



Teytelbaum, E. (2019); 'Polybius's Views on Sieges and Siege Craft: Human and Technical Factors'

Rosetta **24**: 21-37

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue24/Teytelbaum.pdf>

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# POLYBIUS'S VIEWS ON SIEGES AND SIEGE CRAFT: HUMAN AND TECHNICAL FACTORS

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## **Abstract**

This paper considers the nature of Polybian siege descriptions. Polybius's approach was defined by diverse factors, including his personal experience and the influence of literary canons. Traditional literary clichés were used by the historian in passages where he provides instructions on how to capture cities. Advice is provided on the capturing of cities by military tricks, treachery and siege techniques. Capturing cities was important due to the difficulty of a long siege and problems with supply. However, internal conflicts and the lack of resources often experienced by cities under siege provided an opportunity to exploit these weaknesses with a sudden attack.

*Key words: Hellenism, historiography, warfare, strategy, tactics, poliorcetics.*

In some ways, the Hellenistic era was characterised by development in siege craft. Military innovations of the 4th century BCE contributed greatly to progress in siege techniques and increased the role of sieges in warfare.<sup>1</sup> Polybius' *Histories*, generally considered a major source on the wars of the third and second centuries BCE,<sup>2</sup> describes a total of 26 sieges in detail (Sardis, Syracuse, New Carthage, Ambracus etc.), of which 19 were successful, and reflects the author's apparent interest in siege craft. Polybius also mentioned 61 other sieges in brief, but this paper deals mostly with the main 26 cases.

When considering the *Histories* as a source on Hellenistic siege craft, it must be remembered that Polybius himself participated in the siege and capture of Carthage during the Third Punic War (Ammianus Marcellinus: 24.2.16–17; Plutarch *Apophthegm*: 200a; Pausanias: 8.30.5–8).<sup>3</sup> Polybian siege accounts are generally considered to be highly sophisticated.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, scholars have pointed out that Polybius sometimes prioritized descriptions of individuals and psychology over accurate replays of events,<sup>5</sup> and have insisted this approach was defined by traditional literary canons.<sup>6</sup>

This raises a number of questions. Why did Polybius narrate sieges this way? What were his views on the interrelation between human and technical factors in siege craft? How realistic were Polybian siege descriptions?

This article aims to answer these questions in two ways. Firstly, it considers Polybian narration of human and technical factors in siege craft. Secondly, it compares Polybian

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<sup>1</sup> On Hellenistic siege craft see Garlan 1974: 201–271; Sabin 2008: 447–460; Connolly 2001: 214–218. For the role of Hellenistic siege techniques, see Garlan 1974: 212–243; Campbell 2006: 83–93; Connolly 2001: 216–217. On the role of techniques in Hellenistic siege craft see Garlan 1974: 212–243; Campbell 2006: 83–93; Connolly 2001: 216–217.

<sup>2</sup> Connolly 2001: 75; Marsden 1974: 272.

<sup>3</sup> F.W.Walbank put forward strong arguments regarding the role of Polybius in the Third Punic War. According to him, the Achaean historian was a military adviser and political representative of the Achaean League in the Roman army. (Walbank 2002: 19–30.) On Ammianus Marcellinus's and Plutarch's coverage of Polybian participation in the capture of Carthage, see below.

<sup>4</sup> Miltsios 2013: 88–89; Eckstein 1995: 177–182.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson 1991: 14.

<sup>6</sup> Levithan 2013: 89–111.

siege accounts with the views of *poliorcetics* – ancient military theorists dealing with siege craft.

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Siege accounts were an integral part of Ancient Greek literary culture since the time of Homer. Certain rules of siege descriptions existed in Greece already during the classical period.<sup>7</sup> These included traditional narratives about *περιπέτεια* – turns of events – as well as a significant role for individuals and their feelings, both besiegers and besieged, and emotional depictions of the fall of the city.<sup>8</sup> The motive of *περιπέτεια* was reflected in the exploits of heroic individuals from both attacking and defending sides.

