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IDEALS AND PRAGMATISM IN GREEK MILITARY THOUGHT 490-338 BC

PhD Thesis – Ancient History – UCL

I, Roel Konijnendijk, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the principles that defined the military thinking of the Classical Greek city-states. Its focus is on tactical thought: Greek conceptions of the means, methods, and purpose of engaging the enemy in battle. Through an analysis of historical accounts of battles and campaigns, accompanied by a parallel study of surviving military treatises from the period, it draws a new picture of the tactical options that were available, and of the ideals that lay behind them.

It has long been argued that Greek tactics were deliberately primitive, restricted by conventions that prescribed the correct way to fight a battle and limited the extent to which victory could be exploited. Recent reinterpretations of the nature of Greek warfare cast doubt on this view, prompting a reassessment of tactical thought – a subject that revisionist scholars have not yet treated in detail.

This study shows that practically all the assumptions of the traditional model are wrong. Tactical thought was constrained chiefly by the extreme vulnerability of the hoplite phalanx, its total lack of training, and the general's limited capacity for command and control on the battlefield. Greek commanders, however, did not let any moral rules get in the way of possible solutions to these problems. Battle was meant to create an opportunity for the wholesale destruction of the enemy, and any available means were deployed towards that goal. Far from being at odds with nobler ideals, pragmatism was itself a leading principle of tactical thought throughout the Classical period.

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Finally, in a battle which, like those of the Greeks, has no rules, my thanks belong to Eri, who sets the rules for me.

Introduction: The Case of Leuktra[1]

The Limits of Greek War

Warriors are the product of their society and its values. Their behaviour in war is a window onto their culture as a whole. Scholars have therefore been engaged for centuries in answering a fundamental question: what sort of warfare did the city-states of Classical Greece produce?

In a sequence of academic studies stretching across these centuries, scholars of Greek military history have constructed and upheld an all-embracing answer – a comprehensive set of arguments and assumptions covering all aspects of the subject from the purposes of Greek strategy to the way they held their spears. According to this traditional view, military practice was confined within very particular limits. Warfare in Archaic and Classical Greece was a 'wonderful, absurd conspiracy': from the late eighth century onwards, the landowning middle class of the city-states equipped itself as heavy infantry and effectively asserted a monopoly over the conduct of war.[2] These men decided their conflicts through single head-on confrontations with their well-armed smallholder counterparts from other states. Such battles were fought over farmland, on farmland, by farmer militias; they were fought only in summer, when there was less farming to be done. They took the form of mass collisions of heavily armoured spearmen in tight monolithic formations, on level ground, at prearranged times, with no interference from lighter, more flexible troops. For some three hundred years, at least until the paradigm shift signalled by the Peloponnesian War, Greek battles followed 'formal conventions' and rules that were 'carefully prescribed'.[3] There were no tricks or tactical manoeuvres to upset the balance. There was an unspoken agreement to spare civilians, prisoners, and even the

[1] All dates cited in this thesis are BC unless they refer to modern scholarship. All translations of Greek are by the author, generally based on those available through the Perseus Collection. All passages from modern scholarship in languages other than English have been translated by the author.
[2] Hanson, 'Ideology', 6; for summaries of this view see Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes'; Connor, 'Land Warfare'; Ober, 'Rules of War'; Mitchell, 'Hoplite Warfare'; Runciman, 'Warrior Culture', 731; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 41-42; Kagan/Viggiano, 'Hoplite Debate', 2-35; Viggiano, 'Hoplite Revolution', 125-126; Hanson, 'Hoplite Narrative', 257-269.
[3] Hanson, 'When, Where, and Why?', 205, 218.

routed enemy. Every aspect of this way of war was designed to restrict the violence to a single, fair, glorious clash.

'If such views may be described as orthodox,' wrote Cawkwell, 'there have been notable heretics.'[4] Recent years have brought out a rising chorus of dissident voices. Nietzsche once wrote that the Greeks were possessed, not of a fair competitive spirit, but of 'a tiger-like urge to destroy'[5] – and this statement may serve to some extent as a motto of the works of the 'heretics'. These works have shifted the emphasis from evidence for gentlemanly rules to passages describing trickery, brutality and uninhibited slaughter.[6] More structurally, the central role of small farmers and the farmer-hoplite's domination of limited wars has been called into question, affecting the very foundations of the traditional view.[7] If, as Van Wees has argued, there was no middle class setting the policy of Greek city-states, how could we claim that such a group manipulated the whole of political and military culture in an effort to safeguard its farms?

Indeed, it seems like the traditional view has left a good deal of evidence unaccounted for. Much that could challenge its central tenets has been explained away as irrelevant or atypical, or has been meticulously excluded from the particular time and space within which the hoplite 'conspiracy' was taken to have held sway. This realisation raises important questions – particularly in the field of military thought. If the Greeks were not bound by a morality of fairness and self-inflicted primitivism, what *did* define their choices in war?

Central to the orthodox view is the notion that the Greeks decided their wars by pitched battle between rival phalanxes in the open field. The supposed result of this restricted form of warfare is that Greek military thought consisted of little more than *tactical* thought, and that this tactical thought was deliberately stunted. The recent and fundamental reinterpretation of both the features and the underlying structures of Greek warfare invite a reassessment. The decisions made by Greek

[4] Cawkwell, 'Orthodoxy and Hoplites', 375; its proponents now seem to prefer the term 'grand hoplite narrative' (see Kagan/Viggiano, 'Introduction', xv; Hanson, 'Hoplite Narrative', 257).
[5] Nietzsche, F., 'Homers Wettkampf' (unpublished, 1872): http://www.thenietzschechannel.com/works-unpub/five/hcg.htm (accessed 12/05/2015).
[6] The essential 'heretic' publications are Krentz, 'Deception' and 'Fighting by the Rules'; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*; Dayton, *Athletes of War*; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*; Van Wees, 'Defeat and Destruction'; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*'; Sheldon, *Ambush.*
[7] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, especially 47 n.3.

commanders reveal their attitudes to battle; a characterisation of these attitudes, and by extension an account of the value and purpose of battle in the military thinking of the Greeks, should be fundamental to any reinterpretation of their approach to war. What options did commanders think they have when they set out for battle? What were their intentions when they engaged the enemy? What considerations gave shape to Classical Greek tactical thought?

This question has two main interrelated components. First of these is the matter of defining the ideals we see operating in a military context. Ideals on subjects such as courage, fairness, protection of the helpless, and proper treatment of the dead may act as limiting factors on a society's behaviour in war, as they do in the present day. Modern scholars have built most of their characterisation of Greek warfare on the restrictive ideals they identified. But have they assessed these ideals correctly? As this study will show, we have little reason to believe that Greek warfare was shaped by idealised concepts such as pure hoplite warfare, battles on open plains, or combat without tactics or trickery. Battles did not end when the enemy fled, which implies that the purpose of battle and the nature of victory have been misunderstood. Did the Greeks even *wish* to fight 'agonal', rule-bound battles, or were their ideals of a different kind? What were the ideals underlying Greek tactical thought?

The second component is that of analysing the possible tension between ideals and pragmatism as guiding principles of military action. In the eyes of orthodox scholars, the ideals that defined Greek warfare stood at one end of the scale, with cold pragmatism on the other. In no way would the Greeks allow their restricted way of war to be sullied by those who placed a favourable outcome above honour, fairness and mercy. Yet the works of recent scholars have shown that the Greeks were perfectly willing, for example, to deceive or ambush their enemies, to slaughter prisoners of war, and to wipe entire communities off the map. Greek actions in battle, too, seem altogether less noble and restrained than what has often been suggested. This is where a better sense of Greek tactical ideals should provide vital new insight. The findings of the 'heretics' may prompt us to wonder to what extent Greek military thinking was really defined by idealistic limitations – but a better question might be to what extent ideals and pragmatism were mutually exclusive in Greek tactical thought.

Despite the great reach of 'heretic' scholarship, analysis of this aspect of the subject has remained very limited. Much evidence has been presented to question orthodox views on battle, campaign and war; but there is as yet no treatment of tactical thought that takes the implications of those facts into account. In this respect there still seems to be only the orthodoxy, plus a series of suggested exceptions.[8]

The peculiar origins of the 'orthodox' system of beliefs are therefore of crucial importance for us to understand how we have come to think the way we do about Greek tactics. The traditional view of Greek tactical development has a very long pedigree, and even a brief overview will be instructive of how certain concepts and ideas have taken on a life of their own. In this introduction, I hope to show through the example of the battle of Leuktra that there are problems with the orthodox version of the development of Greek tactics and tactical thought that have become inextricably embedded in the discipline. The works of the 'heretics' have not yet managed to change this fact. Any new analysis of Greek military thought will have to start from the beginning.

The Rise of the Orthodox View

The Prussians

Greek warfare has never ceased to fascinate students of history in any period since the fall of the *poleis* to Macedon. The survival of various ancient Greek writings on exclusively military subjects testifies to this. However, as with most aspects of the ancient world, the serious academic study of Greek military history, the critical philological treatment of the texts as well as the systematic analysis of the evidence, began with a group of German scholars writing from the middle of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Their works are the origin of the field's oldest theories and reconstructions.[9] They provided the foundation upon which all later scholarship, consciously or unconsciously, was built.

[8] No comprehensive study of Greek tactical thought has appeared since Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, although relevant points have been recently made in Wheeler, 'Battle', and Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*'.
[9] Rüstow/Köchly; Droysen; Bauer; Lammert, 'Taktik'; Kromayer/Veith, *Antike Schlachtfelder* I-IV; Delbrück; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*.

In what follows I will refer to this group collectively as 'the Prussians'. This is not strictly accurate; while many of them were born in Prussia, most of their writings were published in the days of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. But the word has appropriate connotations. For the purposes of this study it simply cannot be overemphasised that these authors were, by and large, military men.[10] Both Rüstow and Veith were retired high-ranking army officers. Delbrück, author of a three-volume history of 'the Art of War', was the personal tutor of a Prussian prince. Lammert was drafted for the Franco-Prussian War; Droysen volunteered for it. Kromayer insisted it would be impossible for anyone to understand Greek warfare without thorough knowledge of both the source material and the actual business of war.[11] Rüstow and Köchly explicitly meant for their work to be instructive not just to historians and philologists, but to soldiers most of all.[12]

Their mindset is reflected in their works. These authors understood Greek warfare primarily as one form, one expression, of the timeless realities of war. Casual analogies with Prussian practice abound.[13] They were used to visualise equipment and tactics, to provide comparative cases of specific battle plans and troop types, and to build arguments where information from the sources was lacking. Prussian standards served to reconstruct anything from possible running distances to the course of whole campaigns – Delbrück's advice for the struggling student was 'to study Clausewitz, again and again only Clausewitz, until he has understood Thucydides'.[14]

True to their backgrounds, these authors' main interest was battle. Several of them openly admitted they were ignorant of naval affairs; they consequently decided to ignore these. Chapters on siege warfare – if any were offered – served chiefly to stress how little the Greeks understood of it. Of all these scholars only Rüstow and

[10] The notable exception is A. Bauer, an Austrian, who seems to have devoted his life to teaching history.
[11] Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 16; their four-volume collection on ancient battlefields was dedicated to none other than the architect of German strategy for World War I, Count von Schlieffen.
[12] Rüstow/Köchly, iii-iv, ix.
[13] Rüstow/Köchly, 9, 14, 21, 27, 44, 102, 108, 113, 131, 134, 150, 152, 163; Lammert, 'Taktik', 4, 6 n.1, 9 n.7, 12, 13 n.1; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 11, 60-61, 68, 71, 77, 81, 317-318, 326-328; Delbrück, 10, 37, 52-55, 65-69, 74; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 212-215.
[14] Delbrück, 116. The question whether any of these analogies were valid was in fact only ever raised by Delbrück – probably due to his intention, unlike the others, to write a history 'in the spirit of Leopold Ranke': xiv, 48-49, 96, 161. Wheeler ('Introduction', xxvi) saw Delbrück as 'the first historian to apply the principles of historicism to military history'.

Köchly paid serious attention to the earliest origins of warfare in Greece, and its connection to the development of state and society.[15] Thus the subject was ruthlessly cut down to the elements that held their attention; presented in seemingly immutable order, these were weaponry, troop types, unit drill and tactical developments.

