Classical Civilisation 1A Archaic Greek Warfare

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Plan of lecture

- Naval warfare
 - □ Homer
 - □ 7th-6th century BC
 - Persian Wars
- Cavalry and chariot warfare
 - □ Homer (mainly *Iliad*)
 - □ 7th-6th century BC
 - Persian Wars
- Infantry warfare
 - □ Homer (mainly *Iliad*)
 - □ 7th-6th century: Hoplite revolution?
 - □ Persian Wars





Homer

None described, ships are for transport.

7th century

Egyptian and Phoenician navies dominate.

Types of ship:

- 1. Penteconter
- 2. Bireme



Penteconter



Late Archaic, ca. 520-510 BC, Circle of the Antimenes Painter.

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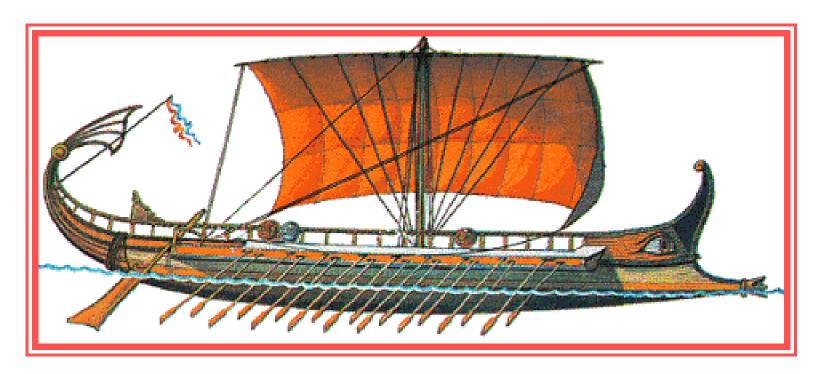
http://www.flickr.com/photos/antiquitiesproject/5034865972/



'Dionysus Kylix' by Exekias, 540-30 BC



Bireme



Downloaded from:

http://www.artsales.com/Ancient%20Ships/kGreekWarShips.htm



6th century

- Egypt introduces <u>triremes</u>.
- Cambyses of Persia creates a navy.
 - □ Rowed by maritime subject-peoples
- Athens (Themistocles) creates a navy.
 - □ Against Aegina
 - □ Rowed by lower-class citizens



'This was not the first time that Themistocles' point of view had prevailed at an important moment. Once before, when there were <u>huge surpluses of public funds generated by the mines at</u> Laurium and the Athenians were planning to divide it among themselves at the rate of ten drachmas a man, Themistocles had persuaded them to drop this idea of sharing the money out and to use it instead to build two hundred ships for the war, by which he meant the war against Aegina – a war which, at the time in question, proved to be the salvation of Greece, because it forced the Athenians to turn to the sea. In fact, the ships were not deployed for the war for which they had been built, but they were available at Greece's hour of need.'

