

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 16 – Greek Warfare - Navy

CLCS4007

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Themes

- ▣ Sailors and Marines – who they were, weapons, armour, reasons for fighting.
- ▣ Types of vessels
- ▣ Nature of naval warfare.
- ▣ Battle of Salamis.

Sailors in Greek City-States

- ❑ Free men, not galley slaves (no whips!).
- ❑ Often poor, cannot afford hoplite armour – pay often 3 obols a day.
- ❑ Can become very skilled, notably Athenian navy.
- ❑ Oarsmen.
- ❑ Helmsman.
- ❑ Deck fighters (marines).
- ❑ Officers.



Vessels in the Classical World

- ▣ Pentaconters in use in Archaic period (50 oared ships).
- ▣ Biremes (two banks of oars) and Triremes (three banks of oars).
- ▣ Ameinocles “first” to develop triremes – **Thucydides 1.13; Pliny NH 7.57.**
- ▣ Trireme crew made up of c.200 men (mostly rowers, about 10-15 “marines” and few officers and a helmsman).

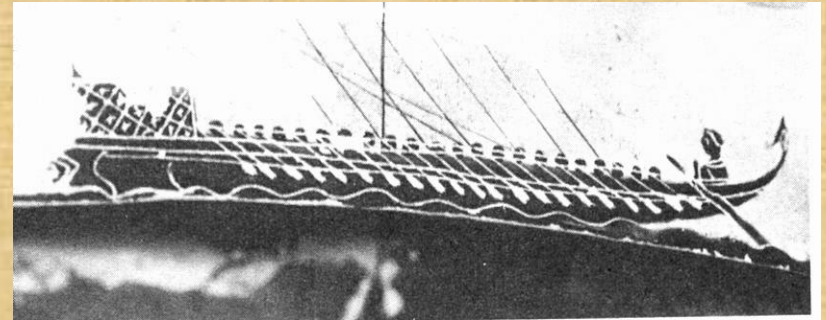
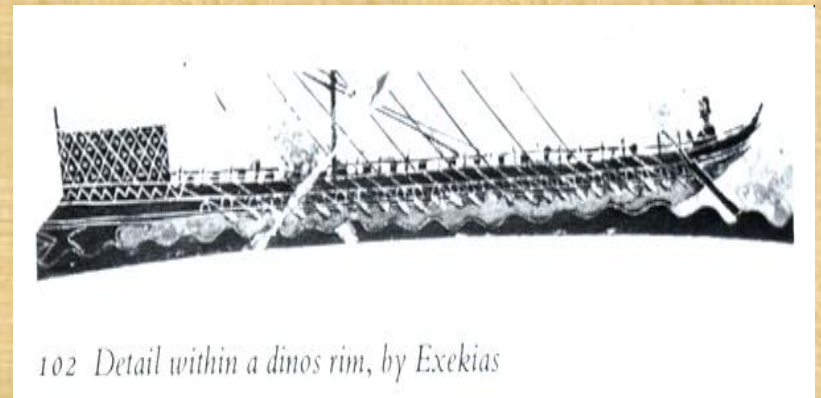


Image of a Pentaconter – Attic vase
c.520 BC



Bireme - Attic vase painting c.6th C
BC

Reconstruction



Modern reconstruction of a trireme – The Olympias.

Trireme (1)

- ▣ The were usually around 120 feet in length.
- ▣ Overall beam (width) of just under 20 feet.
- ▣ Oarsmen were spaced just under 3 feet.
- ▣ One man per oar.
- ▣ Length of the oars were between 13-14 feet (longer oars for higher banks).
- ▣ Speed varied depending on us of sail or oars, and whether in battle conditions – 6-10 knots.

Trireme (2)

- ▣ Principal weapon is the ram.
- ▣ Usual aim is to hit vessels side on, emphasis on speed and manoeuvrability.
- ▣ Also break the enemies oars.
- ▣ Ships usually break up, not sink, timbers float.
- ▣ Exchanges of missiles and attempts at boarding also possible tactics (especially when manoeuvrability limited).



