

# NAVAL CAPABILITIES

## MORE INFORMATION

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#### THE GREEK TRIREMES

The *triremes* of 480 BCE were about forty metres in length, six metres in width, with a 1.5 metre draught. This classic ratio of 1:7 was designed to be fast and manoeuvrable. The front of each trireme was fitted with a wooden and bronze ram for piercing the hull of an enemy ship.

*Triremes* were open vessels with little room for supplies. Each side had three rows of approximately thirty oarsmen, totalling 170 rowers per ship. *Triremes* were agile and very fast (up to ten knots).

In addition to the oarsmen, there was a piper (to keep time), a captain and archers or *hoplites* prepared to board ships.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Conditions on a *trireme* were extremely cramped, with no quarters for sleeping or eating. Oarsmen ate at their oars, went to the toilet over the side and beached the ship at night to sleep.

#### ← SOURCE 1

A modern reconstruction of an Athenian *trireme*, commissioned by the Greek Navy.

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#### ATHENIAN NAVAL TACTICS

Being light and low to the water meant that *triremes* could weather storms much more effectively than heavier, taller ships. This was vital given the unpredictable squalls of the Aegean Sea. This agility was best utilised by weaving in and out of rocky inlets, outflanking and ramming larger enemy ships.

Favourite manoeuvres involved ramming enemy formations in the side before disengaging to avoid boarding. Speed and coordination between ships were vital.

#### THE PERSIAN FLEET

The Persians used Phoenician and Ionian *triremes* as part of their mixed fleet, with high prow and stern castles for archers. In Xerxes' campaign, each ship was equipped with up to forty archers and marines for boarding. Xerxes had divisions from Egypt, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Ionia and Northern Greece, so the ships in the Persian fleet varied in their design. However, the Persian ships were generally larger than the Athenian ships, less manoeuvrable, and weighted down with supplies and marines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peter Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 190.