Herodotus 7.144



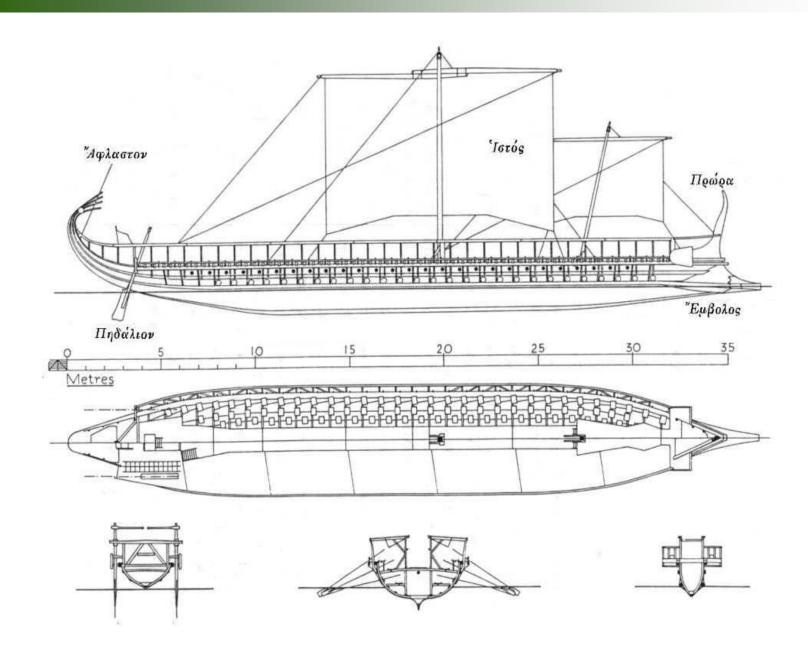
Second Persian War

- Athenian navy is decisive (480 BC)
 - □ Battle of Artemisium
 - Evacuation of Athens
 - □ Battle of Salamis
- Other Greek states had fleets as well, e.g.
 - □Aegina
 - □ Sparta
 - □ Corinth

Main source = Herodotus books 7 and 8.

Trireme







Downloaded from: http://modelshipmaster.com





Homer

- No horse-riding
 - but horses are an object of aristocratic pride.
- Chariots used for transport to and from battlefield
 - ☐ Fighting is mostly done on foot
 - □ Sometimes spears are thrown from chariots
 - □ Two men in a chariot: driver and fighter



The hero rides to the battlefield in his chariot, but fights on foot

Diomedes rallies the Achaens

"Up now, rouse our fighting-fury!" With that challenge

He sprang from his chariot fully armed and hit the ground.

A terrific din of bronze rang from the captain's chest,

Striding toward attack. Fear would have gripped

The staunchest man and made his knees give way.'

Homer Iliad 4.484-488 (transl. by Fagles)

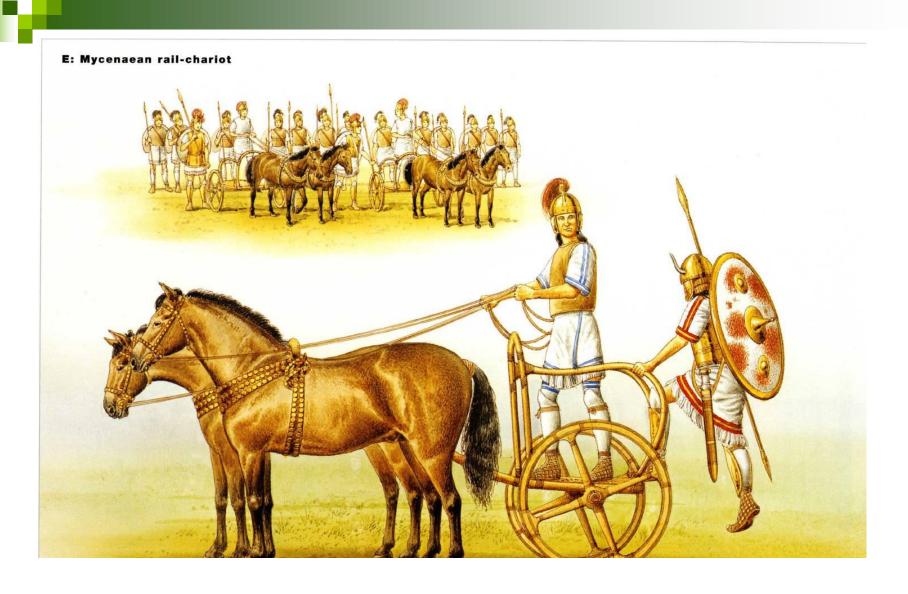


Horses as a source of aristocratic pride and as booty

The Achaens are in flight, Diomedes picks up Nestor

So all on his own Diomedes charged the front, lurched to a halt before old Nestor's team And winged a flight of orders at the horseman: "Old soldier, these young fighters wear you down – [...]

Your driver's worthless, your horses drag their weight. Come, up with you now, climb aboard my chariot! So you can see the breed of Tros's team, their flair for their own terrain as they gallop back and forth, One moment in flight, the next in hot pursuit — I took them both from Aeneas, driving terrors."



Mycenean rail chariot. Art by Brian Delf. From N. Fields (2006) *Bronze Age War Chariots*, New Vanguard.



