

# **Epiteichismos in the Peloponnesian War**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Generally, historians who deal with ancient Greek history and thereby tackle the Peloponnesian War have mostly failed to recognize the full significance or import of the **Epiteichismos** (Greek; “to build upon”) strategy and its contribution to the rise and the imperialistic ambition of Athens, and Athens’ subsequent defeat during the Peloponnesian War, owing perhaps to their different motive, orientation, philosophy, targeted audience and aim for writing. (De Ste. Croix (1972), Robinson (1962), Westlake (1969), Powell (1988), Pomeroy et al. (1999)). Notwithstanding the fact that Thucydides is the primary source with respect to the account of the Peloponnesian War, traits of the intendment of the **Epiteichismos** strategy are equally scattered throughout the history of antediluvian warfare. Using a critical analyses of primary and secondary sources, this paper noting the deficiencies in existing secondary sources makes an attempt to give not only a systematic and coherent outline of the significance of the **Epiteichismos** strategy as the war unfolds, but to also show how both Athens and Sparta exploit this strategy to their respective advantage in the Peloponnesian War.*

## **Epiteichismos in the Peloponnesian War**

### **Introduction**

Historians of the Peloponnesian War have generally failed to realize the full significance of the *Epiteichismos* strategy and its contribution not only to the rise of Athens but also in the furtherance of Athens' imperialistic ambition. It was therefore not surprising that when Sparta became aware of the efficacy of this strategy they made optimum use of it which eventually led to the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war by 404B.C. Notwithstanding the fact that Thucydides is the primary source as far as the account of the Peloponnesian War is concerned, traits of the significance of the *Epiteichismos* strategy are scattered throughout the history of ancient Greek warfare. Hence, based upon these shortcomings of the historians, an effort will be made to give a systematic, comprehensive and coherent account of the significance of the *Epiteichismos* strategy in the Peloponnesian War, as recounted by Thucydides.

The term “ἐπιτέλιςμός” (*Epiteichismos*) which has other variants like *epiteichisis* and *epiteichisma*, is derived from the verb *epiteichizo* which means, “to build upon” (Liddel & Scott, 1968). *Epiteichizo* implies to “build a fort or stronghold on the frontier”, obviously, on the enemy's territory to serve as a basis of operations against him. This meaning is used by Thucydides (cf: I: 142 and 7: 47). In fact, in Thucydides I: 142 the variant there is “*epiteichisis*” meaning “building a fort on the enemy's frontier”. By implication, though debatable, a fortification raised on ones own territory or on the territory of allies would not pass for an *epiteichizo* or *epiteichisis*. One notes from Liddel and Scott (1968:664) that the term *epiteichizo* appears in other authors, non historians and historians alike. For instance, in Plutarch's *Alcibiades*, 23, the term appears in relation to the fortification of Decelea by the Spartans at the instigation of Alcibiades. The only apparent usage of the actual term *Epiteichismos*

in Thucydides occurs in Bk. 7: 18, where its equivalent is given as *epiteichisis*. (cf. Adcock, 1947:5 (note 5); Westlake, 1983:13 (note 8)). Thus in its specialized usage of *Epiteichismos* as found in Thucydides, the word literally means “building a fort or stronghold on the frontier of the enemy’s country to serve as the basis of operations against him.”(Thucydides, I: 142). Noting that Xenophon actually uses this term in the *Hellenica* once at Bk. 5: 1, in relation to an event which falls outside the chronology of the Peloponnesian war, we shall limit our discussion of the military strategy of *Epiteichismos* in the Peloponnesian war only to Thucydides’ account.

It is equally significant to state here that this ever important strategy was not peculiar to the Peloponnesian War; at least we can trace a trait of its usage in Homer’s epic the *Iliad*. For this reason the first part of this paper discusses the use of *Epiteichismos* or its idea in Greek warfare before the period of Pericles, who brought this strategy to the state of the art, and the significance of seafaring and naval expeditions and the mobility they provided by sea in times of war; the second considers its usage under Pericles; and the third and fourth review the operation of *Epiteichismos* after Pericles and its usage by Sparta respectively, when the latter upon the advice of Alcibiades (an Athenian politician and general) fortifies Decelea and uses it as a basis of attack on the Athenians resulting in the defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War. We must reiterate that the thrust of the paper is on the use or otherwise of *Epiteichismos* as a military strategy in the Peloponnesian War. Our major primary source here is Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War*, as translated by Rex Warner (1954).

### **Brief Review of Related Literature**

Before we proceed to highlight some examples of *Epiteichismos* in Greek warfare before Pericles, we deem it prudent to look briefly at some works on Greek history and the Peloponnesian war that mostly tend to ignore the role of *Epiteichismos* in the Peloponnesian war. We acknowledge that this

apparent shortcoming, if indeed it is one, may be due to the motives, orientation, philosophy, targeted audience and aims of the historians concerned.

To begin with, Robinson (1962), though acknowledging the dire straits that Athens underwent after the capture of Decelea by the Spartans, does not point out the role of *Epiteichismos* in the determination of the War's outcome. In addition, we note that in Powell's (1988) work, in which he (re) constructs Greek history from a political and social angle with emphasis on Athens and Sparta, he fails to do justice to the concept of *Epiteichismos* as one would have wished. This may be because his Chapter Five (1988: 136-213) which is devoted to the Peloponnesian War rather attempts "a critical review of Thucydides' account of the war" (137). Nonetheless, like Robinson (1962), he notes the strategic importance of the capture of Decelea to the Spartans (1988: 192). Understandably, but regrettably, de Ste. Croix's magnificent work (1972) on the origins of the Peloponnesian war makes no reference to the policy of *Epiteichismos* even before 431 B.C. In one of the current, comprehensive works on ancient Greece (Pomeroy et al., 1999), the authors, though affirming the causes and course of the Peloponnesian war in a refreshing manner (287-326), do not treat in any discernible manner the policy of *Epiteichismos* in the War. Surprisingly, but happily though, Westlake (1969: 89) makes reference to the strategy of *Epiteichismos* in the Peloponnesian War and notes with perspicacity the apparent reason for it being employed in the Archidamian War by the Athenians and confirms how a naval power might use it to its advantage.

