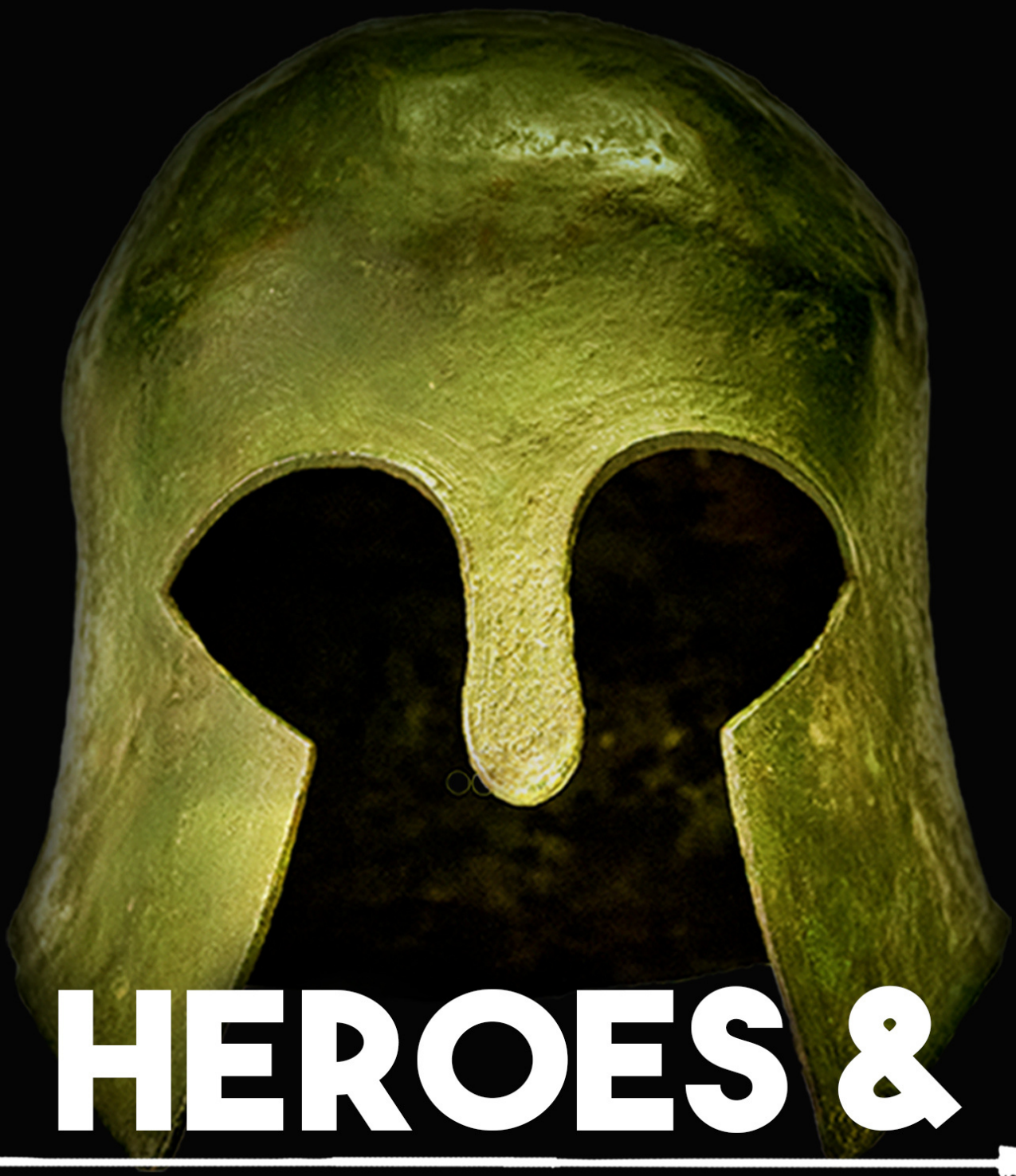

HEROES & HOPLITES

WARFARE IN ANCIENT GREECE

HELLENIC MUSEUM
ZAPARAS LAWYERS
MANTZIS FAMILY TRUST
STAMBOS 1985
PETER & MARY MITRAKAS
ΚΟΥΜΑΝΤΑΤΑΚΗΣ FAMILY

This exhibition features helmets from the Peter Mitrakas and Mary-Ann Savas collection, Attic and south Italian pottery from the Koumantatakis Family collection and replica helmets from the Hellenic Museum.

