

**PRACTICE OF SECURITY IN ANCIENT
GREECE****A BIZTONSÁG GYAKORLATA AZ ÓKORI
GÖRÖGORSZÁGBAN**BEKE Éva¹, KOVÁCS Tibor²**Abstract**

Ancient Greece was a place of significant political and social experiment at the same time it had a tremendous force for innovation as well. This was the cradle from where the first political thinkers and philosophers emerged and where practice was equally important to rules. This paper's aim is to show how their innovative minds and capabilities to create made the Greeks the most influential ancient nation by establishing security measure of their time which could enforce many other countries to follow their league for centuries. For this paper I have used desktop research and secondary literature review of interpretations based on the processing of contemporary works.

Keywords

Ancient Greece's security practice, Greek influence, Ancient Greek architecture for defense

Absztrakt

Az ókori Görögország jelentős politikai és társadalmi kísérlet helyszíne volt, ugyanakkor rendelkezett az innovációhoz szükséges hatalmas lendülettel is. Ez az ország volt a bölcsője, az első politikai gondolkodóknak és filozófusoknak, csakúgy, mint az a hely, ahol a gyakorlat ugyanolyan fontos volt, mint a szabályok. Ennek a tanulmánynak az a célja, hogy bemutassa, hogy innovatív gondolkodásuk és képességük hogyan emelte a görögöket a legbefolyásosabb ókori nemzetek közé azáltal, hogy biztonságot igyekezett teremteni a városállamokon belül, amely számos más országot is arra ösztönzött, hogy évszázadokon át kövesse és tanulmányozza vívmányaikat, stratégiájukat. Ehhez a munkához a kortárs és jelenkori alkotások feldolgozásán alapuló interpretációk irodalmi áttekintését használtam.

Kulcsszavak

az ókori Görögország biztonsági intézkedései, a görög befolyás, az ókori görög védelmi építészet

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INTRODUCTION

Although early settlements and countries had made ample progress in the scientific fields whether in architecture or in philosophy, it was chiefly the Greeks who built the foundation of reasoning and used observation based logic. As far as security concerned they did not have set policies or manuals, yet their entire existence based on securing their land and city-states. It was accomplished either by building the Acropolis, the walls and watchtowers with moans or by discovering the most advance armory of their times or else by using their landscape to their strategic advances. They were also the first who have invented both the state and the consequent laws. Modern era notions about civil rights, political leadership and a flourishing government system are all originated from them.

1. HOW THE IDEA OF SECURITY HAS DEVELOPED FROM EARLY ON IN ANCIENT GREECE?

In the 8th century B.C. - after the Mycenaean civilization fell - numerous groups of people started to emerge to have a settled life style within ancient Greece, most of them near the shores or in valleys. This change could only be possible when safety and security has been guaranteed on all different levels: in the everyday lives of the individuals as well as for the society. When they were able to fabricate tools, for cultivating the surrounding lands, hunting or defending themselves and their homes, small city-states started to form. First was the language necessary to communicate and an alphabet – which they adopted from the Phoenicians -, but formed into their own to write, kept these early settlements more coherent.

Since these early communities had to face many different dangers, highly depending on their locations – let it be sea, land or mountain – gradually unique skills have been developed. While some were experienced in making clothes and tools, others mastered warfare forging and the subsequent knowledge to survive. At the beginning the most valued skills were the healers' practices. They were privileged, simply because they had the necessary knowledge of basic medicine, herbs and plants with curative power. They were also the first ones capable of controlling pain, locating fractured or dislocated bones and helping at labors. At the beginning they could provide security and health within the settlements. (3) As George Sarton points out in his publication: “no privileged race so to speak, but for each task and for each time some people or some nation may excel all others.” (5)

Politically it was a disorganized alliance, consisted of numerous independent “states”. A walled or otherwise protected city or land with a few thousand inhabitants was enough to form a city-state. Their citizens were also very capable of having their own opinions and whenever they felt it necessary fighting for them.

