

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 15 – Greek Warfare - Army

CLCS4007

Matthew Cobb

Why Societies go to War?

- ▣ **Human nature?**

“For (as he would say) “peace,” as the term is commonly employed, is nothing more than a name, the truth being that every State is, by a law of nature, engaged perpetually in an undeclared war with every other State.” – **Plato *Laws* 626a.**

- ▣ **Religion -**

“During this interval they sent embassies to Athens and made various complaints that their grounds for going to war might be all the stronger in case the Athenians refused to listen. The first ambassadors desired the Athenians to drive out 'the curse of the Goddess.' [Murder of conspirators of Cylon at sanctuary on the Acropolis] – **Thucydides 1.126-27.**

▣ Honour, Justice and Revenge -

- 1) “honour draws all human beings into its hold, for its sake people will suffer and face all dangers...” – **Xenophon *Hiero* 7.1-3.**
 - 2) [Speech of Pericles] “Athenians, as I have always said we must never yield to the Peloponnesians... Any claim, the smallest as well as the greatest, imposed on a neighbour and an equal when there has been no legal award can mean nothing but slavery.” – **Thucydides 1.140-41.**
- ▣ **Aristophanes *Acharnians* 410-540** – kidnap of Aspasia’s prostitutes.

▣ **Protecting Loved-ones, Property and Homeland –**

- 1) [Archidamus Spartan King] “... and for this reason our enemies may be quite expected to meet us in the field. Even if they have no such intention beforehand, yet as soon as they see us in Attica, wasting and destroying their property, they will certainly change their mind. For all men are angry when they not only suffer but see, and some strange form of calamity strikes full upon the eye; the less they reflect the more ready they are to fight...” – **Thucydides 2.11.**
- 2) “The devastation of their country before their eyes, which the younger men had never seen at all, nor the elder except in the Persian invasion, naturally appeared to them a horrible thing, and the whole people, the young men especially, were anxious to go forth and put a stop to it.” – **Thucydides 2.21.**

▣ **Environment and Lifestyle –**

[Clinias] – “As you may have noticed Crete, as a whole is not a level country, like Thessaly: Consequently, whereas the Thessalians mostly go on horseback, we Cretans are runners, since this land of ours is rugged.... Under these conditions we are obliged to have light armour for running and to avoid heavy equipment; so bows and arrows are suitable for their lightness” – **Plato *Laws* 1.625c-d.**

▣ **Economic Motives –**

“Alcibiades the son of Cleinias... was hoping that he might be the conqueror of Sicily and Carthage; and that success would repair his **private fortunes, and gain him money as well as glory.**” – **Thucydides 6.15.**

Common Greek Rivalries

▣ **Bad Neighbours -**

- Sparta Vs Argos
- Athens Vs Thebes (also) Athens Vs Aegina
- Corinth Vs Corcyra
- Chalchis Vs Eretria

Frequency of War in the Ancient World

- ▣ Athens, on average, was at war for 2 out of every three years between 490-338 BC.
- ▣ Citizen soldiers – importance of the harvest.
- ▣ Only limited amount of time spent in battle itself.



Statue of Peace and Wealth by
Cephisodotus (c.370s BC).
Timotheos' Peace (375/74 BC).

Seasonality of Warfare

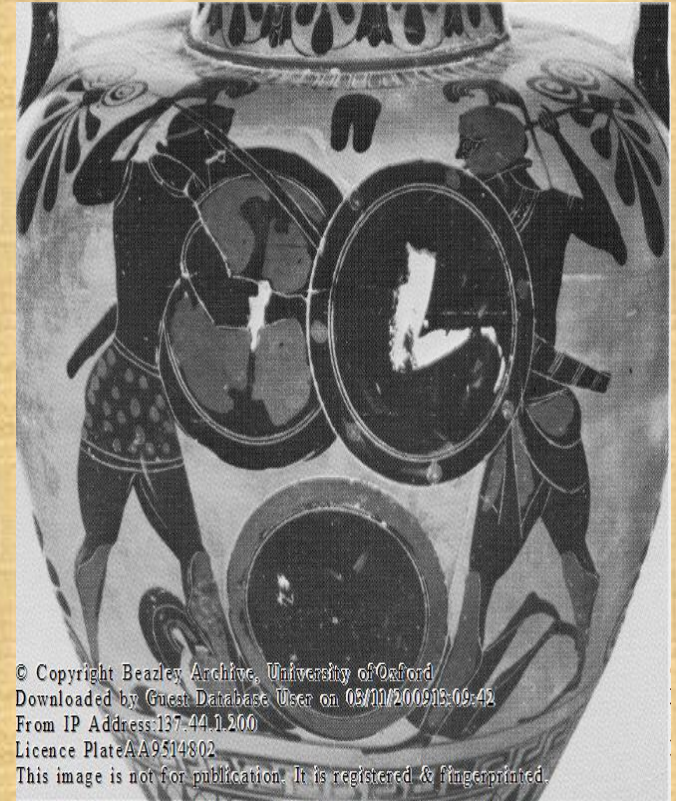
“While the Lacedaemonians were still celebrating the Carneia they [Athens and her allies] marched all together against Epidaurus, and began to surround the city with a wall... In this part of the works a garrison was left, to which all furnished a contingent; they then returned to their several cities. So the summer ended.” – **Thucydides 5.75.**

