

Armies and Navies

Lecture 3: *Of Bronze and Iron*

Mycenaean Arms & Armour

- The Mycenaeans used swords and spears as offensive weapons.
- They wore armour, initially of leather and then of bronze.
- They had shields, both round and oval.

The Dark Ages (c1000-800)

- During the Dark Ages there was influence on weapons and armour from the Near East as well as the Mycenaean past.
- The evolution of weaponry in this period was instrumental in the evolution of the hoplite panoply.

The Hoplite Arms and Armour

- The emergence of the hoplite is a matter of debate and part of the debate regards the evolution of the hoplite panoply.
- Certainly, there was considerable evolution in the early archaic period, particularly in relation to armour.
- However, evolution and devolution in the hoplite panoply was a constant feature of warfare in the archaic and classical periods.

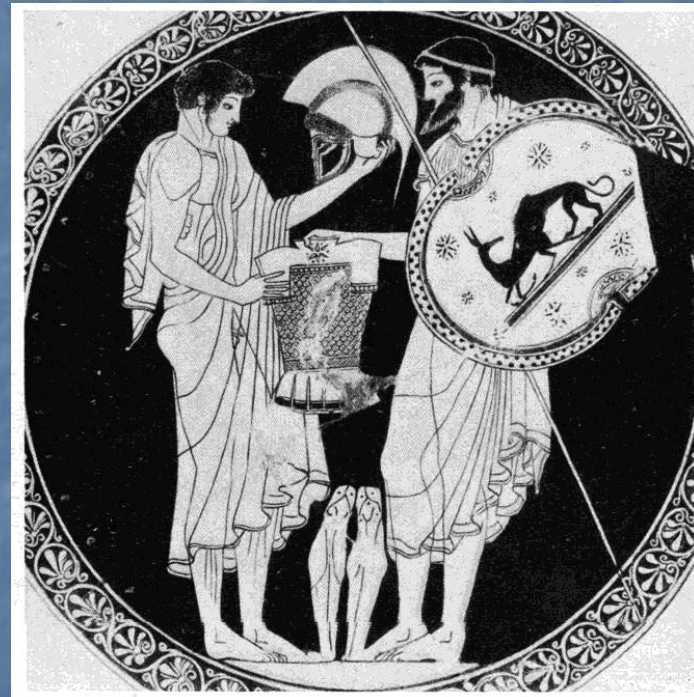
Armour: The cuirass (1)

- The main protection of the hoplite was the cuirass or breastplate.
- In the early stages of the evolution of the hoplite panoply, the cuirass was made entirely of bronze.
- The bronze cuirass was made of two plates (one for the front and one for the back).



Armour: The cuirass (2)

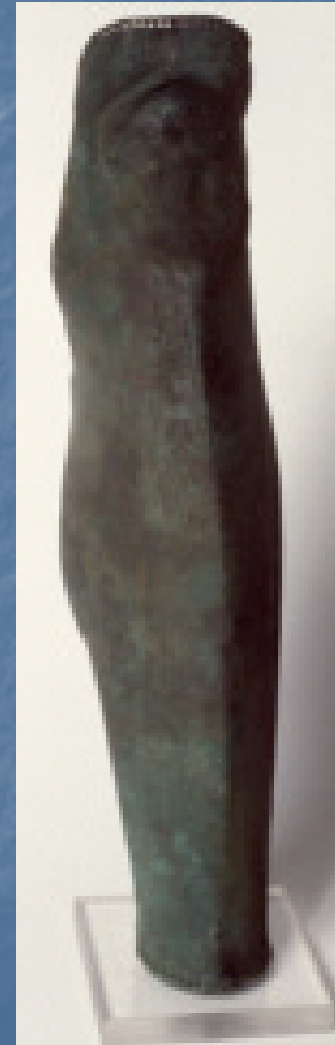
- From the 6th century onwards, the cuirass evolved to a linen and metal construction.
- This change was probably due to the soldier's desire for greater mobility in battle.
- The new type of cuirass was comprised of several layers of linen with bronze scales.



*Warriors with
armour: helmet,
breastplate,
leg-pieces.
Painting of
Doris.
5th century B.C.
After E. Pfuhl.*

Armour: The Greaves

- Greaves were the main protection of the lower leg and were made of bronze.
- Originally they covered only the calf and were later extended to cover the knee as well.
- The greaves were not fastened on the leg but fitted.



Armour: The Helmet

- There are several types of helmet used in the Greek world in the archaic and classical periods.
- Helmets were made of sheets of metal riveted together.
- A common characteristic of helmets was the crest.