Inevitably, their interpretation of these elements was heavily informed by their professional military focus. They based their assumptions on file width and marching formations on their own army experience. Several of them insisted on describing in exhaustive detail what is known of Greek unit drill and formation evolutions.[16] Even though they could not establish any clear connection between the various forms of drill and the way Greek battles were actually fought, they still took formation drill to be of crucial importance – so much so that several of them took the existence of such training in cities other than Sparta for granted, despite the complete absence of evidence.[17] It appears to have been difficult for them to conceive of a warfare so primitive as to lack this feature. The sources would not confirm it, so the sources were put to one side. The Prussians were aware that the depth of the phalanx differed according to circumstance, but Rüstow and Köchly asserted that it must have had a standard depth of eight ranks; the execution of formation evolutions demanded it. All known alternative depths were therefore dismissed. Delbrück protested that the standard of eight ranks was 'arbitrary' – no such standard was ever established by the Greeks – but even he conceded in the end that eight ranks must have been the norm.[18]

These authors tended to describe ancient battles in the terms of the contemporary military academy – terms like 'battalion', 'defensive wing' and 'concentration of force'. In this way it was demonstrated how the Greeks 'had already mastered all the fundamental concepts of waging war' as early as the battle

[15] Rüstow/Köchly, 5-56, 72-103.
[16] Rüstow/Köchly, 104-117, 120-128, 183-189; Droysen, 39-47, 49-54; Bauer, 328-331; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 79-82; *Schlachtfelder* I, 20-22.
[17] The burden of evidence is explicitly flouted by Rüstow and Köchly (127), who claim that Spartan drill, 'as we may plainly assume', must have existed throughout Greece. Bauer (348-349), Lammert ('Taktik', 11-13, 25) and Kromayer and Veith (*Heerwesen*, 79) agreed, though the notion was disputed by Droysen (36). For a discussion of training, see Chapter 1 below.
[18] Rüstow/Köchly, 118-120; Droysen, 91; Delbrück, 31-32, 149; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 237 n.1; *Heerwesen*, 29. This subject is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 below.

of Marathon.[19] While all authors agreed that light troops and horsemen proved decisively effective against hoplites in several notable clashes, they still tended to dismiss the actions of these troops as 'of no meaning whatsoever' because the proper (that is, *modern*) tactics for their use in open battle could not be discerned in the sources.[20] There was a clear desire to see the standards of then-current military theory reflected in the ancient world – nowhere more poignantly illustrated than in Rüstow and Köchly's honest attempt to reconstruct the textbook deployment of chariots and infantry in Homer.[21]

It was on this basis that the Prussians defined their concept of Greek warfare. Their military background was not an incidental personal circumstance; it permeated their every thought and theory. This could not fail to influence their view of the development of Greek battle.

In a rare case of general agreement, the authors all divided this development into three distinct phases. The first of these ran from the time of the Persian invasions down to the end of the Peloponnesian War. The Prussians believed the warfare of the Archaic period to be either beyond reconstruction, or to be of a different nature than that of the Classical age; either viewpoint excluded it from their studies of phalanx battle.[22] Neither did they regard the Peloponnesian War itself as a catalyst of tactical change. It taught the Greeks the beginnings of strategy and year-round campaigning, and it triggered an explosion in the use of mercenaries, but strangely it caused no alterations in the basic tactics of battle. It was just another part of the first phase.

This period, then, was the period of 'pure hoplite warfare'.[23] It was envisioned as a time when little could interfere with the parallel deployment and advance of hoplite phalanxes. The Greeks fought only 'small wars of rivalry', in which battles were tests of strength, not attempts at annihilation; the Prussians saw

[19] Delbrück, 77; see also Rüstow/Köchly, 57-62, 126, 144, 160-161; Lammert, 'Taktik', 9; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 7.
[20] Rüstow/Köchly, 52-54, 93, 97, 128-135, 182; Droysen, 94-97 (with quote, 95); Bauer, 327-328; Lammert, 'Taktik', 5-7; Delbrück, 34-37, 71, 108-109, 138-141, 150-152; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 84, 87-92, 94; Beck, 'Delion', 197.
[21] Rüstow/Köchly, 6. They also assumed (131-132) that formation drill must have existed for peltasts since their first appearance. On the subject of Homer, Lammert went much further, suggesting that the epics display tactics of a sophistication that would have put Napoleon to shame: 'Taktik', 1-2.
[22] Rüstow/Köchly, 30-31, 45-56; Droysen, 91; Delbrück, 1-2; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 22.
[23] Rüstow/Köchly, 142.

no evidence of combined operations or pursuit.[24] There was no manoeuvre; light troops and cavalry played no part or cancelled each other out; the clash of hoplites decided the battle. In Lammert's view, Greek warfare was governed by 'single-mindedness, prejudice and templates' – egalitarian armies 'wrestled with each other like two athletes without any tricks or feints'. Droysen and Delbrück appear to have chafed at this simplified overall picture, but they did not offer any alternative models.[25] All authors contributed to the construction of the 'template', the 'typical' hoplite battle: a step-by-step account of phalanx fighting, seen as the central feature of Greek war.[26]

This account is a peculiar creature. Several of the Prussians acknowledged that units within a phalanx had a reasonable degree of autonomy, that the deployment and depth of the phalanx could vary, and that generals must have made plans in advance – yet when they turned to describing the typical battle these notions went out the window.[27] The phalanx was a single homogenous force. Its best troops were always on the right. Both phalanxes drew to the right as they advanced; both right wings consequently outflanked and routed the troops stationed over against them. After this, the two victorious right wings turned to confront each other, and it was this *second* clash that really decided the battle.

Such a second encounter is only known from the battle of Koroneia, and Xenophon himself considered this event strikingly unique. Yet the Prussians built their entire model of phalanx warfare on the notion that every single hoplite battle was resolved in this way.[28] This is another blatant imposition on the sources. Perhaps the only explanation for it is that the template demands it; if the initial clash resulted in partial victories for both sides, it follows that some kind of continuation must have occurred in order to establish the 'real' winner. This is therefore assumed in spite of the ancients' actual accounts. In the process the Prussians enshrined Pausanias' assertion that the Spartans did not pursue routed enemies because they were afraid to

[24] Rüstow/Köchly, 80, 144-145; Droysen, 93-94; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 85 (with quote).
[25] Lammert, 'Taktik', 11, 21; Droysen, 92 n.1; Delbrück, 107, 111-112, 117.
[26] Rüstow/Köchly, 143-145; Droysen, 91-94; Bauer, 326-328; Lammert, 'Taktik', 20; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 70-72; Delbrück, 107; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 84-85.
[27] Compare Rüstow/Köchly, 142-143 and 178-179; see also Droysen, 92 n.1; Lammert, 'Taktik', 18-20; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 83-84, 86.
[28] Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.16; contrast Rüstow/Köchly, 178-179; Droysen, 93; Delbrück, 107; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 84-85.

lose their cohesion; it gave a neat tactical rationale for the perceived Greek habit of allowing beaten enemies to flee.[29] The rule was by necessity made to apply to all Greeks. Only a phalanx that maintained close order after the first encounter could win the day.

Why did the Prussians define Greek battle as such a restricted affair? It has been noted that contrary evidence was often acknowledged, but then suppressed even within the same work. The authors' astounding knowledge of Greek texts and their extensive reconstructions of actual battles did not lead them to reconsider their model, despite the fact that there is little in the sources to confirm it. This was not out of respect for some perceived Greek method; Delbrück stressed not only that their tactics had glaring weaknesses, but that the Greeks themselves were aware of it.[30] Pupils of Clausewitz could hardly be brought to admire a form of warfare in which neither side appeared willing or able to decisively destroy the other. I would suggest instead that the Prussians *intended* to reduce Greek warfare to a minimum set of standard forms, a generalisation that seemed to accommodate all the evidence, even if it matched none. This ideal type was necessary to illuminate the impact of two great revolutions – the second and third phase in the development of hoplite tactics.

The second phase was marked by the Ten Thousand's return to Greece. The story of this mercenary army is packed with innovations; it shows a hoplite phalanx subdivided into small, flexible units, supplemented by missile troops and horsemen, together forming a combined-arms force responding to its desperate situation with an apparently unprecedented readiness to depart from tradition. The Prussians credited Xenophon with the invention of supporting flank guards for the phalanx, tactical mobility, reserve units, even 'manipular tactics' – all the elements of the later Macedonian and Roman ways of war. Clearly these new methods embodied a potential overthrow of the old ways of hoplite armies in battle. Yet they did not catch on in Greece. The Prussians believed the reason was simple: these irregular tactics

[29] Paus. 4.8.11. The pursuit of routed enemies will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
[30] Delbrück, 107; for further criticism of hoplite warfare, see Droysen, 101; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 11; *Heerwesen*, 94.

would have been ineffective against an advancing phalanx. They had no place in wars of Greek against Greek.[31]

In their view, the real problem holding back the development of Greek warfare was the fact that there was no satisfactory way of subverting the template of phalanx battle. Since phalanx battle was Greek warfare's central truth, Xenophon's tactics, however brilliant, altered nothing. When the tactics of hoplite battle were finally changed, this marked the beginning of the third phase – the final stage of development, the tactical revolution. Its champion was Epameinondas. To him we will return.

The English

The works of the Prussians were soon supplemented by some important studies published in Britain. The foundation of these studies clearly lay in the scholarship described above. Yet they stood out for the very important reason that they attempted to *explain* the peculiarities of Greek warfare that earlier scholars had identified. The supposed 'paradox' of Greek warfare was put into words for the first time: how did a limited, heavy-infantry-based form of fighting come to define warfare in a country as ill-suited for it as Greece?[32]

The key figure of this scholarship was G.B. Grundy. He appears to have adopted the Prussians' template of phalanx battle wholesale. In his view even the most deviant battles were actually examples of the common type, in which only hoplites counted, the best of these were always on the right, and tactics amounted to no more than marching forth and breaking through. Wars were 'short and sharp' and fought only by the citizen militia; light troops and cavalry were utterly irrelevant at least until the Peloponnesian War, and even then they struggled to have any impact on open battle.

What is of interest here is the explanations Grundy offered for this model of limited war. Modern readers might not put much stock by his belief that Greeks were

[31] Rüstow/Köchly, 154-158; Droysen, 47-48; Delbrück, 138-139.
[32] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 242-246; Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, 10; Adcock, *Art of War*, 6-7.

racially predisposed to hoplite warfare,[33] but many of his other suggestions have since become a staple of the discipline; '[k]nowledge from (…) Grundy is incorporated into contemporary scholarship far more than is formally cited.'[34] His argument rested first of all on technology. Hoplite equipment was extremely heavy; therefore the fully equipped hoplite was practically immobile. This reduced his field of operations exclusively to open plains and his tactics exclusively to the frontal assault. Grundy believed hoplites were unsuited for manoeuvre or sieges – their effectiveness lay in bringing their sheer size and mass to bear. With Lammert, he argued that the hoplite was 'absolutely dependent' on the phalanx to function. It is from him that we have inherited the image of phalanx fighting as 'a scrummage at the Rugby game of football'.[35]

The weaknesses of such a clumsy warrior are obvious: he is vulnerable to attacks by light troops and cannot overcome fortifications – and the landscape of Greece seems to invite precisely these two forms of warfare. It puzzled Grundy that Greek missile troops and cavalry nevertheless appeared to be either ineffective or non-existent, and that the Greeks continued to display only the most basic grasp of siegecraft. This prompted him to describe Greek warfare as 'one of the most paradoxical phenomena in history'.[36] How could simple hoplite battle so dominate warfare when better alternatives existed?

His answer had the great merit of going beyond the military sphere. Greek campaigns, he argued, were aimed against enemy farmland; no community could afford to have its farmland devastated. Therefore, when invaded, a city-state would call out its hoplites to act as a literal human wall. They could only fight on plains, but only the plains mattered; as a line from mountain to mountain, they could not be outflanked, and from the front their closed phalanx was indestructible. It was the best possible defence the Greeks could devise.[37] To this view Gomme added the frequently rehearsed argument that the obvious alternative of guarding the passes to

[33] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 259-262. To Grundy (4-7), all of Greek history was a story of 'racial decay'; the 'superior race' failed to take its 'racial responsibilities' when it left its great civilising mission to Philip and Alexander.
[34] Hanson, 'Modern Historiography', 8 n.7.
[35] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 244, 267-269, 273, 290; Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, 10; Lammert, 'Taktik', 12. The rugby analogy persists despite Fraser, 'Phalanx-Scrimmage', 15-16.
[36] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 242.
[37] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 246-249, 253, 255.

the plains was not open to the Greeks; they had neither the money to support such garrisons nor the desire to arm and train the poor for the purpose.[38]

But was his question fundamentally the right one to ask? Like the Prussians, Grundy acknowledged that light troops were repeatedly used to devastating effect against hoplites. He pointed out the impact of well-handled horsemen and argued that cavalry would inevitably wipe out any force of infantry not equipped with firearms. He even noted the hoplites' preoccupation with outflanking, 'the great theory of Greek tactics throughout the [fifth] century' – an observation that flew in the face of his own contention that these warriors had no skill for manoeuvre, and one he therefore took care to suppress.[39] He believed that, despite their cost, mercenaries quickly rose to prominence during the Peloponnesian War, offering city-states the possibility of waging long campaigns with specialist troops. Parke's great work on mercenaries written in this period stressed that actually the profession was 'of immemorial antiquity' in Greece, and only saw a brief decline in the fifth century.[40] In fact, Grundy showed a general tendency to ascribe all tactical developments to the effect of the Peloponnesian War – a theory the Prussians, as we have seen, explicitly did not accept. They recognised plenty in Herodotos to disprove that Demosthenes taught Greece how to fight.[41]

With this in mind we may conclude that Grundy's paradox was to a large extent self-inflicted. His inspired efforts to explain a model based on a very selective use of the evidence displayed the same problems the Prussians had run into. Again we find examples from nineteenth-century warfare used as evidence for the ancient world.[42] Again we find self-censorship where the thrust of an argument clearly pointed away from the author's basic assumptions. It is difficult to understand why

[38] Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, 12-15; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 3-5; Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 22, 24; Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 98-99; Krentz, 'War', 167. The theory of the passes tends to be treated as a running controversy, but it seems that despite Xenophon's endorsement (*Mem.* 3.5.25-27) only De Ste. Croix (*Peloponnesian War*, 190-195) has ever made the case in favour. The most balanced assessment is Hanson, *Warfare and Agriculture*, 88-102.

[39] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 266, 270, 272, 276-280. Greeks feared a flank attack, he argued, but they would not perform one, afraid to expose their own flank in the process. Which was first – the chicken or the egg?

[40] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 258-259, 264 (echoing Droysen, 74-75, and Delbrück, 137); Parke, *Mercenary Soldiers*, 3-23.

