

Ancient Art of War

By Walter S. Zapotoczny

Greek Art of War

The understanding of the Greek art of war begins with Homeric poems. They provide a glimpse of warfare in the 8th and 9th century B.C. A kind of democracy existed during this time. It was not based on the rights of man but in a balanced separation of powers among the Greek leaders. In contrast with the Greek leadership, the authority of the Trojan royal family was unequivocal. According to Homer, the usual material for weapons was bronze. The characteristic offensive weapon of the time was the spear. It was made of ash wood and was for throwing rather than thrusting. Swords are referred to as being large and sometimes two-edged. Shields were body length. Protective metal armor seems to have been mainly the privilege of the leaders. The Greeks and the Trojan chiefs maintained horses and chariots. The normal purpose of a chariot was to carry a fully armed warrior to the battlefield, where he would dismount and fight on foot while his charioteer waited at a discreet distance with the horses and vehicle. The methods of fighting during this time involved the chieftain dismounting from his chariot and approaching the enemy on foot. He carried one or two spears, which he launched against his opponent. If the enemy remained unscathed, he then protected himself with his shield against the enemy's spears. If the spears of both produced no effect, they would set at each other with swords or even throw rocks at each other. The regular members of the army carried spears and shields. Some leaders were good archers although it appears that the bow was secondary to the spear. The Greeks and the Trojans employed siege warfare. Ships were lightly built and often the rowers were also the fighters.

In the 5th century B.C., the Persian Empire sought to expand their territory westward. In a series of engagements, the Greek allies withstood and repulsed the invaders. The brilliance and resolution of Greek leaders proved to be too much for the Persian kings. At the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., the Greeks attacked the Persians as they were disembarking from their ships and encircled their forces. Then they attacked the Persian ships and defeated the Persians. In 480 B.C., the Persians again launched an invasion against the Greeks. Although defeating the Persian naval forces, the Persians are successful in occupying Athens. The inhabitants take refuge on the island of Salamis. The Greek naval tactics depended on attacking the enemy's oars and steering gear then ramming. Once rammed, the enemy's ship could be boarded. The Persian fleet is beaten by these methods at the battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. The next year brought defeat to the Persian army at the battle of Plataea.

Macedonian Art of War

Philip II developed the Macedonian art of war after he came to power in 359 B.C. His force was based on a combination of the phalanx with cavalry and light troops, which protected it from the flank attack and which could themselves easily develop an outflanking movement against the enemy. The phalanx made use of extremely long pikes, which the phalangists grasped with both hands. This type of pike gave the formation greater thrusting power, with a denser array of spearheads projecting beyond the shields of the first rank. The depth of the Macedonian phalanx developed its time from eight to sixteen ranks. The formation was prepared to thrust

with its pikes of push with its shields. Another Macedonian specialty that contributed to their particular art of war was the corps of hypaspistai. A hypaspist was originally a shield-bearer or squire to a heavily armed fighting man. The hypaspist were foot-guardsmen. They played a prominent part in tactics by a feigned withdrawal. They would then lure inexperienced enemies forward, creating a fatal gap in the enemy's formation.

In 335 B.C., Alexander's army crossed the Hellespont with about 42,000 soldiers. After an initial victory against Persian forces at the Battle of Granicus, Alexander accepted the surrender of the Persian provincial capital and treasury of Sardis and proceeded down the Ionian coast. At Halicarnassus, Alexander successfully waged the first of many sieges, eventually forcing his opponents, the mercenary captain Memnon of Rhodes and the Persian satrap of Caria, Orontobates, to withdraw by sea. Alexander left Caria in the hands of Ada, who was ruler of Caria before being deposed by her brother Pixodarus. From Halicarnassus, Alexander proceeded into mountainous Lycia and the Pamphylian plain, asserting control over all coastal cities and denying them to his enemy. From Pamphylia onward, the coast held no major ports and so Alexander moved inland. At Termessus, Alexander humbled but did not storm the Pisidian city. Alexander's army crossed the Cilician Gates, met and defeated the main Persian army under the command of Darius III at the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C. Proceeding down the Mediterranean coast, he took Tyre and Gaza after famous sieges.

