

The storm of spears

Greek citizens fought many battles to protect their land from invading armies. Battles were a frightening and bloody experience as spears clashed with shields in brutal combat. A soldier's equipment included his food rations, bedding and drinking canteen, along with his weapons. These served the style of fighting in which he was trained. Equipment like the spear and breastplate armed a soldier against his enemy and protected him from being wounded in battle. Written histories, plays, poems, images and the objects themselves provide evidence for the type of military equipment used in Greece. Blades, a spear head and arrow head are examples of weapons that have survived in the ground [[Warfare 9-11](#)], whereas objects like painted pots [[Citizenship 1-2](#)] give us a good idea of what this military equipment looked like and how it was used.

Warfare in ancient Greece was a costly business. Throughout the Classical period (480-323 BC) it was the duty of a citizen-soldier to provide his own weapons and armour. Such military equipment was

Persian king fighting Alexander's army, on a mosaic from Pompeii, House of the Faun, now in Naples.



expensive to buy because it was very tough and well made from metal, so it could sometimes be passed down from father to son. Only soldiers in the infantry [[Warfare 2–3](#)] and cavalry [[Citizenship 3](#)] could afford their own equipment and horses. In Athens, the poorest citizens, who could not afford their own equipment, served in the navy as rowers [[Warfare 29](#)]. Many of the battles in ancient Greece were fought by **hoplites** (men-at-arms) in the infantry [[Warfare 1–7](#)]. These soldiers formed into a **phalanx** (battle formation) of spearmen. Each phalanx contained ranks of men who moved forward with their spears to thrust and stab at their enemy.

There were some differences in styles of equipment over time and according to the region of Greece from which a soldier came from ([Warfare 2-4,7,17-18](#)). In Athens, the most important item of *hoplite* equipment was the aspis (shield) ([Warfare 2,4-7](#)). This was usually made of wood with a metal covering, but some shields could also be made of leather. A soldier used his shield to protect against a spear or sword thrust from wounding him in battle. His main weapon of attack was the *dory* (spear) ([Warfare 2](#)). Each spear could be up to nine feet in length and may have been made of ash wood, with a metal tip and spear-butt called *astyra* or *sauroter* ('lizard killer'), which enabled the warrior to plant his spear into the ground when not in use. A *hoplite* also carried a *kopis* (sword) as a secondary weapon, in case his spear broke in battle. Finally, each *hoplite* wore a metal helmet ([Warfare 2,7](#)), *cuirass* (breastplate) and greaves, to protect his head, body and legs from sword and spear wounds.

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