With regard to the lacunae in the sources, concerning treatment of *Epiteichismos*, notable exceptions exist in the articles of F. E. Adcock (1947: 2-7) and H.D. Westlake (1983: 12-24) in that they presented useful exegeses on *Epiteichismos*. However, Adcock's work limits itself to the Archidamian

war in a basic survey, whereas Westlake does a panoramic survey of *Epiteichismos* from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

In sum, we note from the sources cited here that there is unanimity with our primary source, Thucydides, about the outcome of the Peloponnesian War although none of them tracks the strategy of *Epiteichismos* for obvious reasons. We now turn our attention to the strategy of *Epiteichismos* in Greek warfare before the advent of Pericles and the Peloponnesian War.

### ***Epiteichismos* Before Pericles**

In the first place, Greek tradition makes us aware that Minos was the first to have organized a navy and establish a *thalassocracy*. Through his naval expeditions and easy mobility by sea, he captured and ruled the Cyclades and the Carians. He therefore founded colonies, which were governed by his sons. Related to this, he was able to check the activities of pirates and also enhanced his revenue collection abilities. (Thucydides, I: 4) Moreover, because of the dispersed nature of Hellenic cities, on the coasts and islands, seafaring was the only option through which other Hellenes and allies could easily communicate. According to Thucydides, “cities were sited differently in the later periods; for, as seafaring became more general and capital reserves came into existence, new walled cities were built actually on the coasts, and isthmuses were occupied for commercial reasons and for purposes of defence against neighbouring powers”. (Thucydides, 1:3)

Further still, Thucydides gives us a catalogue of Hellenic states that embarked on shipbuilding and naval expeditions because of their significance. He mentions Corinth and the naval engagement between Coreyra and Corinth; the Ionians who were for some time masters of the sea in their region

when they were fighting against Cyrus, and the exploits of Polycrates who became very powerful in Samos because of his naval resources. He conquered a number of the islands, including Rhenea. To add to this, the Phocaeans, too, when they were founding Marseilles, defeated the Carthaginians in a naval engagement. (Thucydides, I: 13).

In all, seafaring and naval expeditions paved the way for easy communications among nations; enhanced the chances of nations, who were expanding their territories through naval engagements, as the vanquished lands were seized and further contributed in reducing the population concentration in Athens, for instance, as more colonies were founded for landless citizens and foreigners alike. They further enhanced the trading activities between different city-states and allies. In addition, they had the effect of checking the activities of pirates who always disrupted and seized the goods of merchants when they could. One single case is of the Dolopian pirates, for instance, in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Most importantly, Athens' empire building ambitions could not have been achieved without sea-borne raids or naval engagements, seafaring and easy mobility by sea.

However, prior to all these developments is the event, which Homer's *Iliad* covers, the Trojan War, which to the minds of most Greeks was one of the bloodiest wars ever fought in human history. Here, again, Homer's account of the Trojan War in the *Iliad* emphasizes the significance of seafaring, siege warfare and most importantly, the *Epiteichismos* strategy. He makes it clear that the Achaean forces built long and strong walls for the ships with trench alongside. The Achaean forces encamped themselves in their ramparts which they had built on the shores of Trojan territory and attacked the Trojan forces from that base. Besides, Homer's explanation and description of the ramparts built by the Hellenes emphasizes the reason why the Trojans, under the leadership of Hector found it too mountainous to raze; hence contributing to their final defeat. He describes the Hellenic ramparts thus:

“Indeed the dyke was by no means easy to take at a bound or to cross at all. Both banks were overhanging all along, and on top there was a row of pointed stakes, close-set and strong, which Achaean troops had planted there to keep out their enemies.” (XII: 50ff.). Moreover, by seizing vantage places and fortifying them, the invading Achaean army at Troy was able to go on marauding raids to ravage the allies and neighbours of Troy and thus sustaining itself with the provisions and spoils won.

Thus, although the Trojan War lasted for ten years, one can claim that the *Epiteichismos* strategy of the Hellenic forces played a considerable role in the final defeat of the Trojans.

Commenting on the origins of *Epiteichismos* in Greek warfare during the period of the *poleis*, Westlake attributes its introduction, “to the notorious backwardness of the Greeks in conducting assaults on fortified positions, however weak...” (1983:12-13).

In Herodotus’ *Histories*, the idea and the importance attached to sea-borne raids and *Epiteichismos* strategy are faintly painted. During the council meeting of the Ionians, Hecataeus emphasizes that, considering the wealth, armoury and nations, which are under Persian domination, the only prudent course the Ionians could opt for is to work for control of the sea. This wise counsel given by Hecataeus presupposes that he might have been aware of the importance of seafaring or naval expeditions in war. The Ionians, however, ignored this advice. (Herodotus, V: 36)

The Persians did the opposite in their progress into the heartland of Greece, which ended at Salamis. Once again, when Hecataeus’ earlier advice was not heeded by the Ionian rebels, he advised Aristagoras, to construct a fortress on the island of Leros. (Herodotus, V: 127). The implication of this expert advice cannot be over-emphasized. In view of the present danger facing Aristagoras and his fellow Ionians, the advice given him to construct a fortress with the intention of using it as a base of



both defence and attack on the Persians could indubitably have ensured his return to power. The twist is that the fortress in this case was not in enemy territory. The island mentioned indicates that the fortress was to be raised outside of Ionia; however, the importance of this instruction does not lie in the location of the fortress but in the idea that the *Epiteichismos* strategy is an eminently effective tool for both defence and attack on the enemy.

When Athens' aid to Sparta was rejected in the siege of Ithome, during the generalship of Cimon, there were strained relations between Athens and Sparta. When the Messenian rebels were finally defeated by the Spartans, they were exiled. Athens then came to their aid and settled them in the town of Naupactus, which the Athenians had recently taken from the Ozolian Locrians. (Thucydides, I: 102-103; cf. de Ste. Croix, 1972: 181). The Athenians then erected a fortification and stationed there a naval base with the purpose of not only protecting the interest of their new friends, but also to withstand any invasion from any intruders. Moreover, they planned it as a base of attack against a nearby enemy when the need arose. To add to this, since the Delian League was but recently formed, and the foundation was as yet not very strong, the possibility that an ally could defect was real. Therefore to easily forestall such defection, *Epiteichismos* strategy was resorted to as for instance in the case of Naupactus.

