

Comparing the Greek Phalanx with the Roman Legion

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Greek Phalanx (c. 220- 168 BCE)

- ❑ The common formation used by ancient Greek and Eastern armies throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods.
- ❑ Heavy infantry formed into a dense mass, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, chest to back. Usually between sixteen and thirty-two men deep and several hundred meters long.
- ❑ Rows one through five holding pikes (called sarissas) straight out in-front of them. These pikes were generally about fifteen to twenty feet long.
- ❑ Rows six through nine holding their pikes at a 45 degree angle to help deflect missiles, as well as be prepared to lower them to fill a position in front when a soldier is killed.
- ❑ Last rows held pikes straight up to deflect missiles. These men added density and weight to formation for added resilience and staying power in battle.

Advantages

- ❑ The density and number made the formation very heavy, which gave them great staying power in the shoving matches of ancient battles.
- ❑ Wall of Pikes
 - ❑ Allowed the phalanx to keep their enemies at a distance
 - ❑ Protect against missile weapons
 - ❑ Many pikes could be showing in a small area. (five pikes to every soldier showing at the front)
- ❑ Phalangites generally wore relatively heavy armor

Disadvantages

- ❑ Had difficulty advancing over rough terrain.
 - ❑ Men packed so closely together over such great distances, obstacles tended to disrupt the entire line
- ❑ Very vulnerable to flank and rear
 - ❑ Cumbersome pikes could not be turned quickly to respond to these threats
 - ❑ Very little short range weaponry
- ❑ Unable to relieve tired soldier
 - ❑ Packed too closely together to swap fatigued soldiers with fresh ones
- ❑ Must operate as one giant unit
 - ❑ Either the entire army advances or the whole line must remain still or the loss of cohesion will open gaps in the line.
 - ❑ Small units were not possible

Roman Maniple (c. 220- 168 BCE)

- ❑ “Handfuls” – Approximately 120 men per maniple, and thirty-five maniples per Roman legion
- ❑ *Triplex Acies* – The “Triple Line”
 - ❑ *Hastati, Principes, Triarii*
- ❑ Armed with short swords, large oval shields, and chain armor.
- ❑ Commanded by *centurion*.
- ❑ Maniples of each line deployed with gaps between the units

Advantages

- ❑ Flexible
 - ❑ Each maniple could operate independently of the rest of the army.
 - ❑ Could turn unit in any direction relatively quickly
 - ❑ Gaps between maniples allowed for maneuver while advancing without disrupting adjacent units
- ❑ Relief system
 - ❑ Front line could be substituted for second line to give soldiers rest while maintaining the front.
- ❑ Large shield and thrusting sword
 - ❑ Gave soldiers defense advantage at short range
- ❑ Multiple lines
 - ❑ Allowed for complex formations
 - ❑ Lines could serve as reserve for line in front if the enemy managed a breakthrough
- ❑ Pila
 - ❑ Missile weapon for distance attacks

Disadvantages

- ❑ Low density lines
 - ❑ Usually only 4-6 men deep. Not as much shoving power as the phalanx
- ❑ Short distance weapons
 - ❑ Short swords meant they had to get very close to enemy to attack.
 - ❑ Only one sword per soldier at the front.

Ancient Examples

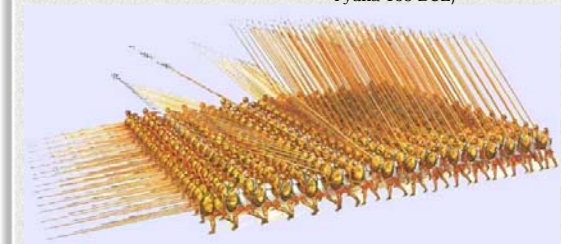
- ❑ Battle of Cannae (216 BCE)
 - ❑ Roman Defeat
- ❑ Battle of Zama (201 BCE)
 - ❑ Roman Victory
- ❑ Battle of Pydna (168 BCE)
 - ❑ Roman Victory



Roman short swords



Phalanx versus maniples (Battle of Pydna 168 BCE)



Phalanx formation

Select Bibliography

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