Later another conception arose, when small city-states with exclusive rights of citizenship had been merged and became a larger unity, based on the universal idea of society, between man and man, groups and groups. The recognition of unified safety and security came during the wars whether against the Persians or against other city-states.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEK RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY IN REGARDS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY

As far as religious morality concerned the Greek's biggest fear was committing hubris, so they always emphasized moderation in all things human. One of the biggest risk and danger is to jeopardize security of others by embarking and perishing at sea, especially when one was seeking wealth off shore. Sailing was counted an unjust, disastrous and hubristic activity, unless it was regarded as a justly combat with the enemy or with poverty. Poseidon, the ancient sea god was also called Poseidon Asphaleios – Poseidon the Securer. (Fig.1) This was the god, who had devastating power, so he had to be pleased and tamed for safe return. (2)

Asphaleia, the Greek goddess of safety and security, in early representations is leaning against a column. In ancient Greece she stood for physical stability and played an important aspect of functioning democracy as she was assigned to deal with threat. She is also the one who guarantees that institutions will not fall, so she is responsible for legal and civic stability and defense. In this sense her role has a striking resemblance of today's homeland security. Her name also signifies nowadays usage of asphalt, which was retrieved from the Euphrates in ancient times protecting Babylon's wall from invasions, also paved urban path and streets for safe transport.



Figure 1. *Poseidon by Anders Petersen*

3. HOW DEFENSE HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED IN ANCIENT GREECE?

Although security and safety have never been a political issue – *expressis verbis* – in ancient Greece, but the fact that they established forces to save its citizens and protecting the city's walls signify that they have never been really far from it.

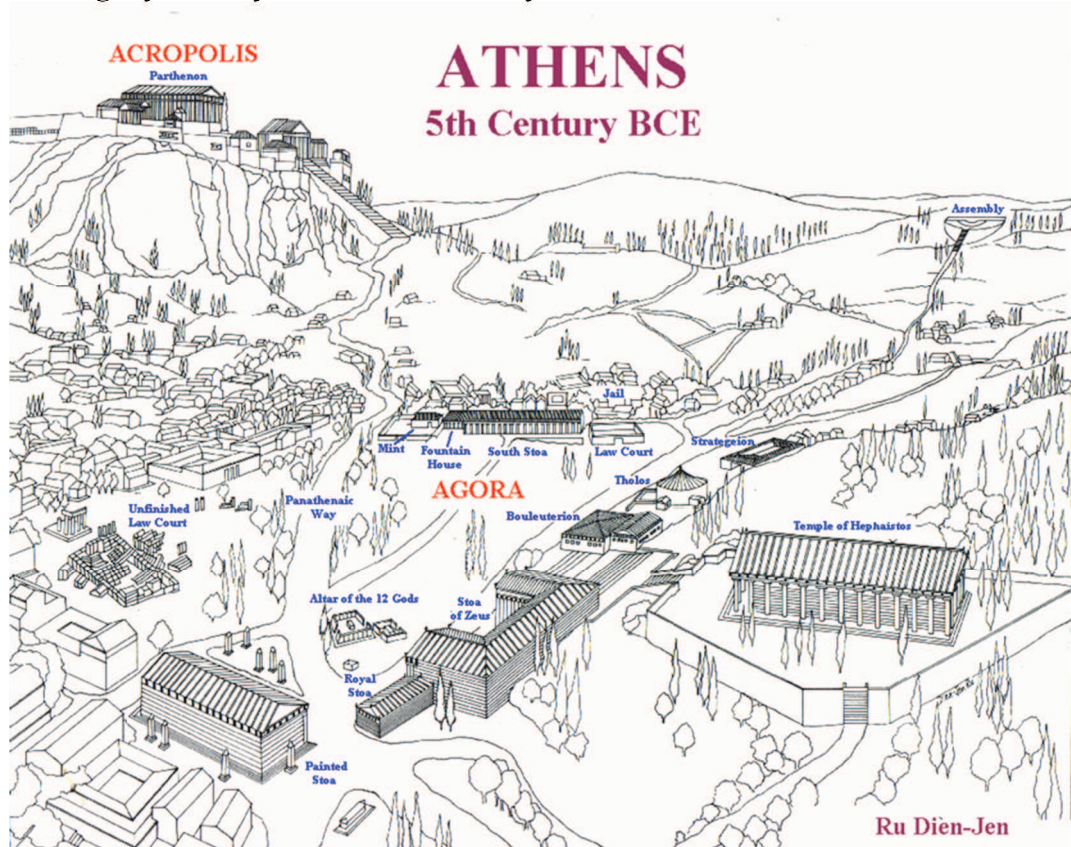


Figure 2 Athens in the 5th century BC (panoramic drawing)
Photo credit: [11]

1. Architecture for defense purposes

Greece rose to still greater heights of achievements after the Persian Empire threat has been solved (VI-V BC centuries), but the “Hellenic age” cannot be called the age of decadence either, as far as architecture concerned.