Following this event, the Megarians who hitherto were members of the Peloponnesian League joined the Athenian League because the Corinthians were attacking them in a war concerning the frontier boundaries. Consequently, the Athenians because of their easy mobility by sea quickly sailed to Megara and held Megara and Pegae after Megara had sought for help. They then built for the Megarians their long walls from the city to Nisaea, garrisoning them with some Athenian troops. As a result of this the Corinthians began conceiving the most bitterest hatred for Athens. (Thucydides, I:103)

To add to this, not only did this *Epiteichismos* and the occupation of Naupactus serve as a blockade of Corinth; they further had the effect of cutting Corinth off from access to the west, from Epidaurus and from Aegina. By this action Athens controlled both ends of the Corinthian gulf. Thucydides aptly describes the situation thus: “This was a severe blow to the Corinthians.” (1:106). Moreover, according to Russel Meiggs, the fortification of Pegae and Nisaea were vital to Athens’ empire ambition because, “Megara’s port of Nisaea on the Saronic Gulf commanded the easiest route for a Peloponnesian army invading Attica, and Pegae was a useful harbour on the Corinthian Gulf” (Meiggs, 1973: 177).

Before Pericles started operating fully as the leading general, there were other important and experienced generals, who had commanded Athenian forces namely; Myronides, Leocrates and Tolmides. As far as the *Epiteichismos* strategy is concerned, they won some important battles for Athens; especially, Tolmides. For instance, there is evidence that Tolmides installed a garrison at Chaeronea after the revolt had been quelled with some 1,000 Athenian and allied forces. (Thucydides, I: 113). This fortified garrison was to serve the purpose of first maintaining peace and order in Chaeronea and also to defend Chaeronea from possible enemy attacks as well as serve as a base from which to launch an onslaught on any enemy territory. To buttress the earlier claim, Meiggs asserts: “When the political revolution was consolidated by military successes in the early fifties, Pericles was not yet a dominant figure; the more experienced generals, Myronides, Leocrates, and Tolmides, were probably the most powerful voices in the Assembly: (Meiggs, 1973: 156).

### ***Epiteichismos* as a Periclean Strategy**

Pericles, one of the chief architects of the *Epiteichismos* strategy, began operating in the mid-fifties, around 454 BC. By then he had made his reputation as a general and Cimon, Leocrates, and probably Myronides were dead. Meiggs therefore declares: “The strong policy now being pursued by

Athens should be regarded as Periclean. Politically and militarily he was mature". (Meiggs, 1973:156). According to Victor Ehrenberg:

The rule of Athens was established by garrisons, tribute, Athenian inspectors, the presence of the Athenian navy, various decrees imposing political or economic or jurisdictional dependence, and possibly the introduction of a democratic constitution in allied states. (Ehrenberg, 1973: 219).

Thucydides recounts that, not long after Boeotia's independence from Athens, Euboea revolted from Athens. The Athenian naval ships, which provided easy mobility by sea, sailed to Euboea under Pericles. The purpose of this naval expedition was to quell the Euboean revolt and probably leave an Athenian garrison there to maintain peace and order. Pericles' attention was then drawn to a Peloponnesian invasion of Attica. Moreover, before this event, Megara had also revolted with the aid of Corinth and Epidaurus with a consequent destruction of some of the Athenian garrisons at Megara except Nisaea to where some Athenian hoplites managed to escape. Significantly, these fortifications saved Athenian soldiers from a near massacre. It is also important to note that although Pericles' predecessors, erected these fortifications, their continuity and maintenance ensured an eventual Athenian victory under Pericles. Moreover, Pericles eventually quelled the Euboean revolt with the Athenian navy, culminating in the thirty-year truce established between Athens and Sparta. (Thucydides, I: 101). This rapprochement marked the end of the so-called First Peloponnesian War. (de Ste. Croix, 1972: 180 & 196).

Here again, it will not be enough, if not scholarly, to talk about the use of the *Epiteichismos* strategy without highlighting the significance of Periclean seaborne raids. According to H.D. Westlake:

If Periclean strategy is to be fully appreciated, it is clearly important to enquire why they were undertaken." (Westlake, 1969:84). Pericles, apart from avoiding a headlong collision with the Peloponnesian army adopted a systematic plundering of cities rather than mere assault. (Westlake, 1969:85).

Between 431-430 BC, the Athenian navy and other Athenian generals like Hagnon, embarked upon systematic seaborne raids. These seaborne raids were concentrated in the Peloponnese, which included Pheia in Elis. The capture of Sollium and Astacus in Acarnania and of Cephallenia and Atalanta where a permanent fort was established were achieved. We shall later discuss the importance of this fort as far as the *Epiteichismos* strategy is concerned. Around the period, Epidaurus was plundered and almost captured, which was followed by the plundering of the territory of Troezen, Halieis, Hermione and Prasiae in Laconia, which was captured and sacked. In the same summer, Hagnon and Cleopompus who were Pericles' colleagues in the higher command embarked upon a naval expedition in Thrace against the Chalcidians and the Potidaeans (Thucydides, II: 56ff.)

Significantly, these naval expeditions in the Peloponnese were, first, part of the defensive strategy of Pericles, because they had the effect of not only destroying the defenses of the Peloponnesian states but also prevented them from their continual attack on Attica. In addition, Pericles was able to clear the seas of Athens of pirates. (Westlake, 1969:86)

We must also add that Periclean naval expedition strategy was not only geared towards expanding the alliance base, but it was also used as a mechanism to depopulate the ever-increasing population of Athens through the creation and occupation of garrisons and *kleruchies* overseas. Underneath these operations was the agenda of *Epiteichismos*. According to H.D. Westlake:

Developments in the later years of the Archidamian War suggest that the Periclean raids may have been designed to lead to the occupation of fortified posts in coastal areas, from which the neighbouring country could be harried throughout the year. *Epiteichismos* by seaborne troops was a strategy upon which any power enjoying command of the sea might embark at will... . (Westlake, 1969: 89).