Soldiers in Greek City-States

- ❑ Soldiers = militia in most Greek city-states (though tyrants often employed mercenaries, e.g. Syracuse – mercenaries become more important by 4th c BC).
- ❑ Free men who could afford some level of equipment – farmers, fishermen, artisans etc (notable exception is use of Helot serfs by Spartans). – By late fourth century BC some states may have started to issue equipment.
- ❑ Training may be limited, relying on experience of older generation – Athens inducted *ephebes* (young men) into military life from ages of 18-20 (not systematic training). – Only Spartans seem to have systematically trained (Aristotle *Politics* 8.1338 b27).
- ❑ Age might range from 18-60 years of age.
- ❑ Slaves accompanied masters in non-combatant roles (e.g. carrying equipment, supplies etc.)
- ❑ No uniformity imposed but similar or standard types of equipment used.

Types of Soldiers – Hoplites

- ❑ Heavy infantry of Classical Greece.
- ❑ Weapons – spear and sword.
- ❑ Armour bronze greaves, breastplate, and helmet.
- ❑ Shield – *Hoplōn* (a round wooden shield, with a slight bowl shape, 3m in diameter, might be plated with bronze) – only offers limited protection to the body.
- ❑ Total equipment may have weighed 50-70 pounds – heavy and unpleasant to wear in Mediterranean sun.



Types of Soldiers – Light Infantry

- ❑ Peltasts
- ❑ *Pelta* – A light crescent-shaped shield.
- ❑ High boots rather than greaves.
- ❑ No armour besides shield.
- ❑ Armed with Javelins.
- ❑ Hit and run tactics.
- ❑ Frequently used for scouting, ambushes, sieges.



Types of Soldiers - *Psiloi*

- ❑ *Psiloi* = light armed - skirmishers and missile troops.
- ❑ Archers (bow and arrows).
- ❑ Stone throwers / slingers.
- ❑ Javelins.
- ❑ Usually no armour or shield, but may carry short sword or dagger.
- ❑ May fight initially in the Van (front of formation) or operate on flanks.



Types of Soldiers – *Hippeis*

- ▣ *Hippeis* = Cavalry.
- ▣ As a rule aristocratic – they could afford to buy and maintain a horse.
- ▣ Light cavalry armed with javelins (harass and skirmish).
- ▣ Heavy cavalry used lances to close with their opponents.
- ▣ “Dragoons” – equipment allowed them to fight on horseback and foot.
- ▣ Attack, scout, harass, screen, pursue enemies.



© Copyright Beazley Archive, University of Oxford
Downloaded by Guest Database User on
03/11/2009 13:42:59
From IP Address: 157.44.1.200
Licence Plate AA9514802
This image is not for publication. It is
registered & fingerprinted.

Nature of Warfare in Classical Greece – Phalanx

- ❑ Hoplites formed in Phalanx – massed infantry formation usually rectangular in shape.
- ❑ Head on collision of hoplites.
- ❑ Columns of men, depth can vary but eight deep fairly common.
- ❑ Depth Vs Breadth.
- ❑ Tendency to drift rightward to protect exposed side.
- ❑ Most advantageous on flat, level terrain.
- ❑ Flute-player provided rhythm for marching.
- ❑ Eventually one side starts to get pushed back and losses formation – retreat.