These trends had existed in Greek historiography since Herodotus and were widespread in the Hellenistic era. The historian Phylarchus (Plutarch *Pyrrhus*: 28.4.)<sup>9</sup>, for example, described how Acrotatus's bravery saved Sparta from Pyrrhus at the crucial moment. Other examples of *περιπέτεια* (Plutarch *Aratus*: 31–32) include the description of the unsuccessful Aetolian attack on the city of Pellene. Similar narrative constructions can be found in the inscriptions of that period.<sup>10</sup> In all these cases, the victorious side wins due to the heroism of a single person. Such an approach was frequently combined with descriptions of siege constructions and the actions of both sides, deriving from Thucydidean accounts of the siege of Plataea, the influence of which has been immense on subsequent classical historiography.<sup>11</sup> Thucydides discussed siege constructions used by besiegers in detail, such as a wooden palisade (3.75.1) and siege wall (4.21.1–4), as well as war engines (*μηχανάς*; here this term means rams 76.4). With regards to the siege constructions of the besieged, he described a wooden framework and ramp and protections against missiles (3.75.5) and countermining (3.76.2)

Polybian siege accounts reflect the influence of both these trends, although the historian combined them using his own unique touch. For Polybius, the human factor in sieges was

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<sup>7</sup> Pease 1931: 216–218; Paul 1982: 45.

<sup>8</sup> Chaniotis 2013: 297–298.

<sup>9</sup> On derivation from Phylarchus, see Beston 2000: 316–317

<sup>10</sup> IG II 1209; IG XII 315

<sup>11</sup> Krebbs 2016: 2.

of primary importance. He pays particular attention to the strategies behind the capture of cities.

Interestingly, out of 19 detailed Polybian reports of city capture, 10 were taken without use of military techniques. Polybius narrates these episodes at greater length. According to the historian, even the strongest cities (*τὰς ὀχυρωτάτας πόλεις*) passed into the hands of the enemy if the inhabitants were careless regarding their fortifications (7.15.2–3)<sup>12</sup>. This was illustrated by Polybius in his account of the capture of Sardis by Antiochus III in 213 BCE (7.15–18)<sup>13</sup>. The Cretan Lagorus, who served in the army of this king, noticed a poorly guarded place near a steep cliff (7.15.7–10). As a result, a small detachment of Seleucid soldiers penetrated the walls and opened the gates, allowing the army of Antiochus III to enter the city (7.16–18).

The capture of cities through treachery also plays an important role in the *Histories*. Striking examples include the actions of Hannibal when taking Tarent in 212 BCE (8.26–36), the capture of Cynaepa by the Aetolians (4.18.3–4)<sup>14</sup> and Seleucia by Antiochus III (5.60.5). There seems, therefore, good reason to assume that Polybius gave such details for more than simple literary effect.

Whilst Polybius is almost silent about the constructions of fortifications, he devoted much attention to their geographical position, as in the cases of Lilybaeum (1.42.7), Sinope (4.56.5–9), Leontines (7.6.1–5) and Ambracus (4.61.7–8). The favourable geographic positions of these fortresses are noted. Striking examples include the description of Acragas (9.27.1) - *κατὰ τὴν ὀχυρότητα, καὶ μάλιστα κατὰ τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὴν κατασκευὴν*, Tarentine (10.1.6) - *τοῦ τόπου τὴν εὐκαιρίαν*, New Carthage (10.8.3) – *μεγίστας μὲν χρείας*

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<sup>12</sup> Such a view was widespread in Antiquity. See Strategikos of Onasander: 42.15–16; Herodotus: 1.84; Xenophon *Cyropaedia*: 7.2.1–4. Both the ‘father of history’ and Xenophon expressed this idea with the capture of the same city by Cyrus the Great.

<sup>13</sup> For the capture of Sardis Antiochus see Avramenko 2002: 30–37; Davidson 1991: 14–18 and Miltsios 2013: 90–91. In these authors' views, the description of the capture of Sardis was an example of the focalization of the narrative in order to show the mechanism of decision-making by military leaders.

<sup>14</sup> On the internal political struggle in Cynaepa during the Social War see Sivkina 2006: 100–106; Walbank 1967: 29; Walbank 1957: 461.