[41] Compare Grundy, *Thucydides*, 259, 272, 274, 276; Delbrück, 121. Rüstow/Köchly (142) instead gave this honour to Xenophon. Oddly enough, Grundy himself insisted (*Thucycides*, 255) that the battle of Marathon 'could only have been carried out by a well-trained force'.

[42] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 268, 273, 278-279.

Grundy should have followed the professionally informed Prussian interpretation so closely; perhaps part of the answer lies in his insistence on the invincibility and world-conquering potential of the hoplite.[43] His solution to his paradox can be described in some sense as a justification: it served to explain, not the ancient evidence, but the template of limited phalanx battle.

The theories mentioned here on the development of Greek tactics were effectively summarised after the Second World War by F.E. Adcock, another English scholar, in a short work on 'the Greek and Macedonian Art of War'. Of course, as a printed collection of lectures, the book provided little scope for the exploration of new ideas, but its loyalty to the views and methods of earlier scholars is striking, and surely contributed greatly to their spread across the English-speaking world. Every aspect of the conceptualisation found in the Prussians was echoed. Greek warfare was again declared to be the domain of hoplites, fighting fair and open battles on level ground, pressed to defend their farmlands in a 'mass duel'; the decision of this clash was seen as final, removing any need for pursuit. Light troops and cavalry were again declared to be useless. Like several of the Prussians, Adcock stressed the limitations of phalanx tactics that were the result of its members' lack of training; hoplites crashed together in masses eight ranks deep, without plans, manoeuvres, or reserves, until Epameinondas appeared on the scene.[44] Adcock showed the same lack of acknowledgement of Greek chase and ambush, the same self-censorship that listed evidence of major cavalry victories but followed them up with the statement that cavalry saw 'few important successes'.[45] Once again there was a corpus of analogies with early modern military practice, in this case primarily drawn from the deeds of such British leaders as Nelson and Wellington.[46]

Thus, despite Parke fleshing out a particular aspect of Greek warfare that seemed to go against the Prussian model of hoplite-dominated decisive battle, it was the model that ended up in the textbooks – now substantially reinforced by Grundy and Gomme's theories as to why this form of fighting dominated Classical Greek

[43] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 7, 255; see above, n.33.
[44] Adcock, *Art of War*, 7, 9-10, 14, 25, 41, 49, 77, 79, 84; Greek campaigns were defined (82) as 'a walking tour ending in a combat'. For hoplite amateurism, see Droysen, 36-37; Delbrück, 107.
[45] Adcock, *Art of War*, 49; similarly, missile troops were declared to be 'as lightweight as their weapons' (16).
[46] Adcock, *Art of War*, 7, 12, 34, 45, 52, 71, 83-92.

warfare. Advances in strategy were fixed onto the Peloponnesian War; battle tactics were still taken to be in deadlock until finally Epameinondas changed the rules.

The Americans

From the 1960s and 1970s onwards, when leading French historians turned primarily to the social and religious aspects of Greek warfare,[47] the baton of purely military history was picked up by a number of American scholars. These men have defined the modern features of the field. Their works were and are applauded for their insight, erudition and accessibility; they continue to be the default reference works on the nature and development of Greek military theory and tactics.[48] It was not until the early years of the new millennium that their theories were seriously challenged.

When it was published in 1970, J.K. Anderson's work on fourth-century tactics did much to revive the study of this particular field. It was also, in many ways, more 'Prussian' than the Prussians. Where they had confessed that battle was simply their own preferred subject, Anderson declared the Greeks themselves to be obsessed with it, at the expense of strategy, skirmish and siege.[49] On the very first page are the two famous ancient passages that supposedly describe the limits the Greeks imposed on warfare; these lines have become utterly ingrained in the discipline and are frequently cited at length despite their doubtful context and veracity.[50] The Prussians' doubts about the training and abilities of the phalanx were brushed aside with the unqualified statement that all hoplites 'must have been' drilled – followed by another elaborate study of Greek formation evolutions. Yet even Anderson was compelled to acknowledge the important triumphs of lighter troops – thereby forcefully contradicting his own contention that 'it was still by pitched battles that wars were won, and hoplites, not peltasts, won the pitched battles.'[51] The template still defied clear confirmation from the sources; Anderson again chose to restate it.

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[47] The defining works being the volume edited by Vernant, *Problèmes de la Guerre*; Garlan, *Guerre*; Lonis, *Guerre et Religion*; Ducrey, *Guerre et Guerrier*.
[48] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*; Pritchett I-V; Hanson, *Western Way*; Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites*; Ober, 'Rules of War'.
[49] Compare Delbrück, xiv; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 6-9, 42.
[50] Hdt. 7.9β.1; Polyb. 13.3.2-8; for a discussion of the value of these passages, see Chapter 2 below.
[51] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 42, 94-110, 111.

Pritchett, who saw Anderson's work as supplementary to his own, made an invaluable contribution to the discipline by collecting and collating all the evidence related to Greek war; but, given the massive scale of this task, it is not surprising that little room was left for him to confront existing interpretations. The result is best demonstrated by an example. Pritchett listed all the known depths of the phalanx, and in the process revived Kromayer and Veith's comment that it should not be regarded as a monolithic force of fixed size. Yet he still accepted Rüstow and Köchly's assertion that its standard depth was eight – apparently unaware of why these authors had decided there should be a standard depth at all.[52]

With the works of V.D. Hanson, finally, the Prussians' model of hoplite battle reached its highest form. All doubts about its centrality to Greek warfare were removed. The 'formalized ritual' suggested by the Prussians was given both cultural and physical justification. Grundy's explanations were incorporated and expanded upon to form an overall picture in which battle, while brutal and bloody in itself, was rigidly restricted to the clash of tight phalanxes of heavily armed middling farmer-hoplites. Hanson repeated Grundy's point that these battles were 'often identically replayed' because they were the best known way to resolve rivalries and border disputes between states: short, simple, uniquely decisive battles fought on the only ground that mattered and the only ground where hoplites were able to fight.[53] There was no pursuit; cities and civilians were spared the ordeal of war. The 'formal conventions' of Greek warfare thus reduced it precisely and exclusively to the template of phalanx battle. Ober brought this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion by establishing exactly what rules restricted the conduct of Greeks in war. In his view, these rules were imposed on Greek society to maintain 'the hoplite-dominated socio-military system' – rooting tactics and military thought firmly in the perceived societal structure. It was not until the Peloponnesian War – again – that all the rules came to be broken.[54]

Hanson's work expanded Grundy's attempt to provide a social and economic basis for the model of phalanx battle into a comprehensive system of studies and

[52] Pritchett I, 137-143; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 83-84, 86; Rüstow/Köchly, 118.
[53] Hanson, *Western Way*, xv, 5, 16, 25, 198; 'Ideology', 3-4; 'When, Where and Why?', 203-222.
[54] Ober, 'Rules of War', 56, 66-70; Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 205, 212, 213. The notion of the Peloponnesian War as a catalyst has spread widely: see for example Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 11; Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter*, 94; Wheeler, '*Hoplomachoi*', 5; Hunt, *Slaves*, 53; Mann, *Militär*, 16.

assumptions about the stratification of Greek society, their civic and military ideology, and the power of particular interest groups to assert complete authority over the manner of fighting across the whole of the Greek world. Yet it seems that all awareness of the peculiar origins of the model itself was lost. In the works of Hanson there is little to no acknowledgement of alternative forms of fighting, and no justification for the neglect of subjects like sieges or naval warfare. Until such things are attested in the sources, it is argued, hoplite supremacy must have defined three whole centuries of wars – despite the fact that most of these wars have left little trace in the sources.[55] Since the reasons behind limited war were taken to be economic, social and moral in nature, the omnipresence of the model could be assumed; no other form of fighting would have emerged from ancient Greece. Having thus placed the existing framework of interpretations on an unshakeable foundation, Hanson eventually fell into a great historiographical irony. In a discussion of earlier scholarship he criticised the Prussians for their failure to accept their own model: 'the very notion of a brief collision of uniformly armed equals – little tactics, little strategy, little generalship – must have disturbed these men, and so they did their best to reinvent Greek warfare into something that it was not.'[56]

However, at the same time, new ideas also started to appear. P. Krentz, another American and a close contemporary of Hanson, has become one of the most influential of the 'heretics' mentioned above. It is with him that criticism of Greek warfare's traditional characterisation began to gather momentum.

His more recent studies on surprise and deception and his direct response to Ober's rules of Greek war have led, in combination with the works of Dayton and – in the international academic community – Rawlings and Van Wees, to an almost complete reimagining of Greek warfare. The evidence that contradicted the Prussian model, and that had consequently been underappreciated, manipulated, or simply ignored, has been used to challenge many aspects of the model itself. Many of its contradictions and failings have come to light. The cultural and economic

[55] Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 222. Hanson himself has admitted that there is not a single known description of a battle matching what he believes to be the universal standard of Greek warfare for three hundred years: *Western Way*, 37.
[56] Hanson, 'Ideology', 10.

justifications devised for the model since Grundy have drawn similar criticism,[57] and much of it can no longer be taken for granted. While Hanson's elaborated version of the traditional view still holds sway in non-specialist treatments, and even in many expert studies, it is now increasingly difficult to write such works without acknowledgement of the ongoing debate.

All this suggests that questions about battle tactics and military thinking also require new answers. But there is no alternative analysis of Greek tactical thought. To this day, despite all the material that has either been given new emphasis or has first been treated in earnest, few authors dwell on the professional Prussian interpretation of one of the most central elements of Greek war. Treatments of tactical options and ingenuity continue to be expressed in terms of deviations from the Prussian model.[58] The brief analysis above has hopefully made clear exactly how fundamental and influential this model has been. Its enduring effect is nowhere better demonstrated than in the case of the elusive battle of Leuktra.

A Revolution in Battle Tactics

The Genius

The battle of Leuktra was fought in 371 in the plain of Boiotia between the Theban-led Boiotian army and the Spartan-led forces of the Peloponnesian League. Four accounts of the battle survive in ancient sources; all have their particular shortcomings, but they allow some reconstruction of the events.[59] What is beyond dispute is that the Thebans massed their own hoplites fifty ranks deep on their left flank and used this column to attack the Spartan contingent head-on. The Spartan king Kleombrotos was killed and his army was routed, leaving four hundred Spartiates dead. Sparta never recovered from the blow.

[57] For example, Foxhall has recently shown ('"Hoplite Revolution"', 212, 215-217) that there is no archaeological evidence for the existence of a broad class of small farmers until the end of the Archaic period.
[58] For recent reassertions of the Prussian model, see for instance Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 41-42; Hutchinson, *Attrition*, viii-ix; Lee, 'Land Warfare', 391-392; Buckler, 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 663.
[59] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9-15; Diod. 15.55-56; Plut. *Pel.* 23; Paus. 9.13.3-12.

For this achievement, the Theban general Epameinondas won great glory and fame in antiquity[60] – and the songs of praise continue to this day. Droysen, echoing Rüstow and Köchly, saw him as the herald of 'a new age in battle tactics' representing 'the pinnacle of what could be achieved.' Bauer referred to him as 'the greatest tactician of the Greeks' and 'the instructor of the age to come'; Kromayer and Veith called him 'the first of the great military thinkers'. Similarly, Adcock saw in him 'the greatest tactical innovator that the Greek city-states ever produced', Lazenby wrote of 'a general of genius', and Hammond quoted Snodgrass referring to him as 'the most masterly of all hoplite commanders'. Anderson credited him with a 'revolution' in generalship; Cawkwell too noted a 'revolutionary change in the conception of warfare' brought about by 'the novel methods of genius'. Cartledge called it a 'paradigm shift', a display of 'wise policy as well as brilliant generalship' in which Epameinondas 'outgeneralled Kleombrotos all along the line'. The late Sir John Keegan himself considered him an 'outstanding general'.[61] Few figures from ancient history have inspired such lasting admiration.

What exactly did Epameinondas do to earn this scholarly praise? The political consequences of his victory are well known. What is of greater importance here is that the Prussians shared the belief – faithfully repeated by Adcock – that it was Epameinondas who perfected phalanx tactics and brought Greek warfare to its highest stage of development. They deployed the terminology of the military academy to explain what his great innovation entailed. His deep formation turned the traditional Greek 'parallel battle' of straight phalanxes into a 'battle of the flanks'; he divided his army into an offensive and a defensive wing and concentrated his attack on a single point.[62]

[60] Plut. *Pel.* 24, 29.2, 29.6; Diod. 15.52.7, 55.1, 56.3, 88.3.

[61] Droysen, 97-101; Rüstow/Köchly, 142, 171-182; Bauer, 411; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 57, 76-85, 165; *Heerwesen*, 93-95, 155; Adcock, *Art of War*, 24; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 40; Hammond, 'What may Philip have Learnt?', 357 n.7.; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 205; Cawkwell, 'Epaminondas and Thebes', 261, 263; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 239-240, 380; Keegan, *Warfare*, 258.

[62] Rüstow/Köchly, 179-180; Bauer, 410-411; Lammert, 'Taktik', 24-25; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 57; *Heerwesen*, 94; *Schlachtfelder* IV, 323; Adcock, *Art of War*, 89. The view of Leuktra as the dawn of a new age in battle tactics was repeated recently by Chrissanthos, *Warfare*, 71.

