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Xiphos

The ***xiphos*** (Ancient Greek: ξίφος [ksípʰos]; plural ***xiphe***, Ancient Greek: ξίφη [ksípʰɛː])^[1] is a double-edged, one-handed Iron Age straight shortsword used by the ancient Greeks. It was a secondary battlefield weapon for the Greek armies after the *dory* or *javelin*. The classic blade was generally about 45–60 cm (18–24 in) long, although the Spartans supposedly preferred to use blades as short as 30 cm (12 in) around the era of the Greco-Persian Wars.

Etymology



Iron *xiphos*, Thessaloniki museum

Stone's *Glossary* has *xiphos* being a name used by Homer for a sword. The entry in the book says that the sword had a double-edged blade widest at about two-thirds of its length from the point, and ending in a very long point.^[2]

The word is attested in Mycenaean Greek Linear B form as 𐀓𐀢𐀖𐀓, *qi-si-pe-e*.^[n 1] A relation to Arabic *saifun* ('a sword') and Egyptian *sēfet* has been suggested, although this does not explain the presence of a labiovelar in Mycenaean.^[10] One suggestion connects Ossetic *äxsirf* "sickle",^[11] which would point to a virtual Indo-European **k^wsibhro-*.

Construction

Most *xiphe* handles followed a two-piece construction (similar to a knife) using either native woods or for more exotic imports like ebony and animal bone. The two slabs were attached to the tang of the sword, secured via two or three pins and then made smooth via filing giving the characteristic oval shape of a *xiphos* grip. Hand guards usually followed a "bridge" shape and were either also of organic material or iron or a combination of both, also secured via pins on each point. Some swords found in Italy or Macedonia tended to have an iron extension/reinforcement running along the handle (see picture of modern reconstruction of a *xiphos* made by Manning Imperial above).

There have been finds of *xiphe* with hilts decorated with gold foil. These swords were most likely ceremonial since they are always found in burial sites.



Modern reconstruction of a Greek xiphos and scabbard.



Actaeon holding a xiphos. Painted vase from Metaponto, c. 390–380 BC

- Makhaira

Notes and references

Notes

1. *Qi-si-pe-e* is thought to be the **dual number nominative case** form of **qi-si-po*; that is, its meaning is "two swords". It is found on the **PY Ta 716** tablet.^{[3][4][5][6]} Mycenaean 𐀓𐀗𐀞, *pa-ka-na*, could be an attested form of φάσγανον, *phasganon*, the famous **Homeric** word for sword.^{[7][8][9]} A sword is usually represented iconographically in **Linear B** by the **ideogram** 𐀀.

References

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External links

- **Casting** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R62TPFzBQ40>)