As far as the *Epiteichismos* strategy is concerned, Pericles won two important battles for Athens, namely: the Samian War and the establishment of the fortification of Atalanta. When the Sacred War

ended, a thirty-year truce was established between Athens and Sparta with her consequent surrendering of Nisaea, Pegae, Troezen and Achaëa to the Peloponnesians. In the sixth year of the truce, war broke out between Samos and Miletus over the question of Priene. Subsequently, the Milesians invited the Athenians to intervene. The Athenian forces, under Pericles, then sailed to Samos and established a democratic government there. They then established an Athenian garrison before leaving. (Thucydides, I: 115ff.) The purpose of this garrison was first, not only to ensure and maintain peace and order in Samos but also to thwart the intrigues of the Samian oligarchs who might want to topple the democratic government of Samos, established by Athens, and secondly, and most importantly, to ensure the success of the *Epiteichismos* strategy. This is true, because the established garrison could easily be used as a base from which an onslaught could be launched into any nearby enemy territory. Moreover, Athens, at the end of the Samian War, won a successive victory both on land and at sea; as the three walls they built blockaded Samos from having access to the sea and also to call for land forces or naval forces from any of their immediate neighbours to assist them. In addition, this garrison had the effect of protecting and defending the Milesians from enemy attack, in this case, by Samos.

Also, as stated earlier, Atalanta was one of the victims of Periclean naval expedition strategy. Besides, in the case of the occupation of Atalanta, a fortification was erected, corresponding to the Periclean *Epiteichismos* strategy. The capturing and the subsequent fortification of Atalanta was vital to Athens in the sense that, according to Thucydides, “it was to prevent pirates from sailing out from Opus and other parts of Locris and doing damage to Euboea.” (Thucydides, II: 32). The importance of Euboea to Athens has been stressed in various books of Thucydides’ account of *The Peloponnesian War*. For instance, at Athens there was the expression of disgust and fear at the founding of Heraclea by the Spartans; since it appeared to be aimed at Euboea and the crossing to the Euboean town of Cenaeum was very short. (Thucydides, III: 93). Moreover, Euboea served as a means through which food supplies

could reach Attica. Thucydides further adds that the Peloponnesian ships, which rounded Sunium, around 411 BC, caused a revolution inside Athens as they cut off Athens from Attica and Euboea.(Thucydides, VIII:95).

Moreover, to elaborate further on the significance of the Periclean naval expeditions or the Athenian navy and the *Epiteichismos* strategy, which are important tools that Pericles used among others in achieving Athens' empire ambitions, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Athenian navy was the strength of the Athenian empire and Pericles makes it clear in Thucydides, that the world can be divided into two parts, the land and the sea, each of which is valuable to man. Pericles thus emphasizes: “with your navy as it is today there is no power on earth – not the king of Persia, nor any people under the sun – which can stop you from sailing where you wish.” (Thucydides, II: 62).

Therefore, one can safely conjecture that the strength of the Periclean seaborne raids laid a solid foundation for the *Epiteichismos* strategy to be effective and successful. This is true, because, the Athenian navy provided an easy mobility by sea, hence, enhancing their capability to raid an enemy's territory with subsequent erection of fortifications or garrisons to enforce the rule of Athens. In effect, the naval expeditions of Athens under Pericles, and the use of the *Epiteichismos* strategy, during the early stages of the Peloponnesian War, won important and strategic battles and territories for Athens between 431-430 BC, until his death in 429 BC. Other Athenian generals such as Nicias, Demosthenes, Cleon, Paches and many others who came after Pericles continued with the *Epiteichismos* strategy to chalk some successes in the Peloponnesian war.

## ***EPITEICHISMOS* AFTER PERICLES**

It is interesting to note that, although the chief architect of the *Epiteichismos* strategy during the war was Pericles, its full significance was realized only after he had died of the plague in 429 BC. Athenian generals like Paches, Nicias, Demosthenes, Cleon, etc. utilized the *Epiteichismos* strategy to win important battles for Athens. After Pericles' death in 429 BC, Athens was faced with the problem of quelling the Mytilenian revolt, which occurred in 428/7 BC. The Mytilenians wanted to absorb Lesbos into their territory in order to have control over the Lesbians. (Thucydides, III: 2). Moreover, the subsequent defeat of the Methymnians who were Athenian allies by the Antissans made the Mytilenians masters of the whole country. Therefore when Athens realized the increasing power of Mytilene, they dispatched 1,000 citizen hoplites under the command of Paches, son of Epicurus. Paches, being aware of the significance and advantages of the *Epiteichismos* strategy, built a single wall completely surrounding Mytilene, reinforced with forts, and garrisoned by soldiers, placed at various strong points. By this action, Mytilene was firmly blockaded both from the land and from the sea. This blockade further had the effect of cutting the food supplies of the Mytilenians as the Peloponnesian allies found it difficult if not impossible to come to their aid. Consequently, they were compelled to come to terms with the Athenians. (Thucydides, III: 18&27). It is important to note that, these forts established by the Athenian forces under Paches ensured the final victory or quelling of the Mytilenian revolt. Besides, the presence of these garrisons of soldiers ensured and maintained peace and order. Paches further reduced Pyrrha and Eresus and finally took over the Mytilenian navy. (Thucydides, III: 50).

In the same summer, and after the conquest of Lesbos, Nicias, the son of Niceratus made an expedition against the island of Minoa, which lies off Megara. Nicias, being privy to the significance and advantages of the *Epiteichismos* strategy, stationed the Athenian blockading force on the island

where the Megarians had built a tower. The reasons are that, this station was closer than the existing stations at Budorum and Salamis. Besides, he realized that by stationing this Athenian blockading force on the island of Minoa, he would not only prevent the Peloponnesians from sailing out unobserved from there with their *triremes*, but also check the unscrupulous activities of pirates while also stopping any ship from entering the port of Megara. Thus, by using the island of Minoa as the base from where to attack their enemy, they were able to capture two towers projecting into the sea on the side of Nisaea and also cleared the entrance into the channel between the island and the coast. Finally, after the whole place had come under the control of the Athenian blockading force within some few days, they established fortifications on the island and left a garrison there. (Thucydides, III: 51). As earlier said, these fortifications were to maintain peace and order, and most importantly to ensure Athenian rule, that is, democracy, apart from being used as a base from which they could launch an attack on the enemy's territory as well as defend themselves when under enemy attack.

