

ARMIES AND NAVIES

Lecture 19: Archers

Prehistory of Archery

- ▣ Archery was known in Greece and the Aegean at least since Minoan times.
- ▣ Arrowheads have been found in most Minoan and Mycenean sites in Greece and the Aegean.
- ▣ There were two types of bows known to the Greeks: the self and the composite.

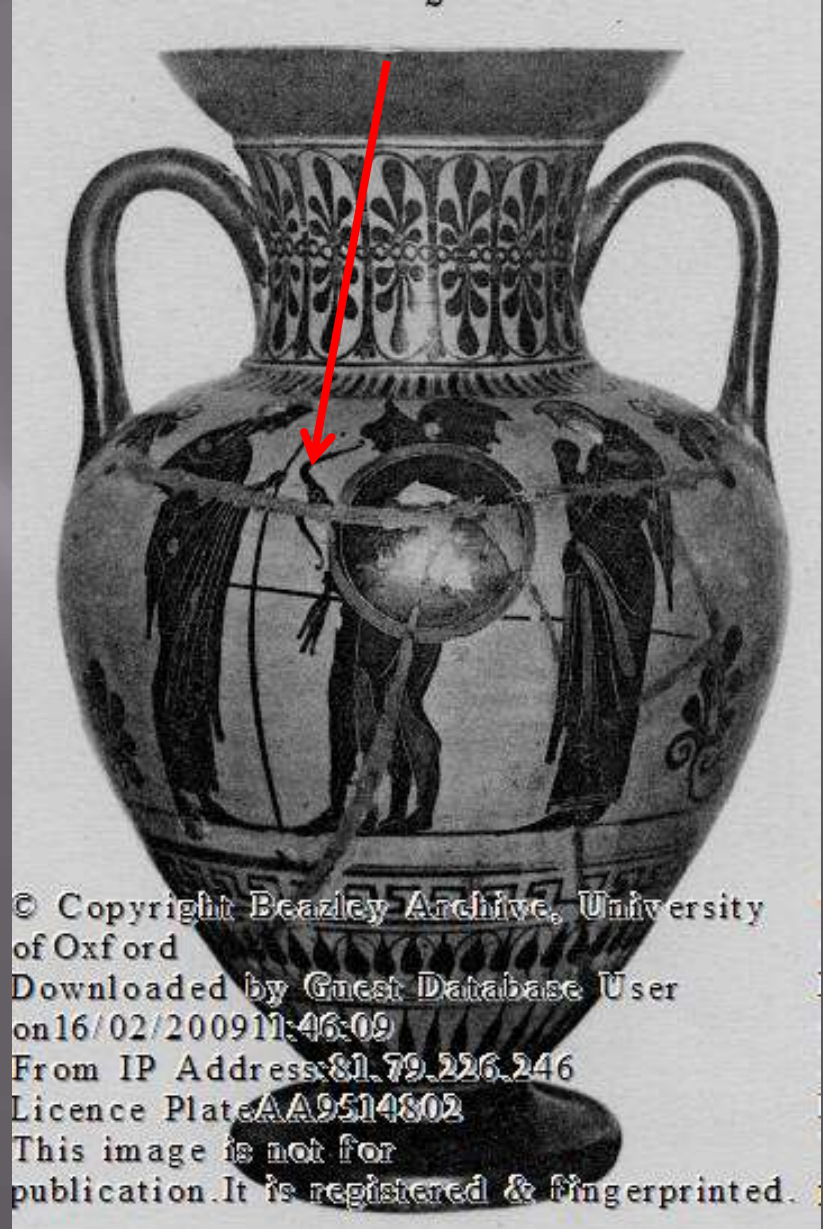
The self-bow

- ▣ The self-bow is made of one piece of wood.
- ▣ It is the earlier type of bow.
- ▣ It's strength lies in its length, which should be equal to the archer yielding it.
- ▣ The most famous self-bow is the English long-bow.



The Composite bow

- ▣ The composite bow is made of wood and horn mainly.
- ▣ Most composite bows are recurve bows.
- ▣ Composite bows are shorter than self-bows but pack more power.
- ▣ Thus, they can be used from horseback and from chariots.