This exhibition was made possible with the generous support of:

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HEROES & HOPLITES

Homeric epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* immortalised the achievements of the past. These works chronicle the mighty battles and epic struggles faced by swift-footed Achilles, noble Hector, Ajax, Menelaus and cunning Odysseus, whose respective virtues had won them power and prestige. These valiant heroes, who pursued a life of greatness and glory through supremacy both on and off the battlefield, became the Greek ideal. The stories of these heroes, and their battles, were considered by the ancient Greeks as records of their cultural origins - with some claiming direct descent from the heroes. As such, honour and status among the ancient Greeks was fundamentally linked to their martial prowess and their ability to be the best amongst their peers.

Despite being set in Bronze Age Mycenaean Greece, around the twelfth century BCE, Homer's account often yields to the realities of Greek warfare in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. The feudal social structure apparent in the background of the *Odyssey* seems more akin to Homer's Greece than to Odysseus'.

Warfare changed significantly around 700 BCE. Gone were the days of heroes in single combat; the rise of the *polis* (city-state), along with technological and tactical advancements, led to more organised warfare and the development of the *hoplite phalanx*. Greek *poleis*, with the exception of Sparta, did not maintain standing armies. Instead, soldiers were drawn from the *polis* and would have had little training compared to their Spartan counterparts. *Hoplites* were generally citizen soldiers of a Greek army who could afford to equip themselves with armour and weaponry.

War was a constant reality in the lives of the ancient Greeks. Whether small skirmishes or brief raiding expeditions between rival cities, prolonged campaigns of conquest or annihilation, motivations were often much the same then as they are now - economic and political gain. In spite of the seemingly fatalistic approach the Greeks took to the existence of war, it is worth appreciating that many who experienced battle were not necessarily in favour of it. Xenophon, writing in the late 5th and early 4th centuries, stated "it is fated by the gods that wars should exist, man should be cautious about beginning them and anxious to end them as soon as possible" (Hellenika, 6.3.6).

The 'Heroes & Hoplites' exhibition presents a selection of armour, weapons, and vases from both Greece and the wider Greek world.

THE AGE OF HEROES

Meriones gave Odysseus a bow, quiver and sword
and over his head he set a helmet of leather.
Inside it was crisscrossed taut with many thongs,
outside the gleaming teeth of a white tusked boar
ran 'round and round in rows stitched neat and tight-
a master craftsman's work, the cap in its centre
padded soft with felt.
Homer, the *Iliad*, Book 10, 260-5.

Ancient Greek warfare traces its roots to the warriors of Mycenae in the 17th century BCE. The Bronze Age was fertile ground for 'heroes', and from the *Iliad*, set in 1200 BCE, sprang forth protagonists whose names are known today. The *Iliad* was not the work of a single author, however, evolving organically over hundreds of years, and is likely to depict an amalgamation of the fighting styles and cultural values from the Bronze Age to the Archaic Period. The desire of the heroes in the *Iliad* to fight to the death in single combat is closely linked to honour – one of the key motives of the poem – as the victor's glory depended largely on the quality of their vanquished foe. These poetic images of hero against hero, no matter how savage, were mythicised and inspired heroic notions of war in later generations.