Military Leadership in Athens

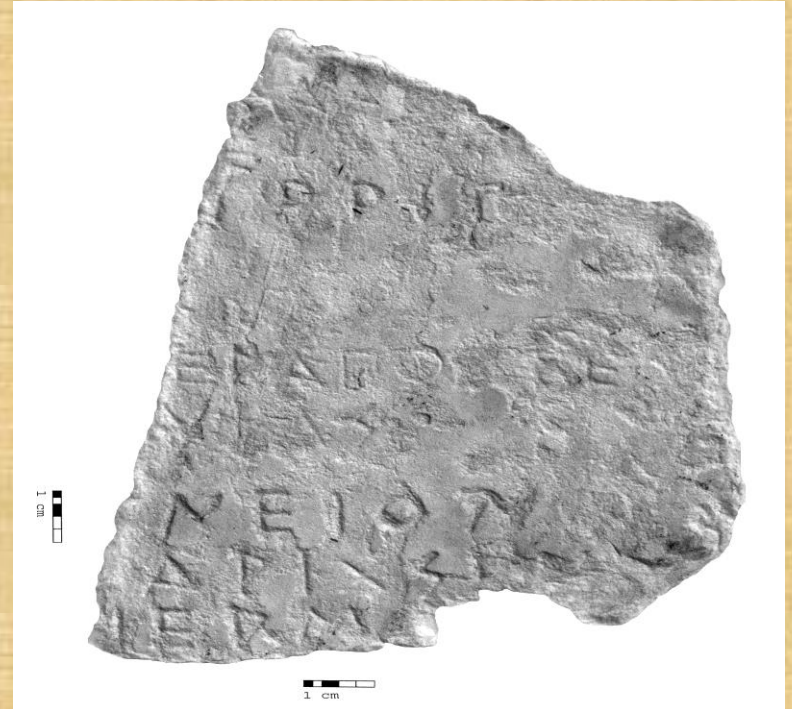
- ▣ Athens - elected ten generals.
- ▣ *Contra* Sparta – one of the two kings acted as general outside the *polis*, other commanders also appointed most likely by *Gerousia* (council of elders).
- ▣ Level of competence may vary.
- ▣ Choice in deployment.
- ▣ Limit ability to direct battle once its commenced (tactics).
- ▣ High mortality rate – generals often in front ranks. By 4th c BC generals increasingly led from rear.

1) “It was also my fate to be an exile from my country for twenty years after my command at Amphipolis...” – **Thucydides 5.26.5.**

1) [Lamachus] “ Ah! the generals! They are numerous but not good for much! – **Aristophanes *Acharnians* lines 500-01.**

Morale and Casualties

- ❑ Casualties varied depending upon victory or defeat.
- ❑ Many of casualties sustained during retreat.
- ❑ Severe losses possible, can be devastating for small communities.
- ❑ Often fighting alongside kin and friends.
- ❑ Morale can be issues, especially after serious disasters – c.f. Sicilian expedition.



Inscription - IGI², 928
Athenian casualty list of
464 BC.

Alliances

- ❑ Alliances (*symmachia*) often based on some real kinship or mythical connection – e.g. Peloponnesian League mostly “Dorians”.
- ❑ Often spoken of in terms of friendship, more than simple *realpolitik* (though see debate between Plataeans and Archidamus one of the Spartan kings) – **Thucydides 2.71-72.**
- ❑ Sharing friends and enemies, though not always equal.
- ❑ By time of Peloponnesian War most states in mainland Greece are part of a larger Alliance or under the influence of one – primarily Delian or Peloponnesian League.
- ❑ Neutrality not always possible – Melian Dialogue – **Thucydides 5.85-111.**

Thucydides 5.47 - Treaty between Athens, Argos, Elis and Mantinea declared in 420 BC-

“The Athenians, Argives, Mantineans, and Eleans, acting for themselves and the allies in their respective empires, made a treaty for a hundred years, to be without fraud or hurt by land and by sea... If an enemy invade the country of the Athenians, the Argives, Eleans, and Mantineans shall go to the relief of Athens...

Likewise the Athenians shall go to the relief of Argos, Mantinea, and Elis, if an enemy invade the country of Elis, Mantinea, or Argos...

Each shall swear the oath most binding in his country over full-grown victims; the oath being as follows:

‘I will stand by the alliance and its articles, justly, innocently, and sincerely, and I will not transgress the same in any way or means whatsoever.’ ...”

- A fragmentary inscription recording this alliance (**IG I³ 83**) has been found and (the surviving parts) conform to Thucydides description.

Difficulties Fighting with Allies

“To approach during the daytime and ascend the heights undetected appeared to be impossible; so he [Demosthenes] resolved to attack by night....

But now the conquerors, in the confidence of victory, began to fall into disorder as they advanced... The Boeotians were the first to make a stand: they attacked the Athenians, turned, and put them to flight....

The moon was bright, and they saw before them, as men naturally would in the moonlight, the figures of one another, but were unable to distinguish with certainty who was friend or foe...