[Battle of Arginusae] “ Consequently he [Callicratidas] was the first to drive at the ship of Lysias the general, and shattering it at the first blow together with the triremes accompanying it, he sank it; and as for the other ships, some he rammed and made unseaworthy and from others he tore away the rows of oars and rendered them useless for the fighting. – **Diodorus Siculus 13.99.3.**

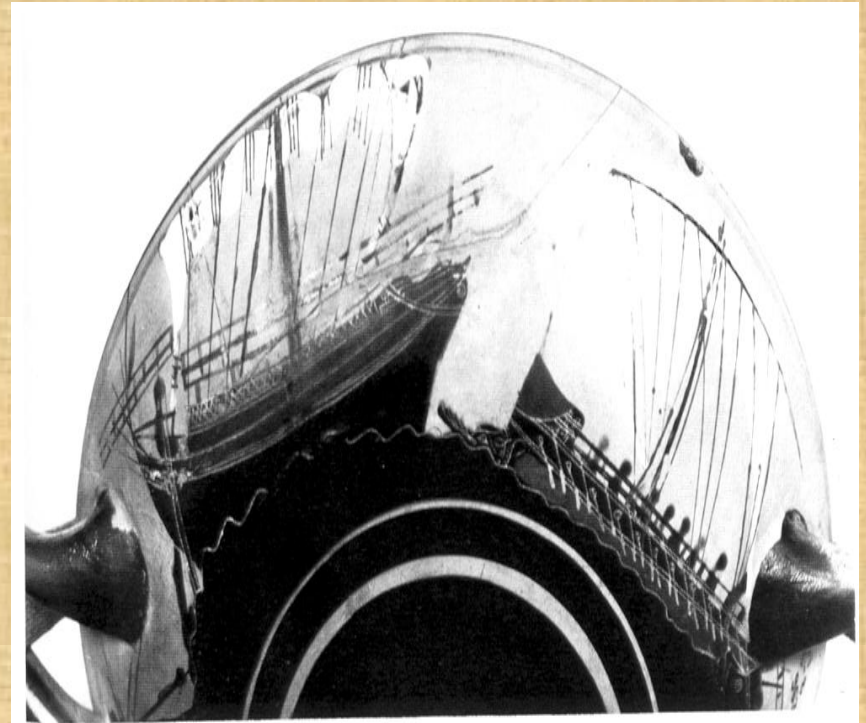
Boarding and Combat

“Some of the empty ships they [the Peloponnesians] fastened to their own and began to tow away; one they had already fought the crew, but others were saved by the Messenians, who came to the rescue, dashed armed as they were into the sea, boarded them, and, fighting from their decks when they were being already towed away, finally recovered them.” –
Thucydides 2.90.

[Battle of Arginusae] “Last of all he rammed the trireme of Pericles [the Younger] with a rather heavy blow and broke a great hole in the trireme; then, since the beak of his ship stuck tight in the gap and they could not withdraw it, Pericles threw an iron hand [grappling iron] on the ship of Callicratidas, and when it was fastened tight, the Athenians, surrounding the ship, sprang upon it, and pouring over its crew put them all to the sword.” –
Diodorus Siculus 13.99.4.

Sailing on Triremes

- ▣ Limited space – cannot carry many supplies, not troop transport ships.
- ▣ Often sailed close to coast.
- ▣ Ships generally “beached” (or in a shipshed) at the end of every day – need to keep hull dry.
- ▣ Crew normally “beach” in order to eat, rest etc.



180 Cup. Warship and merchantman

Image of a cargo vessel and a bireme – 6th c BC Attic vase

Equipment

- ▣ Cushion – for comfort.
- ▣ Oar – for rowing (obviously).
- ▣ Thong (to hold the oar in place).

[Peloponnesian forces preparing for a surprise attack on the Piraeus] – “Each sailor was to carry his cushion and his oar with its thong, and cross on foot with all haste from Corinth to the Athenian side of the Isthmus; they were to go to Megara and from Nisaea, the harbour of Megara, to launch forty ships which happened to be lying in the docks; thence they were to sail straight for the Piraeus.” – **Thucydides 2.93.**

[Nicias' report to Athens] - "They (the Syracusans) have discovered that the length of the time we have now been in commission has rotted our ships and wasted our crews, and that with the entireness of our crews and the soundness of our ships the pristine efficiency of our navy has gone. For it is impossible for us to haul our ships ashore and careen them [Turning a ship on its side for cleaning, caulking, or repair], because, the enemy's vessels being as many or more than our own, we are constantly anticipating an attack. Indeed, they may be seen exercising, and it lies with them to take the initiative; and not having to maintain a blockade, they have greater facilities for drying their ships." – Thucydides 7.12.

Leadership

- ▣ Generals (*Strategoí*) – may command army and navy.
- ▣ Trierarchos – responsible by liturgy for maintaining the ship (wealthy citizen duty); can accompany ship or delegate duty.
- ▣ Commander (*keleustes*).
- ▣ Helmsman (*Kybernetes*) – steered.
- ▣ Lookout (*prorates*).