Given the elusiveness of solid textual evidence, we are left with the physical evidence which tells its own story. The earliest examples of Greek helmets were Mycenaean boar tusk helmets, as mentioned in the *Iliad*. They were created by attaching slivers of boar tusks in rows around a leather or felt base; each helmet would require the tusks of forty to fifty boars and the cost would have been significant. By the 15th century BCE, metal cheek guards appeared on boar tusk helmets and bronze helmets became increasingly more common by the 13th century BCE, replacing boar tusk helmets entirely by the 10th century.

REPLICA BOARS TUSK HELMET

REPLICA BRONZE HELMET

WEAPONS & HOPLITE WARFARE

Physical and pictorial evidence suggests full body armour was worn from the Bronze Age on, but technological developments in metal smelting and weapons production significantly changed the shape of warfare. During the period when hoplites held sway over Greek infantry warfare, they were defined above all in terms of their primary offensive and defensive weapons. Soldiers were required to equip themselves with armour and weapons, often referred to as the hoplite panoply. The key components of the panoply were a spear, sword, shield and helmet, however in many cases hoplites would also have a cuirass, greaves, ankle guards and a dagger. It has been estimated that the full panoply could cost between 75-100 drachmas, the equivalent of 3 months' pay for a skilled worker. However, the disparate economic means of the soldiers meant that those with more money could afford to equip themselves as elaborately as they desired and, as such, armour became a visible reflection of social status.

Spear

The primary weapon of the hoplite soldier was the spear. The shaft generally measured between 2 and 2.5 metres and was tipped at one end with a bronze or iron spearhead, and at the other with a *sauroter* or butt-spike. The *sauroter*, which translates to "lizard killer" (possibly a humorous reference for its use while not in combat), allowed the base of the spear to be thrust into the ground to provide traction against a charge from the enemy.

Sword

Swords were a hoplite's secondary weapon and were generally only employed if a soldier's spear had broken or if the fighting devolved into hand-to-hand combat. Due to the close quarters of the phalanx formation, short, double-edged blades were favoured over single-edged blades, which required more room to swing. When not in use the sword would have hung in a scabbard and strap from the shoulder.