παρέχεσθαι τοῖς ὑπενναντίοις and Oeniadae (4. 65.8) - τὴν εὐκαιρίαν τοῦ τόπου, as well as Abydus and Sestus (16.29.3) - τὴν εὐκαιρίαν τῶν πόλεων.

Accounts of the capture of cities were often accompanied by a number of details. Speaking of Hannibal's capture of the city of Tarentum during the Second Punic War,<sup>15</sup> Polybius stressed that Hannibal collaborated with city inhabitants who were dissatisfied with Roman rule (8.26.7–9). Hannibal verified the sincerity of their intentions and then bribed the guards (8.27.3–5). According to Polybius, the main factors which ensured the capture of the city (8.28.3–9) were the strict discipline of the Numidians and misinformation of the enemy regarding the aims of the Carthaginian army.<sup>16</sup> Careful selection of a time (8.30.1–13) for the attack was an equally important determinant of success.

Besides this, Polybius stressed the need for precautionary measures even after the seizure of the city. Information provided by the *Histories* showed such measures were not excessive. Neglecting at least one of these factors could turn even brilliantly planned operations into a disaster. Examples include the attacks of Cleomenes on Megalopolis in 223 BCE and Aratus on Cynaepa in 241 BCE.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, poorly calculated times of attack proved disastrous. Polybius wrote that Aratus and Cleomenes arrived at the city walls too late, and as a result their supporters had already been arrested. Therefore, the attack on the city walls failed (9.17–18). The attacking army could be thrown back even after the capture of the city gates and penetration through the walls. In these situations, the decisive role was played by patriotism, solidarity of the citizens and their motivation to resist even in critical situations.<sup>18</sup> Some attacks failed due to poor discipline in the

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<sup>15</sup> Hannibal's capture of Tarentum was not a spontaneous move; it reflects his policy of seeking out dissatisfaction with Rome among the Greeks of Southern Italy and Sicily. (Walbank 1968: 142–144.)

<sup>16</sup> On the capture of Tarentum by Hannibal, see Seibert 1993: 274–277. Seibert emphasised the limited nature of Hannibal's success: the Carthaginian general was unable to capture the harbour. See Fronda 2011: 257; Lazenby 1996: 111–112; Hoyos 2003: 135.

<sup>17</sup> On Megalopolis, see Walbank 1936: 64–71; on Cynaepa Walbank 1968: 142–144.

<sup>18</sup> On the role of patriotic motives in the defence of cities, see Chaniotis 2013: 51–57. Stubborn resistance could have some effect even in cases where the city was actually captured by the enemy.

attacking armies; instead of capturing important buildings they began to plunder the city. During the Social war in 220 BCE, the Aetolians wanted to take the city of Cleitorus by sudden attack (*προσβολὰς ἐπιοῦντο*), but the inhabitants defended it courageously (*γενναίως καὶ τολμηρῶς*) and saved their city.

The bravery of the defenders could also turn the situation even in the case of initial setbacks. This occurred during the Aetolians' attack on Aegirum in 220 BCE. The guards got drunk and neglected their duties - *πυλῶν αμεθυσκομονους καὶ ῥαθύμως διεξάγοντας τὰ κατὰ τὴν φυλακὴν* (4.3). The Aetolians broke into the city and almost captured it, but Aegirum was saved because of the 'noble courage' of the defenders – *διὰ τὴν εὐψυχίαν καὶ γενναιότητα* (4.58.12).

It is thus not surprising Polybius emphasised that even after achieving success and penetrating into the city in several places, (8.31.4) Hannibal followed strict precautions. He sent some troops to capture the central city square. The remaining troops were left in reserve in case of unforeseen situations (8.32.2–3). Sometimes such precautions were, however, excessive. This is shown by an episode featuring Polybius himself during the siege of Carthage in the Third Punic war. After the Roman army penetrated the city walls, Polybius advised Scipio to throw iron hooks into the water or drop boards with nails (*σανίδας ἐμβαλεῖν κεντρωτάς*) into the lagoon separating Romans and Carthaginians in order to protect Romans against possible enemy attacks. The Roman general categorically refused. He said that it was foolish to avoid battle with the enemy when they were already within the city:<sup>19</sup> (*ἔφη γελοῖον εἶναι κατειληφότας τὰ τεῖχη καὶ τῆς πόλεως ἐντὸς ὄντας εἶτα πράττειν ὅπως οὐ μαχοῦνται τοῖς πολεμίοις.*)