The general design of the city chiefly influenced by the religious, political safety and security factors of the Greeks, as hardly any decorative elements can be seen from oriental impact.

Places have been chosen for strategic and economic reasons – either near the sea for trading, or at protected places by mountains in the case of extreme weather or at those valleys and lands where it is rich in fertile soil. (1)

The acropolis was rather significant in much of the older settlements or city-states. A cliff that was fairly easy to defend yet not so difficult to access. The acropolis served as

a center place from where the city can be observed. The rest of the city has been built around it in circles. The cities' other centers were the agora, places to gather for many reasons: let it be commercial, political, educational or social. In later centuries, the agora became the most distinctive place in the cities, while the acropolis served only as a fortress.

The walls around the cities accommodated the shape of each city providing defensibility for its citizens. Circular walls became known only in the VI century BC. Cities near the shore have grown rather inland for being protected from piracy.

The acropolis was also the main augmented place in the city, as the walls served the city's greatest defense, supposedly impregnable.

They were the first line of protection as the city's faith depended on them largely. The size of the acropolis was different, as it should be suitable for many different needs: monarchy, oligarchy or democracy. It should be able to serve well enough for single rulers as well as for larger communities.

Strong walls around it showed a solid autonomy, the acropolis itself – especially in older towns – counted as “the place”, because of its sanctity and consequent importance. Both monuments – acropolis and the walls – were the most outstanding architectural achievements of ancient Greek cities, and even nowadays, they show some exceptional engineering and beauty. As per Aristotle (Politics VII. 10.8) “The city walls ought to be not only an embellishment, but a protection as well.”

The city walls should be the first statue to impress visitors and at the same time to have a dispiriting reaction of imminent villains. Most walls were erected from the V. (B.C) century on when the science of armors has started to develop rapidly, so the walls should stand and be able to take all sorts of different strikes. In addition, gates and towers have been added, mainly at strategic points, so defense could be easily placed there.

The defense line begins with the mountains or hilly slopes, what the enemy had to cross. Then the walls stood and were able to block passages, followed by fortresses or a fortification in a commanding position.

Athens also had circuit walls before the Persian invasion, and after they rebuilt to maintain an “ante status quo”. The difference was that this time they connected the walls to the Piraeus port. This way the Athenians had unlimited access to the sea – even under siege – from where their food could be brought in. (see Athens map in Fig.2.)

Hippodamus as far as recent studies tell was born in Miletus and most of his time lived there too in the bounce of Ancient Greece classical span. Based on Aristotle, Hippodamus was the very first author who recoded the concept of government without any functional knowledge of constitutional and civic employment.

His proposal of Greek cities were characterized by structure and regulation in opposite to the difficulty and disorientation prevalent of that era in many bigger cities even in Athens. He is considered to be the father of a city plan where orderly format is being used in agreement with a balanced communal regulation.

“The arrangement of the private dwellings is thought to be agreeable and more convenient for general purposes if they are laid out in straight streets, after the modern fashion, that is, the one introduced by Hippodamus; but it is more suitable for security in war if it is on the contrary plan, as cities used to be in ancient times; for that arrangement is difficult for foreign troops to enter and to find their way about it in when attacking. Hence it is well to combine the advantages of both planes (for this is possible if the houses are laid

out in the way which among the farmers some people call 'on the slant' in the case of vines), and not to lay out the whole city in straight streets, but only certain parts and districts, for in this way it will combine security with beauty." (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1330b 23)

As we can see Aristotle's final suggestion is not to build the whole city in accordance with Hippodamus' theories, but to fuse the two models of spatial plan.