Dagger

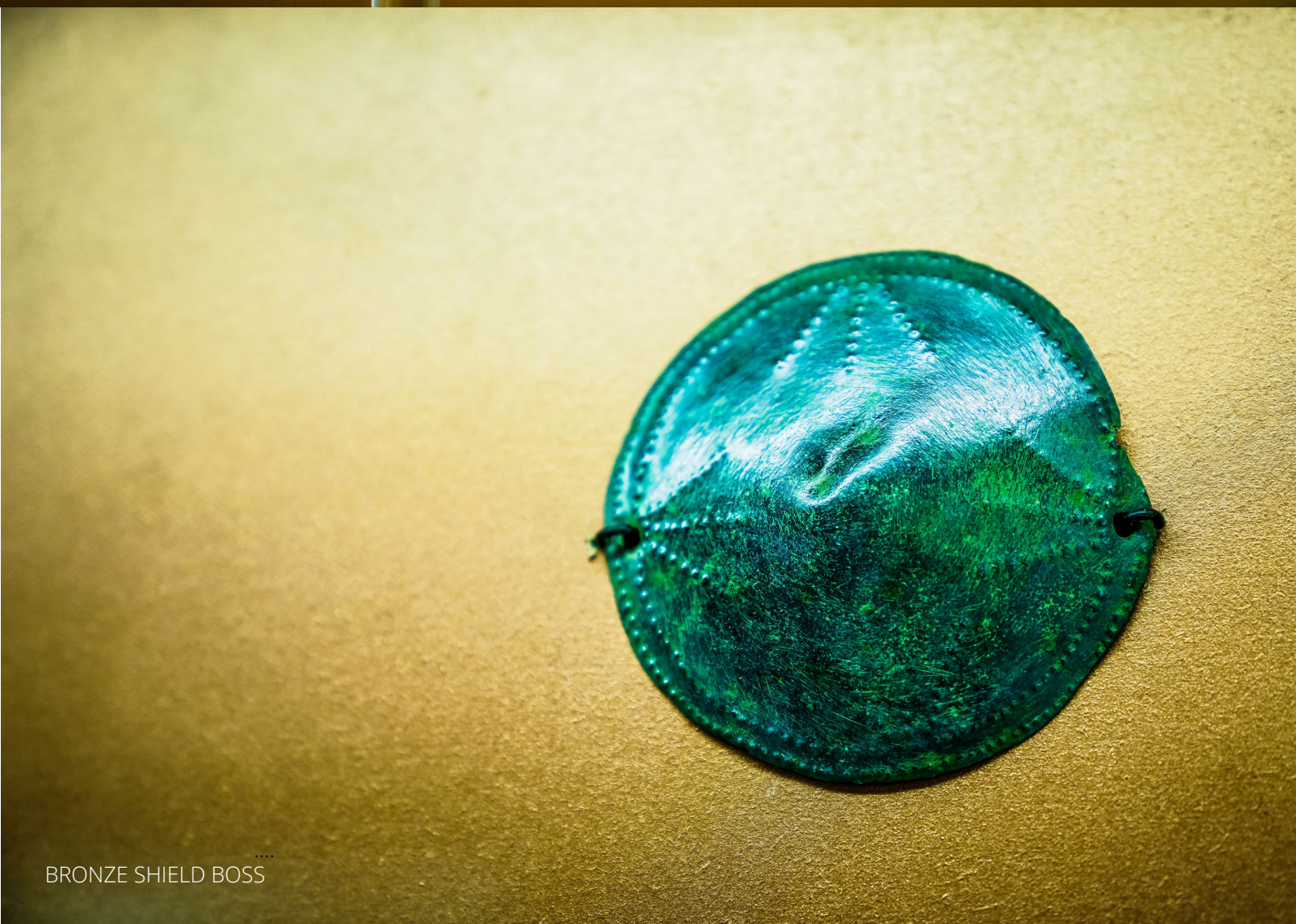
Used for close quarters combat, the dagger could just as easily be used for ceremonial rites or to butcher meat, making them the most versatile weapon in a hoplite's panoply. Daggers often had grooves running down the length of the blade, often mistakenly referred to as 'blood channels' as it was thought by some that their function was to speed the flow of blood from an enemy, thus inflicting a more severe or fatal wound. The actual function of such a groove or grooves is simply to lighten the blade, decreasing its mass without weakening it or diminishing its flexibility.

Arrowheads

Due to the perishable nature of organic materials, archaeologists have yet to excavate a single ancient Greek bow - as a result most of our information about archers comes from arrowheads. The size and shape of the arrowhead can offer useful information about the size of the arrow shaft, the size of the bow, and even the arrow's intended purpose. Whether by casting or forging, the manufacture of arrowheads meant they could be made in considerable quantities and variations.

COLLECTION OF ARROWHEADS FROM THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL PERIODS

BRONZE ARROW HEAD



BRONZE SHIELD BOSS

REPLICA ILLYRIAN STYLE HELMET WITH CREST OR PLUME HOLDER

COLLECTION OF WEAPONRY FROM THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL PERIODS

CUIRASS

The cuirass first appeared in Archaic Greece; made from hammered and embellished metal, it was designed to cover and protect a soldier's torso. A breast plate and a back plate were connected by bands of leather and metal over the shoulders, and with leather lacing down the sides. Metal armour was used by those who could afford it, and as a result was only worn by 1 in 10 men. Some wore leather breastplates, while others would have donned a linothorax; armour made from layers of linen, laminated and bonded together with animal glue. Failing the ability to afford either, soldiers would have worn a simple tunic into battle. Only the front half of the cuirass in the cabinet above survives. It is made from six or seven parallel rows of rectangular iron plates that overlap and on top are three rows of decorative plates that give an outline of collar bones and pectorals. This style of cuirass is less well known than the articulated type made to look like the 'idealised' muscled torso of a man. While they offered protection, their appearance - reminiscent of the heroic nudity so favoured in statues - was primarily designed to impress.

