

Gravestone of Pollis

Learn about Greek funerary practices and the relations between the Greeks and Persians by exploring a gravestone for a young Greek warrior. Read the information and follow the instructions to complete the activities below.

Depicting Death

Even after twenty-five hundred years, we can still learn from this gravestone of a young Greek soldier named Pollis who died about 480 B.C., during the wars between the Persians and Greeks. We can see what his family wanted to show about him.

The rectangular gravestone is inscribed at the top with a Greek text and decorated below with a low-relief image of the deceased, shown nude. In Greek art, male nudity implies heroism, and death has elevated Pollis to heroic status. He carries the military equipment of a hoplite, a heavily armed soldier. Hoplites famously interlocked their shields to form a protective wall as they advanced against an enemy.

An English translation of the inscription reads:

I speak, I, Pollis dear son of Asopichos, not having died a coward, with the wounds of the tattooers, yes myself.

The soldier's face is worn, and the monument is broken below his knees. Originally, the artist would have painted this relief to add lifelike color and show details not carved into the stone. Over time the paint faded and wore away.

Gravestone of Pollis
Unknown artist
Greek, Megara, about 480 B.C.
Marble
60¼ x 17¾ x 6¼ in.
90.AA.129



Gravestone of Pollis: Worksheet for Students

What important information does the monument tell us about how the young man died?

What do you think "tattooers" signifies?

What do you think the young man is doing? What are the clues?

What helpful or interesting details, now lost, do you think the artist may have originally shown with paint?

What questions do you have that you cannot answer with the information the stele provides?

Depicting Soldiers: Compare and Contrast

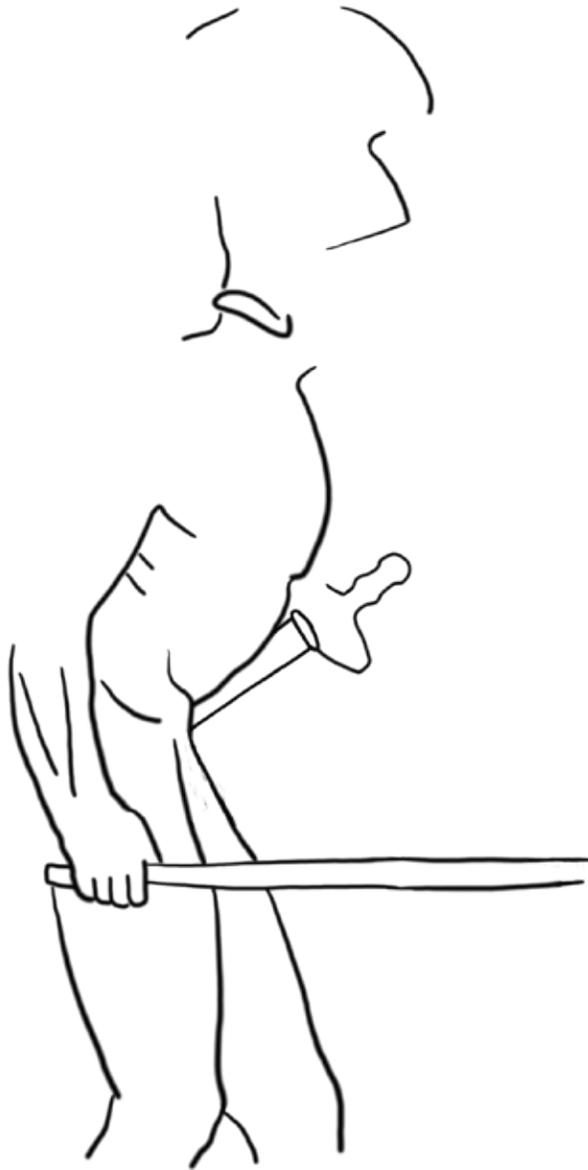
Examine this Athenian amphora (storage jar) from two generations earlier than the gravestone. It depicts a hoplite confronted by two Thracians, tribesmen from northern Greece who were allies of the Persians. This amphora might have been used at a Greek party to hold wine, and drinkers would have commented on war and fighting. Almost all Greek males would have had battle experience and could easily understand images of soldiers.



Storage Jar with Cavalrymen
Attributed to the Bareiss Painter
Greek, Athens, about 530–520 B.C.
Terracotta
12¹/₁₆ x 8⁵/₁₆ in.
86.AE.85

Gravestone of Pollis: Worksheet for Students

What can you learn from the image of the soldier on the amphora to complete the picture of Pollis on his gravestone? Add to the drawing of Pollis at left to show how he might have looked in life wearing all his equipment. Include his helmet, shield, sword and sheath, spear, and cuirass (breastplate).



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