchisement the prisoners returned from Athens (V. 33–4). In the north-east Athens captured Scione and killed all the men; there should have been hardly any women and children left in the city to be enslaved (V. 32. i). In the following winter, however, Olynthus captured Mecyberna, nearby on the coast, although there was an Athenian garrison in it (V. 39. i).

In the winter of 421/0 matters started to become more complicated. When Sparta's new official year began (probably after the autumnal equinox), two of the new ephors, Cleobulus and Xenares, were men opposed to the peace with Athens. After a conference in Sparta had achieved nothing, they suggested to the Boeotian and Corinthian representatives that Boeotia should join the alliance which Corinth and others had made with Argos, and swing that alliance into alignment with Sparta; some Argives also were eager to bring Boeotia into the alliance, but their aim was to create a bloc which would be a match for Sparta. Megara was to be brought in too. But the plan broke down through an excess of secrecy. The senior federal officials of Boeotia, the Boeotarchs, first proposed a defensive alliance of Boeotia, Corinth, Megara and the north-eastern cities opposed to Athens; but they failed to explain to the Boeotian councils the pro-Spartan purpose behind joining the Argive alliance, and the councils rejected the plan out of fear that it would alienate Sparta (V. 36–8).

The Spartans wanted the Boeotians to give them Panactum so that in accordance with the Peace of Nicias they could return that to Athens and themselves

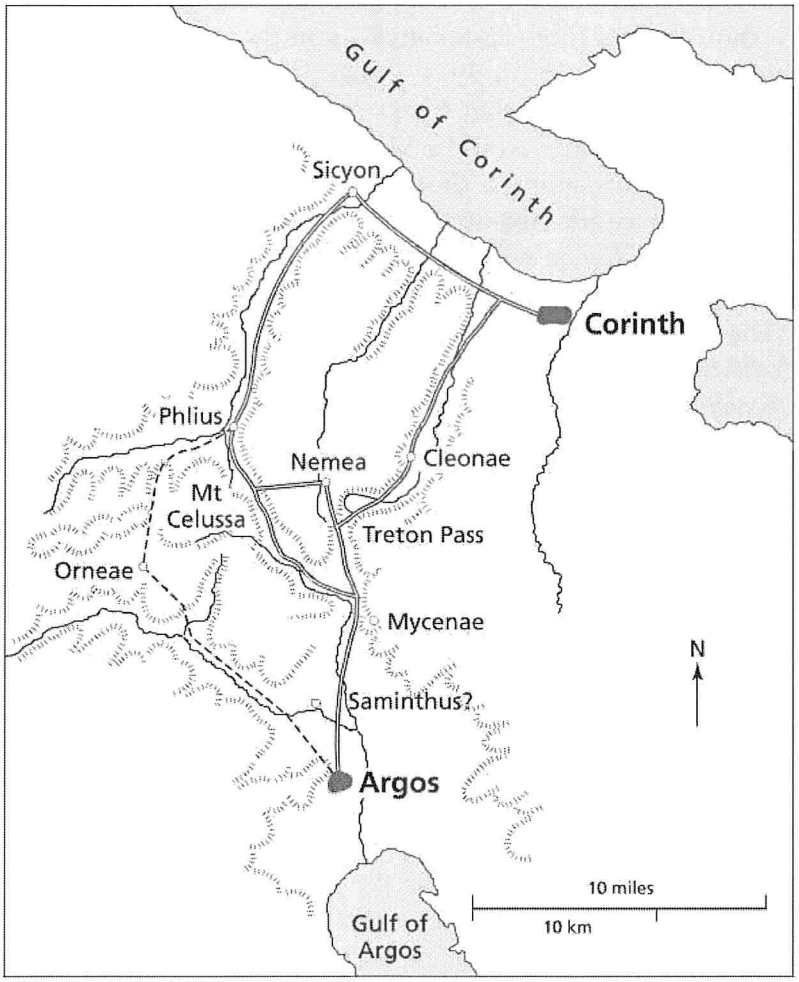
recover Pylos. Early in 420 the Boeotians made it a condition of this transfer that Sparta should grant them an alliance – and they demolished the fort before handing over the site (V. 36. ii, 39. ii–iii, 42. i). Argos, having heard no more from Boeotia, and supposing that Sparta's dealings with Boeotia had Athens' consent, began to fear that it would be isolated, and so itself entered into negotiations with Sparta, obtaining a draft of a fifty-year peace with limited rights to fight over the territory disputed between them. But Sparta had not had Athens' consent, its alliance with Boeotia was therefore a breach of its alliance with Athens, and the Athenians were angered by the destruction of Panactum, and afraid that if Argos joined Sparta they would be isolated (V. 42, 43. iii).

This provided an opportunity for those Athenians who were opposed to the Peace of Nicias, in particular Alcibiades. He invited Argos, Elis and Mantinea to send envoys to Athens; at the same time, to prevent a breach, Sparta sent envoys, one of whom was Endius, from the family linked to Alcibiades' family. The story which Thucydides then tells is difficult to believe, but it is hard to imagine a convincing scenario of which it might be a distortion. The Spartans appeared first before the council in Athens, and said that they were *autokratores* ('had full powers', but the expression is often used in circumstances where it is not clear how full the powers are) to settle the disputes. Alcibiades spoke to them privately and promised that if they did not admit to the assembly that they were *autokratores* he would help them to obtain the result they wanted. However, in the assembly, when the Spartans did deny that they were *autokratores*, Alcibiades denounced them. An earthquake led to the adjournment of the assembly. When the assembly resumed, Nicias had himself and others sent on a deputation to Sparta, but they achieved nothing, and at Alcibiades' prompting Athens made a hundred-year defensive alliance with Argos, Elis and Mantinea. However, as relations between Athens and Sparta worsened, Corinth's alienation from Sparta was fading: it was not represented in Athens, and afterwards refused an invitation to join the new alliance (V. 43–8, 50. v, cf. *IG* i^3 83).