Helmet types:



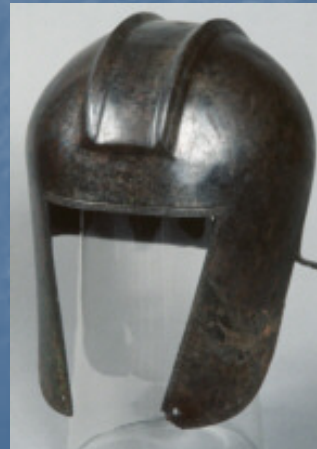
Corinthian
Type



Chalcidian
Type



Attic
Type



Illyrian
Type

Arms: The Hoplon (1)

- The hoplon was the shield.
- The hoplon gave its name to the hoplite, since it was the hoplite's most characteristic piece of equipment.
- The hoplon shield was made of leather or wood and usually faced with bronze.

Arms: The Hoplon (2)

- The hoplon was about 80cm in diameter.
- It was held by inserting the left arm through a central band (*porpax*), and gripping a cord or strap at the rim (*antilabe*).



Arms: The Hoplon (3)

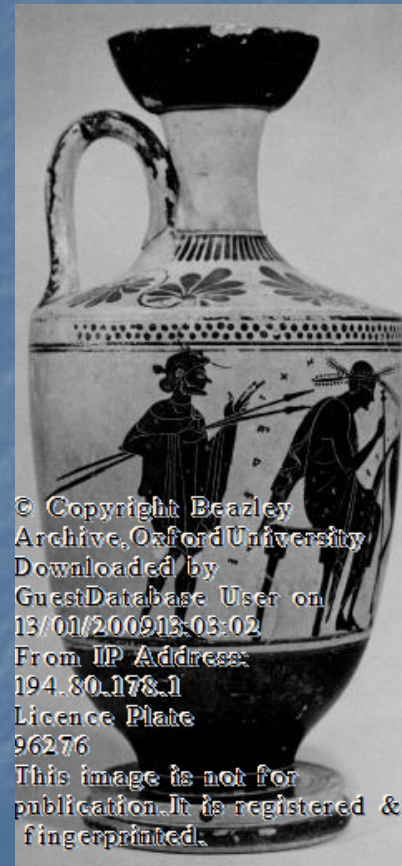
- There is evidence from the classical period that hoplite shields had devices on them.
- The best known is the Spartan Lambda.
- The hoplon was both a defensive and an offensive weapon.

Arms: The Spear (1)

- The spear was the main weapon of the hoplite in the archaic and classical periods.
- There are two types of spears known in the Greek world:
 - The throwing spear (akontion)
 - The pike

Arms: The Spear (2)

- In the archaic period, it is common in iconographic representations for hoplites to hold two spears as they march into battle.
- Probably one of them was used for throwing and the other for thrusting.



Arms: The Spear (3)

- The spear was the main offensive weapon of the hoplite.
- It was about 2m long with an oaken shaft and an iron or bronze head.



Arms: The sword

- The sword was the hoplite's secondary weapon.
- It was a short, straight-edged blade.
- It was useful only in close quarters.

Weak spots

- The main weak spots of the hoplite was his neck and groin.
- Thus, most injuries would be to those areas.
- Injuries in both areas because of the arteries there were fatal or near-fatal.
- The vulnerability of the neck area made the spear a better offensive weapon than the sword.

Weather and Armour

- The main fighting season for the hoplites was during the later spring, early and late summer and early autumn.
- In the Mediterranean during those times of the year, temperatures are usually between 20 and 40 degrees Celsius.
- The armoured hoplite was well-protected during battle but vulnerable to heat-stroke.

Mobility

- The mobility of the hoplite was compromised by the weight of armour and weapons.
- This is the main reason why the bronze-plate cuirass was abandoned in the 6th century.
- This is also the main reason why the hoplon was abandoned quickly in case of a rout.
- Some Saian mountaineer
Struts today with my shield.
I threw it down by a bush and ran
When the fighting got hot.
Life seemed somehow more precious.
It was a beautiful shield.
I know where I can buy another
Exactly like it, just as round. Archilochos F6

Ease of movement

- The armour and weapons of the hoplite also limited the available spectrum of movement.
- For example, the increased weight of the greaves at the lower end of the legs meant that leaping over an obstacle was more difficult.

Preparation

- Hoplites needed to prepare before battle and train.
- Not only for the tactical aspect of battle (staying in line, etc) but also for walking around with such weight on them and holding the hoplon steady for a long period of time.

Questions?

Follow-up Reading

- Anderson, J.K. 'Hoplite weapons and offensive arms' in Hanson, V. D. (ed.) *Hoplites*, pp. 15-37 [Available from NetLibrary]