

## THE SIEGE OF ATHENS

While the Athenians could rely on their navy to import food, they could retreat behind the Walls and avoid a land battle. But in 430BC, the city was struck by plague: it lasted four years, killing a quarter of the population, while the Spartans destroyed land all around them. By 421BC, both sides were exhausted and signed a truce.

## BETRAYAL AND DEFEAT

In 415BC, a politician named Alcibiades persuaded the Athenians to attack Syracuse in Sicily. But, before the attack, he was recalled to Athens to face charges brought against him by his enemies. He fled to Sparta, Syracuse's ally, and betrayed his city. His treachery spelled disaster for Athens: 175 ships were destroyed or captured, and 40,000 men were killed.



### INTERNET LINK

For links to websites where you can read a cartoon story about one of the battles and find out more about the wars, go to [www.usborne-quicklinks.com](http://www.usborne-quicklinks.com)

## DEMOCRACY IN PERIL

Life in Athens became very unstable after this. For a while, democracy was even abolished. Desperate for a strong leader, they recalled the traitor Alcibiades from exile. But he failed to solve their problems. Support for the Athenians declined, and some of their allies in the Delian League turned against them.

## SPARTA BUILDS A FLEET

For the Athenians, the final nightmare came when their old enemies, the Persians, joined forces with their rival Sparta. The Persians agreed to fund a fleet of ships: in return, Sparta had to agree to recognize Persia's claim to Ionia.

The Spartans were now poised to attack at sea as well as on land. In 405BC, they made a surprise attack on the Athenian navy at Aegospotami.



This coin was issued in Syracuse to commemorate its victory over Athens.

## FINAL SURRENDER

Led by their admiral, Lysander, the Spartans won a crushing victory: they captured 170 Athenian ships and executed about 4,000 prisoners. Then they laid siege to Athens itself. Without a fleet of ships, the city was unable to import food. The Athenians were finally starved into surrender in 404BC.