Homeric Archery

- ▣ Straightway he uncovered his polished bow of the horn of a wild ibex, that himself on a time had smitten beneath the breast as it came forth from a rock, he lying in wait the while in a place of ambush, and had struck it in the chest, so that it fell backward in a cleft of the rock. From its head the horns grew to a length of sixteen palms; [110] these the worker in horn had wrought and fitted together, and smoothed all with care, and set thereon a tip of gold. This bow he bent, leaning it against the ground, and laid it carefully down; and his goodly comrades held their shields before him, lest the warrior sons of the Achaeans should leap to their feet [115] or ever Menelaus, the warlike son of Atreus, was smitten. Homer *Iliad* 4.105-15

Views of Archers in Homer

- ▣ But with no touch of fear mighty Diomedes spake to him: [385] “Bowman, reviler, proud of thy curling locks, thou ogler of girls! O that thou wouldst make trial of me man to man in armour, then would thy bow and thy swift-falling arrows help thee not; whereas now having but grazed the flat of my foot thou boastest vainly. I reckon not thereof, any more than if a woman had struck me or a witless child, [390] for blunt is the dart of one that is a weakling and a man of naught. Verily in other wise when sped by my hand, even though it do but touch, does the spear prove its edge, and forthwith layeth low its man; torn then with wailing are the two cheeks of his wife, and his children fatherless, while he, reddening the earth with his blood, [395] rotteth away, more birds than women around him.” Homer *Iliad* 11.384-95

Scythian Archers

- ▣ The Scythians were bowmen of note in the Greek world.
- ▣ The Athenian 'police' force was made up of Scythian archers.
- ▣ It is probable that Scythians first introduced the composite bow to the Greeks



The Bow as Persian Weapon

- But come, Persians, let us take our place on the steps of this ancient palace and devise some wise and deeply-pondered counsel — for need of this has come upon us — as to how Xerxes our King, [145] Darius' son, scion of our own race as his forefather's name declares, is faring. Is it the drawing of the bow that has triumphed, or is it the might of the sharp spear-head which has prevailed? Aischylos *Persians* 140-8



Archers and Tyrants

- ▣ here are those who say that the Samians from Egypt defeated Polycrates; but to my thinking this is untrue; for they need not have invited the Lacedaemonians if in fact they had been able to master Polycrates by themselves. Besides, it is not even reasonable to suppose that he, who had a great army of hired soldiers and bowmen of his own, was beaten by a few men like the returning Samians. Herodotos 3.45
- ▣ But now that the war has come round to you in your turn, it is time for remembering Gelon! [4] Despite the fact that you slighted me, I will not make an example of you; I am ready to send to your aid two hundred triremes, twenty thousand men-at-arms, two thousand horsemen, two thousand archers, two thousand slingers, and two thousand light-armed men to run with horsemen Herodotos 7.158

Athens and Archers

- ▣ If the cavalry had attacked you first, it would have been the duty of both ourselves and the Tegeans, who are faithful to Hellas, to aid you; but now, seeing that the whole brunt of their assault falls on us, it is right that you should come to the aid of that division which is hardest pressed. [3] But if, as may be, anything has befallen you which makes it impossible for you to aid us, do us the service of sending us your archers. We are sure that you will obey us, as knowing that you have been by far more zealous than all others in this present war.”
Herodotos 9.60
- ▣ Pericles also showed them that **they had twelve hundred horse including mounted archers, with sixteen hundred archers unmounted**, and three hundred galleys fit for service. Such were the resources of Athens in the different departments when the Peloponnesian invasion was impending and hostilities were being commenced. Pericles also urged his usual arguments for expecting a favourable issue to the war. Thucydides 2.13

Increased importance in the classical period

- ▣ After the severe and unexpected blow that had befallen them in the island, the occupation of Pylos and Cythera, and the apparition on every side of a war whose rapidity defied precaution, they lived in constant fear of internal revolution, [2] and now took the unusual step of raising four hundred horse and a force of archers, and became more timid than ever in military matters, finding themselves involved in a maritime struggle, which their organisation had never contemplated, and that against Athenians, with whom an enterprise unattempted was always looked upon as a success sacrificed. Thucydides 4.55

Archers in Naval Warfare

- ▣ Archers were part of the complement of a trireme in the Athenian navy.
- ▣ Each trireme carried four archers as part of its marine complement.
- ▣ Each trireme also carried screens (pararhymata) to protect the rowers from enemy fire.

Archers and hoplites

- ▣ The hoplite armour made archers less important in Greek warfare than in other cultures.
- ▣ The heavy armour and large shield protected the hoplite.
- ▣ Still by the numbers of archers and archer-contingents mentioned in the historical sources, it is clear that archers were considered useful in Greek warfare.

Archers in Sieges

- ▣ Archers were also of particular importance in defending (as well as assaulting) fortified positions.
- ▣ The height of the walls meant that the archer had the advantage over the ground troops assaulting the wall.
- ▣ As Aeneas Tacticus informs us, archers were also used to defend against siege engines.

Questions?

Follow-Up Reading

- ▣ Everett L. Wheeler 'Ephorus and the Prohibition of Missiles' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-), Vol. 117, (1987), pp. 157-182 Stable URL:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/283965>
- ▣ Wallace McLeod 'The Range of the Ancient Bow' *Phoenix*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Spring, 1965), pp. 1-14 Stable URL:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1086685>