Chariot team of driver and fighter

Diomedes and Nestor kill Hector's driver

'Nestor grasped the glistening reins in both fists,
Lashed the team and they charged straight at Hector
Charging straight at *them* as Tydides hurled a spear
And missed his man but <u>he picked the driver off,</u>
Eniopeus son of proud Thebaeus gripping the reins —
He slashed him beside the nipple, stabbed his chest
And off the car he pitched, his horses balking, rearing.'

Homer *Iliad* 8.119-140 (transl. by Fagles)

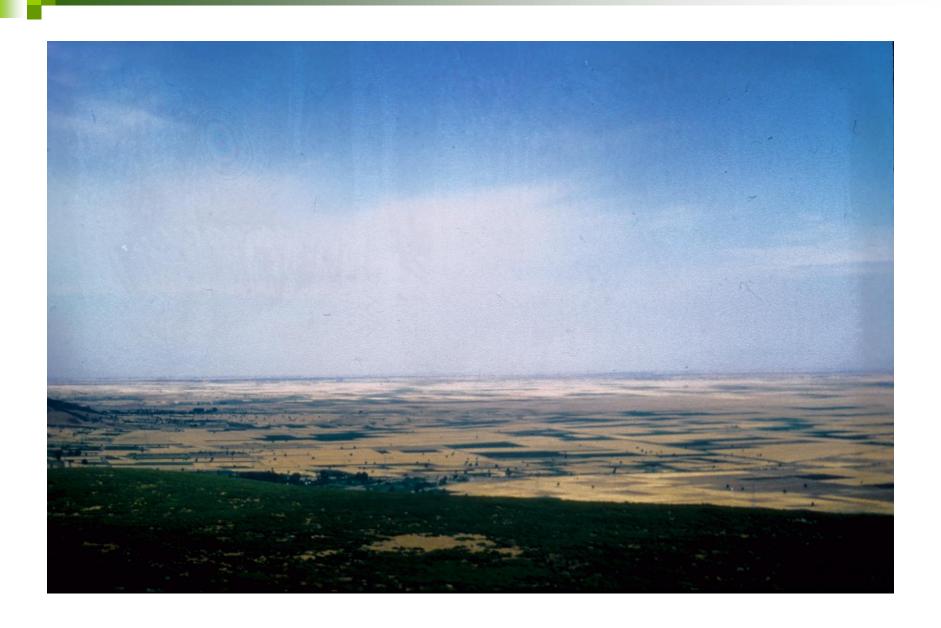


7th-6th century and Persian Wars

- Thessaly famous for horses and cavalry
- Southern Greek poleis:
 - No cavalry (or none to speak of)
 - No Athenian cavalry at Marathon?
 - Spartan cavalry instituted 424 BC
 - ☐ Horses kept by the aristocracy
 - Hippeis = aristocratic class
 - □ Chariot racing as competition

The plain of Thessaly





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InfantryHoplites and peltasts



What is a hoplite?

Heavy-armoured:

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helmet
breast-plate
leg-greaves
shield (Greek: hoplon)
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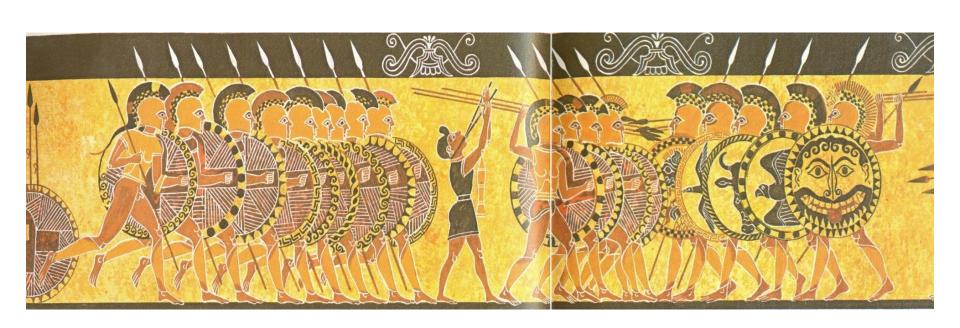
- Heavily armed: spear and short-sword
- Fighting in close formation
 - □ Shield covers self and man to the left