Now Sparta had an alliance with Boeotia as well as with Athens, Athens had an alliance with Argos and other Peloponnesians as well as with Sparta, and Athens might be able to challenge Sparta on land in the Peloponnese as it could not in the Archidamian War. However, although the next few years were to see serious conflict between Sparta and Athens, it did not suit either to say that the Peace of Nicias and their alliance were at an end.

Renewed Fighting

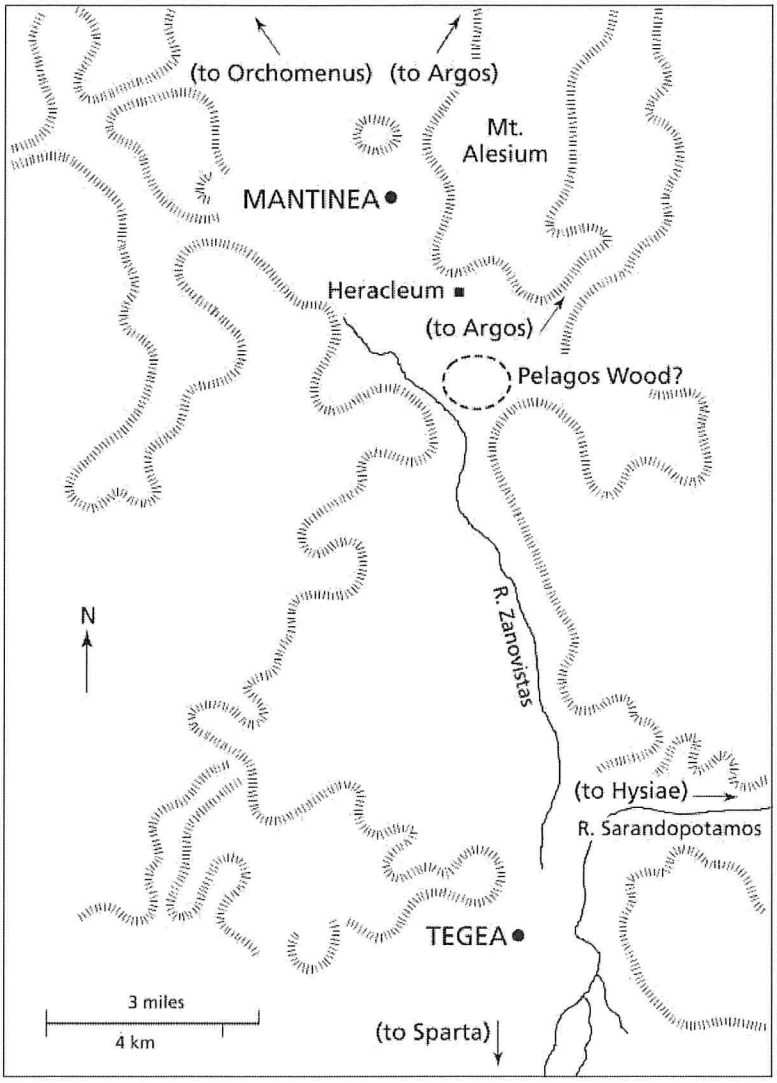
420 was an Olympic year, and at the beginning of the Olympic truce Sparta continued its support for Lepreum by sending an army there. Elis responded by excluding Sparta and Lepreum from the festival. Afraid that Sparta might use force, it was joined by the other members of the alliance in setting up a garrison. Sparta did not break the peace, but harboured a grudge for twenty years (V. 49–50. iv: cf. p. 240). In the winter the Spartan colony at Heraclea,



Map 5 The vicinity of Argos (after B. W. Henderson, *The Great War Between Athens and Sparta* [London: Macmillan, 1927], p. 308)

near Thermopylae, was defeated by the neighbouring peoples and its governor was killed; in summer 419, to prevent it from falling into Athenian hands, the Boeotians took it over, to Sparta's annoyance (V. 51–52. i; the Boeotians invited by Heraclea according to Diod. Sic. XII. 77. iv); it was apparently under Spartan control again by 413/2 (cf. VIII. 3. i).

In 419 the Argive alliance tried to put pressure on Corinth. First Alcibiades succeeded in taking an allied army through the Peloponnese to Patrae, in Achaea, and encouraged it to build long walls down to the Gulf of Corinth, but he was prevented by Corinth and Sicyon from establishing a fort at Rhium, at the mouth of the Gulf (V. 52. ii). Argos began a war against Epidaurus, with two expeditions, the second supported by Alcibiades; two Spartan expeditions were halted by unfavourable auspices; in a conference at Mantinea summoned by Athens, Corinth was not won over (V. 53–5). In the winter Sparta sent a garrison to Epidaurus by sea; Argos protested that the Athenians ought to have



Map 6 The vicinity of Mantinea (after J. F. Lazenby, *The Peloponnesian War* [London: Routledge, 2004], p. 119, map 7)

prevented that; and the Athenians solemnly recorded that Sparta was in breach of the Peace of Nicias, and reinstated in Pylos the helots from Cephallenia (V. 56).

In 418 the Spartans decided that a major effort was needed, and under king Agis assembled an allied army (including Corinthians and Boeotians) at Phlius for an attack on Argos (see map 5). The Argives went out on the main road to Nemea to confront the attackers, but Agis divided his forces: he took a route through the hills via Orneae to the Argive plain, a contingent including the Corinthians took a route bypassing Nemea, and another contingent including the Boeotians was to take the main road. When Agis reached the plain, he was between the city of Argos and the Argive army; the Argive army, which had

turned back and had brushed past the Corinthian contingent, was between Agis and the Boeotian contingent. On each side the ordinary soldiers thought they were in a winning position but their commanders did not; which side was in the winning position depends on how far away the Boeotians were, and Thucydides suggests that they were near enough for the advantage to lie with the Spartans. Two leading Argives sympathetic to Sparta approached Agis, who accepted their offer of a four-month truce. The armies dispersed without fighting, but the commanders on each side were in trouble, being thought to have thrown away a good opportunity: Agis was given a suspended sentence, and a board of advisers to prevent future errors (V. 57–60, 63).

