

SPARTAN
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.

On Sparta

Sparta reformed its military after the Persian wars into a more mobile and efficient fighting force.

True 'Spartans' are those from the city of Sparta itself, others should more correctly be called Lacedaemonian.

Spartan males enrolled in the agoge at the age of 7 and did not become free members of Spartan society until they were 30. This comprised several stages of very strict and rigorous training comparable in many ways to that of modern Special Forces.

This process created some of the most highly trained and effective soldiers in history. Contemporary commentators praised the Spartans' fighting prowess as well as their ability to march and perform complex manoeuvres without losing order. Such a body of men moving and fighting as one must have presented an extremely intimidating sight to inexperienced troops struggling to maintain a cohesive formation.



Representing the Phalanx

It is often assumed that the Spartans wore only the Pilos type of helmet. This could be true as each Hoplite would have to be aware of his surroundings and able to hear orders clearly to perform as required. The Pilos was certainly very popular in Laconia, and one style is even referred to as 'Laconian'. There is nothing to stop you mixing other types of helmet in as well. The Thracian and Chalcidian types would also afford good sight and hearing, and the later Phrygian style could also be worn towards the Macedonian era. These helmets are not included in the box, but can be bought on the 'Classical hoplite frame' via www.immortalminiatures.com

The idea that Spartan Hoplites did not wear armour at this time is baseless. In fact records show that Hoplites were fined for coming to battle unarmoured. Whether this means an individual had no helmet, no greaves or no cuirass (or none of them!) is not entirely clear. Xenophon, Thucydides and Athenian temple dedications all mention Spartan armour.

Spartans are said to have used a very short bladed sword (although they probably used other length swords too). No examples have been found, so a smaller leaf bladed sword has been assumed.

We are told that Spartans wore crimson tunics and had highly polished bronze shields. During the Peloponnesian War the Lambda symbol (the first letter of Laconia) was adopted as a uniform shield emblem, although what colour this was painted is pure conjecture.

'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 Aineias refers to the helmet as a "Koryphaias". 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 Hoplites, 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.



THE GREEK WORLD



WARLORD
GAMES

warlordgames.com