GREEK DECORATED IRON CUIRASS. 3rd c. BCE

THE CORINTHIAN HELMET
&
THE LEGACY OF THE HEROIC AGE

The Corinthian helmet has been referred to as one of the great achievements of early Greek technology. Fashioned from a single piece of bronze, these helmets were made-to-measure and were first developed in the 8th century BCE. Their design made each soldier particularly reliant on other hoplites as their vision and hearing were restricted.

Corinthian helmets are also arguably the most iconic of all Greek helmets, and came to symbolise the glory of the past and the idealised hoplite warrior.

The cultural legacy of the heroic age was most evident in the way that warfare was perceived socially. War was seen to be the ultimate expression of masculinity, a way for men to attain social distinction, honour and fame through their martial exploits. Battles also held the opportunity for an individual to perform in front of other men in a context of ritualised contest.

These heroic ideals never disappeared, instead they were adapted to the new collective fighting styles and battle organisation. Those with the financial means would dress to emulate bygone heroes while phalanxes created a theatre of war in which men could play out their idealised version of heroic endeavour. Men could prove their valour to their peers and hope to gain their place amongst the heroes by holding his position in the line and bearing down potential death.

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMETS WITH BRONZE CORINTHIAN HELMET ca. 7th-6th C. BCE IN CENTRE

BRONZE CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET. ca. 7th-6th c. BCE

ARCHAIC BATTLE PREPARATION & STRATEGY

There are various theories about how early battles were arranged, but a lack of textual evidence makes it impossible to ascertain the exact manner. It is likely that in an effort to avoid war, early *poleis* would first attempt to negotiate reparations for any perceived injuries or offences. If negotiations failed, then an intent of war would be declared and if the challenge was accepted, men were called to arms.

It appears that an early form of hoplite warfare was introduced at the beginning of the 8th century, but the exact date remains unrecorded. An early form of the famous *phalanx* formation appeared in the mid 8th to early 7th century, however it was likely more fluid and open in style than the later, more structured variants. This lack of structure was further exacerbated by the fact that soldiers were not part of a standing army and that battle training was haphazard at best. Men were expected to supply themselves with whatever armour and weaponry they could afford, as a result, homogeneity was rare. Campaigns were planned for the summer months so that men could be drawn up for the army without impacting their harvest season, while hopefully maximising damage to the enemy's crops in order to undermine their ability to feed and support themselves.

Terrain was strategically important and chosen in advance of battle, with flat grounds and closed spaces preferred to protect the flanks and minimise the chances of being surrounded. For the most part, individual campaigns were not intended to last long, however wars were occasionally protracted affairs which raged over multiple campaign seasons.

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMETS WITH SMALL ATTIC BLACK-FIGURE COLUMN KRATER ca. 5th c. BCE IN CENTRE

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

SMALL ATTIC BLACK-FIGURE COLUMN KRATER OF A SOLDIER ADJUSTING HIS GREAVES. ca. 5th c. BCE

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

CLASSICAL BATTLE PREPARATION & STRATEGY

As the *poleis* grew in power and a new system of *demokratia* emerged, military service became a feature of citizenship. State regulated armies resulted in a greater focus on warfare, particularly as the growing population could provide higher numbers of men while a stronger economy guaranteed soldiers financial recompense for their service.

Once boys reached maturity at the age of 18, they received two years of military training and service as part of their initiation into adulthood. A man's social status and experience would determine what military position he would hold while mass mobilisation became easier as every citizen was registered in his *deme*. Additionally, battles were no longer centred around harvest time because supplies could be shipped from outside the *poleis*, making warfare a yearlong proposition.

Infantrymen were still the main participants of the army but they were now better trained and armed, and their ability to change tactics successfully from long-range fighting to a melee made them formidable. As interaction between *poleis* and foreign empires expanded, military strategies grew in complexity and relied on greater group cohesion. General battle tactics included night time assaults, releasing false plans, surprise attacks, ambushes, and diversions. They also employed false manoeuvres, like feigning retreat in order to take advantage of favourable terrain to capture their enemy.

