Chapter 13
Euryalos Castle and Dionysian Walls in Syracuse:
Creation of a Multimedia Tour

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ABSTRACT

Euryalos Castle, in Syracuse, is the most important example of a Greek fortress in the Western world. It dates back to the late 5th century BC, connected with the Dionysian walls. Using European funding, the Superintendence of Syracuse has developed a museological project for the setting up of a little Antiquarium to be used for archaeological finds, according to traditional criteria, and a multimedia project for a modern enhancement of the site. This chapter presents the history of Euryalos Castle and its multimedia project concept. Thanks to the project, this monument lives through images, allowing visitors to grasp the real evolution of the archaeological landscape and its history. Primary objective of the project was to explain a monument such complex as Euryalos Castle according to modern digital storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 734 BC on the island of Ortygia, Syracuse was the most important Corinthian colony in the Mediterranean sea, becoming soon a very powerful city-state (Ampolo, 2011).

The city grew larger, spreading well beyond Ortygia on the mainland and divided into four other districts: Akradina, Tyche, Neapolis (meaning “new city”) and Epipolis (“upper city”). These neighborhoods, favored by their orography, were such extensive that Syracuse was described as a Pentapolis, a city of five cities. Its geomorphology is formed by low hills: the greatest of these is given from the Epipolis plateau, geologically belonging to the Eastern foothills of the Iblei mountains.

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During VI and V centuries BC, the most important public buildings were built, such as the Temples of Apollo, Artemis and Athena in Ortygia, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Theater in district Neapolis.

In the V century BC Syracuse became the center of political and military events in the Mediterranean, fighting even with Athens and with Carthage, allied with Sparta against Athens during the Peloponnesian wars. At the end of the century the tyrant Dionysius I the Elder built the Euryalos Castle connected to the new walls of Syracuse (originally 27 kilometers in length), to protect the city by the Northern side of Epipolis.

Finally, Syracuse was conquered by Romans in 212 BC.

The Euryalos Castle is the most important and the largest example of a Greek fortress in the Western world (with a surface of 15,000 mq, as in Figure 1), survived until the present day (Karlsson, 1992).

The Castel, the Dionysian walls and the Greek Arsenal in the Little Harbor named Lakkios represent the unique complex of Greek Syracuse’s military fortifications. Some remains of the walls and the Arsenal are still visible, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

The Castle is a monumental work of military architecture, built by Dionysius between 402 and 397 BC to protect Syracuse from the Carthaginians, the eternal enemies of Syracuse. The district Epipolis for its orographic characteristics is gradually narrow in width, forming an acute angle. The name Euryalos comes from the ancient Greek word meaning “shape like a nail head”. The city appeared to those coming from the hinterland, including enemies, with this sort of a angle: during the Athenian attack and siege in 415-413 BC the Epipolis had been proven to be a weak point in the defense system, because the Athenians were nearly successful in cutting Syracuse off from the mainland by building a wall from one side to the other of the peninsula where Syracuse stands. To strengthen the defenses of the city, Dionysius decided to fortify the terrace with a Castle named Euryalos, appearing like the tip of the fortifications, occupying a very strategic location.

Figure 1. Remains of Euryalos Castle in the district called Epipolis
Source: Superintendence of Syracuse archives