Most disastrous of all were the mistakes caused by the sound of the Paean, which, the same being heard in both armies, was a great source of perplexity. For there were in the battle Argives, Corcyraeans, and other Dorian allies of the Athenians, and when they raised the Paean they inspired as much alarm as the enemy themselves; so that in many parts of the army, when the confusion had once begun, not only did friends terrify friends and citizens their fellow-citizens whom they had encountered, but they attacked one another, and were with difficulty disentangled.” – **Thucydides 7.43-44.**

Greeks Vs Persians

- ❑ “Ionian Revolt” in 499-94 BC – Athens and Eretria send ships to aid (20 and 5 respectively).
- ❑ Darius invades Greece in 490 BC.
- ❑ Xerxes invades in 480/79 BC.
- ❑ Major land battles – Marathon (490), Thermopylae and Plataea (480/79 BC).



Battle of Marathon

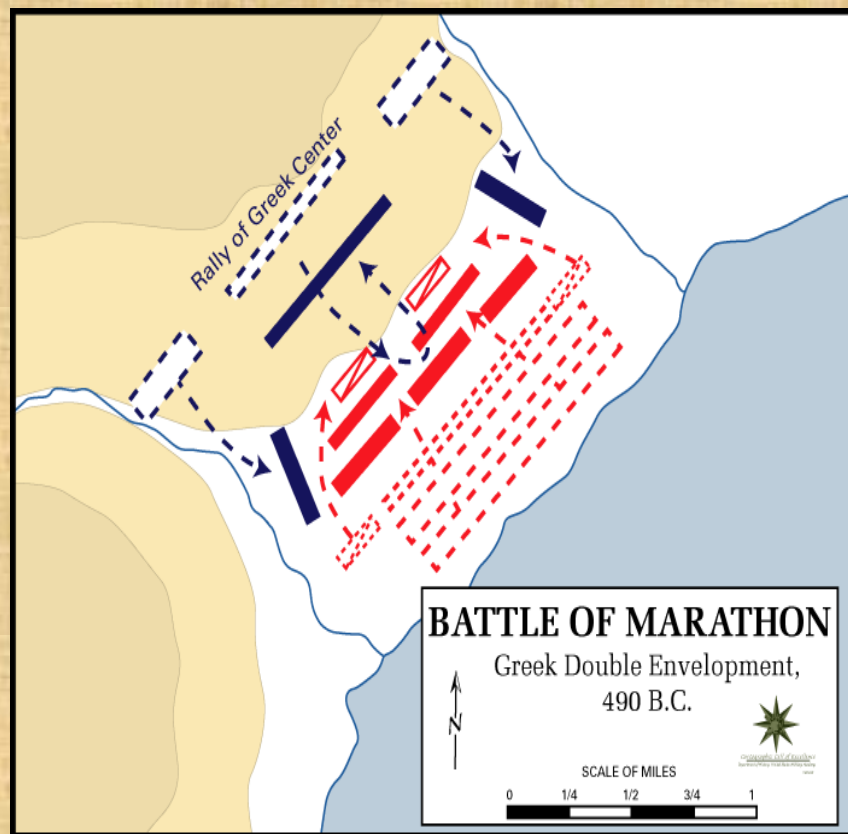
- ❑ Persians attacked across the Aegean capture the city of Eretria after 6 days.
- ❑ Persians land on northern Attica coast at Marathon.
- ❑ Athenians ask Spartans for help but they arrive a day too late due to a religious festival.
- ❑ Persians outnumber Athenians (precise size unknown) – Athenians have 9,000 hoplites and another 1,000 Plataean hoplites.
- ❑ Led by ten generals including Miltiades.

“In this battle at Marathon 6400 of the Barbarians were slain and 192 of the Athenians” – **Herodotus 6.117.**



Battle of Marathon (cont.)

- Athenians drawn up with Plataeans on left wing.
- The centre was weakened with only a few ranks, but the wings were strengthened.
- Athenians have no cavalry or archers.
- Supposedly advance at a run at Persians over a mile distance (Persians shocked by this) – **Herodotus 6.112.**
- Athenian centre breaks but at both wings Athenians and Plataeans are victorious (Persian forces flee). Two wings turn attention to centre and rout Persian forces.
- Athenians slay fleeing Persian forces and capture 7 ships.



Map Courtesy of the Department of History, United States Military Academy

Further Reading (optional)

- ▣ Hanson, V. D. (2000) *The Western Way of War*.
- ▣ Van Wees, H. (2004) *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (chapters 7, 9 13 esp.).
- ▣ Everson, T. (2004) *Warfare in Ancient Greece: Arms and Armour from the Heroes of Homer to Alexander the Great* (chapters 4 and 5 esp.).
- ▣ Worley, L. J. (1994) *Hippeis: The Cavalry of Ancient Greece* (chapters 3, 4, and 5 esp.).