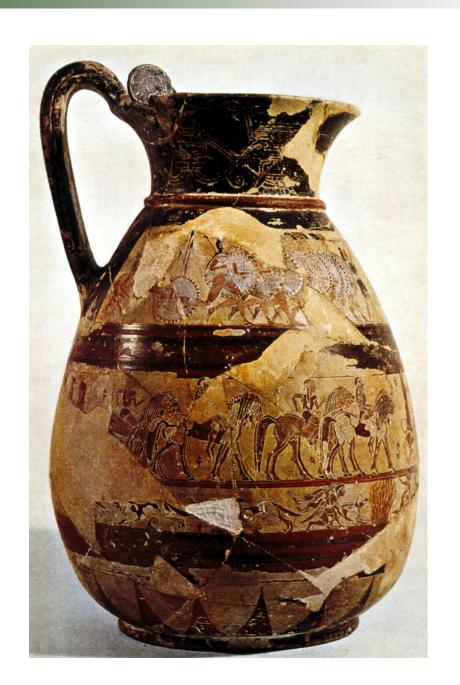


Chigi vase

Proto-corinthian *olpe* found in Etruscan grave. From 650-640 BC





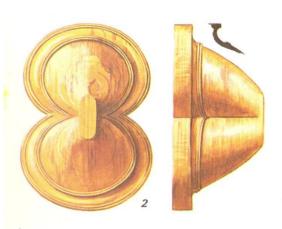




Main characteristic: shield (hoplon)

(Images from P. Connolly (1977) The Greek Armies, Macdonald Educational.

Homeric shield









6th cent. hoplite formation





Thucydides (mid-5th cent.) on the hoplite formation

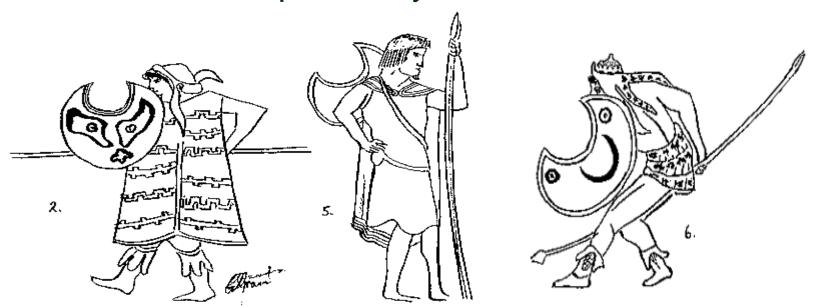
'It is true of all armies that, when they are moving into action, the right wing tends to get unduly extended and each side overlaps the enemy's left with its own right. This is because fear makes every man want to do his best to find protection for his unarmed side in the shield of the man on his right, thinking that the more closely the shields are locked together, the safer he will be.'

Thucydides 5.71.1



What is a peltast?

- Light-armoured: leather or linen cuirass
- Light-armed: small shield, javelin, bow, and/or shortsword
- Armour and weapons vary

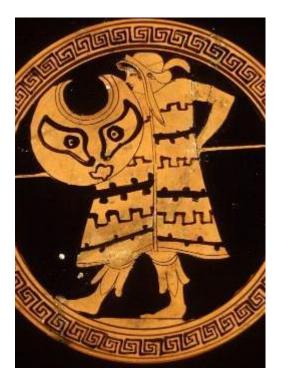




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(Images from

http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Morals%20and%20Law/M+L/Plato/peltast.htm



Traditional view of the 'hoplite revolution'



Homer

- Fighting by individuals, champions represent the army
- Open formation
- Archers/ 'peltasts' mixed in with the 'hoplites'

7th-6th century: the 'Hoplite Revolution'

- Fighting in close hoplite formation
 - □ Each soldier protecting the man to his left
 - = transition from aristocracy to democracy/hoplite oligarchy
- Archers/peltasts in different division



Homer on archers/'peltasts' in the battle line

'And Teucer came up ninth, tensing his reflex bow
And lurking under the wall of giant Ajax' shield.

As Ajax raised the rim, the archer would mark a target,
Shoot through the lines – the man he hit dropped dead
On the spot – and quick as a youngster ducking under
His mother's skirts he'd duck under Ajax' shield
And the gleaming shield would hide him head to toe.'