Contrary to what Westlake (1983: 16) maintains, that the Periclean invasion of Epidaurus in 430 BC and Nicias seizure of Minoa in 427 BC do not constitute an *Epiteichismos*, we contend that these were instances of *Epiteichismos*, albeit of a temporary and experimental nature. Consequently, when Pylos fell to the Athenians in 425 BC, the Athenians knew exactly how to put their success to good use. We agree though with him that *Epiteichismos* was not everywhere successful, as practiced by both the Athenians and Peloponnesians, during the Peloponnesian War (1983: 17).

In the same summer, a fleet of thirty ships, under the generalship of Demosthenes embarked upon an expedition against the Leucadians. The Acarnanians who were Athenian allies advised Demosthenes to build a wall to blockade the city. This strategy would starve them to surrender and hence cut out the hostilities between the Acarnanians and the Leucadians. Demosthenes, upon the



advice of the Messenians acted on the contrary and abandoned this important *Epiteichismos* strategy. He rather embarked upon an expedition against the Aetolians where the Athenians and their allied forces were utterly defeated. (Thucydides, III: 94-98). Thus, Demosthenes' refusal to employ the *Epiteichismos* strategy resulted in the defeat of the Athenian forces in Aetolia. Although, Demosthenes avoided the use of the *Epiteichismos* strategy in the expedition against the Leucadians, (427/6) and also only erected road-blocks in the expedition against the Ambraciots; he however, upon realizing his folly, changed his strategy in 425 BC during the Athenian occupation of Pylos. Therefore, in the expedition round the Peloponnese, when the Athenian ships were off the coast of Laconia, Demosthenes proposed the fortification of Pylos. According to Thucydides, Demosthenes' reason was that, "the place was in a naturally strong position, and, together with most of the country round, uninhabited." (Thucydides, IV: 3). Demosthenes further made it clear that, the use of the *Epiteichismos* strategy in Pylos will be advantageous in the sense that there was a harbour close by, and the Messenians who spoke the same dialect as the Spartans could use this place as a base to do damage in any nearby enemy territory. Besides, the site will also be a reliable garrison. Consequently, fortifications were established in Pylos. (Thucydides, IV: 3ff.).

Therefore, when the Athenians and their allied forces were attacked by Sparta and their Peloponnesian allies, the Spartans were initially beaten both on land and at sea. Besides, the Athenians and their allied forces captured about five Spartan ships and subsequently blockaded the Spartans and the Peloponnesian allies from escaping from the island. Consequently, an armistice was reached, but not long afterwards the fighting began again. In the event, although Pylos was accidentally burnt, the strong fortification established at Pylos made it difficult for the Spartans to break the defences of the Athenians. Therefore, when the Athenian forces got reinforcement from the Messenian allied forces, they used their fortifications as a base of attack on the Spartans, who could not withstand the onslaught

of the Athenians, surrendered, and were taken prisoner to Athens. According to Thucydides: “Pylos was firmly garrisoned, and the Messenians from Naupactus sent some of their best troops back there to what was in fact their old country, since Pylos was in what used to be Messenia.” (Thucydides, IV: 41). Subsequently, the Messenian forces used this garrison as a base to carry out raids into Laconia and did a great deal of damage. Westlake, (1969: 90), buttresses the extent of damage the Spartans suffered after Pylos had been captured in the following words:

From 425 onwards *ἐπιτείχισμός* proved a very effective weapon: it led the Spartans to sue for peace soon after the fall of Sphacteria, (Thu. 4. 41, 2.3), contributed to the grave decline of Spartan morale (4.55), might have caused serious disturbances among the Helots if Brasidas had not achieved his successful diversion in Chalcidice (4.80), and was partly responsible for the willingness of Sparta to make peace in 421 BC (5. 14. 3), though anxiety to recover the prisoners lost at Sphacteria was doubtless a stronger motive.

When Athens’ initial attempt to take control of Corinth had failed, they then set out to Crommyon in the territory of Corinth, around 425/4 BC. Here again the significance of the *Epiteichismos* strategy is emphasized. Before the Athenians set sail to Epidaurus and thence to Methana, they laid waste the land of Crommyon. Upon landing in Methana, they left behind a garrison which carried out raids on the territories of Troezen, Haliae, and Epidaurus. (Thucydides, IV, 45).

Besides, this fortification served the purpose of cutting off Methana from the Peninsula since it lay between Epidaurus and Troezen. Related to the above, the systematic raids on the territories of Troezen, Haliae and Epidaurus had the effect of disorganizing the defences of the Peloponnesians and also preventing them from their continual annual attack on Attica during the harvest seasons. (Thucydides, IV: 45ff.). Moreover, in the same summer, the Athenians made an expedition against Cythera, under Nicias and other commanders. After the usual struggling and fighting, the Cythereans surrendered to Athens. Athens then occupied the town of Scandea on the harbour and put a garrison into Cythera itself. Significantly, the capturing and fortifications of Pylos and Cythera had untold economic

and political consequences on Sparta and her allied forces. Economically, the capturing of Cythera could now be used to prevent merchant ships from supplying Sparta and their allied forces with the needed food and other important commodities.

According to Ehrenberg, Cythera's capture, "became a permanent menace to Sparta, more dangerous even than Pylos; actually the whole Peloponnese was more or less blockaded, and Sparta's allies suffered." (Ehrenberg, 1973: 283). Besides, Cythera once served as a protection of Laconia from attack by pirates from the sea. It therefore, presupposes that the opposite is bound to happen as it is now in the hands of the Athenians. Thucydides remarks:

Since it was the port for merchant ships from Egypt and Libya and also served as a protection of Laconia from attack by pirates from the sea—which is its one vulnerable point, since the whole of Laconia juts out into the Sicilian and the Cretan seas. (Thucydides, IV, 53).

Politically, it dampened the morale of the Spartans and their allied forces and they also feared that there might be a revolution against the government after the great and unexpected disaster at Sphacteria. In addition, the capture and fortifications of Sphacteria and Cythera encouraged the Athenians to continue their expedition and to lay waste the following Peloponnesian towns: Cotyrta, Aphrodisia, Epidaurus, Limera, Thyrea and Aegina. (Thucydides, IV: 53-57).