The Theories

That, however, was as far as their common opinion went. Even on the innovative value of the supposed 'battle of the flanks' they could not agree. The earlier writers asserted that it was simply the concentration of force on one wing that made Epameinondas' tactics unique; Bauer and Delbrück pointed out in response that this concentration itself was not new – the Thebans had used a deep phalanx at Delion – but that its position on the left made it revolutionary. This was disputed in turn by Kromayer and Veith, who insisted that Epameinondas would have placed his best troops wherever the situation demanded it, which just happened to be on the left both at Leuktra and later at Mantineia. In their view the real innovation was his intention to attack the enemy where they were weak and exposed, to break through the line with one wing, and to encircle and capture the entire enemy army.[63] All authors clearly had trouble expressing what it was exactly that Epameinondas did, and what place his actions had in the development of Greek warfare as a whole.

On the subject of the battle's actual course, the Prussians' disagreement was complete. There was endless debate over which ancient account should be the basis of modern reconstructions. Despite their apparent loathing of Plutarch, Rüstow and Köchly attempted to synthesize his account with those of Xenophon and Diodoros, while Droysen favoured Plutarch altogether. This approach was rejected by Delbrück, who preferred to focus on Xenophon. Wolter, contributing to Kromayer and Veith, advised caution in the use of Xenophon's supposedly apologetic pro-Spartan writings and forcefully dismissed Plutarch's version as 'factually impossible'; in his view only Diodoros offered a sensible account of the battle plan.[64]

Since the ancient sources vary greatly in focus and content, it should be no surprise that the battle narratives resulting from these inquiries were vastly different – even if the bare essentials outlined above were generally accepted. Plutarch places great emphasis on the role of the elite Theban Sacred Band, yet it is not clear to anyone where exactly these troops were deployed, or what they did when the fighting began. Xenophon neglects to mention any Spartan manoeuvres and fails

[63] Rüstow/Köchly, 179-180; Droysen, 97-100; Bauer, 408-409; Delbrück, 155-156 (for a similar view see Lammert, 'Taktik', 24-26); Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 77-80.
[64] Rüstow/Köchly, xv (on the worthlessness of Plutarch), 172-175; Droysen, 97-100; Delbrück, 156-157; Wolter, 'Leuktra', 301-308.

to explain how the Thebans protected their flanks, leaving the battle looking like a crude frontal assault. Diodoros meanwhile introduces a Spartan crescent formation, a concept unknown to the Classical world. Xenophon alone speaks of horsemen; in their attempts to create a plausible picture, some of the Prussians argued that these fought in front of the phalanx, others that it covered the wings. Some believed in a direct strike by the Thebans, others thought they were moving at an angle when they charged. Some took issue with the advance 'in echelon' by which Epameinondas is said to have protected his weak right wing; they did not agree on whether untrained citizen hoplites would have been capable of such a manoeuvre, and wondered whether the words might simply refer to a 'leaning back' which the weaker flank of a phalanx would naturally be doing anyway.[65] After eighty years of German scholarship, none of these matters were resolved. Later writers had little respect for the efforts of their predecessors: Wolter mocked Delbrück for his tendency to hypothesize obstructive terrain features, and called Rüstow and Köchly's version a 'contamination'.[66] Yet it is doubtful whether his own account, relying mainly on the weight of the Thebans' charge, would have convinced them in turn.

Scholars of more recent times have been no more successful. A long list of alternative accounts has served only to increase the confusion. Wheeler has noted that Leuktra, 'along with Marathon, are the two most controversial battles of Classical Greek history'; Pritchett commented with a hint of exasperation that 'there are more reconstructions of Leuktra than of any other Greek battle, and the end is not in sight.'[67] When Anderson revived the debate on what happened at the battle, he did so in a fashion true to the earlier examples, by first explaining why he favoured one ancient account over the others – in his case, that of Plutarch – and then putting forth a reconstruction that has since been accepted by practically no one.[68]

Both trends persisted over the following decades. On the subject of sources, most authors agreed with Wolter and Anderson that Xenophon's 'one-sided apologia' was of little value; Cartledge, Buckler, Lazenby and Tuplin found Diodoros similarly

[65] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 59-60, 84-85; Delbrück, 161; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 314; *Heerwesen*, 84-85, 94; Lammert, 'Taktik', 1-2, 26-27.
[66] Wolter, 'Leuktra', 308-311.
[67] Wheeler, 'Introduction', lxiv; Pritchett IV, 54 n.159.
[68] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 198-220. His suggested solution to the problem of the Sacred Band's role had been dismissed earlier by Delbrück (156-157) and Wolter ('Leuktra', 303-306) and was dismissed again by Buckler ('Plutarch on Leuktra', 77) and Devine ('ΕΜΒΟΛΟΝ', 206-207).

useless, but Hammond believed him to offer the more credible account. Against these views Devine and Hanson reasserted the importance of Xenophon, the only authority not writing hundreds of years after the event.[69] Thus we may return to the beginning.

As for reconstructions, to the existing multiplicity Cawkwell added his interpretation of the deep Theban phalanx as a reserve behind the front line; this notion, offered earlier by Fraser, was rejected in detail by Holladay, Lazenby, and Hanson.[70] Buckler and Lazenby suggested that the Spartans attempted a complicated countermarch to extend their right wing, but more recent publications by Cartledge, DeVoto and Hutchinson subscribe instead to the more conservative outward march in column presented by Anderson.[71] Devine and Hammond separately launched new interpretations based on hints in the sources that the Thebans used a wedge formation; the former envisioned a vast infantry wedge with the Sacred Band at the tip, while the latter suggested that the entire Theban army advanced in column at an angle across the battlefield, colliding with the Spartans like a spear thrust only six files wide. Yet this reading of the Greek in Xenophon was already decisively dismissed earlier by Bauer and Buckler. Again, no other authors appear to have gotten on board with these theories.[72] Despite Delbrück's and Wolter's contention that the deployment of cavalry in front of the phalanx at Leuktra was nothing new, several recent authors have argued that it was highly unusual; Cawkwell, Cartledge and Buckler even saw it as the earliest example of the tactical coordination of infantry and horsemen in Greek history.[73] Yet Hanson disagreed, pointing to the evidence of the battle of Delion, as Delbrück had done before. Spence, in his work on the effectiveness of cavalry in Greek warfare, also seems to have sided with

[69] Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 258; Buckler, 'Plutarch on Leuktra', 75-76 (and more recently 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 658); Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 156; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 236-238; Tuplin, 'Leuctra Campaign', 84 n.42; Hammond, 'What may Philip have Learnt?', 359 (with quote); Devine, 'ΕΜΒΟΛΟΝ', 205; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 204-205.

[70] Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 261; Fraser, 'Phalanx-Scrimmage', 16; Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 96 n.13; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 156-157; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 196-197.

[71] Buckler, 'Plutarch on Leuktra', 84-86; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 158-159; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 211-213; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 240; DeVoto, 'Leuktra', 117 n.8; Hutchinson, G., *Xenophon*, 171. Even more recently, Buckler reasserted his position: see 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 661.

[72] Devine, 'ΕΜΒΟΛΟΝ', 207-210; Hammond, 'What may Philip have Learnt?', 360 (possibly inspired by Lammert, 'Taktik', 27); Bauer, 409; Buckler, 'Epameinondas and the *Embolon*'.

[73] Delbrück, 155-156; Wolter, 'Leuktra', 311-312; compare Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 262; Buckler, '*Embolon*', 142-143; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 159; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 239; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 107; Buckler, 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 666.

Wolter on this.[74] Lazenby questioned Plutarch's notion of a refused right wing, sharing Kromayer and Veith's doubt whether untrained citizen hoplites had the skill to perform an ordered retreat, and suggesting instead that the Theban right simply did not move; Hanson outright dismissed the advance in echelon, pointing out that it had no purpose in the event and that Xenophon does not mention it at all. However, in his more recent overview of Greek military developments, Van Wees returned to the notion that the Theban victory was largely due to this supposed slanted advance.[75] In short, the experts are no closer to a common opinion now than they were in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Basics

None of this is meant to demonstrate scholarly incompetence. If anything it merely shows how even the greatest minds of the discipline can be frustrated by the imperfect nature of the evidence. No matter how often the subject is tackled, Leuktra remains, in the words of Wheeler, 'an engagement of which the tactical details swirl in uncertainty'.[76] But it does raise one question, as simple as it is essential: on what grounds has Epameinondas been declared a military genius?

The ancients themselves are of little help here. It has been noted that Xenophon does not record much of the battle plans; in fact he does not even mention Epameinondas in relation to Leuktra. He only praises him later on, for his handling of the Peloponnesian campaign of 362 and the second battle of Mantineia.[77] If the admiration of modern scholars applied to the general's whole career, it would be easier to find justification in this contemporary work – but he is usually praised specifically for his tactics at Leuktra, and for this we get nothing from Xenophon. Of the later authors, Diodoros and Plutarch were no experts on matters of war; their likely sources for fourth-century history, Ephoros and Kallisthenes, were heavily

[74] Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 196; Spence, *Cavalry*, 154-155.
[75] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 59-60; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 157 (a view shared by Rusch [*Sparta at War*, 198]); Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 197-199; compare Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 196 (repeated in Mann, *Militär*, 20, and Toalster, *Feldherren*, 149-150).
[76] Wheeler, 'Battle', 217; he makes little effort in his chapter to grapple with this uncertainty. Others are no more sure of themselves: 'infinite caution must be taken when attempting to reconstruct the manoeuvres of this battle' (Hutchinson, *Xenophon*, 166).
[77] Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.8-11 and 19-25.

criticised by Polybios for their poor grasp of military affairs.[78] Furthermore, their understanding of the battle is likely to have been influenced by works on tactical theory the Classical Greeks would not have dreamed of.[79] In any case, their actual praise is only in general terms; a victory over Sparta was a source of great glory regardless of how it was won. Similarly, Pausanias calls Leuktra the most famous battle of Greek against Greek, but his account of the battle contains not a word about tactics.[80] Frontinus, who must have known more about this than Diodoros or Plutarch, adds only fragments, and most of these are to do with how Epameinondas inspired his men. He tells us nothing about the manoeuvres he used.[81] Arrian does mention them, but like Diodoros he suggests the use of an infantry formation otherwise unknown from the period, and one of which the existence and usefulness in general has been questioned.[82] Polyainos comes closest to a judgment of tactics. He writes how Epameinondas likened his plan to crushing the head of a snake. Sadly the line may well be apocryphal, but even if authentic it points to nothing more than the massed column on the left of which Xenophon already tells us.[83] No ancient work gives clear evidence of a tactical revolution at Leuktra – only a political one.

At the very least, though, we can be certain of the basics. No authority has disputed that the Thebans deployed a phalanx fifty shields deep, placed it on their left wing, and thereby won the victory. Is this in itself enough to justify Epameinondas' magnificent reputation?

As shown above, the Prussians appear to have thought so. They regarded the Theban general's 'battle of the flanks' as a brilliant departure from tradition. This idea is widely acknowledged in modern writings; scholars may disagree on the details of the battle's course, but the very deep Theban formation alone is often

[78] Polyb. 12.17-22; 12.25f.3-5; see also Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 204-205. Polybios himself (12.25f.4) notes only that Leuktra was a 'simple battle'.
[79] Anderson made the keen observation that Diodoros' account of Leuktra neatly mirrors his contemporary Onasander's passage on how to counter a crescent formation: *Theory and Practice*, 207-208; compare Diod. 15.55.2-56.2 and Onasander, *Strategikos* 21.8-9. Since no such formation is known from the Classical period, it seems likely that much of Diodoros' battle narrative was made up. Hammond, however, disagrees: 'What may Philip have Learnt?', 357-358.
[80] Paus. 9.13.11.
[81] Front. *Strat.* 1.11.6, 1.11.16, 1.12.5-7, 4.2.6. Epameinondas is notably absent from the chapter about deployment for battle (2.3.1-24).
[82] Arr. *Takt.* 11.2; Wheeler, 'Legion as Phalanx'; contrast Devine, 'ΕΜΒΟΛΟΝ', 205, 211, who argued that Epameinondas invented it.
[83] Polyain. *Strat.* 2.3.15; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12, 7.5.24. For doubts about the authenticity of the Stratagems, see Parke, *Mercenary Soldiers*, 77-79; Fraser, 'Phalanx-Scrimmage', 16; McKechnie, 'Mercenary Troops', 301.

considered exceptional, and its deployment on the left flank has increasingly come to be regarded as a truly groundbreaking innovation. Subverting a long history of typical phalanx battle, Epameinondas shocked the Greek world by matching strength against strength, crushing the helpless, petrified Spartans arrayed against him: '[t]here was nothing in past military experience to prepare Kleombrotos for Epameinondas' innovations.'[84]

But was that really the case? It bears repeating that the Prussians failed to agree on a clear distinction between the tactics of Epameinondas and those that had gone before. When we look more closely at what they believed made Theban tactics so extraordinary, we find that each of their positions raises questions.

