

A Greek infantry soldier would have worn this breastplate to protect the upper part of his body in battle. It is made of two bronze plates, moulded to look like the human body and fastened at the sides with leather straps. The Greek soldier who fought on foot was called a hoplite after the *hopla*, shield. He usually had to pay for his own equipment. Along with the breastplate this included his round shield which was made of bronze, like his high-crested helmet. Sometimes hoplites also wore leg guards called greaves.



**BATTLE TACTICS**

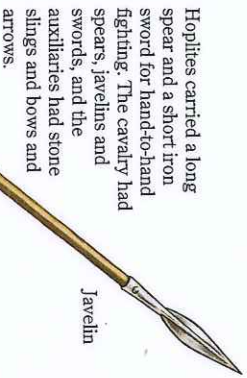
Hoplites fought close together, shoulder to shoulder, in a battle formation called a phalanx, usually eight ranks deep and protected by a wall of shields. They would move towards the enemy and then engage in hand-to-hand combat.

For a long time hoplites were greatly feared all over the eastern Mediterranean, defeating all foreign forces. In 490 BC, the hoplites defeated the invading Persians spectacularly. They routed the invading army – thousands of Persians were killed and the rest were chased back to their ships.

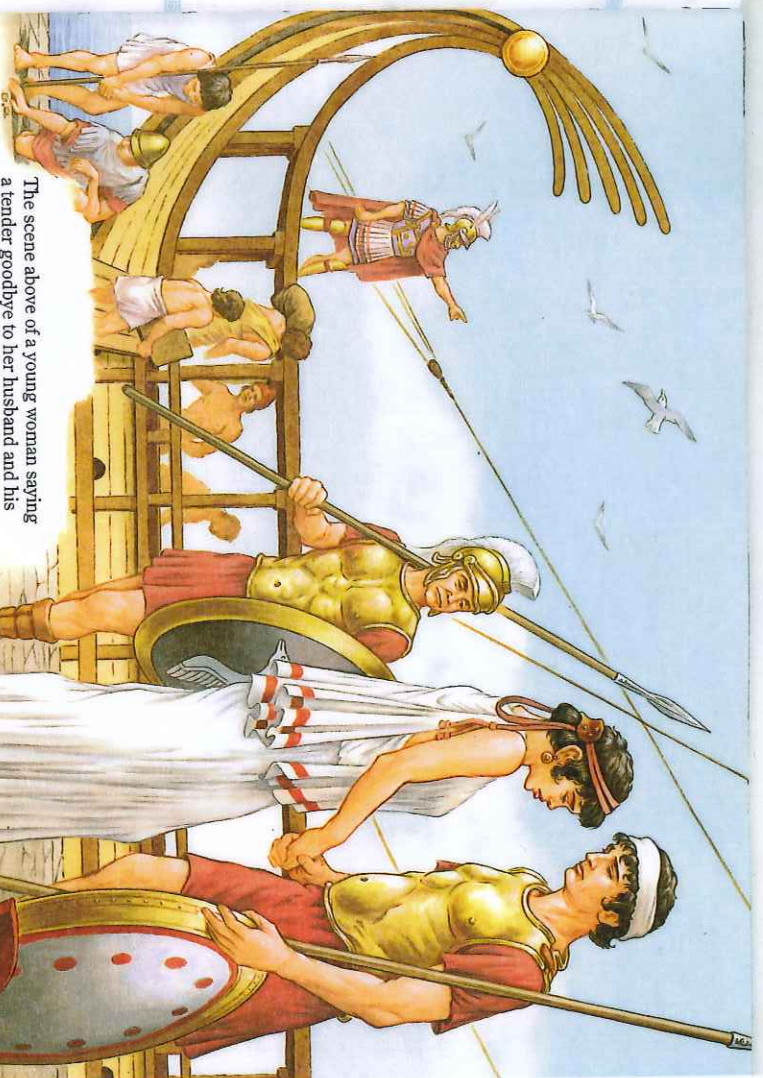
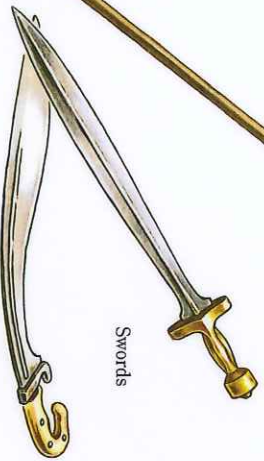
Other Greek soldiers included cavalrymen and auxiliary soldiers, poor men who could not afford hoplite armour. They were sometimes used to protect the hoplite phalanx.

Hoplites carried a long spear and a short iron sword for hand-to-hand fighting. The cavalry had spears, javelins and swords, and the auxiliaries had stone slings and bows and arrows.

Javelin



Swords



The scene above of a young woman saying a tender goodbye to her husband and his friend as they go off to war, must have been very common in real life.

**THE LIFE OF A SOLDIER**

In Athens and other Greek cities, boys trained to be soldiers between the ages of eighteen and twenty. After that they could be called up when necessary to fight for their city state. War was a normal part of Greek life and battles took place almost every year. Only the city of Sparta, for a

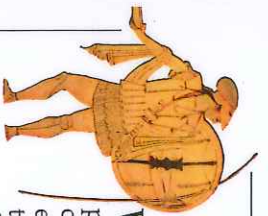
long time the enemy of Athens, had a professional army. The life of the Spartan soldier was very hard. Boys were taught to be tough. They were taken from their families as early as the age of seven and had

to live in freezing cold barracks and eat a horrible black soup. An Athenian writer said that he was not surprised that the Spartans were so brave in battle, because a man would prefer to be killed rather than live such a hard life!