Moreover, when the pro – Athenian Megarians' betrayal of Megara had become unsuccessful, the Athenian forces under the leadership of Demosthenes in 424 B.C began to blockade Nisaea. They therefore walled off the place from Megara by building fortifications that extended down to the sea at each side of Nisaea. Consequently, this *Epiteichismos* strategy blockaded the Nisaeen garrison and further cut their food supply, compelling them to surrender. Besides, and most importantly, the Athenian forces used these fortifications to defend their hold on Nisaea when they were attacked by the Boeotian forces. The battle ended with each claiming victory, but certainly, Thucydides seems to imply

that the Boeotians lost a larger number of their forces than the Athenians as important generals of the Boeotians were killed. (IV: 69-74).

It is also important to note that, when the Athenian expedition and fortification of Delium under Hippocrates had failed as they were defeated; one other significant event that overwhelmed the Athenians was the capture of Amphipolis by Brasidas in 424 / 3 BC. Therefore, when the one – year armistice between Athens and Sparta had expired in 422 BC, Cleon went on an expedition against the Thracian towns, with the aim of recapturing Amphipolis. In the event he first attacked Scione and later Cophos and Torone. Subsequently, he left a garrison at Torone as a measure in consonance with the *Epiteichismos* strategy.

When the Athenians withdrew and abandoned their fortifications at Epidaurus upon the fifty–year truce which Sparta established with Argos in 418/7(Thucydides,V:80), the Athenians embarked upon an expedition against the Melians in 416/5, under the generalship of Cleomedes, the son of Lycomedes and Tisias, the son of Tisimachus. It appears that by now Athens, still in control of the sea, had established *Epiteichismos* as the strategy of choice so the generals, being privy to the *Epiteichismos* strategy, built a wall completely round the city of Melos and left a garrison. The purpose of this strategy was to blockade the Melians by land and sea. Consequently, the Melians surrendered unconditionally to the Athenians who slaughtered the men and sold the women and the children into slavery, and later sent out a colony of 500 men to occupy the place. (Thucydides, V: 114-116).

After the event of Melos, the Athenians and their allied forces embarked upon an expedition against Sicily which engendered the *peripeteia* of the Athenians' fortunes in 415 BC. It is interesting to note that, although the Sicilian expedition finally caused a change, in fact, a peripety of the Athenian fortunes, the *Epiteichismos* strategy helped the Athenians to win strategic battles in Syracuse around 415

BC. When the Athenians and their allied forces arrived in Syracuse, their initial encounter and defeat of the Syracusans boosted their morale. Therefore, they strategically, built a fort at Labdalum, on the edge of the cliffs of Epipolae over-looking Megara and Syracuse itself. Other forts were also established at Syca, called the Circle. The Athenians therefore used these fortifications to launch attacks on the established defences of the Syracusans. Besides, at one time when the Athenians and their allied forces were under Syracusan attack, the Circle fortification saved them, as they were able to defend themselves by burning some timber to prevent the attack of the enemy. After this strategic victory in 415, the Athenians and their allies built a double wall down to the sea, shutting the Syracusans in. The effect of this blockade was so telling on the Syracusans that they contemplated surrender to the Athenians. (Thucydides, VI: 97-103).

It is now clear that the *Epiteichismos* strategy helped Athens to win most of her battles after Pericles had died, and it ensured among many other things, the expansion of Athenian territory and the alliance base; the enforcement of Athenian rule through the presence of their garrisons, and most importantly, it laid a solid foundation for Athens' empire ambition. Thus it is reasonable to affirm that, not until the Sicilian expedition which caused a change in the fortunes of Athens, and Alcibiades' intrigues with the Spartans which resulted in the fortification of Decelea, and hence causing their defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Athens would have enjoyed a long supremacy and hegemony in ancient Greece.

#### **FORTIFICATION OF DECELEA – SPARTAN *EPITEICHISMOS* STRATEGY**

Alcibiades was recalled from the Sicilian expedition because he had been accused in connection with a profanation of the mysteries. In actual fact, the Athenians thought that he was part of a plot aimed at setting up an oligarchy or a dictatorship in 415 B.C. (Thucydides, VI: 60ff.). Rather than submitting

himself to a possibly prejudiced trial, Alcibiades fled first to Cyllene and later to Sparta, on the invitation of the Spartans themselves (Thucydides, VI: 88). In the Spartan Assembly, Alcibiades leaked the entire plan of the Athenians to the Spartans. He gave a catalogue of countries that Athens intended to conquer after Sicily. These were apart from Sicily, the Hellenes in Italy, the Carthaginian Empire and Carthage herself, and the Peloponnesians. He further advised the Spartans to take among many others, the following measures: to send a force to Sicily whose members have the ability to row the ships themselves, with a regular Spartan officer, to carry out the war in Hellas more openly; and most importantly to fortify Decelea in Attica.( Thucydides, VI: 89ff.). This according to Thucydides:

Is the thing of which the Athenians have always been most frightened, and they think that of all the adversities of the war this is the only one that they have not experienced. The surest way of harming an enemy is to find out certainly what form of attack he is most frightened of and then to employ it against him. (VI: 91).

J.B. Bury affirming this also notes as follows, albeit with hindsight:

Alcibiades urged the Spartans especially to take two measures: to send at once a Spartan general to Sicily to organize the defence, - a general was far more important than an army; and to fortify Decelea in Attica, a calamity which the Athenians were always dreading. 'I know,' said the renegade, 'the secrets of the Athenians'. (Bury, 1951: 471).