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Polybius praised the bravery (Eckstein 1995: 49–51) of the defenders of Abydus against Philip V and their mass suicide after the fall of the city (16.30–33). Polybius's praise may have wider political meaning. According to him, the fate of Abydus greatly impressed the Roman envoys and impacted Roman demands on Philip V (16.34.1–3), which led to the Second Macedonian war. This may explain why Polybius, contrary to his usual practices, focused on the tragedy of the siege over tactical elements. On Philip V's campaign in Asia Minor, see Walbank 1967: 133–136.

<sup>19</sup> Modern researchers disagree on the incident with the hooks. According to Mishchenko, (Mishchenko 1896: 16), this episode preceded the situation described by Ammianus. Walbank,

Sorties made by the besieged were also described by Polybius in great detail. He argues that sorties - *ἐπέξειμι* - played a crucial role in the successful defence of the city. This is why he speaks highly of the activities of Himilco, the chief of the garrison of Lilybaeum during the First Punic War. Polybius praised him for being active and energetic (I. 42. 12–13) and for trying to find ways to set the enemy's siege constructs on fire. Speaking of attacks in which Himilco participated, Polybius emphasised a successful choice of terrain favourable for attack as the most important factor in performing sorties (1.45.5). Describing technical devices used by Aetolians during the siege of Ambracus and especially underground fights in tunnels, where the defenders used smoking barrels with burning feathers to drive the Roman soldiers out of the tunnel, the Achaean historian especially stressed the role of sorties in the defense (21.28).

The technical aspect of sieges, however, was not ignored by Polybius. He wrote that at the siege of Lilybaeum in 249 BCE, the Romans used the moat (*τάφρος*) with the wall (*τείχος*) - (1.42.9–10) alongside (1.48.2, 1.48.10) siege towers (*πύργους*), siege galleries (*στοάς*) and rams (*κριῶν*). According to the historian, during the Social war the Aetolian fortress Ambracus, was taken by the Macedonian king Philip V with the use of earthworks - *τοῖς τε χώμασιν* (4.63.2–3). When the besiegers could not breach the walls, they attempted to dig a tunnel, as in the case of Philip V of Macedon during the siege of Thebes in Phthiotis (5.100.4) and Cephallenia (5.4.7–8).<sup>20</sup> Speaking about the other siege of Ambracus made by the Romans, Polybius noted (21.27.4) that the Romans first moved forward the siege constructs (*ἔργα*) alongside siege machines and rams (*τῶν μηχανημάτων*)<sup>21</sup>. He also emphasised the role played by military engineers, including the tactics of the famous Archimedes during the siege of Syracuse (9.9.2). Describing the techniques used by Archimedes to repel Roman assaults (9.7.1–9.4), Polybius stressed

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however, believed that this event, most likely, took place in the autumn of 147 BCE. (Walbank 1979: 673.)

<sup>20</sup> The description of the siege of the city in Caria with the digging of ditches seem to be rather untypical for Polybius (16.11.3–6). For the siege of Thebes, see Campbell 2011: 140.

<sup>21</sup> Livy's account of the siege of Ambracus (35.4–5), while borrowing factual material from Polybius, significantly reduced the information describing the role of technical devices, presumably in order to achieve a more entertaining and literary narrative. See Walsh 1961: 192–194; Briscoe 2013: 121.



Archimedes invented machines that shot at long, medium and short ranges. The ingenuity of Archimedes was combined with effective measures by King Hiero II,<sup>22</sup> who ordered the preparation of large quantities of missiles and siege weapons.<sup>23</sup> Polybius also gives a detailed description of a huge siege ladder called *sambuca* (8.6.3–11).