An Athenian contingent reached Argos afterwards. Alcibiades was present, but as an envoy, not a general: it is unclear whether the Athenians could not arrive earlier or this year men less enthusiastic for the alliance were more influential (more Athenians were to arrive after the battle of Mantinea: cf. p. 136). The allies attacked and won over Orchomenus, in northern Arcadia; when they chose Tegea rather than Lepreum as their next objective, the Eleans, who had been present at Argos, returned home (V. 61–2).

When sympathisers in Tegea appealed urgently for help, the Spartans under Agis hurried there and summoned their allies (cf. map 6). The Argive alliance occupied the hills to the east of Mantinea. First Agis went within shouting distance of the enemy but withdrew. Then, to provoke the enemy into coming down to the plain, he diverted a stream so that it would flood Mantinean territory. Finally he marched north, and was caught unexpectedly by the enemy marching against him (the surprise is easier to understand if there was a wood in the narrow part of the hour-glass-shaped plain, blocking the view; but the wood is not mentioned until Paus. VIII. 11. i, v, of the second century AD). Hoplite phalanxes always tended to sidle to the right (cf. p. 287), and on this occasion each was too far to the right for an effective encounter. Agis ordered his left wing to move to the left, and his right centre to move into the gap; the left wing did move but the right centre did not, and he went into battle with a gap in his line. Now, if ever, the Spartan army ought to have been defeated, but it was not: Spartan skill and discipline were still too much for an opposing army of allies who had little experience of fighting together. Agis, in the centre, defeated the Argives and then rescued his left wing; the Athenians, on the left of the opposing army, were able to withdraw but both their generals were killed. Spartan reinforcements and allies, on their way to Mantinea, were not needed (V. 64–75. iii). This battle of Mantinea was the largest hoplite battle in the Peloponnesian War, with perhaps 11,000 on the Spartan side and 10,000 on the other (for Spartiate numbers cf. p. 251): whereas a defeat for Sparta would have been disastrous, this victory enabled the Spartans to reassert their leadership in the Peloponnese, and for the Athenians and Argives it would have been better not to have tried than to have tried and failed so clearly.

Epidaurus took advantage of the engagement at Mantinea to attack Argos; but after the battle the defeated allies, joined by Elis and reinforcements from Athens, struck back and began a blockade of Epidaurus (V. 75. iv–vi).

Defeat improved the prospects of those Argives who sympathised with Sparta: in the winter, despite the presence of Alcibiades arguing on the other side, a draft was produced and a final version agreed of a fifty-year treaty of the Spartans and their allies with the Argives and their allies, which apparently envisaged a leadership of the Peloponnese shared between Sparta and Argos (it was not to last long enough to be put to the test). They won over Perdiccas of Macedon and renewed Sparta's alliance with the Chalcidians of Olynthus; the Athenians in obedience to Argos withdrew from Epidaurus; Mantinea came to terms with Sparta (a thirty-year treaty: Xen. *Hell.* V. ii. 2) and gave up its claim to the neighbouring communities. Sparta established a narrower oligarchy in Sicyon (the first attested instance of such constitutional interference by Sparta; to be followed by interference in Achaea the following summer, V. 82. i), and a pro-Spartan oligarchy came to power in Argos (V. 76–81).

But Argos was not to remain pro-Spartan and oligarchic for long. In the summer of 417 the democrats overthrew the oligarchs at the time of the Spartan Gymnopaediae: the Spartans postponed the festival and set out to support the oligarchs, but turned back on learning that they were too late. Envoys from both sides went to Sparta, and the Spartans decided to intervene but did not act; the Argives with Athenian help (attributed by Plut. *Alc.* 15. iv–v to Alcibiades) started building long walls down to the sea. In the winter Sparta and its allies (except Corinth: we do not know why) attacked Argos: they hoped for treachery, but in vain; they demolished the new walls; and on their way back they captured Hysiae, south-west of Argos, and killed all the free inhabitants. Argos then raided Phlius, which had taken in most of the oligarchic exiles (V. 82. ii–83. iii).

Argos' alliance with Athens was finally renewed in spring 416 (*IG* i^3 86). Alcibiades went to Argos and deported three hundred Spartan sympathisers (V. 84. i); the Argives attacked Phlius again but were caught in an ambush (V. 115. i). In winter 416/5 an intended Spartan attack on Argos was halted by unfavourable auspices, and in Argos more Spartan sympathisers were arrested (V. 116. i). Later Sparta and its allies (again without Corinth) did attack Argos and established exiled oligarchs and a garrison in Orneae, north-west of the city; but afterwards Argos and Athens attacked Orneae, the men escaped and the town was destroyed (VI. 7. i–ii). Alcibiades had been supporting the anti-Spartan democrats, but in summer 415 his friends in Argos were suspected of plotting against the democracy, and to reassure the democrats Athens handed over for execution the men deported the previous year (VI. 61. iii). In 414 the Spartans set out to attack Argos but were halted by an earthquake, after which Argos raided the disputed territory of Thyrea (VI. 95. i). A later invasion by Sparta and its allies did take place; ships came from Athens to support Argos and joined in a raid on the east coast of Laconia, and then Argos raided Phlius again (VI. 105).

In 419/8 Athens had reinstalled dissident helots in Pylos (cf. p. 134). In 416 they made a successful raid on the surrounding territory. The Spartans did not themselves put an end to the Peace of Nicias, but they invited their allies to

raid Athens, and Corinth, not a party to the peace, did so (V. 115. ii–iii). Athens' joining Argos in the raid of 414 was the clearest breach yet of the peace: since 421 Athens and Sparta had fought against each other, but this was the first time one party had invaded the other's territory; the Spartans were now confident that they were in the right. Now they offered to go to arbitration and Athens refused (VII. 18. iii: contrast 432/1, pp. 92, 94).