As we have seen, Rüstow and Köchly claimed that Epameinondas revolutionised warfare by focusing his offensive strength on one flank. However, this contradicts their belief that hoplite battle traditionally hinged on elite troops stationed on the right. The Prussians seem confident of a fundamental difference between earlier hoplite battles and the 'battle of the flanks', but in practice both appear to have been decided by massing the finest men in the army on one end of the line. The Thebans may have held back the other end, the Spartans tended to sacrifice it; either way it had no impact on the course of the fight. Only the actions of the core contingent mattered. How could the Theban concentration of force count as an innovation if they used it to defeat the equally concentrated Spartans on one wing of the enemy phalanx?[85]

In fact, even the concept of concentrating force in a deep phalanx was hardly new, as several of the Prussians and many later scholars have pointed out.[86] Grundy therefore categorised Leuktra as merely the purest example of the general Greek

[84] Buckler, 'Plutarch on Leuktra', 88.
[85] Wolter ('Leuktra', 315-316) rightly stresses the durability of the twelve-deep Spartan formation. Echeverría ('*Taktikē Technē*', 68) pointed out that, regardless of the deployment of the hoplites, phalanx battles were only really lost when the leading unit was broken – a point actually made by Rüstow and Köchly (144).
[86] Lammert ('Taktik', 25) and Kromayer (*Schlachtfelder* I, 83) regarded the deep formation as 'the Boeotian national tactic'. See also Delbrück, 117, 155-156; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 93-94; Pritchett I, 141, 143; Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 260-261; Buckler, '*Embolon*', 142; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 156; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 240; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 193; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 185; Wheeler, 'Battle', 218; Chrissanthos, *Warfare*, 69; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 57-58.

habit of massing the best troops on one wing.[87] This certainly seems more in line with the evidence. It may be argued that the fifty-deep Theban formation was at least unusual; but since the phalanx had no fixed depth and any number of ranks was theoretically possible, why should any particular number be seen as an innovation?[88]

Bauer, Lammert and Delbrück assigned greater importance to the column's location than to its depth. They saw its deployment on the left flank as a clean break with all Greek tradition – a belief that has since become a fixture of scholarship on the subject.[89] Some scholars have even argued that it went against the fundamental tenets of Greek culture itself.[90] But Epameinondas was not the first to deploy his best troops on the left. Authors so intimately aware of the course of battles such as Plataia, Olpai and the Nemea could easily have pointed this out.[91] Instead there are hints in modern scholarship at a conscious desire to gloss over the fact; Cartledge called Leuktra 'the first recorded occasion on which the left had been privileged over the right wing *in a regular hoplite pitched battle in open country*' – a clear example of the 'no true Scotsman' fallacy.[92] Wheeler similarly dismissed earlier cases on the puzzling pretext that they were not on the same scale as Leuktra, while Buckler claimed that all earlier examples happened by accident.[93] With their acknowledgement of earlier uses of very deep formations, why have historians failed also to acknowledge earlier occurrences of armies led from the left?

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[87] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 270.

[88] Notable battles involving 'deviant' numbers of hoplite ranks before Leuktra include Delion (Thuc. 4.93.4-5), First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.68.2-3) and the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18-19). Spartan-led troops used a very deep formation at Peiraieus (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34) and attempted to form one at Kerkyra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.21-22). The relevant evidence is gathered in Pritchett I, 135-137. For more on this see Chapter 3 below.

[89] Adcock, *Art of War*, 25; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 203; the deployment has been called, among other things, a 'revolutionary change' (Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 261), a 'brilliant innovation' (Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 162) and a 'paradigm shift' (Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 240).

[90] Arguments for the supposed tactical consequences of a Greek cultural prejudice against the left have appeared in Lévêcque/Vidal-Naquet, 'Epaminondas Pythagoricien', and Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 69-70. DeVoto ('Leuktra', 116-117 n.7), however, called this a 'fanciful notion'; Buckler ('Epameinondas and Pythagoreanism') has dismissed the theory of Lévêcque and Vidal-Naquet in detail.

[91] Hdt. 9.28-30, 9.46-47; Thuc. 3.107.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18; see also the battle of Solygeia (Thuc. 4.43.1-4) and the assaults on Stratos (Thuc. 2.81.3) and Olynthos (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40). Hanson ('Epameinondas', 194) is the only one to have pointed at some of these as predecessors to Leuktra. For detailed discussion of this matter, see Chapter 3 below.

[92] Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 240 (my emphasis). The definition excludes nearly all Classical Greek engagements.

[93] Wheeler, 'Battle', 218; Buckler, 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 663.

Finally, there is Kromayer and Veith's belief that Epameinondas won his battles by attacking with all his might at the enemy's weakest point. This is frankly baffling in light of the fact that he directly confronted the Spartan contingent in both his major battles. There was no stronger point to be found in all of Greece. Surely, according to the traditional model of hoplite battle, breaking through a weak segment of the enemy line with one's best troops is exactly what Greek generals had been doing *before* Epameinondas decided to reverse his deployment. The claim is very difficult to understand, and it may simply have been another occasion on which the authors' desire to see the principles of the modern military academy reflected in the ancients proved stronger than their adherence to the evidence.

To their credit, Kromayer and Veith later adapted their view, claiming that the true brilliance of Theban tactics lay in deploying their best troops against the enemy's *best*. Epameinondas left the hard fighting to those most suited for it, intending to 'crush the head of the snake' instead of leaving victory to chance.[94] This fits much more neatly into their conceptualisation of phalanx battle before Leuktra. If we assume, as they did, that the template held true, then a deliberate attempt to rearrange the phalanx according to the needs of the battle must signal a great leap forward in military thought. This view on the tactics of Leuktra has gained wide currency among scholars, to the point where a focus on the game-changing impact of 'strength against strength' has become something of a cliché.[95] Adding to its popularity is the fact that it serves as a useful catch-all for those who wish to avoid attempting a reconstruction of their own and addressing the philological and historiographical problems outlined above. However, again, it was not an innovation. This is demonstrated by the earlier examples of elite units on the left; the whole premise of that deployment was always, and often explicitly, to counter strong troops on the enemy right. This concept is seen in Greek warfare as early as the battle of Salamis. The deployment of the contingents in a phalanx was never set in stone; a string of battle narratives from the Persian Wars onwards bears this out.[96] It is simply

[94] Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 93-94.
[95] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 270-271; Adcock, *Art of War*, 76; Buckler, 'Plutarch on Leuktra', 88; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 157; Hutchinson, *Xenophon*, 234-235; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 107; Chrissanthos, *Warfare*, 69. It was for this reason that Keegan (*Warfare*, 369) equated Epameinondas' tactics with *Blitzkrieg*.
[96] Hdt. 8.85.1 (with Diod. 11.81.1-2), 9.46-47; Thuc. 3.107.4, 4.43.1-4, 6.67.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 5.2.40.

impossible to attribute to Epameinondas a tactical concept without which entire chapters of Herodotos and Thucydides no longer make sense.

The Problem

All this seems to leave little of Epameinondas' great achievement. What is certain was not new; of the rest we cannot be certain. Nevertheless, after a century and a half of debate over what really happened at Leuktra, the Theban general's status as the greatest of hoplite commanders is so firmly entrenched in the discipline that he is treated with something approaching veneration. Lammert claimed his brilliance was of such magnitude that the Greeks themselves did not understand it. Lendon, who believed nothing very new happened at Leuktra, still called him 'the great Epaminondas', apparently by default. In his article rejecting the idea of a Theban wedge formation, Buckler lamented his 'regrettable duty to deprive Epameinondas of a military invention'; he took care to stress that the Theban general's other innovations remained 'undeniable'. In his final contribution to the Leuktra controversy, published posthumously in 2013, Buckler asserted in true Prussian fashion that those who denied Epameinondas' genius simply failed to understand it.[97]

The result is a reversal of cause and effect. There is a belief that Epameinondas must have done something that fundamentally changed the military theory of his day; it is this belief that guides the efforts of scholars. Anderson claimed there simply had to be 'more to the Theban victory than the old device of massing men to a great depth on one wing'. Holladay was willing to take it for granted that 'Epaminondas, being a military genius, fought in a more sophisticated way than conventional generals'. In his brilliant article on Leuktra, Hanson pointed out that Xenophon's account of the battle is much maligned and rarely used by historians precisely because it *does not* suggest the Thebans did anything spectacularly new.[98]

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[97] Lammert, 'Taktik', 29; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 83; Buckler, '*Embolon*', 134, 142 (for a similar apology see Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 323); Buckler, 'Epaminondas at Leuctra', 662, 669.

[98] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 203; Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 96-97; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 191.

This is the heart of the matter. Everyone admires Epameinondas, but no one remembers why. The key to the riddle is sought in the sources, and scholars continue to produce a never-ending series of interpretations, but these end up disputed, mocked, or forgotten; no obvious solution exists. This may well be because these studies do not address the real problem. I would like to suggest three interrelated causes behind the worship of Epameinondas, none of which have much to do with the actual accounts of the fight: firstly the problem of praise from the ancients, secondly the old faults of works on battle and war, and thirdly the crippling effect of the field's academic tradition.

First is the fact that, as has already been noted, Epameinondas was lauded by the ancients as one of the greatest commanders of the Greeks. Diodoros and Plutarch both relate how his victory gave him enormous prestige, boosting his political influence to unimagined heights; the later collectors of stratagems credited him with a long list of ingenious tricks and ploys. Parke noted that he was 'the only serious rival of Iphicrates as the hero figuring in popular tradition'.[99] The fact that Iphikrates still looms larger both in Xenophon and in later sources should give us pause;[100] yet any student of the ancients will inevitably come away with the impression that Epameinondas, for whatever reason, was considered a great general in the centuries after his death. What if the Prussians, and others following in their wake, asked themselves not what happened at Leuktra, but what it was that made the Theban general great?

This potential teleological bias is strongly encouraged by the second issue – the traditional focus of military history on great leaders and tactical change. The Prussians meant for their studies to instruct, and this required some emphasis on the deeds of worthy examples. The sources appeared to suggest one. It has already been pointed out that these scholars happily regarded ancient and modern warfare as essentially the same – and the greatest hero of Prussia just happened to have won his most glorious victories by deploying in echelon and fighting a 'battle of the flanks'.

[99] Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers*, 78-79, though perhaps he may have overlooked Agesilaos. Few other Greek commanders appear to have inspired any admiration in modern writers, though there are some who praise Xenophon (Rüstow/Köchly, 158), Demosthenes (Lammert, 'Taktik', 16), Brasidas (examples collected in Wylie, 'Brasidas', 76), or Pagondas (Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 107).

[100] Plutarch (*Mor.* 194a) tells the story that someone once asked Epameinondas who was the best general: Epameinondas, Chabrias, or Iphikrates? The Theban replied, 'it is hard to tell while we are alive.'

Thus Epameinondas came to be seen as a forerunner of Frederick the Great, an early master of similar tactics, his victorious battles against the Spartans at times explicitly equated with the Prussian king's exploits at Rossbach and Leuthen. We may be tempted to dismiss this as rampant Prussian chauvinism, but Adcock, true to form, chose to revive the analogy – claiming the Theban general 'ranks with or above' Frederick the Great among history's greatest commanders.[101]

Military history of the last few decades might be less concerned with the achievements of great men, but it has its own peculiarities. There is a tendency to categorise military developments in a series of 'revolutions', as well as a keen interest in 'face-of-battle' studies that focus on combat as the beating heart of war.[102] Both only reinforce the status of Epameinondas. Greek military history is an account of many minor changes and developments over time, of which the first signs are often unrecorded or seen without proving decisive. This has none of the glamour of a single moment in which tradition is swept aside. The Spartan Eurylochos actually appears to us as the first general to place his best hoplites on the left, but he was defeated; the Corinthians, who tried the method earlier at sea, were also beaten.[103] Epameinondas, however, crushed the vaunted Spartan hoplites in open battle – something no other commander in the Classical period had managed to do. With the centrality of hoplite battle so firmly established in the common view of Greek war, it is not difficult to conclude that only this new kind of hoplite battle could signal a meaningful change. The liberal use of the word 'revolution' and its derivatives in the scholarship could be taken to reveal this perspective, as could the downplaying of earlier examples of the same tactics being used in lesser fights. It is just not a proper military revolution unless the new means are used to overthrow the old order in a single, magnificent clash.

Yet the third reason is by far the most important. It both facilitates and necessitates the others. Since the earliest studies it has been assumed that Greek warfare was once limited; that wars were decided by single battles, and battles adhered unfailingly to the model of phalanx battle. These are assumptions, and they

[101] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 27-28 and elsewhere; Adcock, *Art of War*, 25. It should be noted that Delbrück (161) dismissed these ideas as 'pseudo-academic false comparisons'.
[102] Hanson, 'Historiography', 16-18; Wheeler, 'Battle', 187.
[103] Thuc. 3.107-108; 1.48.4; the use of the same tactic at Salamis (Hdt. 8.85.1; Diod. 11.18.1-2) is the earliest known example.

do not work, as the many tactical examples anticipating Leuktra clearly show.[104] Yet they determine what scholars expect to find. Further arguments and conclusions continue to be based, not on the evidence, but on these assumptions – creating theories that consist of 'stacking assumptions', one idea built on another. If Greek warfare is hoplite battle, and hoplite battle is rigidly prescribed, then Greek warfare cannot easily change. The form of war followed from the values of the warriors; they would not conceive of another. The Spartans presided over an immutable, ritual, repetitive tactical system of which they were the undisputed champions.

These assumptions *require* a military genius. They *require* a revolution. Any casual subversion of protocol can only be a minor aberration; change must take the form of a wholesale dismissal of tradition, a clear statement that the rules no longer apply. Leuktra provides this statement. It was not the first to deviate, but it deviated more; Epameinondas dispensed with tradition and mighty Sparta was defeated. This, at last, was the tactical revolution. When all the evidence from Greek accounts of battles is disregarded in favour of a fabricated 'typical' engagement in which the same depth was always chosen and the same flank always strong, changes to this system simply *must* have been the work of a great mind, a free-thinking master of war, deservedly praised by the ancients – one who ought to be canonised among the most brilliant generals of all time.

It remains only to make the evidence conform to this obvious truth.

Ideals and Pragmatism in Greek Military Thought

It is a cliché of historians of a hotly debated topic to say that they will 'go back to the sources' and find the answers others have failed to find. I would certainly not presume to have a greater affinity with the evidence than the great German classicists, or such towering figures of more recent scholarship as Pritchett or Hanson. But I hope I have been able to demonstrate that a good deal of information has been deliberately left by the wayside. It was found, acknowledged, even described in detail, but it was denied its consequences – not out of stupidity or sloth,

[104] See above, n.88, n.91, n.96; Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 27-31; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 81-83; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 81-85, 90.

but out of a conscious or unconscious desire to justify and contribute to an inherited system of beliefs about what Greek warfare was like.