Some siege constructs were intended for both ramming and digging. A good example of this is the three-floor siege tower used at the siege of Echinus (9.41.1–10). According to Polybius (9.41), this tower resembled a siege tortoise (*χελώνη*) and consisted of three floors. The lower floor had a ram and devices for undermining the walls. The second floor had catapults. The third floor was manned with soldiers, who were used for repulsing the counterattacks of the besieged. Polybius viewed catapults (1.74.4) as essential - *τοὺς καταπέλτας καὶ τὰ βέλη καὶ συλλήβδην ἀπάσας τὰς πρὸς τὴν πολιορκίαν παρασκευὰς*.<sup>24</sup> During the siege of Cephallenia in 218 BCE (5.4.1–7), Philip V made use of a stone-thrower (*πετροβόλοι*). From the information given by Polybius, we can conclude that the catapults and stone-throwers were used for protecting the actions of siege constructs. Such mechanisms were described by the historian in his account of the siege of Thebes in Phthiotis. Philip V attacked this city with 150 catapults and 25 stone throwers. After the missiles launched from the siege machines inflicted heavy losses on the defenders,<sup>25</sup> the Macedonians began to excavate and undermine the city walls (5.99.7–100.2).

In spite of this attention to the technical aspects of siege craft, Polybius's narrative is far from a complete account of such things. He was almost silent about the constructions of fortifications and the deployment of troops.<sup>26</sup> He did not describe how siege machines

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<sup>22</sup> On the role of military technicians and engineers in Hellenistic warfare, see Garlan 1973: 17–18; Sabin 2008: 452–454; Chaniotis 2013: 158–160. According to Chaniotis, the increased role of mechanics reflects a trend towards the growth of the professionalisation of warfare in the Hellenistic era.

<sup>23</sup> Lack of tactical and topographical details during the sieges of Ambracus and Syracuseae, justly stressed by Levithan (92; 103), can be partially explained by the fact that these fragments survived only in later excerpts.

<sup>24</sup> For Polybius's terminology on catapults, see Campbell 2011: 142–143.

<sup>25</sup> Polybius applied this term to missiles of all kinds. (Campbell 2011: 143.)

<sup>26</sup> This may be partially due to Polybius stressing the actions of outstanding individuals, as previously mentioned. (Levithan 2013: 102–110.)

worked and said nothing about their military effectiveness. The detailed information provided on *sambuca* and the three-floor siege tower seems to be an exception rather than the rule.

In spite of Polybius's undoubted interest in technical factors, capturing cities through stratagems seems to have been at least equally (if not more) important to him than techniques. To address why this is the case, we must consider the tactical elements of sieges and their role in military campaigns of that era, and in particular the matter of *poliorcetics*.<sup>27</sup> The third and fourth centuries BCE saw the emergence of Aeneas Tacticus's *How to Survive under Siege* and the *Poliorketika* of Philo Mechanicus.<sup>28</sup> Modern scholars generally consider Aeneas and Philo competent in siege craft.<sup>29</sup> Both authors stressed the possibility of treachery inside the city.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, their works were far from identical. <sup>31</sup> Philo's views can be characterised as preoccupied by the enemy outside the city and Aeneas's as by the enemy inside.<sup>32</sup> Garlan considered Philo more of a tactician and Aeneas more of a psychologist,<sup>33</sup> but I would suggest that the reasons for the difference in the two's styles can be found in the disparate political

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<sup>27</sup> The *poliorcetics* peaked during the Hellenistic period. (Spaulding 1933: 660.)

<sup>28</sup> On Aeneas Tacticus, his life and political views, see Shipley 2017: 52–55. On his work, see Pretzler 2017: 68–95. Shipley believes the work of Aeneas resembles other didactic texts that appeared in the Late Classical period. On Philo of Byzantium and his work, see Garlan 1973: 16–33.

<sup>29</sup> See Fox 2017: 39–42; Garlan 1973: 18. Both authors note the influence of Aeneas on the treatise of Philo.

<sup>30</sup> Pretzler 2017: 146–165 demonstrates that Aeneas believed the inclination of citizens to internal struggle arises from human nature. The influence of Aeneas Tactics on the work of Philo of Byzantium is further discussed by Whitehead 2017: 28.