Armies from wealthier *poleis* (i.e. Attica) were better structured and organised, with hoplites supported by separate units of light infantry, cavalry, and archers who could help break enemy ranks. They also had the resources to wear down their enemies, by targeting areas of weakness in order to incapacitate them or by using superior resources to force them to surrender.

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMETS WITH ATTIC BLACK-FIGURE LEKYTHOS DEPICTING FOUR WARRIORS IN BATTLE, ca. 4th c. BCE

HELMET CRESTS

"With helms glittering and hung high, crested over with white horse-manes that nod and wave and make splendid the heads of men who wear them."
Alkaios of Mytilene, c.600 BCE.

Depictions of crested helmets in ancient Greek art are relatively common. Beginning in the Bronze Age, they became increasingly elaborate, however given their organic composition no physical evidence of original crests exists. As a result, it is unclear how prevalent their use was amongst soldiers. Additionally, there is no literary indication as to how much a crest would have cost, further reducing insights into their obtainability.

There were multiple ways of attaching a crest to a helmet. In early Illyrian helmets, the crest would have served to strengthen the join of its two halves. Later helmets had two ridges which were designed to hold the crest in place. The function of crests was to make a soldier look taller, more striking and intimidating; to this purpose, they were often dyed bright colours. The shape of the helmets like the two in the cabinet above, are exceptional.

The presence of a crest of this size did not necessarily indicate someone's rank in an army, however, it has been suggested that Spartans depicted wearing transverse (ear-to-ear) crests held a position of command amongst their peers. Crests, while striking, not only made the wearer more visible to the enemy, but had the unfortunate disadvantage of providing something for enemy soldiers to seize in the heat of battle.

REPLICA ILLYRIAN TYPE HELMETS WITH CRESTS

SPARTAN WARRIOR CULTURE

Significant social reform in the 7th century BCE focused all aspects of Spartan life on the development of a military *polis*. Sparta maintained a standing army which was the sole occupation for all Spartan men between the ages of 20 and 60. From age seven, boys entered military school where they learned how to fight, obedience to the state, endurance, courage, and self-control. Spartans believed deeply in the gods and made sacrifices to make sure war was waged at an auspicious time; if they received an affirmative answer, the *Gerousia* (Council of Elders) drew from the available fighters and the soldiers began their march.

Sparta was both respected and feared by the other *poleis* for their battle prowess, professionalism, and mental stamina. Spartans kept a strict training schedule both on and off campaign and were constantly ready for war. As well as being fearsome warriors, they were also cunning strategists, employing tactics that other less practised fighters would be unable to execute. In order to enforce dominance outside of their own territory, Spartans developed a social structure that gave women freedoms beyond those of their Athenian counterparts. Women were expected to run everyday business, protect themselves and their property and remain physically fit. Additionally, the use of *periokoi* (non-citizens) who supported trade and agriculture and *helots* (captured and enslaved people) for hard labour, allowed the Spartans to maintain their warrior culture.

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN WARFARE

As the scale of warfare increased, so too did the development of military technology.

The prohibitive expense of metal *cuirasses* led to the increased use of the cheaper and more flexible *linothorax*. Helmets, however, went through many different developments. The Illyrian helmet of the Archaic Period, with its rectangular face opening, did not have the protection offered by the Corinthian helmet, but its visibility and the later inclusion of ear holes made the helmet more practical. This paved the way for increasingly unobstructed styles, such as the Pilos and Thracian helmets, which allowed for quicker movement and unhindered fighting.

The shift away from full-face helmets reflect the increasingly diverse nature of war and the need for protection from newly developed technologies. Two revolutionary offensive methods were fire and catapults. The first was an early incendiary weapon, used at Delium in 424 BCE. Made from an iron-plated hollow beam that connected a cauldron, filled with coal, sulphur, and tar on one end, with bellows on the other. An iron tube was inserted into the cauldron through which air was pumped. The resultant flame was large enough to set fire to a fortified structure.