Homer *Iliad* 8.306-312 (transl. by Fagles)



Alternative view: gradual development

Particularly championed by P. Krentz

(See e.g, Krentz in The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece)



Evidence 1: Massed formations are already seen in Homer



Massed formations in Homer 1:

'So tribe on tribe, pouring out of the ships and shelters, Marched across the Scamander plain and the earth shook, Tremendous thunder from under trampling men and horses Drawing into position down the Scamander meadow flats Breaking into flower – men by the thousands, numberless As the leaves and spears that flower forth in spring. $[\dots]$

The armies grouping now – as seasoned goatherds Split their wide-ranging flocks into packs with ease When herds have mixed together down the pasture: So the captains formed their tight platoons, Detaching right and left, moving up for action'

Homer *Iliad* 2.543-564 (transl. by Fagles)



Massed formations in Homer 2

'.... Here were the best picked men <u>Detached in squads</u> to stand the Trojan charge And shining Hector: a wall of them bulked together, Spear-by-spear, shield-by-shield, the rims overlapping, Buckler-to-buckler, helm-to-helm, man-to-man massed tight And the horsehair crests on glittering helmet horns brushed As they tossed their heads, the battalions bulked so dense, Shoulder-to-shoulder close, and the spears they shook In daring hands packed into jagged lines of battle – Single-minded fighters facing straight ahead, Achaeans primed for combat.'

Homer *Iliad* 13.152-162 (transl. by Fagles)



Evidence 2:

Tyrtaeus (mid-7th cent.) still shows open formation with mixed fighting styles.



'When men stand side by side, not flinching

From hand-to-hand fights at the front,

Some dies, but they save their people. When men run away,

All their virtue is lost.

No one could name every evil that comes

To a man in such disgrace.

Though cleaving the back of a man in flight in the heat

Of combat gives no pleasure,

The corpse fixed to the round by a spear thrown from behind lies in disgrace.

Now is the time for a man to stand, planting

His feet and biting his lip,

To hide his body, ankles to neck, behind a shield's big belly,

To jab on the right with his strong spear and shake

His helmet's fearsome crest.



'Violent acts teach warfare better Than cowering out of range. March to the front, close with the enemy, strike with spear or sword and take him. A man who holds spear or sword must fight that way: toe to toe, shield to shield, crest to crest, helmet to helmet, breastplate to breastplate. You soldiers who are lightly armed can each find a shield to crouch by, throw your stones and spears, keeping close to men in heavy armor.'



Evidence 3:

Herodotus on the Athenians at Marathon (490 BC) shows their massed, unsupported charge as unusual.



'When their battle lines were drawn up and the omens from the sacrifices were favourable, the Athenians were released, and they charged the invaders at a run. The distance between the two armies was no less than eight stades. When the Persians saw the Athenians running towards them, they got ready to receive them, but they thought the Athenians must be mad – mad enough to bring about their utter destruction – because they could see how few of them there were, and that their charge was unsupported by either cavalry or archers. [...] They were the first Greeks known to charge enemy forces at a run, and the first to endure the sight of Persian dress and the men wearing it.'

Herodotus 6.112 (transl. by Waterfield)



Hoplite revolution?

Transition from fighting by aristocratic individuals to fighting in hoplite formation:

1. Sudden revolution tied in with social change in 6th century

or

2. Gradual development because of advances in weapons and tactics.



FIGHTING STYLES AND CONSTITUTIONS



'The earliest form of constitution among the Greeks after the kingships consisted of those who were actually soldiers, the original form consisting of the cavalry (for war had its strength and its pre-eminence in cavalry [...]); but as the states grew and the armed men had become stronger, more persons came to have a part in the government.'

Aristotle *Politics* 1297b12



Transition from champion fighting to hoplite fighting initiates transition from tyranny/oligarchy to democracy.



Final thoughts to take away

- Hoplites in 6th century = 'middle class'
 - Becoming politically powerful
 - □ Solidarity in the battle line and in civilian life
- Citizen armies
 - Armies of amateurs
 - except for Sparta.