Consequently, at the very beginning of the next spring, the Spartans and their allied forces invaded Attica under the generalship of Agis, the son of Archidamus, and laid waste the land. They proceeded to plant a fortification at Decelea. Thucydides remarks that the fort was built to threaten and control the plain and richest parts of the country, and it was visible from Athens itself. (Thucydides, VII: 19). Meanwhile, if Thucydides' statement "the surest way of harming an enemy is to find out certainly what form of attack he is most frightened of and then to employ against him" is anything to go by, then it is this strategy that the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies employed against the Athenians and

their allies. We must state that the Spartans and their allied forces did not only employ the *Epiteichismos* strategy of fortifying Decelea in Attica, but also, they attacked and captured the strongholds of the Athenians in Sicily. For instance, in 413 BC, when the Syracusans had unsuccessfully engaged the Athenians earlier at sea, they however managed to capture the Athenian forts at Plemmyrium. (Thucydides, VII: 23). This capture of Plemmyrium was indeed, according to Thucydides, “the greatest and the principal cause of the deterioration of the Athenian army.” (VII: 24). It brought untold hardships on the Athenian forces as supplies to the forces were cut, resulting in the decline of the morale of the army. Besides, the Syracusans even intercepted Athenian triremes that were to supply them with some goods and destroyed them. They subsequently burned a quantity of timber for ship – building which lay there ready for the Athenians. (*Ibid.*). Thucydides recounts the position of Athens in Nicias’ letter in the following words: “The position therefore is that we, who thought we were the besiegers, have become in fact the besieged.” (VII: 11).

The fortification of Decelea in Attica was an *Epiteichismos* strategy employed by the Spartans and the Peloponnesian allies as earlier stated. Interestingly, previous innumerable Peloponnesian attacks on Attica did not last long before they were abandoned for obvious reasons. This time however, the fortification of Decelea enabled them stay in control of the Attic countryside throughout the year. The seriousness of the fortification of Decelea is aptly captured by Thucydides, who remarks: “The position was that, ever since Decelea had been first fortified by the whole of the invading army during the summer and had then been used as a hostile post against the country, with garrisons from the various cities relieving each other at fixed intervals, Athens had suffered a great deal.” (VII: 27). Moreover, after the fortification of Decelea, the Spartans and their allied forces used their garrisons to undertake systematic raids to secure supplies. (*Ibid.*) Judging by the success of Sparta’s *Epiteichismos* at Decelea, one finds it strange that they never seriously applied themselves to this military strategy, though they

had threatened to do so in 421 BC, and had to wait for the promptings of Alcibiades before they acted. (Thuc., V: 17; Powell, 1988: 192).

The Spartans' fortification of Decelea, in Attica, brought political, economic and financial consequences on the Athenians and their allies. Politically, the Athenians were deprived of about 20,000 slaves who were skilled workmen as they deserted. (Thuc., VII: 17-28). The effect of this desertion was that, not only was there a reduction in the numbers of citizens who could be conscripted to join the already demoralized and dwindling Athenian forces, seeing that citizens now had to perform tasks initially assigned to slaves, but also it could serve as a good recipe for other slaves in other allied cities to desert to the enemy side. Economically, the Athenians lost all the sheep and farm animals in the countryside that lay outside the protection of the city walls. Besides, their horses got lamed on the rough ground due either to the continuous hard work they were put to, or were wounded by the enemy. (Thuc., VII: 27-28). This could have the effect of limiting the number of cavalry Athens could levy to fight the enemy. In addition, as far as Euboea is concerned, this Spartan *Epiteichismos* strategy cut off Euboea from Athens and Attica, and crippled the food supply of Athens and her allies. Thucydides, remarkably captures this idea by saying, "the supplies of food from Euboea, which previously had been brought in by the quicker route overland from Oropus through Decelea, now, at great expense, had to go by sea round Sunium" (VIII: 28)

Furthermore, the fortification of Decelea by the Spartans and their allied forces had financial consequences on the Athenians. Firstly, by this time, every single item had to be imported. Moreover, the occupation of Decelea compelled the Athenians to impose upon their subjects a tax of five per cent on all imports and exports by sea: the reason being that the two wars Athens was conducting inflated the expenditure of the Athenians while revenue was declining. (Thucydides, VII:28). To add to this, as a



result of this financial crisis, the Athenians sent back the Thracian forces who were to beef up the already wearied Athenian forces under Demosthenes.(Thucydides,VII:29). Besides, the effect of the occupation of Decelea on Athens and their allied forces is aptly captured by Cyril .E. Robinson who declares:

The constant menace of this enemy post, visible to good eyes from the citadel itself, told upon the Athenians' security in many ways; it kept their garrison upon the city walls under a constant strain of anxiety; it rendered effective cultivation of the soil impossible; it cut the overland communication with Euboea, the war-time repository of the Attic farmers' live-stock; it formed an easy refuge for a growing number of runaway slaves (and 20,000 escaped, it is said); it meant the dismantling of their farms which were stripped even to the roof-tiles, and, worst of all perhaps, it compelled the closing of the Laurium silver-mines and so checked the lucrative output of the mint. (Robinson, 1962: 228-229)

Moreover, the Peloponnesian occupation of Decelea had untold effects on Athens and her allies; what wore them down more than anything else was the fact that they had two wars on their hands at once. Thucydides therefore remarks, "for it was incredible, besieged by the Peloponnesians who were based on a fortress in Attica, They should not only not leave Sicily, but actually stay on and lay siege in just the same way to Syracuse." (VII: 28). Unfortunately for the Athenians, they never imagined that the Peloponnesian invasion and the subsequent fortification of Decelea in Attica would last even for more than two or three years. (Thucydides, VII: 28ff.). To worsen the plight of the Athenians, the Sicilian expedition had become a fiasco as they were successively defeated by the Syracusans and their allies in 413 BC: they first suffered a heavy defeat in the great harbour (VII: 41), followed by their unbelievable defeat at sea in Epipolae (VII: 55ff.), and the final and significant Syracusan defeat of the Athenians at sea (VII: 71), resulting in the withdrawal from the over-ambitious Sicilian expedition. Thucydides therefore summarizes the effect of the Sicilian expedition's disaster on Athens in the following words: "They were utterly and entirely defeated; their sufferings were on an enormous scale; their losses were, as they say, total; army, navy, everything was destroyed, and out of many, only few returned." (VII: 87).