As more cities built walls to defend against attack, new weapons were developed to overcome them. *Gastraphetes*, an early crossbow, were more powerful than a regular bow and more effective against armoured enemies. By mounting a larger version on a tripod, they were adapted into an *oxybeles* (an early type of ballista) for siege warfare in order to bring down enemy walls. These eventually evolved into the *katapeltikon*, an early torsion spring catapult, that required multiple people to operate.

L-R: REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET, CAMPANIAN RED-FIGURE AMPHORA ca. 380 BCE, BRONZE ILLYRIAN TYPE HELMET late 6th - early5th c. BCE, REPLICA CORNITHIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

CAMPANIAN RED-FIGURE AMPHORA DEPICTING A SCENE FROM THE TROJAN WAR FEATURING ACHILLES AND PENTHESILEA. c. 380 BCE

BRONZE ILLYRIAN TYPE HELMET. Late 6th - early 5th c. BCE

DEFINING BATTLES OF THE CLASSICAL AGE

Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
(Combined death toll: 5,000 - 8,000)

Having failed to help the Ionian Greeks in their rebellion against the Persian Empire, Athens prepared for imminent invasion. The Athenian army marched over 42km in 24 hours to meet with Plataea, their only ally, on the plain of Marathon. The terrain was strategic: having landed their ships, the Persians would be cornered on a flat plain, hemmed in by mountains and swampland with Greeks blocking further incursion into the mainland. Approximately 10,000 Greek soldiers stood against over 20,000 Persians. The Greeks took the Persians by surprise, charging their front while also flanking the sides and turning inward, encircling the Persians in the first known use of the pincer manoeuvre. The Persian centre broke formation and fled to their ships, chased by the Greeks. The victory became legendary: a small force of hoplites, free Greek men, were able to defeat the powerful Persian Empire.

Battle of Salamis 480 BCE
(Combined death toll of Greco-Persian wars: approx. 73,000+)

The second Persian invasion of Greece led by Xerxes began with Persian victories and the sacking of Attica, Boeotia, Euboea and Phocis. The Greek Alliance was consequently formed to combat the threat of Persia. The poleis retreated to the Isthmus of Corinth for a final stand, where they gathered in the strait between Salamis and Attica. Athenian general Themistokles wanted to lure the Persian fleet into the strait, where they would become trapped due to their size and numbers. The Persians moved into the strait, where they were then rammed by the Greek triremes lying in wait. Those who bore the brunt of the attack, panicked, while others who tried to retreat were pushed back into the advancing fleet, causing chaos. Xerxes and his remaining ships fled, while any Persian soldiers who managed to make it to shore were killed by Greek hoplites waiting for them. The defeat of the Persian navy ensured that they were not able to sufficiently supply their army and halted the expansion of the Persian Empire.

Battle of Leuctra 371 BCE

(Death toll: Boeotian 47 - 300; Spartan 1000 - 4000+)

When Thebes, the largest city of Boeotia, wanted to sign a peace treaty with Sparta on behalf of all Boeotians, Sparta refused and negotiations collapsed. The neighbouring communities around Sparta were liberated by the Boeotian forces, slowly eroding Sparta's power and supplies. A final battle saw the Theban infantry smash through the Spartan hoplite formation by establishing an even deeper formation and marching diagonally, utilizing organisation over manpower. Spartan dominance of the region came to an end with this innovative technique. Theban power, however, did not last long.

REPLICA CORINTHIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA ILLYRIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA ILLYRIAN TYPE HELMET

THE RISE OF MACEDON

Following the Persian Wars, the Greek *poleis* were constantly engaged in war against one another in a bid to assert, maintain and grow their own power. While the Peloponnesian War ended with a Spartan victory, their supremacy was under constant threat until Thebes finally superseded them. Peace treaties and alliances were continually in flux and failed to prevent further battles from breaking out between the exhausted *poleis*, all determined to assert their autonomy.