<sup>31</sup> Similarity in their views is arguably exaggerated by Garlan (Garlan 1973: 21).

<sup>32</sup> Whitehead 2016: 54.

<sup>33</sup> Garlan 1973: 24.

situations in the fourth and third centuries BCE.<sup>34</sup> Aeneas dealt mostly with short sieges and immediate attacks on the city. He stressed, that due to lack of defenders, the garrison (40.2) was not able to defend the entire perimeter of the walls. For this reason, he advised (Ibid.) to concentrate the forces of the defenders on those sections of the city walls which were the most vulnerable, directing soldiers to these unprotected areas if necessary. Aeneas also recommended that the defenders, relying on their better knowledge of terrain, must make sorties in order to impose chaos and disorder in the ranks of attackers (Aeneas Tacticus: 1.1.2; 1.16.7). On the other hand, Philo presents the siege as a chess game between two professionals.<sup>35</sup> He was preoccupied with surviving in a long siege. To do this, he paid a lot of attention to different constructions around walls (A 1-87; 79-86), alongside accumulation of weapons (especially missiles), food and human resources (B 31-47; B 59; D 84-85).

Nevertheless, modern researchers have stressed that these measures would not have been possible in all cases.<sup>36</sup> For this reason, both sides tried to achieve success through risky military tricks.

Polybius demonstrated this with the capture of Farum by the Romans during the Illyrian War in 219 BCE (3.18–19), Lyssus and Acrolyssus by Philip V in 213 BCE (8.15–16) and New Carthage by Scipio Africanus. In the first two cases, the besiegers tricked the defenders by giving the false impression their numbers were small. They enticed the enemy from the gates and attacked from the rear. In the subsequent fighting, the garrisons were destroyed and the cities fell. The fall of the fortress could be caused even by the destruction of part of the garrison.

For this reason, the capture of New Carthage by the Romans deserves special treatment. Modern researchers believe that Polybius gave the Romans more credit than deserved and that their attack on the unprotected part of the city wall near the lagoon was largely

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<sup>34</sup> Whitehead 2016: 33

<sup>35</sup> Whitehead 2016: 35

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: 29-30.

accidental.<sup>37</sup> Levithan also stresses that Polybius downplayed Scipio's mistakes during the first attacks.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it seems likely that this attack was more chaotic than generally considered in Antiquity. At the same time, Scipio's decision to move to immediate attack does seem logical. According to Polybius, the commander in chief of the garrison Mago sent armed citizens through the city gates to make a sortie against the enemy. He hoped to frighten and deter the Romans (10.12.4). The Carthaginians accordingly fiercely attacked the Romans who had left the camp. Seeing this, Scipio deployed his soldiers near the camp in order to draw the enemy as far as possible from the city. He was certainly aware that destroying the best part of the garrison would weaken resistance (10.12.7–8). There is therefore good reason to believe that the destruction of the best part of the garrison in the sortie was a reason for the fall of the city, because it motivated the Romans to attack on different sectors of the city wall, one of which lacked soldiers in the crucial moment (10.14).

Polybius's views on this attack on unprotected parts of the wall may have been influenced by his own experience. Ammianus Marcellinus tells us that Polybius, together with Scipio Aemilianus and thirty Roman soldiers, entered Carthage under the protection of a 'stone tortoise'— *testudo lapidea* (24.2.17). Most likely, the word *testudo* here meant stone fortifications above the gate, which protected the attackers. Polybius and Scipio used the cover of *testudo lapidea* and broke into the city on the sector of wall which lacked defenders.<sup>39</sup>

For Polybius, a shortage of missiles was also a frequent factor in the fall of cities. A vivid example of this is the capture of Psophis by Philip V (4.71.3–12)<sup>40</sup>. Polybius emphasised Philip's determination to attack the city in spite of its formidable fortifications. Subsequent events proved that such a decision was right. The lack of missiles weakened the resistance of the besieged and the Macedonians were able to take the city. These

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<sup>37</sup> For Polybius's attitude toward the capture of New Carthage see Eckstein 1995: 177–182; Scullard 1969: 53–55; Leus 2009: 39–46. According to Scullard, the victory was chaotic in nature and Scipio received more praise from Polybius than he deserved.

