

CLASSICAL GREEK  
**HOPLITES**



**WARLORD**  
GAMES

# A Brief Guide to the Classical Period

After the Persian invasion of 480 BC the Greeks united in an uneasy alliance under nominal Spartan hegemony. The Athenians exploited the ensuing peace between the Greek cities to extend their empire, and as a consequence relations with Sparta gradually worsened. Eventually open war broke out with each city taking one side or other in the ensuing battle for mastery of Greece.

The War between Athens and Sparta was long and bloody. Hoplite forces were raised on an unprecedented scale and pitched against each other in long and brutal campaigns.

Sparta eventually won the war, but at a terrible cost to the whole of Greece. The prolonged war produced hardened veterans who subsequently sold their skills to the highest bidder. The most famous of these mercenaries were Xenophon's 10,000 who fought for Cyrus in his unsuccessful bid to take the Persian throne.

Following the defeat of Athens, Thebes rose to power and dominated Greece for a while. The Thebans spectacularly crushed Spartan resistance at the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC. Not long after they tried in vain to resist the unstoppable Macedonian war machine. The Macedonian's new method of fighting overwhelmed the Greeks' Hoplite forces and Greece became part of the growing Macedonian empire.

This did not end the days of the Hoplite as a valued soldier. Hoplites fought in large numbers in Alexander's campaign across Asia, and were to prove the most durable opponents in the Persian armies.

## Using the Contents of This Box

The main hoplite frame in this box is the same as that in the larger Ancient Greek Hoplite set designed to represent warriors at the time of

the Persian invasion.

This box also contains a small frame with two new bodies and an array of new heads. The bodies are designed to replace the earlier bronze 'bell cuirass' type body on the main frame, which is outdated by the time of the Peloponnesian War (although, if you want to represent hoplites from rural areas, especially northern Greece and early Macedon, the 'bell cuirass' would still be used). You may also wish to replace some of the bodies that have longer hair, which may have gone out of fashion as time went on - although the evidence for this is far from conclusive.

One thing to look out for when assembling your hoplites is that some of the heads have short hair, which will not match the longer hair on some of the bodies. These bodies should be reserved for the heads with helmets that extend over the back of the head.

## Representing the Phalanx

Hoplite equipment, in particular the styles of helmet changed rapidly during this time. Because of the mass call up of citizens to fight for their city, there may also have been a higher percentage of unarmoured soldiers than in earlier armies.

It is a common assumption that Hoplites began to abandon their armour towards the end of the Peloponnesian War and had done so completely by the end of the 5th century. However, careful reading of the primary sources and examination



of monuments from this time will show this is far from the truth.

## The Theban Myth

It is also a misnomer that the Theban army only wore the Boeotian style helmet – Thebes being the chief city of Boeotia. This assumption stems from the fact that the Plataeans shown on the Stoa Poikile are said to be identifiable by their 'Boeotian' style helmets.

The Theban army would look like any other of their time as is evidenced by the fact that uniform city shield emblems were painted on to shields when fighting other Greeks in order to avoid killing their own forces in the confusion of battle.

## The Peloponnesian War

The Pilos helmet seems to have been popular at this time, as was the Thracian and Chalcidian helmet. The Corinthian helmet continued to be represented in sculpture, but usually worn only by important individuals; whether this reflects actual practice is debateable. The Illyrian style helmet would probably still have been worn by some. The Petasos felt hat is likely to be worn by those Hoplitēs recruited from the poorer sections of society and those from Boeotia.

## Hoplites at the Time of Xenophon, 400 BC

The Pilos helmet is likely to be the most common helmet of this time, although the Phrygian style was starting to come into fashion. The bronze cuirass is correct for this period and is commonly depicted on funerary monuments. Shaving may have been more common than previously, so it is appropriate to use some of the beardless heads.

Hoplites at the time of Theban dominance and the campaigns of Alexander

Hoplites of this time would not look drastically different to those of the time of Xenophon. The

Phrygian helmet seems to have been common. The Pilos would still be worn. The Boeotian helmet was also worn at this time, although it seems to have been most common with cavalry.

## New Armour

This is an overview of the new styles of helmet in this box. For coverage of the older styles please see the booklet included in my Ancient Greek Hoplite set.

### 'Pilos' Helmet and Felt Hat.

The Pilos helmet gets its name from the felt hat of the same shape. Thucydides refers to it by this name, but the later Greek writer Aeneias refers to the helmet as a "Koryphaia". These are probably both correct, or could refer to differences which are lost to us now.

The Pilos helmet affords excellent all round visibility and hearing, but at the expense of minimal protection to the face. This is probably what Thucydides was referring to when he says that the Spartans' Pilos "did not keep out the arrows", rather than implying that they were wearing the felt variety.

This helmet varies in shape somewhat. Some have an almost bowl shape lacking a point; others rise to an obvious point. The 'Laconian' style has a more flared edge to the rim (this was worn all over Greece, despite its name). The felt version could still be worn by some Hoplitēs, but they are likely to have been stationed towards the rear ranks. Some Pilos helmets also carried crests and others had cheek pieces, like those on a Thracian helmet.



## Thracian Helmet

The Thracian is quite different to the other styles of helmet, and appears to be a blend of the Corinthian and Chalcidian types. It offers excellent protection to the wearer's face, but still affords good visibility and hearing. As time went on the crown became more pronounced, until it almost resembled the Phrygian style. Vase paintings from the middle to late 5th century show that this evolution started quite early on.



## Phrygian Helmet

This type began to appear around the very end of the 5th century. It started as resembling the Thracian helmet, complete with hinged cheek pieces. Later we see the emergence of another style without cheek pieces, but with a more pronounced brow protector. The face mask seems to have come into use at the end of the 5th century in conjunction with the Thracian type helmet. These were probably more common in the Alexandrian period, but there is no reason they could not have been used earlier. Some beautiful ornate examples have been found in Thracian tombs dating to this period.



## Boeotian Helmet

The Boeotian helmet in this form is more common in the 4th century and especially towards the Macedonian era. Again, it offers excellent vision and hearing, but does not protect the wearer's face. Its shape is said to have derived from an earlier felt version where the depressions in the rim were made by straps, but it could be simply that this shape is easy to form from a single sheet of bronze. The "folds" could be the natural creases in the bronze that were then formed into protectors for the sides of the face, while not inhibiting hearing and vision.



## Petasos

The wide brimmed felt hat is often seen in Greek art. It was normally worn by lightly equipped infantry and cavalry. It was especially common in Thessaly and Boeotia. As with the Pilos type of felt hat, it is likely that hoplites in the rear ranks and those fighting unarmoured could



# WARLORD

GAMES

warlordgames.com