We have glimpses of continuing activity in the north-east. In 417 Dium, on the eastern prong of Chalcidice, defected from Athens (V. 82. i). In 418/7 Perdiccas had made an alliance with Sparta and oligarchic Argos; in 417/6 he refused to support a planned Athenian campaign against the Chalcidians and Amphipolis, and Athens blockaded Macedon (V. 83. iv); in 416/5 Athens sent cavalry, including exiled Macedonians, by sea to harry Perdiccas, and the Chalcidians refused a Spartan request to support him (VI. 7. iii–iv); but by late summer 414 Perdiccas was once more on the Athenian side, joining in an attack on Amphipolis which failed to capture the city but set up a blockade (VII. 9). A fragmentary inscription recording an alliance between Athens and Perdiccas (*IG* i^3 89) is perhaps to be attributed to this last change of alignment. Perdiccas died *c.*413: his successor Archelaus, under whom Macedon became greater than under any of his predecessors (II. 100. ii), was to be consistently pro-Athenian, but, in dealing with a weaker Athens, on his own terms; Athens acquired oars from Macedon *c.*411–410 (Andoc. II. *Return* 11), and new ships commissioned by Alcibiades in 407/6 were apparently built in Macedon (M&L 91 = *IG* i^3 117 ~ Fornara 161).

Melos, in the southern Aegean, was the only island not in Athenian hands. At the beginning of the war it was neutral; in 426 it withstood an Athenian attack; in 425 it was included in the tribute assessment (for 15 talents, M&L 69 = *IG* i^2 71 ~ Fornara 136. i. 65: Melos was one of the larger and more prosperous of the island states), but that does not prove that Athens was in a position to exact payment; if the earlier date for an inscription is correct, Melos contributed money to Sparta in the 420's (cf. pp. 101, 115). Although Thucydides gives a detailed account of the episode, he does not explain why Athens attacked Melos in 416, but Athens must have had respectable grounds for sending a force which included allied ships and hoplites (V. 84). On landing the Athenians first sent envoys, who were allowed to speak not to the assembly but to the officials. Thucydides gives us a dialogue, which must be largely his own reconstruction, since he was in exile from Athens and most of the Melians were to be killed. As in earlier speeches, the Athenians talk the language of power politics, claiming that they have come for their own advantage and it will be better for the Melians if they submit; the Melians appeal to justice, the gods and the Spartans, and refuse to submit. The Athenians set up a blockade and withdrew most of their forces (V. 84–114). The defenders had some successes, but in the winter, when the Athenians sent another force, Melos was betrayed to them: they killed the men and enslaved the women and children (but some escaped: Xen. *Hell.* II. ii. 9), and sent Athenian settlers (V. 115. iv, 116. ii–iv). Later sources give some of the blame to Alcibiades ([Andoc.] IV. *Alcibiades* 22, Plut. *Alc.* 16. v–vi), but he is not mentioned in Thucydides' account.

This particular exercise of power seems not to have given the Athenians a bad conscience (cf. Ar. *Av.* 186, of 414; but Euripides' *Trojan Women*, of 415, may have pricked some consciences), but it became notorious (e.g. Isoc. XII. *Panath.* 63). Thucydides creates a dramatic contrast by placing this detailed account of the sledgehammer's cracking the nut before his detailed account of the Athenians' ambitious but disastrous expedition to Sicily. We should at least remember that almost immediately before Melos he reports the Spartans' killing of the inhabitants of Hysiae – in a single sentence (VI. 83. ii: cf. p. 137).

Sicily

Athens had been interested in the west since the middle of the century, and before the outbreak of the war had expected the west to become involved (cf. pp. 74, 90). Sparta had hoped for support from the west, but in vain (cf. p. 100). Athens sent forces to support Leontini against Syracuse in 427, and by the time the Sicilians agreed to manage without outside intervention, in 424, if not earlier, had begun to hope for conquests (cf. pp. 110–13). There was a further attempt at involvement in 422, soon abandoned (cf. p. 113). Thucydides' allegation that most Athenians knew nothing about Sicily and its inhabitants (VI. 1. i) cannot be true.

The origin of Athens' next intervention lay in the west of the island. Egesta, towards the north, which in 418/7 renewed an alliance made with Athens in 427/6 (Thuc. VI. 6. ii; M&L 37 = *IG* i^3 11 ~ Fornara 81, which contains the oath and above which the decree of renewal could have been inscribed: cf. p. 52; there was added to that *stele* an alliance with nearby Halicyae, *IG* i^3 12), was at war with Selinus, on the south coast. Dorian Selinus gained the support of Syracuse; Egesta (after first appealing to Carthage, according to Diod. Sic. XII. 82. vii) appealed to Athens, claiming to be able to pay the full costs, and Athens sent men to investigate (Thuc. VI. 6). In Thucydides' account the Athenians were altogether too naïve, going from house to house and not realising that they were seeing the same precious objects in each (VI. 46. iii–v): but, in whatever way, they were deceived about Egesta's wealth. He reports for the spring of 415 a decision to send sixty ships under three generals, Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus, to support Egesta against Selinus, to help refound Leontini, and 'to settle other matters in Sicily to Athens' advantage' (VI. 8. i–ii); elsewhere he refers directly to hopes of conquering Sicily (VI. 1. i, 6. i), and he attributes to Alcibiades, as Aristophanes in 424 had attributed to Hyperbolus, hopes of Carthage too (VI. 15. ii, 90. ii, cf. 34. ii; for Hyperbolus cf. p. 128). A fragmentary inscription combines with a reference to sixty ships a vote on whether to send one general – who would presumably have been Alcibiades – or a plurality (M&L 78 = *IG* i^3 93 ~ Fornara 146, fr. *b*). Nicias had opposed the expedition: the inclusion of him with Alcibiades among the commanders reflects not a desire of 'the Athenians' that each should counter the excesses of the other but the support in the assembly for him and his opinion.