Several recent scholars have turned to this neglected evidence and used it to construct a new picture of Greek war. Works like Krentz' article on the ubiquitous use of deception show exactly how much has sometimes been discarded in favour of how little, and how thoroughly this can affect our views. Many aspects of the subject have been given their due attention in the last few decades, fleshing out our awareness of things that have long been treated more casually, from the uses of cavalry to the fate of cities that fell. All this invites a new study of Greek tactical thought. Such thought, after all, was the result of what Greeks believed they could and should do in war. If our fundamental assumptions on this subject are proven wrong, an even more fundamental question must be asked. If not honour, or fairness, or the hoplite ethic, what determined the choices of Greeks on the battlefield?

This question can only be answered from the ground up – gaining an impression from the sources themselves, instead of working back from what has been assumed. Therefore I will not eschew the cliché; like all the 'heretics', I will go back to the sources. The historical accounts of Herodotos, Thucydides and Xenophon reveal aspects of tactical thought whenever they describe any part of a battle – from the choice of ground to the composition of the army and the way in which the battle was won. Sometimes they comment explicitly on tactics; at other times, their unadorned treatment speaks volumes about what they considered normal and acceptable. Other sources, too, feature tactical thought in one form or another, and I have tried to use as wide a range as possible of literary material where it provides useful insights. Most important of all, however, are the military treatises that begin to appear for the first time during the fourth century – Xenophon's essays, his *Kyroupaideia*, and the sole surviving work of Aineias the Tactician. These works were meant to expound tactical thought. They represent the first forays into proper military theory. Wherever possible, I will discuss their advice, and consider whether they confirm or subvert the picture of military practice we find elsewhere.

The first chapter will lay the groundwork for the remainder of this study by examining the question of training – a fundamental aspect of Greek tactical thought that is nevertheless often glossed over in modern scholarship. The conclusions of this

chapter will inform the analysis of the ensuing ones, which follow a more predictable thematic sequence. The second chapter deals with the choice of the time and the place of battle; the third, with army composition and deployment; the fourth, with command and battle tactics; the fifth, with the rout, the pursuit, and the rituals at the end of battle. Under each heading, the essential questions are the same. What were the options Greek commanders felt were available to them, and on what basis did they decide? Did the range of options change, and why did it do so? Through these questions, I mean to arrive at a new characterisation of Greek tactical thought, and an assessment of the principles that defined it.

Many aspects of Greek warfare lie outside the range of this research. Constraints of time and space have forced me to neglect siege warfare; I can say little with confidence about naval warfare, except that broadly similar principles and developments as those found in land warfare seem to apply. Despite the undeniable importance of skirmishes, ambushes, siege assaults, and positional warfare in passes and fortresses, my research is focused almost entirely on open battle. This is in part due to its relevance – tactical thought is revealed in greatest detail in surviving accounts of battles – and in part precisely because it has been of such interest to previous scholars. The Prussian template and its association with a host of supposed moral rules provides an excellent foil for my own work.

Great weight has been given in modern scholarship to the ideals of the Greeks; the hoplite ethic set the rules of war. But we have seen that many of these rules have been constructed, and find no echo in the writings of the Greeks. We have seen how recent authors have questioned every aspect of the moral system itself, from the social group it was based in to the very principles it encompassed. Were the military ideals of the Greeks really what scholars have assumed they were? If not, what ideals *did* give shape to Greek tactical thought? Was it defined by an ongoing struggle between principled restraint and the bitter practicalities of battle? Perhaps the underpinnings of tactical thought went further than this straightforward bilateral tension. In what follows, I will argue that the stifling Prussian model of hoplite battle has caused many important aspects of Greek tactics to be misunderstood – including even the purpose of battle itself. The intention was not just to win a symbolic victory in a contest of hoplites, but to destroy the enemy in a ruthless display of military power. The question was how this could be achieved at minimal risk to the militia

army that city-states relied on to fight their battles. This was the context of Greek tactical thought – and this helps us to understand the intricacies of a tactical system which may occasionally have seemed limited, even primitive, but which aimed for victory by any available means, and nothing less than that.

1. 'Improvisers in Soldiering': Training for War

'If the general indulges his troops but cannot use them,
If he loves them but cannot command them,
If his troops are disorderly and he cannot control them,
They are like spoiled children, and they are useless.'
- Sūn Zi, *The Art of War,* 10.21

The Question

The matter of military training is a hidden controversy in the study of Greek warfare. It has not generated anything like the storm of polemical articles and book chapters on the nature of hoplite combat; instead, scholars rarely discuss it at length, and often take their own conclusions for granted. In this way, the question has been quietly dividing scholars into distinct camps for over a century. Were the militias of Classical Greece trained in weapon proficiency and drilled to function collectively in the manner of later heavy infantry? Some think they were.[1] Others think not.[2] The matter is practically never treated as controversial; only Ridley decided to go on the offensive, attacking the view that the Greeks lacked training, 'as some moderns foolishly imply'.[3] The lines are not usually so openly drawn. Most recent scholarship may lean towards the opinion that at least the training of hoplites tended to be very limited, but no clear consensus has yet been reached.[4]

In the chapters that follow, I will assume that the militia of Greek city-states, Spartans aside, received no official training of any kind until the final years of the Classical period. They were taught neither to use their weapons with skill nor to

[1] Rüstow/Köchly, 127; Lammert, 'Taktik', 11-13, 25; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 269; Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, 14-15, 22; Detienne, 'Phalange', 123; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 84-91; Pritchett II, 208 n.3; Hodkinson, 'Social Order', 256; Hanson, *Western Way*, 10 (although this is contradicted at 31-32); Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 207-208.
[2] Droysen, 36; Delbrück, 107; Adcock, *Art of War*, 3-4; Whatley, 'Reconstructing Marathon', 125, 133; Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 16-17; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 12 n.39; Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 69; Goldsworthy, 'Othismos', 8-10; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 89-93; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 90; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 46; Mann, *Militär*, 11-12.
[3] Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 529-531, 548. Three decades earlier, Gomme (*Historical Commentary*, 14) remarked that he was 'not among those who think the hoplite armies only half-trained militia', suggesting an ongoing debate in his day – but he did not offer any indication as to who 'those' were.
[4] Lendon (*Soldiers and Ghosts*, 92, 108-114) and Hunt ('Military Forces', 133-137) have presented a developmental model, in which military training became more and more prevalent in the course of the Classical period. This seems too optimistic, however, and misinterprets the role of small standing forces such as the Sacred Band (discussed in Chapter 4 below).

march and fight in formation. It is important to highlight this at the outset, since it is fundamental to the model of hoplite battle I will try to piece together. This chapter serves to explain why I take this position, and why – in my interpretation at least – the sources do not make sense if we do not.

As noted, there are two aspects to the question: formation drill and weapon proficiency. Since these aspects tend to be surprisingly distinct, not only in modern scholarship, but also in the sources, I will discuss them separately before commenting more broadly on the absence of training in Greek warfare.

Good Order

The concept of formation drill is crucial for those who wish to see Greek armies as collections of tactical units capable of sophisticated manoeuvres; without a clear and well-maintained system of ranks and files, such manoeuvres cannot be attempted. An army cannot wheel, face about or move from column into line and back if it has not been previously trained to do so. Unit drill is therefore sometimes taken for granted even by those who assume a generally low level of Greek training for war.[5] This view is apparently justified by frequent references in Greek sources to the dangers of disorder in the ranks.[6]

Yet there is no evidence for formation drill anywhere outside of Sparta. Nothing explicitly suggests that it existed. We find no sign of any communal efforts to instil proper discipline in the whole of the hoplite body until the *ephebeia* was made mandatory at Athens, probably around 336/5. Some scholars have tried to push back this date and thereby impose training upon the hoplites of earlier times, but since the ephebes were not compensated for their service until after the reforms of the 330s, the *ephebeia* is unlikely to have been anything but an elite phenomenon before this time.[7] In any case, this is only Athens – and even in late fourth-century

[5] Delbrück, 138-139; Ducrey, *Guerre et Guerrier*, 69-72; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 171-172; Crowley, *Psychology*, 42.
[6] Gathered in Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle', 58-59; Luginbill, 'Othismos', 57; Crowley, *Psychology*, 49-53.
[7] For this controversy see for instance Jaeger, *Paideia* III, 250; Pélékidis, *Éphébie Attique*, 19-49, 71-79; Siewert, 'Ephebic Oath', 102; Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 531-534; Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 237-239, 241; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 94-95; Chankowski, *Éphébie Hellénistique*, 114-129; Crowley, *Psychology*, 25-26; Pritchard, *Sport, Democracy and War*, 214-215.

Athens we do not hear of collective drill reviews, sham battles, or training sessions in preparation for imminent campaigns.[8]

Scholars are always happy to suggest that a silence like this is the result of ancient authors skipping over the mundane and the obvious. In this case, however, we have grounds to assume that it reflects a genuine absence. For one thing, Plato says so: after describing what he regards as a necessary training programme, he states categorically that 'no such group training or competition now exists in any city-state at all, except maybe in a very small way'.[9] For another, when Xenophon offers a detailed description of the formation evolutions mastered by the Spartans in his *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*, he does so with the obvious goal of pitching it to his audience. Xenophon openly addresses 'the common view' that Spartan infantry drill is extremely complex; after a brief outline of its features, he notes that 'none of this is difficult to learn', and emphasises that the Spartans easily carry out manoeuvres 'that the *hoplomachoi* consider very difficult'.[10] The *hoplomachoi*, drillmasters for hire, are presented here as amateurs and charlatans; they pretend to be highly skilled in some sophisticated military art, but they fail to instruct their pupils in even the most basic formation evolutions. Xenophon's message is, rather, that what many Greeks took to be an arcane and complicated system could actually be readily adopted – presumably by following his instructions. What would be the point of such advice, however, if other city-states already subjected their hoplites to drill programmes of their own?[11]

It is clear from Xenophon's other works that his enthusiastic account of Spartan formation drill in this particular treatise was no casual rhetorical experiment.

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[8] Hoplite reviews are known from the late fifth century (see for example Thuc. 6.96.3; Xen. *An.* 1.2.9; *Hell. Oxy.* 15.1), but nothing suggests that they consisted of anything more than drawing up the troops. The mock charge of the Ten Thousand (Xen. *An.* 1.2.17-18) was Kyros' idea. Xenophon speaks of the public review of cavalry at Athens, but only individuals and their horses were judged; manoeuvres were only held for show (*Hipparch.* 1.13-15; 3.6-14). Sham battles are suggested as a form of training by both Xenophon (*Hipparch.* 3.11-13; *Kyr.* 2.3.17-20) and Plato (*Laws* 830d-831a), but probably never seen in practice (the only evidence is an oblique reference in Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.20, regarding the Athenian cavalry, and the late testimony of Polyainos (*Strat.* 3.9.32) that Iphikrates had his men carry out sham operations of every kind). As for collective training, we find it in Diodoros (for instance at 16.5.4), but not in earlier sources; the Theban zeal for training described by Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.23) goes no further than individual enthusiasm.

[9] Pl. *Laws* 831b. The exception may be a reference to the small standing forces that existed in a number of Greek city-states by Plato's time (see Chapter 4 below). We may reasonably assume that these units were trained, but we have no evidence as to the nature of that training.

[10] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.5-8.

[11] Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 69; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 90.

Where Thucydides largely described the Spartan army as a strange creature whose methods were a marvel to ordinary Greeks,[12] Xenophon instead seems to have gone out of his way to stress the benefits of their system of unit organisation and training. The infantry drill outlined in his treatise on Sparta also features heavily in the *Kyroupaideia*; his manual for the Athenian cavalry commander advocates a similar system for horsemen. He describes in detail the nature and uses of the picked units of the Ten Thousand, which had been drawn up according to the Spartan model of unit subdivision. He even interrupts the flow of his *Hellenika* to deliver a precise account of Spartan formation evolutions during king Agesilaos' campaign of 370 – seizing the opportunity to showcase the application of these evolutions in practice.[13] Clearly, his prolonged exposure to Spartan military practice had revealed to him an approach to unit tactics that he felt to be vastly superior to the methods of other Greeks; in his writings, he did all he could to persuade others to adopt it. Needless to say, neither Thucydides' awe nor Xenophon's evangelism make any sense if unit drill was common in Classical Greece.

What was it that got these authors so excited? Xenophon's comments on the straightforwardness of Spartan formation drill do not seem to be all that exaggerated – the system really does appear to have been surprisingly simple. Thucydides notes that Spartan hoplite formations were composed of smaller units that were divided into yet smaller units, each led by its own commander; the result was an army that consisted, in Thucydides' famous phrase, of 'leaders leading leaders'.[14] In battle, nearly the entire front rank of a Spartan phalanx consisted of officers. As Xenophon points out, this meant that the men in the other ranks had to learn nothing more than to follow the man in front of them. The elaborate officer hierarchy meant that orders could be passed down quickly from commander to subordinate all the way along the front rank; the advance of the officers would set the whole phalanx in motion.[15] In the *Kyroupaideia*, Xenophon gives another account of how this works. The army in question is meant to be Persian, but its drill

[12] During his account of First Mantineia, Thucydides repeatedly stresses the unique habits of the Spartans in battle: their officer hierarchy (5.66.3-4; Anderson, 'Cleon', 3; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 89), their omission of pre-battle speeches (5.69.2), their slow advance to the sound of flutes (5.70), and the fact that they hardly pursued their fleeing enemies (5.73.4).
[13] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.1.26-29, 2.2.6-10, 2.3.21-22, 3.3.57; *Hipparch.* 2; *An.* 3.4.21-23; *Hell.* 6.5.18-19.
[14] 'ἄρχοντες ἀρχόντων': Thuc. 5.66.3-4.
[15] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.4-6.

is clearly inspired by Spartan practice – 'all should focus only on this: to follow the man in front'.[16] All tactical manoeuvres followed from this principle.