After almost two-hundred years of war the greatly depleted manpower and resources reduced the capabilities of the *poleis* to fight, and battle developments ceased. Philip II of Macedon, held as a political prisoner by the Thebans in the 360s BCE, utilized his inside knowledge to make Macedon a threat. He reformed his army, discarding the heavy shields and heavy armour, and instead introduced long pikes (*sarissas*) and consistent training.

The use of *sarissas* at varying elevations within the Macedonian phalanx formation formed an impenetrable front to the enemy and was the greatest modification to hoplite warfare in 300 years. Well drilled, they were formidable. No empire would hold as much power until the rise of Rome.

Beyond his military prowess, Philip II was a keen politician and diplomat who made tactical decisions for long term success. The weakened state of the Greek cities, along with their instability and lack of unity, allowed Philip to pit them against one another, until he finally conquered Greece in 338 BCE.


CAMPANIAN RED-FIGURE BELL KRATER DEPICTING TWO
OSCAN WARRIORS WEARING PLUMED HELMETS
c. 340 BCE

CAMPANIAN RED-FIGURE BELL KRATER DEPICTING TWO OSCAN WARRIORS WEARING PLUMED HELMETS, ca. 340 BCE

REPLICA CHALCIDIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA PILOS TYPE HELMET

REPLICA PHRYGIAN TYPE HELMET

REPLICA THRACIAN TYPE HELMET

WAR AT SEA

Naval warfare in ancient Greece dates back to the Bronze Age, with frescoes depicting possible scenes of conflict in Crete along with texts and imagery of warships from the Mycenaeans.

Pentekontors appeared in the Archaic Period as a long vessel used for both warfare and trade. Rowed by 50 oarsmen, with 25 on each side of the ship, they are estimated to have been around 30m long and 4m wide. *Pentekontors* first developed into the *bireme* and later into the *trireme* - a ship specifically built for warfare that had three decks and 170 rowers in total.

Rowers required weeks of training to master difficult manoeuvres, such as encircling an enemy ship and ramming it with a bronze ram from behind (*periplous*) or attacking an enemy's vulnerable side or stern by sailing through gaps between ships (*diekplous*). Discipline and communication were key to these operations because only the top deck of rowers could see outside the ship. If attacked, most of the crew would drown. If they managed to escape a sinking ship they would be held underwater by the enemy, or if captured, rowers faced being maimed to prevent them from rejoining the ranks.

Financed by the silver mines at Laurion in southern Attica, Athens built 200 triremes during the first Persian War. Their swift manoeuvrability gave them the advantage that secured victory and Greek freedom. Later they ensured the safety of various trade routes while also facilitating the expansion of the Athenian empire. In order to help maintain their empire, Athens introduced a monetary public service called a liturgy known as *trierarchia*. Every three years, one or two wealthy citizens would be expected to pay for the upkeep of a single *trireme*, including the training of the rowers. Later, *symmoriai* (a board of men) replaced the individual *trierarchs* and shared the cost. Maritime dominance in the Aegean primarily depended on the ability to finance fleets on a continual basis. Athenian naval supremacy was eventually superseded by Sparta who received funds from Persia.

Naval warfare assisted in turning war into a professional industry. It broadened the scope of war while simultaneously democratising it. While the cavalry consisted of wealthy men and hoplites who were drawn from the middle-classes, the navy provided the opportunity for lower-classes to participate by rowing in warships. The cramped conditions of the decks made rowing unappealing to those of higher status. To fill these positions, Athens offered citizenship, pay and the chance to gain honour by serving the *polis*.

BRONZE CHALCIDIAN TYPE HELMET WITH MARINE ENCRUSTATIONS, early 4th c. BCE

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ΣΤΑΜΟΥΛΗΣ 1905

PETER & MARY MITRAKAS

ΚΟΥΜΑΝΤΑΤΑΚΗΣ FAMILY