Helmets came in different shapes. This one is of the Corinthian type. Made of bronze, it covers the entire head except for the eyes and mouth. It has a strip of metal to protect the nose.

# Warfare



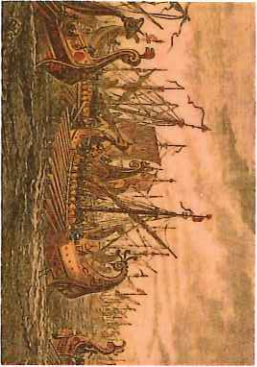
**SHIELDED**  
This Greek vase painting shows how the soldier wears his shield, passing his arm under an iron bar and gripping a leather strap at the rim.

**WARFARE** WAS a normal part of Greek life, and the city-states frequently fought each other. Many Greek men, therefore, had to join an army, and from the earliest times had to pay for their own armour and equipment. In Athens, boys trained as soldiers between the ages of 18 and 20 after which they could be called up for military service. In Sparta, it was much earlier (pp. 56–57). Athenian soldiers were led by ten commanders called *stratēgoi*. The infantry soldiers were the backbone of the Greek armies and they fought in close formations called phalanxes. Poorer soldiers served in auxiliary units as archers and stone-slingers. When laying siege to cities, the armies of Hellenistic Greece used catapults, flame-throwers, battering-rams, and cauldrons containing burning coals and sulphur. Athens controlled its empire by means of oar-powered warships or triremes. At the height of its power, Athens could rely on about 300 triremes.



**SPEEDY BEASTS**  
Greek chariots were often decorated with animals associated with speed. These bronze horses were once fixed on to a fast chariot.

**NAKED BRAVERY**  
In this painted scene from a vase, a warrior is holding a metal cuirass (body armour). He also has a long spear and a shield. Nakedness is a symbol of heroic bravery in Greek art.



**BATTLE OF SALAMIS**  
The famous sea battle of Salamis was a turning point in the Persian Wars (pp. 18–19). It took place just off the coast of Athens in 480 B.C. and was a triumphant victory for the Greeks over the Persian fleet. As a result of this battle, the Persian king Xerxes and much of his army went back to Asia, abandoning the invasion of Greece.

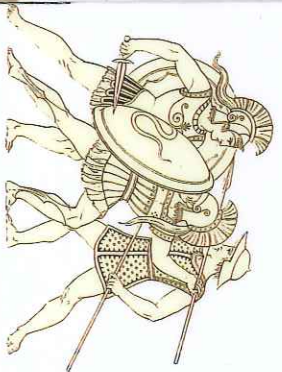


Helmet with nose protection

**HOPLITE**

Greek soldiers were called hoplites from the word *hoplon* meaning shield. Only men from wealthy families could be hoplites, because only they could afford expensive armour and weapons.

Greaves



**FOOT COMBAT**  
A painted vase shows two Greek combatants separated by a herald.

**HELMETS**  
Helmets protected the head from every sort of slash and from blows and knocks. They varied in shape and some had crests made of horse hair to make the wearer appear more impressive and frightening.



Athic helmet has no nose guard

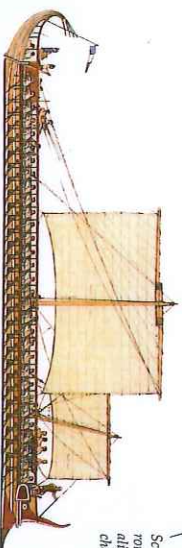


Corinthian helmet with long nose-piece and cheek guards



**BREASTPLATE**  
The breastplate, or cuirass, was usually, although not always, made of bronze. It was the main piece of body armour protecting all the upper organs, each man being specially fitted. The more expensive cuirasses would have ridges, roughly aligned to the body muscles, which were meant to deflect blows. The cuirass was made of two plates joined at the sides by leather straps. The side areas, therefore, were the most vulnerable parts of the body.

Sculpted ridges roughly aligning with chest muscles



**WARSHIP**

The fastest Greek ship was called a trireme and it needed 170 oarsmen to row it. They sat in three levels, one above the other, on either side of the boat. At the prow was a pointed ram strengthened with metal, which could sink enemy ships. There was often an eye painted on the prow (pp. 46–47). This illustration shows two sails, but warships may have had only one, probably made of linen and lowered when the ship was engaged in battle.

The long spear was the main weapon of the Greek infantry



**GREAVES**  
Hoplites wore bronze leg guards called greaves (below) to protect the lower part of their legs in battle. Some of these greaves may have originally been fixed on to large statues of heroic warriors in southern Italy.



**CHAMPION FIGHT**  
This red-figure vase shows a fight between two heroes of the Trojan War, Achilles and Hector (pp. 12–13). The vase painter has clearly painted the blood flowing from the wound just above Hector's knee. Both heroes are wearing the crested helmets and armour worn by infantry soldiers of the 5th century B.C.