The fact that such a basic notion of unit drill was worth advertising to the wider Greek world is revealing; Xenophon's insistence that, contrary to popular belief, it was easy to learn, speaks volumes about the level of organisation and training of hoplite formations outside Sparta.[17] Yet the passages describing unit drill can also tell us a good deal about the nature and the limitations of that drill even where it existed.

The account of unit training in the *Kyroupaideia* is particularly interesting here for several reasons. Firstly, it involves the only direct display of unit drill in the whole of Classical Greek literature. The scene is presented as an amusing anecdote – shared between 'Persian' nobles – on the ineptitude of new recruits, and Van Wees may be right to interpret it primarily as a derisive tale of the common man's inability to grasp the methods of military professionals.[18] However, it also betrays a certain sensitivity to the apparent ridiculousness of formation drill to those who are not familiar with it. The recruits do not understand why they should keep their assigned station, or how they should respond to the commands issued by different levels of officers; once these things have been made clear, the recruits take the lesson too literally and follow their unit commander around wherever he goes. Even in Xenophon's imagination, drill did not come naturally to warriors, and its uses were hardly self-evident when it was taken out of the context of military action.

Secondly, the passages demonstrate the haphazard nature of unit training even in this idealised army. Kyros is made to honour and reward particularly diligent officers, inspiring others to follow their example – a major feature of Xenophon's theory of command.[19] This practice suggests, though, that the necessary standards of formation drill for Xenophon's fictional force were neither defined nor enforced. The

[16] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.2.8; for Spartan inspiration for many elements of the *Kyroupaideia*, see Pritchett, 'General', 114; Hunt, *Slavery*, 204 n.98; Christesen, 'Military Reform', 52-53. Anderson (*Theory and Practice*, 98-100) took the passages on training in the *Kyroupaideia* as evidence that unit subdivision and formation drill were common to all Greek armies, but this apparently does not take into account the author and his intentions, or the obvious similarities with practices unique to Sparta.
[17] Krentz, *Marathon*, 62; see also Pritchett II, 230.
[18] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.2.6-10; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 87-88.
[19] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.1.23-24, 2.3.17-24; see also, for example, *An.* 1.9.19; *Hell.* 3.4.16; *Hieron* 9.6; *Hipparch.* 1.24-26; *Kyr.* 6.2.4-6; *Oik.* 21.5-7.

actual level of training depended largely on the officers' attitude to drill and their desire to please the general, rather than on systematic reviews and disciplinary measures. Indeed, Thucydides shows that official standards of drill and deployment did not exist even at Sparta: at First Mantineia the component units of the Spartan army 'were not all drawn up in the same depth, but as each officer wanted' – presumably in accordance with their own ideas about what the situation required.[20] We do not possess a single example of a Greek army commander held accountable for the level of drill of his troops.

It may be argued that this point relies too much on a straight reading of an author whose clear intention was to teach a particular leadership style. Throughout the works of Xenophon we find the conviction that obedience has to be earned rather than obtained by force; it follows that he would not advertise training methods that relied on strict discipline and harsh punishment. Yet Xenophon was himself a veteran and a general, who spent much of his life in the company of mercenary soldiers and Spartans; moreover, he seems to have taken a special interest in the problems of raising military forces to a higher standard.[21] His views on the matter should be taken seriously. The fact that his own soldiers once put him on trial for the beatings he had inflicted on them suggests that the attitudes he wished to impart on his readers were largely the lessons he learned from experience.[22]

Seen in this light, his notion of the ideal general, with its emphasis on leading by example and inspiring willing obedience, offers a crucial insight into the realities of Greek warfare. Several modern scholars have pointed out that most Greeks fiercely resisted any kind of enforced military discipline. Some took their strict generals to court; others physically attacked them. Xenophon complains that his fellow citizens 'glorify looking down on their commanders'; these commanders had practically no legitimate means at their disposal to assert their authority over their troops.[23] The subordination and obedience required for organised warfare seems to have been incompatible with the values of Greek citizen soldiers, whether these

[20] Thuc. 5.68.3.
[21] Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 73-75.
[22] Xen. *An.* 5.8.
[23] Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.16; Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 513-514; Hamel, *Athenian Generals*, 59-63; Hornblower, 'Sticks, Stones and Spartans', 57-61, 72-73; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 108-112; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 74-77; Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 40-41, 95 n.16; Crowley, *Psychology*, 105-107; Rawlings, 'War and Warfare', 13, 20-21.

found their origins in the competitive culture of the leisure class or the egalitarian ethos of radical democracies. Suspicious of any imposed hierarchy, and unwilling to compromise in any way on their status as free men, the militia army refused to be disciplined.

Yet this attitude conflicted with the need for these very men to submit to military authority in wars fought by large citizen armies. The Greeks were well aware of this need:

> 'ἀναρχίας δὲ μεῖζον οὐκ ἔστιν κακόν. αὕτη πόλεις ὄλλυσιν, ἥδ' ἀναστάτους οἴκους τίθησιν, ἥδε συμμάχου δορὸς τροπὰς καταρρήγνυσι'
>
> *'There is no evil worse than disobedience. This destroys cities; this displaces households; this shatters the turns of the allied spear.'*[24]
>
> 'παρασκευαστέον ὅπως εὐπειθεῖς οἱ ἄνδρες ὦσιν: ἄνευ γὰρ τούτου οὔθ' ἵππων ἀγαθῶν οὔθ' ἱππέων ἐπόχων οὔθ' ὅπλων καλῶν ὄφελος οὐδέν.'
>
> *'You must make the men obedient; otherwise neither good horses nor well-seated riders nor beautiful armour are any help at all.'*[25]

How could the obedience of free men be secured? In the *Laws*, Plato briefly lets his thoughts run wild: for the sake of military effectiveness, he argues, individual freedom of action should be utterly extinguished from all aspects of life – both humans and their domesticated animals must live every moment obeying the commands of others. But the actual military laws he goes on to sketch are heavily circumscribed by legal technicalities and allow almost anything except outright desertion.[26] The initial rant perhaps reveals the frustration of those who recognised the fundamental problem, but could find no easy way to solve it. The citizen could not be made to change his nature. Only the Spartans were taught from infancy to

[24] Soph. *Ant.* 672-675. The *Antigone* of course has many complex things to say on the matter of disobedience, but it remains striking that this list of bad effects moves immediately to the military sphere.
[25] Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.7; the sentiment is repeated in *Mem.* 3.3.8, 3.4.8.
[26] Pl. *Laws* 942a-945b.

obey; other Greeks would not adopt their attitudes, and Spartan generals who gave their allies a taste of Spartan discipline won nothing but their wrath.[27]

The solution Xenophon offers is more constructive. Instead of using force, he suggests that a general should *inspire* his men to obey – an approach that left their sense of equality intact. A system of honours and rewards served to entice them, while the general's own example showed them that he knew what he was doing, and that his demands on them were not unfair:

> 'ὃς ἂν μάλιστα εἰδὼς φαίνηται ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν, τούτῳ μάλιστα ἐθέλειν τοὺς ἄλλους πείθεσθαι.'
>
> *'He who appears to know best what should be done – him, above all, the others wish to obey.'*[28]

If a commander wanted his men to train, all he had to do was hone his own skills as a leader and warrior, and show that those who followed his lead would profit from it.

This seems to make the most of a difficult situation – but the implications for the question of training are huge. What Xenophon suggests by the nature of his advice is that Greek armies were not only commonly untrained, but that they *could not be trained* unless a suitably inspiring commander was present. If Greek citizens felt no urge to impress their general, it would be nearly impossible to get them to do his bidding. If they did not care to train, they could not be made to do so.[29] Lendon has pointed out the complete absence in Xenophon of any sense that a general ought to be obeyed simply because he is a general.[30] Military authority was not considered valid as such. Somewhat pathetically, Xenophon suggests the option of individually persuading men to embrace military discipline;[31] perhaps even more revealing is his endorsement of the idea of manipulating mundane activities so that they might

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[27] Hornblower, 'Sticks, Stones and Spartans', 72-74. Plutarch (*Lys.* 15.5) preserves the story that when the Spartan Kallibios struck an Athenian with his staff, his colleague Lysander scolded him, saying that he 'did not know how to rule free men'.

[28] Xen. *Mem.* 3.3.9; see also *Ag.* 6.4; *Hipparch.* 6.4-6.

[29] Xen. *Oik.* 21.4; Xenophon elsewhere offers the example of the Spartan Mnasippos, whose mercenaries resented him – 'the very thing which is least helpful in battle' (*Hell.* 6.2.19).

[30] Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 74-75. Note Xen. *Kyr.* 2.3.8, where men are said to be given honours *because they follow orders*, and Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.13, where Agesilaos considers his own mercenaries under no obligation to endure any hardship for his sake.

[31] Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.18-19 and 22-24; *Mem.* 3.3.10-11; *Oik.* 13.9. Christ (*Bad Citizen*, 42-43, 63) regards it as a feature of Athenian democratic ideology that persuasion was preferred over compulsion even in military affairs.

surreptitiously serve as training.[32] These were the tools a non-Spartan commander was forced to work with.

Generals tended to concentrate instead on invoking the courage of the troops, so that they would fight, perhaps poorly, but bravely. Their efforts were sometimes explicitly linked to the absence of training. In the first funeral oration of the Peloponnesian War, Perikles famously contrasted Spartan training with Athenian courage, claiming that the latter was just as effective in war, and a lot less hard work. The Athenians apparently needed such reassurance.[33] One of the typical ways to boost the morale of the hoplite body was the general's speech before battle[34] – and Thucydides notes that the Spartans did not bother with such a speech, believing it to be no substitute for careful preparation.[35] Again, it seems clear that the Greeks were very aware of what was needed; the militia, however, would not accept it, and so their commander's best hope was their vigorous fighting spirit.

If we were to assume, therefore, that Greek armies were made up of carefully drilled formations, we would not just be making groundless claims – we would be asking the impossible. Led by our own preconceptions about heavy infantry fighting, we would impose upon the Greeks a form of unit training that ran counter to their very idea of what it meant to be a free Greek. Even if a general could persuade them that formation drill served their and the common good, it could still be resisted by all or part of the army as ridiculous, needlessly demanding or bafflingly complex. To attempt to train one's men was to do things the hard way, and we should doubt whether the span of a normal campaign would have given a citizen general the time

[32] Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.27-32 – although the scene concerns naval training, which was generally taken more seriously.
[33] Thuc. 2.39. The statement puzzled Hornblower (*Commentary* I, 303-304), who noted that 'neither [Thucydides] nor Pericles (…) can have thought anything so silly as that effortless superiority could be achieved in land fighting.' I agree – but the funeral oration was surely not the place to remind the Athenians of their shortcomings.
[34] The reality of pre-battle speeches was called into question by Hansen ('Battle Exhortation', 'Little Grey Horse'), who argued they were a physical impossibility and therefore could be no more than a rhetorical fiction invented by historiographers. However, several scholars have rejected his argument in detail (see Pritchett, 'General's Exhortations'; Hornblower, *Commentary* II, 82-83, 396, 442; Clark, 'Battle Exhortation'; Ehrhardt, 'Speeches'; and most comprehensively Pritchett, *Battle Speeches*, 1-80).
[35] Thuc. 5.69.2 – although Xenophon reports a short speech by king Archidamos at the Tearless Battle in 368 (*Hell.* 7.1.30).

to make any significant progress. Few if any had the character, the means, and the opportunity to forge a militia into a well-trained force.[36]

If this is right, we should expect the Greeks to field mob-like militia armies totally incapable of formation evolutions – and these are exactly the sort of armies we find in the sources. Ancient accounts do not imply unit training; in fact, they often suggest that this was precisely what was lacking in the skill set of Greek warriors. As we will see in the chapters below, there is not a single example of a Greek army carrying out any kind of battlefield manoeuvre that might require formation drill, unless that army is led by a Spartan. Scholars who set out to explain the successes of certain forces tend to overestimate the skills needed to achieve them, creating a problem that can only be solved by assuming extensive training;[37] in reality, these problems do not exist. Our sources present a consistent picture. They tell us that Greek militias were untrained, and show them acting like untrained militias. If we assume the phalanx was normally a well-drilled infantry formation, it becomes a lot harder to explain its often crude tactics and unreliable behaviour in battle.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the performance of Greek citizen soldiers is that we can speak of a hoplite formation at all. By the late fifth century, it had become possible for Greek authors to specify the number of ranks in a line of battle; this suggests that heavy infantry was drawn up in a more or less regular grid pattern by this time.[38] We may be tempted to conclude that Greek armies of the Classical period were trained to manoeuvre and fight in carefully ordered formations. However, the mere existence of ranks and files does not automatically imply an elaborate system of unit drill. The counsels of Xenophon, cited above, suggest that deployment and manoeuvre were seen as separate problems; Greek drillmasters may have mastered the former, but the latter remained beyond their reach.