Since the siege engines have been developed during the IV and III (BC) centuries another defense system was in use too. The goal was still to keep the enemy not only outside of the city, but as far as from the walls as it was possible. They invented catapults and other machinery for defense and the architecture followed suit as the towers and walls were now designed to hold those.

Towers usually had postern gates against attempted occupation. The Greeks also introduced the "ditch-system": at certain places they had two sets, the outer and inner ones. The larger, inner ditches were dug right in front of the walls to make even more difficult to bring weaponry close to the walls. The inner ditches had also stone work behind to hide the artillery or else holes had been dug to trap the enemy, provided they were able to breach the walls. The outer ditches had been protected – as an extra layer of barrier – with thorn hedges. There was usual to build smaller installations for accommodating auxiliary contingents at river crossings or along the roads leading to the city.

Fortifications were developed in accordance with the weaponry inventions. Later they both were complex and elaborate for one single reason: most wars were not fought in battlefields, but against fortified cities and sites. To capture these fortifications was imperative in order to claim victory.

The watchtower was also part of the city wall, often with a 360 view with a garrison to set up. They were there to provide security by discovering the impending enemy, returning soldiers or visitors or else to watch over harbors for safe trade. These towers were either circular, rectangular or square and their constructions were always sturdy and built with local stones.

Their primary purpose was defense in a wider sense, so they usually stood outside of the so-called urban area, such as the agora, theatre or gymnasium. Some of them were built with double walls (e.g. Naxos Tower). They had few openings and a single window 10 meter high from the ground and with arrow slits, signifying the defensive nature of the monument, surrounded by the fortification. The other prime example of watchtowers is the Tower of Agios Petros on Andros served as a "guard" for mining activity next to it and since it was approximately 21 meters high one could easily overlook the entire island as well as the sea. These watchtowers saved their authentic forms and functions to a prominent degree. There haven't been introduced any arbitrations to their original usage, style and structure. (10)

About the private houses and their safety we don't know much in ancient Greece. An ordinary Greek home – unlike the Italians – had very little if any rooms for gardening. The houses were compact for the purpose of defense. Some of the houses have built with higher standards, so they looked inwards the courtyard rather than towards the streets or the neighboring houses. Their entrances were mostly hidden and insignificant, the windows were small and placed high. What is also clear that they were not uniformed and ambitious

places with traditional Greek architectural elements, at least not from the outside. The private houses maintained single subordinate places, in everyday lives the agora, the gymnasium, the theater and shrines took central locations In Greek people's lives. (7)

2. The weaponry of ancient Greece

Ancient Greek warfare evolved from small bands of local communities fighting for local territories into massive set-piece battles between multi-allied counterparts. War became more professional, more innovative and deadly reaching its zenith with the Macedonians leaders Philip and Alexander the great. Learning from the earlier Greek strategies and weapons modernizations they employed better hand weapons, exceptional artillery, marshalled diverse troop units with different arms, fully exploited cavalry, and backed this up with far superior logistics to dominate the battlefield not only in Greece but across vast swathes of Asia. (4)

The ancient Greek's advancement of weaponry included from closed ranged weapons to powerful ranged weapons through chariots, shields and warships.

Close ranged weapons

Kopis was a small dagger with swift movement and accurate blows. Mostly used for stealthily murders, since heavy armors cannot be penetrated with it.

The **xiphos** was a 65 cm long double-sided blade. A light and very powerful weapon, its design was the inspiration for the crusaders in coming centuries.

The **spear** was the main weapon, as it could penetrate any armors with extreme accuracy. Most known spear was the **sarissa**. It had double length compare to the spear. It was also very useful against cavalry.



Figure 3. Chariot
Photo credit: [10]

Powerful ranged weapons

Javelin is a special form of spear that could be thrown over long distances, to break the front lines of armies. It was an excellent tool for hunting big games.

Greek fire and flame throwers were introduced as well. The Greek fire was a well-guarded secret. Nowadays the science is still not sure what was in it. Whatever the Greek fire has touched was ignited and could not be quenched by water. It was one of the most effective weapon at its zenith to be able to push back opposing forces.

