

A toxarchos from the Nereid Monument

COMMANDER OF ARCHERS

The *toxarchos* or *toxarchis* was a commander of – or officer in – a group of archers (*toxotai*). *Toxarchoi* are mentioned both by Thucydides, in the conflict between the Athenians and Aetolians, and by Arrian, in his description of the war between Macedonians and Thebans. On the Nereid Monument from Lycia, dated 390 BC, we see probably a unique representation of a heavily-armoured archer, who is probably the leader of the other archers shown in the scene. He is fighting at the side of a hoplite, reminiscent of the *entaxis* or *parentaxis*, in which men with missile weapons accompanied hoplites in battle.

By Spyros Bakas



Detail of the Nereid Monument from Xanthus in Lycia, showing the archer reconstructed on the opposite page. Currently on display at the British Museum in London.

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The thing that sets this archer apart is the combination of a weapon that requires agility (bow) and a large hoplite shield, which seemingly would complicate the movements of the warrior and is primarily used by heavy infantry. However, the officer must have supervised and guided his men, so he would have remained immobile at certain moments and thus be directly exposed to enemy missiles. This may explain why he is equipped with heavy armour and shield.

The existence of the heavy hoplite shield can be also justified if the particular fighter ever decided to attach himself as a hoplite to the rear lines of the phalanx. He would use the bow when conditions required him to fight as a missile trooper positioned on the flanks or in front of the phalanx.

The armoured archer recalls descriptions of warriors from Homer's *Iliad*. At one point, Teucer, the greatest of the Greek archers, fights as a heavy infantryman, equipped with spear and shield. When necessary, he would switch to using a bow and arrow, which was otherwise carried around

by his attendant Pandion.

Thanks to experiments, we have learnt that the hoplite shield and the bow can indeed be used together. One of the members of our historical association Koryvantes took part in a traditional archery tournament at Biga, Turkey, in September 2013. In full armour and with the shield covering his back, he managed to fire dozens of arrows in the intense Anatolian summer heat. Moreover, correct adjustment of the shield improved the archer's stability, improving the odds of lining up successful shots.

This armoured archer demonstrates the gradual maturity of Greek battle tactics that came through the interaction of the Greek colonies with the local cultures of Anatolia. The Greeks started reappraising the combat value of missile troops in general and archers in particular. That perhaps had to do with the fact that the Greeks encountered peoples who had superior bow-making ability and archery skills, stimulating a kind of ancient arms race. **AV**

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The Officer uses a bronze Archaic-style helmet, with a crest. This type of helmet suits an archer as it increases the field of vision while still offering good protection for the wearer.

The archer uses an Eastern-type recurve bow, with horn on the inner surface and a sinew backing. This type of bow, rather than the widespread 'Scythian' bow, was still common in the Greek world. The arrow has a barbed bronze arrowhead, natural goose-feathers, and a horse neck.

Various vase-paintings of the Classical period depict 'ultra and yoke' composite-armor reinforced with scales. The shoulder-guards and the trunk of the cuirass are covered by more than a thousand handcrafted bronze scales, fixed onto a thick surface made of layers of linen. The chest area has been strengthened with a bronze plate, 1.2mm thick, thus increasing the level of protection for the sensitive area around the heart.

The leather belt loincloth around the abdomen could be used both for protection, as well as a sign of social status or rank.

The scabbard of the archer's *klepsis* is attached to a leather holder, by two bronze loops. It is decorated with a bronze rosette.

The greaves are made in Late Archaic fashion. They are modelled to fit the anatomy of the lower limbs. They are made from a single sheet of bronze, lined with leather for comfort, and are worn without the aid of leather straps.

The long lion tusk suggests Asian or Thracian influences.

The shield has a wooden core and has a diameter of 90cm. Inside, it is lined with leather; the outside features the back profile of a lion, symbolic of the Phalades, an Athenian tribe. It is suspended from the shoulders by a baldric, which is attached to the shield using copper hubs and decorated with red leather. The shield would have afforded protection to the archer's side and back.

The quiver is made of leather and waterproofed with beeswax. The rosette motif was painted with natural red pigment that can be found in abundance on the island of Kythera. It has been suggested that the quiver was used as extra protection for the thighs.

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