In 332 B.C. - 331 B.C., Alexander was welcomed as a liberator in Egypt and was pronounced the son of Zeus by Egyptian priests of the god Ammon at the Oracle of the god at the Siwa Oasis in the Libyan Desert. He founded Alexandria in Egypt, which would become the prosperous capital of the Ptolemaic dynasty after his death. Leaving Egypt, Alexander marched eastward into Assyria (now northern Iraq) and defeated Darius and a third Persian army at the Battle of Gaugamela. Darius was forced to flee the field after his charioteer was killed, and Alexander chased him as far as Arbela. While Darius fled over the mountains to Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), Alexander marched to Babylon. From Babylon, Alexander went to Susa, one of the Achaemenid capitals, and captured its treasury. Sending the bulk of his army to Persepolis, the Persian capital, by the Royal Road, Alexander stormed and captured the Persian Gates (in the modern Zagros Mountains), then sprinted for Persepolis before its treasury could be looted. Alexander allowed the League forces to loot Persepolis.

He then set off in pursuit of Darius, who was kidnapped, and then murdered by followers of Bessus, his Bactrian satrap and kinsman. Bessus then declared himself Darius' successor as Artaxerxes V and retreated into Central Asia to launch a guerrilla campaign against Alexander. With the death of Darius, Alexander declared the war of vengeance over, and released his Greek and other allies from service in the League campaign (although he allowed those that wished to re-enlist as mercenaries in his imperial army). In 326 B.C. Alexander turned his attention to India. King Ambhi, ruler of Taxila, surrendered the city to Alexander. Many people had fled to a high fortress called Aornos. Alexander took Aornos by storm. Alexander fought an epic battle against Porus, a ruler of a region in the Punjab in the Battle of Hydaspes in (326 B.C.). After attaining victory, Alexander made an alliance with Porus and appointed him as

satrap of his own kingdom. Alexander continued on to conquer all the headwaters of the Indus River.

The Roman Legion and the Phalanx

During the Punic Wars, the confrontation between the Roman legion and the phalanx raises questions as to the comparative effectiveness of the sword and pike. The pike had a longer reach, but the sword was a more manageable and less cumbersome weapon, giving greater opportunity for skill in its use. At Pydna, the Italian allies serving under Aemilius Paullus hurled themselves with reckless heroism at the enemy pikes, trying to beat them or hew off their points. The pike points pierced their shields and armor. The phalanx was eventually shattered by good tactical judgment. Paullus divided his force into small units with orders to look for gaps in the pike line and then exploit them. The gaps appeared because of the rough ground, which prevented the phalangists from moving with uniformity and keeping abreast. Forced by the infiltrating legionaries to abandon their pike and fight at close quarters, the Macedonians found that their small swords and shields were no match for the Roman arms. The Romans developed tactics utilizing spears and swords in concert and tried to engage the enemy any time a gap appeared in a phalanx advance.

Marius instituted reforms that contributed to the formation of a Roman professional army. One such reform was the way he recruited soldiers. Marius offered enlistment to members of the poorest section of the population in addition to the landowners. This initiative raised a strong army and at the same time produced one remedy for the problem of unemployment. Marius reorganized the army formations and instituted a chain of command and field rank. He took pains to ensure that every soldier in his army was fit and self-reliant. Another of Marius' innovations was the introduction of the single silver eagle mounted on a staff. They were used for signaling and were considered somewhat sacred by the soldiers.

Sulla was made consul in 88 B.C. He marched on Rome and took control from Marius. His appeal to armed force as a political weapon in Roman internal politics marked a new departure. Under Sulla, the relationship between political and military power became increasingly clear. It was a circular relationship in which political power was the reward of military achievement and military support was guaranteed by the use of political power.

Caesar's Army in Gaul

The organization and equipment of Caesar's army in Gaul was virtually the same as used by Marius. The Roman javelin used by Caesar's armies against the Gauls buckled on impact. This effect was achieved by soft iron in the shank of the javelin, which bent and was hard to remove. In many instances, Gallic shields, which had overlapped each other when their owners adopted a close formation, were pinned together by a single javelin. The Gauls then abandoned their shields and fought unprotected. Caesar also made tactical use of fortifications and relied of trenchers and earthworks. His legions traveled light, leaving their equipment to be transported by large mule trains located at intervals between the marching legions. The legionaries were ready to resist a sudden attack. The Roman was traditionally a foot soldier. However, cavalry

was essential to Caesar, not only for flank protection, but also for swift pursuit of a defeated enemy.

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