Four days later, at an assembly to consider detailed arrangements for the expedition, Nicias reopened the question. Thucydides gives him a speech in which he (perhaps too presciently) highlights the difficulties, that Athens has enough enemies nearer home and cannot afford to reach out for more power, that Sicily will be hard to retain even if it is conquered (cf. pp. 146–7), that Athens cannot afford to squander its recently rebuilt resources, and that Alcibiades is more interested in his own advancement than that of Athens. Alcibiades replies that his personal ambitions are good for Athens as well as himself, that the Greek Sicilians though numerous are a mixed rabble, and the opponents of Syracuse will support Athens, that having set out on the path of empire Athens cannot ration its imperialism. When the Athenians were not inclined to give up, Nicias made a second speech, stressing the strength of the cities Athens was going to attack, and the need for land forces of various kinds including cavalry and light-armed, and doubting Egesta's promised funds. When asked how large a force was needed, he said at least a hundred triremes and five thousand hoplites; and in their passion for the venture (VI. 24. iii) the Athenians agreed. Nicias' opposition had resulted in a much larger expedition, of which much more could be expected, than had originally been intended (VI. 8. iii–26). Despite the promise of money from Egesta, the inscription cited above can be restored with a reference to 'three thousand', possibly the setting aside of 3,000 talents for the campaign (M&L 78 = *IG* i^3 93 ~ Fornara 146, frs. *d*+*g*).

Before the expedition was ready to sail, panic was caused by the mutilation in a single night of most of the herms in Athens (cf. pp. 165–7). This may have been an unsuccessful attempt by opponents of the expedition to create unfavourable omens; investigation uncovered stories of mock celebrations of the Eleusinian Mysteries in which Alcibiades was involved. It was agreed that he should sail with the expedition but be recalled to stand trial (VI. 27–9).

The expedition departed in the middle of the summer: the total force, including those who joined at Corcyra, was larger than any Athens had sent out since 430: 134 triremes (100 Athenian) and two smaller warships, 5,100 hoplites (1,500 Athenian; allies supplying soldiers included Argos and, technically as mercenaries, Mantinea), various light-armed, thirty cavalry and a great variety of camp-followers (VI. 30–32. ii, 42–44. i). These would have to be paid not for a short campaign but all the year round.

While the Athenians had been divided over whether to go to Sicily, Thucydides claims that the Syracusans were divided over whether to expect them (but this is hard to believe, since they had been to Sicily before and there can have been no secret about their preparations). We are given a speech by Hermocrates, warning that the Athenians will come, suggesting an alliance with Carthage (allegedly afraid of an Athenian attack) and an appeal to Sparta and Corinth, and proposing to sail across to the south-east of Italy and challenge the Athenians there (which would probably have had disastrous results); a speech by Athenagoras, refusing to believe that the Athenians will come, accusing young men of using the bogey of Athens as an excuse for bringing in an oligarchy and himself defending the principle of democracy; after which an unnamed general

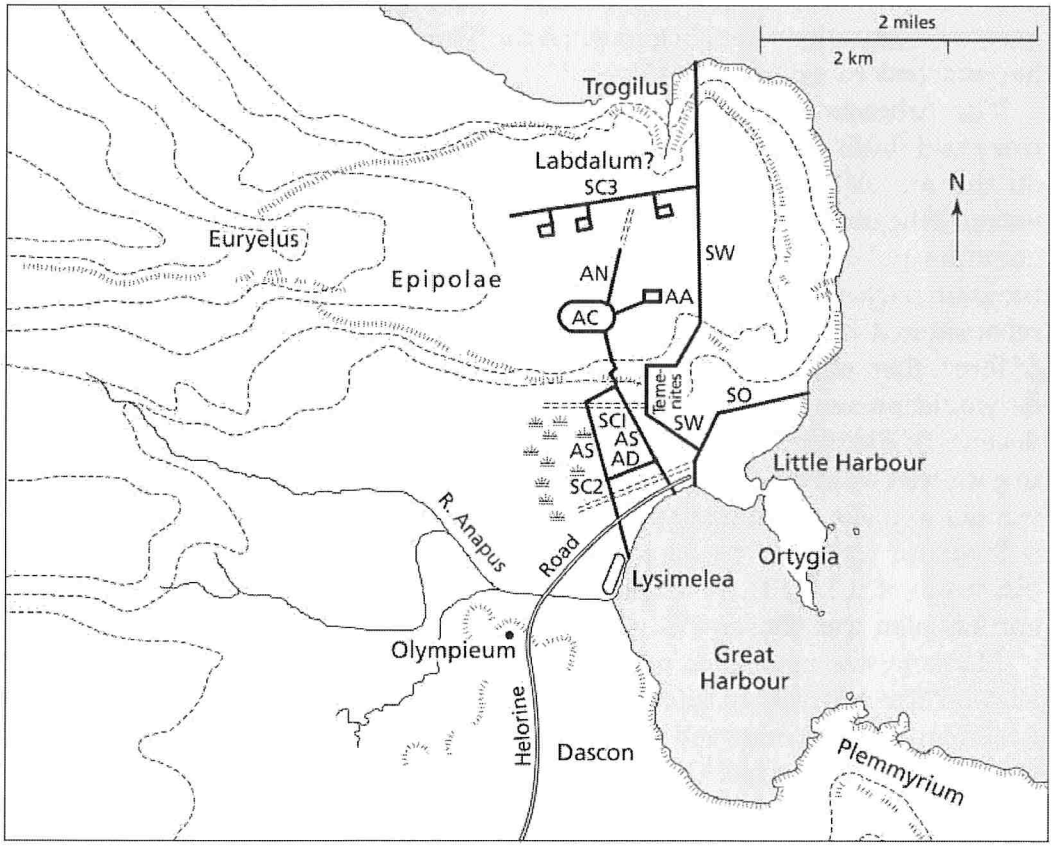
tries to calm the situation and promises suitable precautions (VI. 32. iii–42). Serious preparations were begun when the Syracusans learned that the Athenians had reached Rhegium (VI. 45).