[Build up to the Sicilian expedition]
“The fleet had been elaborately equipped at great cost to the captains and the state; the treasury giving a drachma a day to each seaman, and providing empty ships, sixty men of war and forty transports, and manning these with the best crews obtainable; while the captains gave a bounty in addition to the pay from the treasury to the *thranitae* [rowers of the top bench] and crews generally, besides spending lavishly upon figure-heads and equipments, and one and all making the utmost exertions to enable their own ships to excel in beauty and fast sailing.” –
Thucydides 6.31.

Coordinating the Crew

- ▣ Flute players – for keeping ship coordinated (not using drums!)
- ▣ Oarsmen
 - Thranites (upper bank) 62 men.
 - Zygitēs (middle bank) 58.
 - Thalamites (lower bank) 54.
- ▣ Sailors (handling sails) c.10 men.
- ▣ Besides officers and sailors are “Marines” 10-20 hoplites and archers.



Lenormant Relief c. 400 BC

Manoeuvring

- ❑ Athenian ships often less heavily equipped (lighter).
- ❑ Athenians by mid-fifth century preferred combat in open water.
- ❑ *Diekplous* – charging through enemy lines.
- ❑ Turning about for a new attack (*anastrophe*).
- ❑ Back water (row astern) – i.e. to row the ship backwards.
- ❑ *Periplous* – envelopment (attacking both flanks); requires superior manoeuvring or numbers.

Weather and Currents

- ▣ Sailing season was May to September – sailing in winter in Mediterranean is difficult due to weather and current conditions.
- 1) [Xerxes navy stationed along the coast of Magnesia] “It is not a large beach, and so there were eight rows of ships from shore into the sea. They passed the night in this formation, but early in the morning there was a change in the weather. The sea became choppy and they were lashed by violent storms coming from the north-east on a strong wind... All the ships found out at sea, however, were either driven on to the so-called Ovens of Mount Pelium or the beach, or wrecked on Cape Sepias itself... It was a monster of a storm quite impossible to ride out.” – **Herodotus 7.188.**
- 2) [Battle of Arginusae] “The Athenians learned at once of the approach of the enemy... but refused battle because of the strong winds and made ready for the conflict on the following day, the Lacedaemonians also doing likewise... - **Diodorus Siculus 13.97.4**

Trail of the Generals

- 1) “The Athenians, while they pursued the defeated foe for a considerable distance, filled the whole area of the sea in the neighbourhood of the battle with corpses and the wreckage of ships. ... in the meantime a great storm arose, so that the ships were tossed about and the men, by reason both of the hardships they had suffered in the battle and the heavy waves, opposed picking up the dead. And finally, since the storm increased in violence, they neither sailed to Mitylenê nor picked up the dead but were forced by the winds to put in at the Arginusae... as a result of the loss of so many ships and of the sailors who manned them the coastline of the territory of the Cymaeans and Phocaeans was strewn with corpses and wreckage.” – **Diodorus Siculus 13.100.**
- 2) “After this they condemned the generals who took part in the battle, eight in all; and the six who were in Athens were put to death.” – **Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.7.34.**

Building and Maintaining Triremes

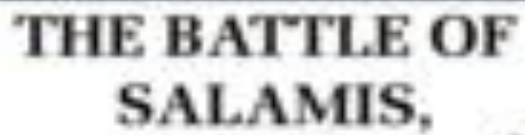
- ▣ Athens paid for construction of ships and for crew – silver mines.
- ▣ Triarchs, paid for equipment and repairs, money also pay extra money for crew – also liable for unnecessary losses.
- ▣ Cost of keeping a trireme, building a fleet.
- ▣ Athenian silver at Laurium.
- ▣ Spartans and Persian gold.



Battle of Salamis

- ▣ Persian invasion of Greece in 480/79 BC.
- ▣ Earlier Greek losses at the battle of Artemisium - inconclusive.
- ▣ 371 Greek ships (subsequently joined by some deserters) - 1207 Persian ships (according to Herodotus).

- Athens - 180	- Epidauros - 10	- Styra - 2
- Corinth - 40	- Eretria - 7	- Cythnos - 2
- Aigina - 30	- Ambracia - 7	- Ceos - 2
- Chalkis - 20	- Troizen - 5	- Melos - 2
- Megara - 20	- Naxos - 4	- Siphnos - 1
- Sparta - 16	- Leukas - 3	- Seriphos - 1
- Sicyon - 15	- Hermione - 3	- Kroton - 1



SCALE OF MILES

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

“...most of the Persian ships at Salamis were destroyed by either the Athenians or the Aeginetans. This happened because the Greeks fought in a disciplined manner, while the Persians became disorganised and lost their battle plan... Ariabignes, the son of Darius, who was one of the Persian military commanders, lost his life...” – **Herodotus 8.86, 89.**