Meanwhile, back at Athens, the disaster of the Sicilian expedition caused fear and consternation. The whole of Hellas turned immediately against Athens. In their bid to turn the course of events, Athens established a fortification at Sunium to give security to their cornships in rounding the point, but this action could not salvage the precarious situation of the Athenians. (Thucydides, VIII: 4). It is rather interesting to note that, after the disaster in Sicily, coupled with the Spartan fortification of Decelea, the worst was to hit Athens as they began witnessing a successive eruption of revolts of their allies. (Grant, 2004: 32). Consequently the people of Lesbos revolted (Thucydides, VIII: 5), which was followed by the Chians, the Erythraeans and Clazomenae. Besides, all those who joined the revolts started building fortifications and making ready for war. (VIII: 14). Moreover, the people of Teos also revolted and even demolished the Athenian fortification in Teos. (VIII: 16). Besides, Miletus also revolted from the Athenian alliance due to the intrigues of Alcibiades and Chalcideus. (VIII: 17). Notwithstanding the untold hardships that befell Athens after the great disaster in Sicily, the effect of the fortification of Decelea by the Spartans in an *Epiteichismos* strategy, and the continual revolt of some of the important members of the Athenian alliance, there was alternate success and failure in Athens' military and naval expeditions thereafter. For instance, among their successes, they were able to reclaim Lesbos, Clazomenae and Chios in 411 B.C. back into the alliance. (VIII: 23ff.) However, this success was shortlived, as the continual intrigues of Alcibiades with Tissaphernes caused internal party strife in Athens, resulting in the dissolution of democracy for oligarchy. (VIII: 45). Moreover, the Peloponnesians took advantage of this precarious situation and used their hold on Decelea as a base to attack the Athenians and their allies. Consequently, in 411 BC, the Peloponnesian forces attacked Euboea, which was one of the important allies of Athens. The Athenians, who were disorganized by now, hurriedly marshaled some forces that were utterly defeated by the Peloponnesian forces in Eretria. The Peloponnesians captured as many as twenty-two of the remaining ships of the Athenians and either

killed or made prisoners of the crews. The effect of this defeat was that, it cut off Athens from both Attica and Euboea, and further caused revolution and despondency in Athens. The Peloponnesians, following this victory, made Euboea to revolt from the alliance. (VIII: 95ff.) Thucydides describes the effect or the impact of the Euboean revolt on Athens in the following words:

When the news of what had happened in Euboea came to Athens, it caused the very greatest panic that had ever been known there. Not the disaster in Sicily, though it had seemed great enough at the time, nor any other had ever had so terrifying an effect. (VII: 96).

The consternation caused at Athens by this string of reverses, following upon the heels of Sparta's capture of Decelea, led to the creation of the *Probouloi* in 411 BC and also to Aristophanes' production of the *Lysistrata*, the last of his peace plays. (Grant, 2004: 30-31).

Thucydides further contends that if the Peloponnesians had undertaken siege operations, considering the greater dissension inside Athens, the whole of Athens would have crumbled. (VIII: 96). At this juncture it is interesting to ask, whether Sparta could have fortified Decelea on her own initiative without Alcibiades' advice, or why Athens, who brought the *Epiteichismos* strategy to a fine art under Pericles, did not fortify Decelea to their advantage in the Peloponnesian War. The reasons are comprehensively and expressly captured in Pericles' declaration to the Athenians in response to the Spartan Ultimatum preceding the Peloponnesian War. Pericles remarks:

Now, as to the war and to the resources available to each side, I should like you to listen to a detailed account and to realize that we are not the weaker party. The Peloponnesians cultivate their own land themselves; they have no financial resources either as individuals or as states; then they have no experience of fighting overseas, nor of any fighting that lasts a long time, since the wars they fight against each other are, because of their poverty, short affairs. Such people are incapable of often manning a fleet or often sending out an army, when that means absence from their own land, expense from their own funds and, apart from this, when we have control of the sea.(Thucydides, I: 141).

He continues with an exposition of Spartan weaknesses in the following words:

while if they merely establish some minor outpost, they could certainly do some harm to part of our land by raiding and by receiving deserters, but this could by no means prevent

us from retaliating by the use of our sea-power and from sailing to their territory and building fortification there. For we have acquired more experience of land fighting through our naval operations than they have of sea fighting through their operations on land. (I: 142)

From the foregoing, we may surmise that Athens, because of her naval power and perhaps complacency, did not bother to fortify Decelea, and that Sparta, by her traditional lack of enterprise, could not have fortified Decelea in Attica without Alcibiades' treachery. It must be acknowledged though that the *Epiteichismos* at Decelea alone could not have brought Athens to its knees (Adcock, 1947: 3). It is now apparent that the disaster in Sicily, and most importantly, the effect of the Spartan capture and fortification of Decelea, with the resultant revolts of many allied members contributed in no small measure to the defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War. Ironically, the *Epiteichismos* strategy which the Athenians used in winning many of their battles against the Peloponnesians was this time used by the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allied forces to defeat Athens and her allies in the Peloponnesian War.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have succeeded in giving not only a systematic and coherent outline of the significance of the *Epiteichismos* strategy as employed in the Peloponnesian War, but have also shown how both Athens and Sparta exploited this strategy to their respective advantages. In sum, the model of raid into enemy territory to capture and fortify a position from which one can carry on operations against that enemy is a model of warfare, which we see clearly in Homer. The Persians found that to be necessary in their progress into the heartland of Greece, which ended at Salamis. This model was obviously brought to a fine art under Pericles, and his successors won important battles with it, because

at that time the Athenians were the best in siege warfare. Apparently, the imperial ambition of Athens could not have been realized without the effective application of the *Epiteichismos* strategy. (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, I, 1. 33-35). Moreover, when the Spartans got hold of this brilliant idea, they used it to defeat the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War. It is indeed true that after Decelea's fortification by the Spartans, the war continued for at least another seven years before Athens' defeat at Aegospotami, which finally ended the war (Westlake, 1983: 18-19). Indeed, the Athenians rebounded on several occasions after their disaster at Sicily and famously defeated the Spartans and their allies at Arginusae. However, the Athenian democracy sullied this victory with the execution of six generals who had failed to rescue Athenian citizens floundering in the waves. It goes without saying, however, that the *Epiteichismos* at Decelea and its socio-economic stranglehold on Athens played an important role in Athens' final defeat. Thus confirming Thucydides' observation that, "the surest way of harming an enemy is to find out certainly what form of attack he is most frightened of and then to employ it against him".

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