<sup>38</sup> Levithan 2013: 106.

<sup>39</sup> den Boeft, Drijvers, den Hengst and Teitler 2002: 60.

<sup>40</sup> See Sivkina 2006: 196; Walbank 1957: 524; Campbell 2011: 138. Campbell emphasised that Philip attacked the city from different directions.

circumstances explain the attempts to take cities with the help of military tricks or sudden attacks.<sup>41</sup>

The organisation of a long-term siege was not always possible. For example, while listing the circumstances favourable to the besiegers, Polybius noted that the territories adjacent to Aegina (9.41.11–12) could supply materials for the siege - *τὴν χώραν ἀφθόβους ἔχειν τὰς εἰς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος χορηγίας*. However, maintaining a long siege *per se* could not fully prevent the enemy from sending reinforcements and food to the besieged (1.18.3)<sup>42</sup>. Only the building of siege walls could effectively isolate the city, but this presented numerous challenges. According to Campbell, even Philip V of Macedon, who was himself a master of siege craft and effective siege techniques,<sup>43</sup> blockaded the cities only in exceptional cases.<sup>44</sup> Polybius emphasised that the blockade of Akragas by the Romans was possible only with the assistance of Syracusan king Hiero II, who organised effective supply of the Roman army (1.17–18)<sup>45</sup>.

Military strategy also impacted sieges. Concerning strategy and sieges, Polybius noted the following circumstances. In his account of the siege of Cephallenia and Ambracia by Philip V, Polybius stressed (5.3.7–8) that the Macedonian king expected to conquer the stronghold and base for military operations against the enemy country (*ὄρμητήριον εὐφυῆς κατὰ τῶν τον πολεμίων χώρας*), as well as a base for landing in the Peloponnese.<sup>46</sup> He gives similar reasons for the capture of Seleucia (*μεγίστας ἔχειν καὶ καλλίστας ἀφορμάς*) (5.58.6) and Acragas (1.17.5). Describing the actions of Antiochus

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<sup>41</sup> See also Polybius's views that in order to make a successful attack the commander must calculate the length of the stairs (5. 97–98. 5) and know geometry (9.18. 5–9; 9. 19. 5–20.6). He supported these views with discussion of the unsuccessful attack of Philip V on Melita during the Social war. An attempt to capture the city failed only because the stairs were too short (*ibid.*).

<sup>42</sup> See also the situation during the siege of Carthage during the Third Punic War. Appian *Libyca*: 120–125.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell 2011: 143; Campbell 2011: 152.

<sup>44</sup> According to Campbell 2011: 151, 70 percent of the sieges carried out by Philip V were Macedonian successes.

<sup>45</sup> Roth 1999: 158–159 notes the problems with supply faced by the Roman army during the First Punic War, therefore confirming the authenticity of information provided by Polybius.

<sup>46</sup> On the strategic aspect of the Social War, see Sivkina 2006: 216.

III, Polybius noted that the capture of a fortress could easily supply the whole army with the goods necessary for war.<sup>47</sup> Similar motivations explained Hannibal's siege of Saguntum (3.17.7)<sup>48</sup>, as well as Scipio's attack on New Carthage (10.8). Their goal was to capture military supplies (*ὠφελείας*)<sup>49</sup> and booty (*λαφύρον*). The seizure of grain stocks was the goal of Hannibal during the siege of Clastidium (3.69.2) and Gerunium (3.100.4–5). The capture of supply centres had a serious impact on strategic planning and decision making.<sup>50</sup> For example, the capture of Cannes affected the supply of the Romans and therefore changed their plans for the entire campaign (3.107.3–5). During the Mercenary War, even the very fact of the siege of Utica and Hyppocritus, which was threatening to cut off Carthage from African resources, forced the Carthaginians to act in unfavourable conditions (1.73.3)<sup>51</sup>.

