

## HI126- Lecture 4

### *Greek Warfare*

#### HELLAS

- is at the root of our Western Civilization
- Greeks called themselves **Hellense**- lacked political unity in ancient times, but shared a language a culture
- in mainland Greece most greeks lived in narrow, fertile valleys separated by steep mountains or on coastal plains and scattered small islands
- greeks also settled in colonies along the coasts of the black sea and mediterranean sea
  - vast majority of greeks were small independent farmers who grew grain, olives, grapes, etc
  - others were artisans or involved in shipping and trade of products like wine, olive, pottery

#### The Greek **POLIS** or City-State

- there were as many as 1,000-1,500 Greek poles on the mainland, Greek islands and overseas as far away as Italy, North Africa and Southern France
  - Each polis was usually a walled city surrounded by villages and field
  - each had its own government, laws, customs, festival
  - the ideal size was 5,000-10,000 citizens but most were smaller
  - **Athens** was a prosperous commercial city: so-called democracy ruled by its 40,000-50,000 citizens
  - **Sparta** was a militarized state with 2 kings and elected assembly: the spartans ruthless ruled over their helots, who out numbered them 5 to 1 and were forced to give 1-2 their crops to them

#### *Warfare in Mycenaean and Early archaic Greece*

- Warriors fought under the direction of their kings
- political power, wealth, prestige and military service went together- belonging to warrior elite
- by 1600 BC in most poles (militarized Sparta was an exception) the army was a citizen militia of independent farmers who fought as hoplites for the rights and freedom of their polis
- independent farmers did not want to leave their fields for very long
- most wars were with a neighbouring polis, so a campaign usually took no more than a few days
- hoplite warfare was designed by the Greeks to reach a decisive decision in a single battle lasting an hour so, after everyone lived and went to farm

#### The Hoplite

- Greek terrain favoured fighting between lightly-armed troops, perhaps using slings and arrows, who could ambush each other and fight it out on the slopes and in mountain passes
- instead were heavily armed infantry organized in tight packed formation (the phalanx) who fought on level ground on the coast or valleys
- tradition battle emerged in the 7th century BC
- carried breastplate, shield, greaves, helmet and slashing sword
- armour was expensive (same as a worker wage in 3 months)
- very heavy and only suited for certain battle
- could only fight for 30-60 minutes
- Hoplite army formed up the **PHALANX**-long line soldiers in 6-8 rows
- opposing phalanxes stood 200 metres apart and charged
- two phalanxes collided in the shoving (*othismos*)
- front ranks stabbed each others, pushed forward by those behind

- Aulus Postumius allowed his son to die by breaking the formation and let the enemy side attack

### ***The Chigi Vase circa 650 BC***

- the earliest picture of a Greek phalanx of hoplites
- two enemy ranks approach each other, shields locked and spears raised for battle
- Phalax** represented a way of life, code of moral conduct
- the word thing a hoplite could do in throw away his shield and break the ranks “shield flinger”
- A spartan mother would reputedly tell her son when he set out for war: return either with or without your shield or on it
- Archilochus threw down his shield but knew he could get another, life was more important but the greek stressed that the only true manliness was to fight enemies face to face

**Cavalry:** not highly developed in classical Greece

- except in certain areas there was little pasture for horses and in any case a horse used land that could feed people
- symbol of wealth

The trireme-principal Greek naval vessel was the trireme- essentially a floating ram with sails and 170 rowers in 3 banks

- expensive to build and maintain
- Athens was the major Greek naval power: in 480 BC, Athens built a fleet of 200 triremes with the revenue from its silver mines
- rowers wanted political rights because they served in war

### **Aristotle (384-322 BC)**

- who fought in war ultimately determined who ruled in the state
- according to the philosopher Aristotle, a military system relying on cavalry leads to an oligarchy-one relying on light infantry and sailors brings democracy

### **The Persian Wars, 499-449 BC**

- was a series of conflicts between the Persian empire and Greek states over mainland and independence of the Ionian states
- was a collision of two tactical systems: Greeks had little cavalry, archers
- Persians used infantry simply to protect archers, chariots and cavalry, which usually decided the battle
- the Athenians beat the Persian invaders under **Darius at the battle of Marathon (490 BC)**
- **Pheidippides** ran 26 miles to bring Athens the news- a run commemorated in marathon races
- **Xerxes** invaded in 480 BC: he defeated the Spartans at Thermopylae (480 BC), then took and burned Athens
- In 478 BC Athens and some other Greek states formed the **DELIAN LEAGUE** (in Delos): 200-300 members
- all members supplied ships for war with Persia or paid annual tribute
- gradually the Delian League evolved into an empire of city states
- states were forced to join against their will
- no state was allowed to withdraw
- *The growth of the Athenian Empire led to almost thirty years of war between Athenians and the Spartans: THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR*

- the limited, formal warfare of the past gave way to an all-out struggle between the two sides that was : *geopratically widespread and ideological*
- was carried out in new ways with ambushes and surprise attacks
- the whole greek world became the theatre of war with campaigns far from home
- -armies devastated the Greek countryside destroyed cities

### **The Melian Dialogue (new ruthless)**

- in 416 BC, Athens demanded that the Melians join the **Delian League** and pay contributions become part of the Athenian Empire or they would be destroyed
- the median declared that they were no threat to the Athens and wanted to remain neutral in the war
- the athenians said that accepting Melian neutrality would make them look weak and their allies might desert
- the melons refused to submit and the Athenians rejected the moral argument
- In 405 BC, the Spartans captured 200 athenian triremes on the beach of Aegospotmi and execute the 3,000 Athenian prisoners of war
- without a navy, Athens had to surrender... thus ending the war
- The spartans decided not to destroy Athens, but the Peloponnesian War and the decades of further wars between the poles that followed weakened Greece irreparably
- The subsequent rise of **MACEDON** had major consequence for the ancient world