The Athenians crossed from Corcyra, making their way along the Italian coast and finding that they were not very welcome, until they reached Rhegium, on the toe of Italy. They were allowed to camp outside the city but not go inside; Rhegium declared itself neutral, but if the Italian Greeks adopted a common policy it would go along with that (VI. 44. ii–iv). Ships sent ahead brought back the news that Egesta was not, after all, rich, and the generals reconsidered their strategy. Nicias wanted to sail to Selinus and make a show of force, then unless Egesta could after all provide funding return home (which he would presumably have justified by claiming that the Athenians had been deceived). Alcibiades wanted the Athenians to base themselves on Messana and to gain friends in Sicily until they could attack Syracuse and Selinus. Lamachus wanted to make an immediate attack on Syracuse (which might have succeeded if Syracuse was as ill prepared as Thucydides suggests, but would have been disastrous if it failed). To resolve the deadlock, Lamachus backed Alcibiades, and his plan was chosen (VI. 46–50. i).

Messana was unwelcoming, Naxos slightly less so. Catana was hesitant but allowed the generals to address the assembly; while they were doing so, the Athenian soldiers managed to enter the city, the supporters of Syracuse fled, and Catana made an alliance with Athens and became their base in Sicily (VI. 50–2). The *Salaminia*, one of Athens' state ships, arrived to take back Alcibiades and others for trial in connection with the religious scandals. They went quietly but escaped during the journey: Alcibiades made his way (perhaps via Argos: Isoc. XVI. *Chariot* 9, Plut. *Alc.* 23. i) to Sparta (VI. 53, 60–1, 88. ix). His colleagues now had to pursue his strategy without him.

Late in 415 the Athenian forces, provoked by detachments of Syracusan cavalry, were growing impatient for action. The generals sent a deceitful messenger to entice the Syracusans to march north and attack the Athenians at Catana on a particular day; and then, while the Syracusans were on their way, themselves sailed south by night, entered the great harbour and landed on the west side near the Olympieum (see map 7 and ill. 13). They were able to prepare a stockade before the Syracusans came back to confront them; they won a battle; but the Syracusan cavalry prevented them from following up their victory and they returned to Catana (VI. 63–71). A promising plan had achieved nothing: Nicias was criticised (Plut. *Nic.* 16), and Thucydides himself was perhaps critical (VII. 42. iii). A hoped-for revolution in Messana failed to occur, since Alcibiades on his departure had warned the supporters of Syracuse; and the Athenians spent the winter at Naxos, sending home for money and cavalry (VI. 74).

In Syracuse, which currently had a democratic constitution with a board of fifteen generals, Hermocrates tried to restore morale and argued for fewer and more powerful generals: he was made one of a board of three (to take office at the new year, perhaps in the spring), and Syracuse appealed for help to Corinth



------- Contours at intervals of 25 metres ⋯⋯ Precipitous ground ⩲ Marsh

Note: The lower reaches of the river were probably not as straight as shown above.

AA	Athenian advanced fortification	SC1	First Syracusan Counterwall
AC	Athenian Circle	SC2	Second Syracusan Counterwall
AD	Athenian Crosswall	SC3	Third Syracusan Counterwall
AN	Athenian Northern Wall	SO	City Wall of Syracuse
AS	Athenian Southern Wall	SW	Syracusan Wall, winter 415/4

Map 7 Syracuse (after K. J. Dover, *Thucydides Book VII*/*Thucydides Book VII* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965], p. viii)

and Sparta (VI. 72–3). Both sides tried to gain support in Sicily (Thucydides gives us opposing speeches at Camarina from Hermocrates and an Athenian called Euphemus). The Syracusans, to make the attackers' job harder, built a new wall which probably ran northwards from the north shore of the great harbour to the sea; the Athenians appealed to Carthage (not now a further target for conquest) and Etruria, where some cities were offering support (VI. 75–88. vi). Corinth as the mother city of Syracuse was eager to support it, and joined in the approach to Sparta. By now Alcibiades was in Sparta. Thucydides gives him a speech to the Spartan assembly, claiming that Athens' democracy is 'agreed folly', setting out an extreme version of Athens' ambitions and suggesting that there is a serious danger of their being achieved, and urging Sparta

Image not available in the electronic edition

Ill. 13 Syracuse: aerial photograph. Science Photo Library, London

to send soldiers and, even more, a Spartan to take command, and to fortify Decelea in the north of Attica. The Spartans were persuaded. On the other side, the Athenians sent 250 cavalry and thirty mounted archers, and 300 talents (VI. 88. vii–93). How much difference did Alcibiades make? According to Thucydides, before his intervention the authorities were inclined to tell

Syracuse not to surrender, but not to send help (VI. 88. x). In the event, Sparta sent Gylippus as commander (perhaps a *mothax*, a Spartan of inferior origin brought up with the Spartiates [Ael. *VH.* XII. 43]; cf. Lysander, p. 156) and, we later discover, two Spartan ships (VI. 104. i), and, in 413, 600 liberated helots (VII. 19. iii), which it might have done in any case in response to the appeal from Syracuse and Corinth. It was not to invade Attica and fortify Decelea until 413 (cf. pp. 147–8). Probably Alcibiades was not as important as Thucydides suggests; but the sending of Gylippus was nevertheless to prove crucial.

In 414 the Athenians began a major attack on Syracuse. They sailed south and disembarked their soldiers at Leon, north-west of the city. These soldiers made their way to Euryelus, at the west end of the plateau of Epipolae outside the city, before the defenders were ready to guard the approaches, and when a force did arrive they defeated it. They established a fort at Labdalum, on the north edge of the plateau; reinforcements reached them, from Sicily and from Athens; and, nearer to the city and towards the south edge of the plateau, they built what Thucydides called 'the circle', which was to be the base for their siege (VI. 96–8). They needed to match the whole length of the Syracusan wall built in the winter, from the great harbour to the sea to the north; and Hermocrates persuaded the Syracusans that it would be best to build an east–west wall across the line of the Athenian wall, south of the circle, to prevent its completion. The Athenians waited until the Syracusans grew careless, then attacked and captured the cross-wall. The Syracusans built a second cross-wall, further south. The Athenians captured that too, though Lamachus was killed in the pursuit of some fleeing Syracusans. While most of the Athenians were still on the low ground, the Syracusans attacked the circle: Nicias, suffering from a kidney disease, was there and saved the circle. At this point the Athenian fleet, which had been waiting at Thapsus, sailed into the great harbour and joined the army (VI. 99–102).

