

A Greek Soldier

The **hoplite** was the backbone of ancient Greek warfare, a citizen soldier who combined the roles of farmer, craftsman, or merchant with that of a trained fighter. When a city-state went to war, men of a certain age and wealth were called upon to serve. Because soldiers had to equip themselves, only those who could afford the necessary armour and weapons — broadly the middle and upper classes — served as hoplites.

A hoplite's equipment, known as the **panoply**, was both impressive and practical. The bronze **helmet** often featured a distinctive horsehair crest designed to intimidate the enemy. A **breastplate** protected the torso, while **greaves** guarded the shins. His primary weapon was the **dory**, a spear roughly two to three metres long. In the chaos of close combat, he would draw a short sword called a **xiphos**. His large circular shield — the **aspis** — was constructed from layers of wood and faced with bronze, and was perhaps his most vital piece of equipment.

In battle, hoplites formed the **phalanx** — a disciplined, tightly-packed formation in which overlapping shields created an almost impenetrable wall. Soldiers advanced together in step, the rear ranks pushing those in front forward. Discipline and trust were essential; a single soldier breaking ranks could prove catastrophic.

Nowhere was this military culture more extreme than in **Sparta**, where boys left home at seven to begin the *agoge* — a rigorous state training programme designed to produce the finest soldiers in the ancient world.

Questions

1. What is meant by the term "citizen soldier"?
2. Why could only men of a certain wealth serve as hoplites?
3. What was the full set of a hoplite's equipment called?
4. What was the purpose of the horsehair crest on the helmet?
5. What were greaves designed to protect?
6. How long was the dory?
7. When would a hoplite use his xiphos?
8. What materials was the aspis made from?
9. What was the agoge?
10. Why do you think discipline and trust were described as "essential" in the phalanx?



Text D Quiz



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