The capture of cities, especially large ones, was often a crucial factor which motivated the population of nearby territories to take the side of the winner. The Iberians, for example, changed sides just after the capture of New Carthage (10.34.3–4)<sup>52</sup>. Describing the actions of Antiochus III during the Syrian war, Polybius noted that the inhabitants of neighboring Arabia all unanimously joined Antiochus – *μοθυμαδὸν αὐτῷ προσέθεντο πάντες* (5.71.1) immediately after Antiochus had taken a number of towns in Coelesyria. Polybius stated that the main factors leading the inhabitants of Tryphilia to submit to the enemy were fear (*αταπλαγεῖς γεγονότες πάντες*; 4.79.1) and a desire to

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<sup>47</sup> Austin 1986: 454–457; Baker 2005: 386; Leveque 1985: 264. On the role of military booty in the Hellenistic era, see Pritchett 1991: 138–143; 148–152; Garlan 1973: 18.

<sup>48</sup> On the role of supply in the Punic Wars, see Roth 1999: 158–162. Roth emphasises the considerable progress in the supply of the Roman army during the Second Punic War. On the role of supply in the wars of the Hellenistic epoch, see Roth 2008: 381–382. On the complexity of the siege of Saguntum and large number of captured goods, see Seibert 1993: 70–71. According to Philo of Byzantium, the booty and profits gained after capturing the cities outweighed resources spent for bribery. (Philo of Byzantium: 65.)

<sup>49</sup> Roth 2008: 470–478. On the role of capturing booty during the Roman conquests, see Harris 1979: 70–71; 74–77; 102–103.

<sup>50</sup> Hoyos 2003: 118.

<sup>51</sup> Hoyos 2007: 114–115. Hoyos notes the mistakes of the rebels in the course of the siege, which contributed to their subsequent defeat at Baghdad.

<sup>52</sup> On the position of the Iberian tribes, the uncertainty of their situation and their tendency toward political maneuvering, see Eckstein 1987: 213.

save themselves. It is also worth mentioning that in the eyes of Polybius, two interrelated aims of Rome during the second Illyrian war were to inspire fear (*καταπλήξασθαι... ταῖς ψυχαῖς τοὺς ὑπεναντίους*) and conquer cities (3.18.5)<sup>53</sup>. Such motivation for sieges was quite understandable within the general nature of the military campaigns of that epoch. The size of armies had increased significantly from the classical Greek period.<sup>54</sup> The problem of supplying the besieging forces thus became even more important.<sup>55</sup> The capture of fortresses in order to acquire food and supply bases was an effective means of putting the enemy at a disadvantage during the military campaign. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that opposing sides used every means to capture fortresses as quickly as possible.

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Polybian siege descriptions are defined by literary cannons and the author's personal experience. Polybius makes use of literary clichés to enhance his instructions on how to capture cities by military tricks, treachery and siege techniques. He describes the difficulty of a long siege and the problems with supply, giving these as reasons why quick capture of a city is so important. Internal conflicts and the resource scarcity often experienced by besieged cities provided opportunities to exploit these weaknesses during a sudden attack. Other factors encouraging generals to attempt immediate attacks were the impossibility of organising a long siege and a desire to disorganise the supply of the enemy. All these factors contribute to the complex nature of Polybian siege accounts.

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<sup>53</sup> On the role of violence and intimidation in the politics of this period, see Ekcstein 2006: 61, 63, 69, 70, 71, 138, 93, 117, 122, 125, 164, 176, 184-85 and Roth 2008: 370-371.

<sup>54</sup> See Roth 2008: 382.

<sup>55</sup> Such problems were typical for Hellenistic armies. The most striking example of this was the campaign of Antigonos I in Egypt in 306 BCE (Diodorus Siculus 20.73.3-74.5). It is itself striking that during this campaign Ptolemy met Antigonos near the border only because he could not afford to move away from his lines of communications (Diodorus Siculus 20.73.1). Very often, the actions of foragers determined the effectiveness of maneuvers, and the inability of armies to supply themselves limited their options (Diodorus Siculus: 19.25.2). Roth 2008: 379.

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