The Athenians appeared to be in a winning position, and gained further allies. They now built two walls from the circle to the harbour, to protect them against attacks either from the city or from outside. The Syracusans considered surrendering and made overtures to Nicias; and they deposed their generals and elected others (VI. 103). Gylippus, on his way with four Peloponnesian ships, to be followed by a further thirteen, heard of this and despaired of Sicily, but still hoped to make sure of Italy; Nicias heard of Gylippus' coming but did not take his small force seriously (VI. 105). In particular, Nicias failed to cut off Syracuse entirely by completing the wall to the north of the circle. Gylippus sailed to Himera, on the north coast, and from there advanced on Syracuse, picking up allies as he went. The Corinthian Gongylus with one advance ship from the following squadron reached Syracuse in time to prevent its capitulation; the Syracusans marched out to meet Gylippus, and he arrived via Euryelus and the northern part of Epipolae. Nicias did not respond to an immediate challenge, when he might still have succeeded, and Gylippus entered the city (VII. 1–3. iii).

Nicias still did not have the northern wall completed while there was time. The Syracusans captured the Athenian fort at Labdalum, and started building a third cross-wall, north of the circle. Nicias, in a futile diversion, built forts on Plemmyrium, the headland south of the harbour entrance, and sent ships to try to intercept those coming to join Gylippus. In fighting on Epipolae Gylippus was defeated in a first battle but returned and was victorious in a second, and the cross-wall was continued beyond the line of the Athenian wall, so that Syracuse could not now be cut off; and the Peloponnesian ships arrived and entered the harbour (VII. 3. iv–7. i). Gylippus set out to raise more forces in Sicily, and asked for more from Corinth and Sparta. Nicias sent a letter to Athens, asking either to be recalled or to be sent reinforcements as substantial as the forces already with him, and to be relieved of his own command. The Athenians did not relieve Nicias, but they appointed two men with him as immediate colleagues, and Eurymedon, who had been in Sicily in 425–424, and Demosthenes, the most energetic commander of the 420's, to take reinforcements, Eurymedon during the winter and Demosthenes the main force in the spring (VII. 7. ii–17).

In Syracuse in 413 Hermocrates returned to influence, if not to office (VII. 31. iii); and the Syracusans made simultaneous attacks by land and sea: they were defeated at sea, but their land forces captured the Athenian forts on Plemmyrium and gave them control of the entrance to the harbour (VII. 21–5). Wanting to achieve more before the Athenian reinforcements arrived, they strengthened their ships for an old-fashioned ramming battle, and again attacked by land, against the Athenian wall, and by sea: this time they were unsuccessful on land but at sea on a third day of fighting they caught the Athenians unprepared and defeated them (VII. 36–41).

Demosthenes engaged in raiding around the Peloponnese on his way (cf. p. 147); Eurymedon returned and joined him; and they arrived at Syracuse together: Athens' total reinforcements amounted to 82 ships, 5,000 hoplites and many light-armed. Demosthenes wanted to strike immediately while the shock of his arrival was greatest, and decided on a night attack, going up to Epipolae by Euryelus and proceeding along the Syracusan cross-wall from the west. This started well but, with too many men recently arrived and not knowing the terrain, ended in confusion and slaughter (VII. 42–6). Demosthenes then wanted to withdraw; but Nicias still had hopes (with some justification, Thucydides suggests) of a Syracusan surrender, and would not even move to Thapsus or Catana. When he at last relented, there was an eclipse of the moon (on 27 August), and he let the seers persuade him to wait another month (VII. 47–50). The Athenians were defeated in another naval battle, in which Eurymedon was killed; and in yet another, with every available man on every available ship. After that they still had sixty ships, more than the enemy, but the men refused to fight again (VII. 51–72). If they had moved at once, the Athenians could have extricated themselves by land while the Syracusans were celebrating, but Hermocrates sent men posing as traitors to Nicias to persuade the Athenians to wait until the Syracusans were ready for them (VII. 73–4).

Finally the Athenians set out in a westerly direction, until they came to the head of a valley, where the Syracusans blocked their advance. After forcing their way through, they turned south-eastwards towards the sea. They became separated; Demosthenes with the rearguard was trapped in an olive grove on the sixth day of the retreat, and eventually surrendered; two days later Nicias surrendered after discipline had broken down at the crossing of a river (VII. 75–85).

Thucydides states that Gylippus wanted to take Nicias and Demosthenes back to Sparta, but they were executed; otherwise the survivors were imprisoned in the quarries outside Syracuse, some sold into slavery after ten weeks but the Athenians and their western Greek allies kept for eight months (VII. 86–7). Diodorus (XIII. 19. iv–33. i) and Plutarch (*Nic.* 28) give different versions of a debate the truth behind which is probably that what was actually done was proposed by the demagogue Diocles (cf. pp. 312–14), while Hermocrates and Gylippus argued for milder treatment.

Thucydides calls this the greatest success for the victors and greatest disaster for the defeated in Greek history (VII. 87. v–vi), and the superlative is justified. The Athenians had started with great ambitions, had spent large sums of money and had sent large numbers of ships and men; but few of the men and none of the ships returned home, the money was spent in vain, and the psychological effect, on them and on the whole Greek world, was enormous. (The one comparable shock was to be the defeat of the Spartan army at Leuctra in 371: cf. pp. 251, 287). The impression given by books VI–VII is that the attack on Syracuse could have succeeded (and if Syracuse was conquered the rest of Sicily would probably have followed: cf. Alcibiades in VI. 91. iii), and indeed very nearly did succeed; but the chance of victory was thrown away when Nicias failed to prevent Gylippus' entry, and his subsequent mistakes, and his refusal to withdraw when he was likely to be blamed for withdrawal, made a bad situation worse. II. 65. xi has a different emphasis: the expedition

> involved not so much an error of judgment about the people against whom it was sent as the failure by those who sent out the expedition to make the right decisions in support of the men who had gone. Instead, through the accusations made against individuals in the struggle for political supremacy, they made the expeditionary force less effective.