Ballista was a crossbow with a stand for accuracy. It is a siege weapon what shot huge object to take out a large chunk of an arms. During Dionysius, the Greeks developed the **torsion catapult**. Its missiles usually were stones or bolts, so they had enough force and power to weaken or even breach the walls. The intention was not necessary to destroy them, but rather to make the city surrender. For machinery, the **chariots and siege engines** - e.g. "Trojan horse" – also were used for forced starvation and ultimate treachery. (Chariot shows in Fig.3) The chariots although utterly ineffective in mountainous terrain was used in some circumstances. It was usually drawn by two horses and carrying two passengers. (A driver and a warrior) Its construction was generally bronze-plated wood. Ancient Greek (3) bioc-hemical weapons means catapulted plaque by rotting animals or smallpox victims thrown towards the enemy. Based on some scholars they also tipped arrows with snake venom. Spartans used Sulphur with flame providing poison gas.

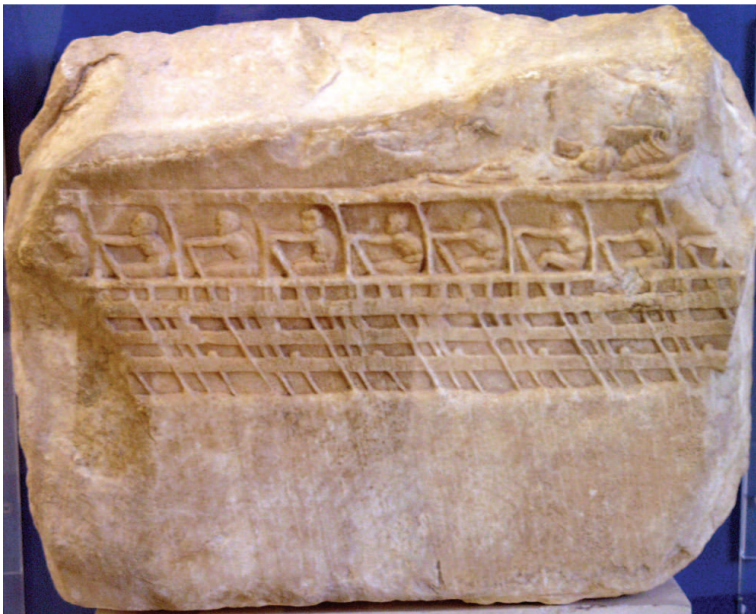


Figure 4 *The Greek pentekontors engraved in stone*
Photo credit: *Ancient Greek ships [9]*

Warships were special assets in ancient Greek's warfare, because of the country's geographic layout. The first warships were called pentekontors. (Fig. 4) They were long, narrow ships, designed to go fast to overtake other ships and attack them. Around 500 B.C. triremes were developed and could go around 14 knots in good weather, as most sea battles

took place during the summer months usually. Greek warships has oars as well as sails. At the front of the trimemes was a sharp metal ram. In battles the trimemes tried to get close to the enemy's ships and possibly crash them. When they smashed a hole in the wooden planks the damaged ship either sank or had to be beached on the nearest shore. (6)

For the Greeks' life, warfare had utmost importance as it showed in the Iliad and Odyssey. War – as for its positive connotation – became of common value of defense and sacrifice. Consequently, for the protection of the warriors' most vulnerable body parts were equally important. They wore helmets, shields, and shoulder and throat guards as well. Ancient Greek military leaders trained the heavily armed hoplite soldiers to fight in a massive formation, called phalanx: standing shoulder to shoulder, the men were protected by their neighbor's shield. This intimidating technique was an important role for example in the Persian wars and helped Greeks to build their empire.

CONCLUSION

The history of safety and security in ancient Greece cannot be pinpointed in exact time like battles and regimes, but can be defined by historical descriptions in context, paintings on vases, temples or else set in mosaics. These inventions and developments cannot fall within special time frame either, as they have extended both in time and in space. Other than historical works, archeology is another useful and supporting science and resource as many artifacts have been unearthed like chariots, helmets, spears along with other types of weaponry. Prime evident also can be drawn from the literary works. With careful interpretations, the results can be implicative.

Throughout the history of ancient Greece safety, security and defense have been practiced either by military or governmental protection. It has never achieved privately, but rather within the city's sheltered walls in the urban centers.

The tactics and strategies of these ancient warriors even today are being studied by historians, scientists and military strategists, as they continue to teach us the value of discipline, training, innovation and audacity.

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