

Weapons of antiquity



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Introduction

Science and technology, especially that of antiquity, were often referred to as inventions, discoveries, or tricks that were conducted for human comfort and understanding. Human beings have, since time immemorial, competed in every aspect of life. This led to competition and hence intensification of warfare from early times. They therefore invented weapons for protection against their enemies and for defense. Some weapons were used by the high class group such as kings and other royalties. Initially the weapons were not very effective and efficient. With time the weapons became more and more advanced. This evolution was witnessed through the centuries. Moreover, in the history of humankind, human beings were always competing with science and technology to accomplish new achievements as to satisfy their curiosity and boost their ego. It is their insistence in developing that made them succeed in reaching their goals.

As people liked the idea of constructing, they also liked the idea of destructing, in the sense of gaining power. The societies wanted to conquer and rule the weaker states and expand their territories. The more advanced the weapon, the better the chances of conquering were. An important sector in history that aroused in the fields of science and technology with its remarkable achievements was weapon technology. In fact, it carved names of the world greatest leaders such as Hannibal and Alexander the Great in an unforgettable memory of the history.

In this report, I will not discuss how, who, or why people were creating weapons; as this would turn to an argumentative essay. Whereas, I will

clarify and describe some of the weapons used; in fact, I will talk about the different kind of weapons, their use, some of their features, their outcome, their manufacturing, and how they were spread in both Roman and Greek societies.

Weapons are usually grouped according to their use, the people who invented them, the period or age that they were invented such as early stone age weapons, middle and new stone age weapons and sometimes, according to their destruction ability. They can also be categorized into melee weapons and ranged weapons. However, I will use a different approach and group them according to their dates of invention.

Weapons of: ~500 BC

The traction trebuchet & the ballista

Probably the most popular and powerful ancient war device, the traction trebuchet, was the key weapon to destruct enemy fortifications. It is thought to have been developed in China around the 5th century BC. Armies were using it until the 15th century, although the introduction of gunpowder took place in Europe in the second half of the 13th century (find the footnote). Powered by teams of about a dozen people, a trebuchet could launch projectiles as far as 125 meters (Lesley & Roy, 1998).

Around the same time, the ancient Greeks developed their own siege weapon, the ballista, a scaled-up crossbow (Lesley & Roy, 1998). The ballista design was based on a huge dart-throwing machine powered by ropes, or sometimes, hair! An interesting story related to ballista states that Greek

women grew long hair as a patriotic gesture, in case new ballistae were required.

~ 700 BC

Doru & Kopis

The ancient Greeks regarded the Kopis, or sword, strictly as a complementary weapon; one that would never supersede their most valuable weapon, the Doru, or spear. The Doru enabled the infantrymen a stable and rigid position within their phalanx formation of shield (Sidnell, 2006). This played a big role in their battles winning. Below is an explanation of both weapons.

The Doru

For the Greek infantryman, the main weapon was the spear or the doru. The Doru is a long thrusting weapon made of wood with about two meters in length and a diameter of two inches. The flat leaf-shaped spearhead is composed of iron and its weight was counterbalanced by a bronze butt-plate, which was also used as a second weapon. The butt of the shaft had sharp bronze spikes which could be stabilized by being pushed into the ground. It could be held in one hand while the shield could be used on the other. In case the spear head broke in the battlefield, the soldier would fling around the spikes as the last solution.

Kopis

This was a type of sword with a hook-like hilt and was a heavy knife with a forward curving blade. Alexander the Great's most favorite weapon was the Kopis, primarily a slashing weapon. Its downward curve made it highly suitable for cavalry as with the height of a horse's back; the Kopis will generate more thrust than any other swords. The kopis sword is one of the one handed weapon with a length of 65 cm, which makes its almost equal to the spatha in terms of length (Sidnell, 2006). The Kopis is a single-edged sword that pitched forward towards the point and the edge being concave in shape and swelling towards the tip. This shape distributes the weight making it capable of giving a massive blow with great momentum. It was used in the Ancient Greece. Later the Marcedonians made a shorter version with the blade being about forty eight centimetres

Sarissa

The Marcedonians developed their own spear or pike, under the leadership of Alexander the Great in 356-323BC. It was twice the length of the doru that is around five metres and sixteen point four feet. It had to be wielded underarm with two hands. This meant using the shield as the case of doru was impossible and therefore, a small shield was strapped to the left forearm. The Marcedonian cavalry would wheel around the flanks and that would propel for a great distance and have serious effects on the enemy.

300 BC

Gladius

Being in service for seven consequent centuries, the Gladius was Romans most popular weapon. It witnessed great development across the three main levels of its evolution, each giving the Gladius a different name: from its original Spanish distinct the Gladius Hispaniensis to the early Romani Gladius, and finally, the last version in 79 BC, which was the Pompeii Gladius. Each phase had its own remarkable physical modification of the Gladius.

The Roman Gladius (Gladius; Lat; sword) got its origins from the Spaniards when after several conflicts; the Romans became impressed with the sword and adopted it for themselves. The only modification that the Romans made was to make the sword somewhat shorter.

By the time of the Roman Republic that flourished during the Iron Age, the classical world was well acquainted with steel and the steel-making process.

Pure iron is comparatively soft, but pure iron is never found in nature.

Ordinary iron ore contains various impurities in solid solution, which harden the reduced metal by producing irregular-shaped metallic crystals. The

Gladius is generally made of iron, while the ones carried by officers were often of higher quality and made out of bronze or occasionally steel.

Eventually, Roman-forging processes led to the creation of more steel edged blades by accident through trial and error of sword smiths while forging with charcoal (Eduard, 1967).

~100AD

Spatha

The Spatha actually began to replace the shorter Gladius as the primary Roman sword from about A. D 100 onwards. As a replacement to the Gladius, the spatha was straight and long and was used throughout the first millennium AD in various parts of Europe. The infantry version of this spatha had a long point and the version used by the cavalry had a rounded tip. It had a tang and high carbon and steel and mirror-polished blade. Covered with simple brass quillions and greatly counterweighted, the pommel had tang-bolts in the shape of a tiny brass hound. It was used in various territories of the Roman Empire up to 600 AD. Most of the swords used today are derivatives of the ancient Spatha. In most of the gladiatorial fights and wars, the spatha really helped since it was longer than the Gladius. Its length helped fighters as they could have more reach in terms of thrusting. Evidence of the spatha has been found in Britain and Germany too. It was used by the Germanic warriors too. Following the introduction of Spatha by Roman army, war became more enhanced in the early imperial period (Eduard, 1967).

Conclusion

People of antiquity saw a distinct view when developing or using their weapons. This is because it boosted their warfare and protected them against their enemies. They had experience in various fields of study such as mathematics and science among others. They used physics, mathematics, and alchemy to create their own weapons with high precision and applied this knowledge in making the weapons and advanced technology. They were competitive and dedicated such as Alexander the Great of the Marcedonians and Phillip of Macedonia, who paid attention to Epaminondas' innovations, <https://assignbuster.com/weapons-of-antiquity/>

and doubled the spears' length of his army (to over 18 feet!) and reduced the size of their shields so his soldiers could hold the long spears with both hands.

It is, thus, clear that humans have proven to be intelligent and it is seen through innovations of the advanced weapons. With time the weapons have become more and more deadly and very effective and efficient. The states that made better weapons such as Marcedonia easily defeated other neighbouring states. It is evident that the Greeks and Romans were highly organized and had advanced technology and strong armies and infantry and reliable weaponry.