The allusion is presumably to the trial of those accused of involvement in the religious scandals (cf. pp. 165–7), in particular the recall of Alcibiades and his consequent exile; and we may also fault the refusal to relieve Nicias in 414/3; but otherwise the detailed narrative does not suggest that the Athenians at home did not support the expedition adequately. We are more likely to think that the venture was 'an error of judgment about the people against whom it was sent': controlling a large and populous island at a distance from Athens would be much harder than controlling the islands and coastal cities of the Aegean; and, although in the short term Athens could have conquered Sicily, it is hard to

believe that it could have retained Sicily for long against opposition (cf. Nicias in VI. 11. i, Euphemus in VI. 86. iii).

The hard-headed Thucydides has puzzled his readers by making no comment on Demosthenes but remarking that Nicias was particularly undeserving of his fate because of his devotion to virtue (VII. 86. iv–v). Although Thucydides did not believe in piety, he did believe in moral standards as well as in hard-headedness, and the morality of a Nicias who was by conventional standards a good man but who took decisions as a result of which more Athenians suffered and died than need have done was perhaps more easily praised by Thucydides than by some of Nicias' critics in our time. Gylippus' achievement seems not to have been appreciated by the Spartans, and he is mentioned only in one later episode (cf. p. 160). The Syracusans built a treasury at Delphi to house their dedications (Paus. X. 11. v) – perhaps just below the Athenian treasury.

Meanwhile

For 415–413 Thucydides concentrates almost entirely on the Sicilian expedition, and gives us only fragments of information on other matters. In 415, at the time of the religious scandals in Athens, Boeotian troops were active near the Athenian frontier and a Spartan force went as far as the Isthmus to cooperate with them (Thuc. VI. 61. ii, Andoc. I. *Myst.* 45). In 414 in Thespiae (where Thebes had intervened in 423: cf. p. 116) a democratic rising was put down with Theban help, and some democrats fled to Athens (VI. 95. ii).

In spring 413 the Athenian Conon (the first appearance of a man who was to be important later), who was at Naupactus with eighteen ships, reported to Demosthenes and Eurymedon that he was being challenged by twenty-five Corinthian ships (so that troop-carriers could take Peloponnesian reinforcements to Sicily) and could not fight against them without more: they let him have ten ships from their force (VII. 19, 31. iv–v). Later in the year he had been succeeded by another commander and the Athenians had thirty-three ships; the Corinthians manned a few more, and fought a close battle which for them was as good as a victory (VII. 34): the Athenians no longer had the overwhelming naval superiority which they had enjoyed in the 420's (cf. pp. 108–9).

But the most important development in Greece in 413 was that the Spartans, believing themselves to be in the right after the raid of 414 (cf. p. 138), and thinking it safe since so much of Athens' manpower was committed to Sicily, sent a Peloponnesian force to invade Attica under king Agis, and built a fort at Decelea, in the hills east of north from Athens: Alcibiades is said to have been urging this since 415/4 (cf. pp. 142–4), and the location at any rate may have been his suggestion. Agis was to remain there with a garrison until the end of the war, and this, by denying the Athenians the use of the countryside and the silver mines, was to do the Athenians much more psychological and economic damage than the short invasions of the early years of the war (VII. 19. iii, 27–8, *Hell. Oxy.* 20. iii–v Chambers). The Athenians still did not abandon Attica entirely:

a fort was built at Sunium in 413/2 (VIII. 4), and another at nearby Thoricus in 409 (Xen. *Hell.* I. ii. 1). While the Peloponnesians were invading Attica, the Athenians sent out thirty ships, together with those bound for Syracuse under Demosthenes, to attack Spartan territory: they collected hoplites from Argos, raided the east coast of Laconia, then opposite Cythera (which they still retained, as they did Pylos) they set up a fort on the mainland (VII. 20, 26).

NOTE ON FURTHER READING

See in general Cawkwell, *Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War*; Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*; Lazenby, *The Peloponnesian War*. For many campaigns there are valuable investigations in Pritchett's series *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*.

On the diplomatic problems following the Peace of Nicias see particularly H. D. Westlake, 'Thucydides and the Uneasy Peace – A Study in Political Incompetence', *CQ*^{2} xxi 1971, 315–25 = his *Studies in Thucydides and Greek History*, ch. 7; R. Seager, 'After the Peace of Nicias', *CQ*^{2} xxvi 1976, 249–69. The view of 'ten-day' truces adopted here is that of A. Andrewes in Gomme et al., *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, iv. 11: the alternative view that they had to be renewed every ten days is championed by M. Arnush, 'Ten-Day Armistices in Thucydides', *GRBS* xxxiii 1992, 329–53; D. Whitehead, 'The Ten-Day Truce (Thucydides, 5. 26. 2, etc.)', in Frézouls and Jacquemin (eds.), *Les Relations internationales ... 1993*, 189–210; Hornblower, *Commentary on Thucydides*, iii. 47–8.

On the battle of Mantinea see A. W. Gomme, 'Thucydides and the Battle of Mantineia', in his *Essays in Greek History and Literature*, 132–55; and, on the problem of Spartan numbers, Gomme et al., *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, iv. 110–17 (by Andrewes, believing in an error in Thuc. V. 68. iii, but starting from the material of Gomme, who did not believe in an error), Hornblower, *Commentary on Thucydides*, iii. 181–2 (accepting Andrewes).

Athens' Sicilian expedition is treated by Freeman, *History of Sicily*, vol. iii, ch. 8. On the Syracusan leader Hermocrates see H. D. Westlake, 'Hermocrates the Syracusan', *BRL* xli 1958/9, 239–68 = his *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History*, 174–202. For a suggestion that Thuc. VI–VII consciously exposed the Athenians' inadequacies see B. Jordan, 'The Sicilian Expedition was a Potemkin Fleet', *CQ*^{2} l 2000, 63–79.