

Free bronze spearhead at the met and odyssey essay sample

War



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Gallery 155 at the Metropolitan museum of Art showcases Athenian Art, mostly vases with black figures that depict scenes from Mythology and actual life in Athens. Also in display are helmets, vests and knives from 7th century BC. While the vases are descriptive with exquisite painting of scenes from mythology, the bronze artifacts are rather telling of the war they were used for. The helmets, the body vests and the knives, although old and rusty are in good shape and can tell the viewer about the size of the person who used it. The fact that they survived this long also attests to their quality. They are displayed neatly side by side, with the helmet in the middle of the body vests. The vests are single pieces that cover both the chest and the back. The helmet also covers most of the head with only a bit of the face visible. But the most interesting object was the bronze spearhead.

While the helmets and the vests give an impression of the warrior and more or less offers a complete picture, the bronze spearhead is interesting as it is a lone piece. It also comes from a different century from that of the other pieces. It has been dated to 12th century BC and from Cyprus. The spearhead itself is 32.4 cms long and is made of bronze. The spearhead must have been attached to a wooden handle, as the rest of it is missing. It is also slightly broken and chipped towards the tapering end which suggests that it had been used. It is quite thin and sharp at the end, probably designed to inflict much damage to the enemy. There is also a ridge running through the centre of the spearhead that gives it four edges. The ridge on the spearhead makes sure that it is not exactly flat. The place it was found and the time it was made suggests that it could have been used in the Trojan War. Cyprus was also an island that was well known to Homer. It was the

island of Aphrodite where the heroes of the Trojan War stopped on their way back home.

There are a lot of references to spearheads in Homer's *Odyssey*. Homer makes references to spears being used throughout the *Odyssey*. Odysseus' men and the Greeks first use the spears to fight and hurt in the Trojan War and later on use them to kill and be killed as they finally make their way home. " And girls with their tender hearts freshly scarred by sorrow and great armies of battle dead, stabbed by bronze spears (Homer 44-45)." Here Odysseus makes a journey to the land of the dead to meet his mother and is scared. He feels fear when he begins the journey when he sees the armies of dead people stabbed by bronze spears. There are also mentions of Odysseus wearing helmets and carrying a bronze spear. When Telemachus, Odysseus son frets about the suitors laying claim to his mother and his land, he is told about how much he needs Odysseus and how he looks.

" But the victors, just behind her, digging spear-butts into her back and shoulders, drag her off in bondage (Homer 592-595). These lines are the Harper's song from *Odyssey* extolling the Trojan War and how bravely Odysseus fought in it. Rather than gloat, Odysseus melts into tears hearing these lines, as the spears here were not used to kill the enemies, but were instead used to hurt and drag innocent women who were the wives of the fallen soldiers. The spearhead here stands not for courage but for cruelty.

**" Quickly we fetched our curved bows and hunting spears
from the ships,**

And splitting up into three bands,

We started shooting, and soon enough some gods had sent us bags of game

to warm our hearts (Homer 172-175).”

In these lines, Odysseus and his crew fight the Cyclops. This proves to be a rather difficult battle for them as their enemies are strong and they are weak after much travelling. They use the spears here not only to fight but also to hunt for food.

“ They speared the crews like fish and whisked them home to make their grisly meal (Homer 135-136).” Here it is not Odysseus’ crew that uses the spears but that of the Laestrygonians, the beast like creatures that were set on killing Odysseus’ crew. These creatures destroy almost all of Odysseus’ crew- 11 out of 12 ships of Odysseus are destroyed. This is a pretty bad battle for Odysseus and his crew and they are decimated. They are also quite late in ignoring the first clue where the beast kills and eats one of the crew members. The spearheads were not only used in battle as can be seen by the following lines. They were also used for hunt for food. The use of spears both for killing and hunting gives a human touch to the otherwise heroic, brave and mythical Greek heroes. Homer perhaps intends to tell the readers that the heroes were mortals like the regular men and needed food to sustain. These references also give an insight into the lives of the Athenian people during that time, especially the soldiers who fought long and hard wars. The soldiers travelled most of the time and for long stretched and they made to do with what they could find in terms of food and it is here the spearheads came handy. What was earlier a tool to win a battle now becomes a tool to help them find food.

“ At last I took my spear and my sharp sword again, “ when I hit him

“ Square in the backbone, halfway down the spine

And my bronze spear went punching clean through—

He dropped in the dust, groaning, gasping out his breath.”

Treading on him, I wrenched my bronze spear from the wound (Homer, 178-181).”

Here Odysseus talks about using his spear to hunt for food. He and his sailors reach the island of Circe close to being dead and Odysseus goes on the lookout for food. He says that the Gods took pity on him and sent him a stag which he kills with his spear. Thrown with the right force and the right angle the spear can do maximum damage such as felling a stag. Odysseus talks about the spearhead making a clean hole right through the stag and the stag going down dead. Looking at the spear at the exhibit and reading through the lines, it can be inferred that the spearhead is capable of inflicting the kind of damage that Odysseus talks about in these lines.

These are but a few examples of where and how the spears and spearheads were used during the Trojan War and after. The Greek warriors had used these spearheads to kill other soldiers, hunt for food and also protect themselves. They have also been victim to these spears as was in the case of Odysseus' soldiers being slain by the giants to be eaten. It is quite interesting to look at an artifact so many centuries later and read references made about it in a book written centuries ago. An old rusted piece of metal on display at the museum when looked at after reading the Odysseus brings to the mind vivid images of the battles fought and lost by the epic heroes of Greek mythology. What is interesting about the bronze spearhead is that it <https://assignbuster.com/free-bronze-spearhead-at-the-met-and-odyssey-essay-sample/>

serves as a link between the myth Odysseus and the current times. Although some of the events have been grossly exaggerated in the myth, we know certain events actually happened with references such as these. The spearhead could very possibly be used by Odysseus himself or by one of his many soldiers. It could also have been that of his enemy or his host and it is this curiousness that makes the artifact that much more interesting.

Works Cited

- Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. London: Penguin Books. 1996. Print.
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