Dionysius the Elder Encyclopedia Article

Dionysius the Elder

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Dionysius the Elder

c. 430-367 B.C.

Greek tyrant of Syracuse who helped establish Hellenistic control in Sicily and southern Italy and developed the first catapult for warfare. Dionysius rose to power as tyrant in 405, after distinguishing himself in a war between the Greeks and Carthaginians of North Africa. In 399 B.C., while preparing for another battle against the Carthaginians, he invited Greek craftsmen to the island of Syracuse in Sicily to help him develop new weaponry. Their work resulted in the invention of more powerful ships, called *quinqueremes*, which had four or five banks of oars instead of the previous three banks, as well as the first catapults—machines able to hurl objects with deadly force. These innovations helped Dionysius lead the Greek army to victory against the Carthaginians in two conflicts, the first in 396 B.C. and the second in 392 B.C. He was finally defeated by Carthage during the third war (383-c. 375 B.C.).