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[36] Pritchett II, 228-229, offers only Iphikrates, Iason of Pherai and Philip of Macedon as non-Spartan examples. It is interesting to note that Iphikrates – the only *polis* citizen of the three – became known as a ruthless disciplinarian in the later tradition; Xenophon gives no indication that this was his actual method.

[37] See for instance Lammert, 'Taktik', 25; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 84; Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 526, 530-534; Hanson, *Western Way*, 136-137; Crowley, *Psychology*, 42-43.

[38] The earliest mention of a certain number of 'shields' as a measure of formation depth is in a fragment of Aristophanes' lost *Babylonians* of 426 (see Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 185); the earliest military engagement for which we are given such details is the battle of Delion in 424 (Thuc. 4.93.4-94.1).

Moreover, the grid pattern deployment itself offered several advantages that justified its introduction as such. Width and depth were essential variables in Greek tactics even in the early days of massed hoplite battle, as Herodotos' account of Marathon makes clear;[39] the introduction of regular ranks and files allowed both to be managed with far greater precision when the army was being drawn up. It also allowed for better estimates of numbers and for the identification of absentees. Krentz has further suggested that the initial establishment of order out of chaos helped boost the morale of the troops.[40] Finally, the grid pattern guaranteed the presence of an unbroken line of shields, a front that – unlike earlier *ad hoc* massed formations – did not present any exploitable weaknesses to enemy hoplites or horsemen. It is in this context that we should see the ancients' noted emphasis on the importance of good order.[41] Crucially, its merits were passive in nature; they did not necessitate the next step of maintaining the formation during the advance. They did not, therefore, require training. Hoplites throughout the Classical period continued to charge into battle at a run, so that their initial order was almost immediately lost.[42] Thucydides found it necessary to explain the Spartan habit of marching to the sound of flutes, saying it served 'not for the sake of the god', but to keep the army from breaking formation, 'as large armies often do when they advance'.[43] No other Greeks had apparently worked out such tricks for themselves.

All sources describing Greek military practice confirm that, throughout the Classical period, citizen armies remained unfamiliar with unit drill and incapable of manoeuvre. The fighting method of ordinary hoplites simply did not require such drill, and we have neither evidence nor reason to suggest it existed. Only the Spartans, raised to follow orders, had moved slightly beyond the simple expedient of forming a long line of troops; as I will show in Chapter 4, their basic system of

[39] Hdt. 6.111-114; for detailed discussion see Chapters 2 and 3 below.
[40] Krentz, 'Continuing the Othismos', 45.
[41] Notably, the passages listed by Crowley in this context (*Psychology*, 49-53) usually concern *preparation* for battle, rather than battle itself. The Syracusans twice abandon their plan to fight a battle when they have trouble forming up (Thuc. 6.98.3; 7.3.3). The Ten Thousand are terrified of being forced to fight before they have a chance to deploy (Xen. *An.* 1.8.1-4), which is what caused the Athenian defeat at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.10.3-8). While Thucydides (6.97.3-4) blames the failure of the Syracusan assault on Epipolai on disorder, the long uphill charge against a prepared and numerically superior enemy was surely doomed to fail either way.
[42] Hanson, *Western Way*, 140-146, 150; Goldsworthy, 'Othismos', 7-8, 14-15; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 95; 'War and Warfare', 21; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 199-202; Krentz, 'Hoplite Hell', 141. This apparently applied even to the well-trained veterans of the Ten Thousand: see Xen. *An.* 1.8.18, 6.5.27.
[43] Thuc. 5.70.

formation drill and the tactical possibilities it offered does much to explain their edge in battle.

Skill at Arms

The matter of weapons training is somewhat more complex. On the one hand, in the context of a dialogue on the merits of physical fitness, Xenophon states outright that 'the city does not publicly train for war'.[44] No evidence exists to contradict him, whether in Athens or elsewhere in the Greek world. On the other hand, unlike formation drill, weapon proficiency could be practiced individually and in private, meaning that a lack of state-sanctioned training does not necessarily imply an untrained militia. In addition, there is the possibility – discussed below – that communal activities like dancing may have contributed to citizens' preparedness for war.

The first question we should be asking, however, is whether the Greeks thought weapons training was necessary at all. Some modern scholars have argued that, at least in the case of hoplites, they did not; they thought of close combat as a natural thing that required no special skill.[45] Becoming a hoplite was simply a matter of dressing up as one. The uses of shield and spear were a matter of pure instinct, so there was little value in trying to make men better at it.

The main evidence cited in support of this view is a scene in Xenophon's *Kyroupaideia,* in which Kyros re-equips his light-armed poor. He gives them swords, wicker shields, and breastplates, in order to make them more effective against an army that vastly outnumbers his own. To forestall their possible misgivings, he tells them that this change in equipment will remove all the differences between the poor and the nobles that derive from the latter's leisure to train; the nobles might be better archers and javelin throwers, he says, but as swordsmen 'how could any of us have an advantage over another except in courage?'[46] This line, of course, is meant only to invoke the soldiers' desire to prove themselves. The implication that close combat

[44] Xen. *Mem.* 3.12.5; see Pritchett II, 217.
[45] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 84-85; Hanson, *Western Way*, 31-32; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 91.
[46] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.1.9-19.

involved no skill should not be taken too seriously.[47] However, later on in the story, one of the men recently re-armed as heavy infantry delivers a long speech explaining how natural his new role feels; he starts out by repeating Kyros' argument that the rearmament is a great equaliser, but he goes on to stress at some length that being a swordsman requires nothing more than having a sword.

> 'μάχαιράν γε μὴν εὐθὺς παιδίον ὢν ἥρπαζον ὅπου ἴδοιμι, οὐδὲ παρ' ἑνὸς οὐδὲ τοῦτο μαθὼν ὅπως δεῖ λαμβάνειν ἢ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως, ὡς ἐγώ φημι. ἐποίουν γοῦν καὶ τοῦτο κωλυόμενος (…) καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία ἔπαιόν γε τῇ μαχαίρᾳ πᾶν ὅ τι δυναίμην λανθάνειν. οὐ γὰρ μόνον φύσει ἦν, ὥσπερ τὸ βαδίζειν καὶ τρέχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡδὺ πρὸς τῷ πεφυκέναι τοῦτο ἐδόκει μοι εἶναι. (…) αὕτη ἡ μάχη καταλείπεται, ἐν ᾗ προθυμίας μᾶλλον ἢ τέχνης ἔργον ἐστί…'
>
> *'Even when I was a boy I used to snatch a* machaira *wherever I saw one, though I swear I had never learned from anyone even how to hold one except by instinct. And I used to do this even though they tried to stop me (...) By Zeus, I used to hack with a* machaira *at everything I could without being caught. For this was not only instinctive, like walking and running, but I thought it was fun as well as natural. (…) Since such a fight awaits us, which is more a matter of spirit than skill…'* [48]

It is this fact which gives him good hopes for victory.

Scholars have been quite happy to regard this as a demonstration of Greek attitudes to hoplite fighting, with little to no acknowledgement of the fact that these men are not hoplites in the sense that we now use the term. Anderson dismissed their wicker shields and curved swords as 'oriental fancy dress' and carried on as if Xenophon were really talking about hoplites.[49] Others seem to have simply assumed that all heavy infantry is the same, and that the actual weapon used is irrelevant.[50] But it is clearly very relevant here – unless we can imagine a Greek child wandering around his parents' house poking things with a spear more than two meters long. The whole point of the scene is to show that *the sword* is a weapon that men instinctively

[47] Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle', 57.
[48] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.3.10-11; the full speech covers 2.3.8-15. I have not translated the word *machaira* to emphasise that it indicates a particular kind of sword – a recurve sabre – which is useless for parrying and thrusting, but extremely effective as a crude slashing weapon (see Xen. *Hipp.* 12.11).
[49] Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 84.
[50] See for example Hunt, *Slaves*, 195.

know how to use. The shields the troops are given are not hoplite shields either: Xenophon repeatedly refers to them as *gerra* rather than *aspides*. Indeed, the speaker claims that the use of his new shield is just an extension of his instinct to throw out his hands to deflect a blow; it is difficult to picture the heavy, double-grip *aspis* being wielded in this way. It is important to recognise the fact that, despite his familiarity with both Greek and Near Eastern heavy infantry, Xenophon deliberately chose to describe a warrior type in this passage that was entirely without parallel in his own world.[51] The swordsmen of Kyros are his invention. If Christesen is right to argue that the *Kyroupaideia* partly served as a suggested programme of military reform at Sparta, we should consider the possibility that Xenophon genuinely meant for the helots to be turned into swordsmen – precisely because it would require less effort to train them. The fact that later on in the story these imaginary warriors are unable to hold their own in battle against heavily-armed Egyptian pikemen shows that Xenophon was neither presenting nor idealising a *generic* infantry type.[52]

The rearmament scenes therefore express no more than a general sense that close combat produced better results with less training than other fighting styles. Whether this counts as a demonstration of hoplite ideology is open to question.[53] Xenophon's description of a fictional warrior type may in fact be a careful attempt to avoid the claim that any man can be a hoplite without any need to train. After all, his ultimate point is to persuade us of the opposite; as we have seen, he takes great care to describe the new infantry's formation drill in detail, and to emphasise the value of that drill at every point. Far from dismissing weapons training as unnecessary, he may have simply regarded it as less important than unit drill for massed heavy infantry. His advice is therefore that the initial focus should be on the latter only.

What other sources support the notion that weapon proficiency was considered unimportant? Some passages suggest that hoplite training did not involve the use of weapons – a revealing indication of Greek attitudes to skill at arms. No

[51] Christesen has claimed ('Military Reform', 63) that Xenophon gives Kyros' troops 'standard Persian infantry weapons', but there is a critical difference – Persian footsoldiers tended to be armed with spears.
[52] Xen. *Kyr.* 7.1.33-34.
[53] Hunt (*Slaves*, 195) suggested that Xenophon was trying to revive the moral ideal that hoplite service was the duty of every citizen (and that the army of every polis was therefore by necessity made up of amateurs). However, this theory, too, fails to account for the fact that Kyros' new infantry are not hoplites.

part of the Spartan exercise regime described by Xenophon includes practice with sword or spear; instead it is focused entirely on increasing the stamina and the outward dignity of the troops.[54] When Agesilaos encouraged his army to train for his campaign against Persia, offering rewards to the best troops of each type, his archers and peltasts all strived to be the finest shots, but his hoplites competed only to see 'who had the best body'.[55] We hear of other armies, too, occupying themselves with gymnastic contests in lieu of any kind of actual weapons training.[56] Later tradition has it that the Thebans were better fighters because they spent their spare time wrestling.[57] It seems even military experts did not think there was much skill involved in heavy infantry combat. Whatever there was to learn, the warriors would have picked up naturally in their youth; commanders could take it for granted that their men knew how to use their weapons. To work on their strength and stamina was enough.[58]

If this was indeed all it took to make good hoplites, we might expect even a militia army to have been a force to be reckoned with. Modern scholars are fond of exalting the relative physical fitness of hard-working Greek farmer-hoplites.[59] However, this notion has to contend with Xenophon's repeated complaint that citizen soldiers were mostly unfit for service:

> '…τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων στρατεύματα τοὺς μὲν προεληλυθότας ἤδη ταῖς ἡλικίαις ἔχει, τοὺς δ' οὔπω ἀκμάζοντας: σωμασκοῦσί γε μὴν μάλα ὀλίγοι τινὲς ἐν ἑκάστῃ πόλει…'

[54] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 12.5-6. Plato claims the Spartans deliberately 'overlooked' weapons drill: Pl. *Laches* 182e-183a.
[55] 'ἥτις ἄριστα σωμάτων ἔχοι': Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16. 'Having good bodies' is the apparent result of hoplite training again at *Hell.* 5.3.17 and Diod. 16.44.6.
[56] Thuc. 5.80.3; Xen. *An.* 1.2.10, 4.8.25-28, 5.5.5. Xenophon (*Kyr.* 1.2.18) encourages the practice.
[57] Plut. *Mor.* 639f-640a; Diod. 12.70.3, 15.39.2, 15.50.5, 15.87.1, 17.11.4. The Spartans are said to have gone one better, and not even practiced wrestling, 'so that rivalry would not be in skill, but in courage' (Plut. *Mor.* 233e).
[58] Xen. *Mem.* 3.12.1-5; Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 538-545; Ducrey, *Guerre*, 69-72; Wheeler, 'Dances in Arms', 223; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 89, 92; Tritle, 'Warfare', 209; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 133.
[59] See for example Hanson, *Other Greeks*, 264-265; Krentz, *Marathon*, 62; Hale, 'Not Patriots', 190; the notion appears to be disputed by Schwartz (*Hoplite*, 98-101).

'…armies levied from cities include men who are already advanced in years and others who have not yet reached their prime. And in every city very few men train their bodies…'[60]

It may be countered that the second part of this complaint was mainly targeted at the rich, whose leisured existence made them far less accustomed to hard work and exposure to the elements than the average citizen. Indeed, Xenophon elsewhere stresses that farm work increases a man's strength and endurance, while Plato at one point explicitly contrasts the pudgy, useless upper classes with the wiry poor who stood by their side in the phalanx.[61] Yet this is not the most straightforward reading of Xenophon's complaint. Unlike Plato, Xenophon here does not openly accuse a particular class of being out of shape, but merely points out that most of the militia is either too young or too old to fight. His claim that the rest does not train seems similarly levelled against the whole of the citizen body; apparently, merely being used to hard work was not enough. Even those who saw skill at arms primarily as a matter of physical fitness believed that such fitness could only be acquired through constant practice at sports such as running and wrestling, as well as a carefully managed diet – to which, without compulsion, few would care to submit.[62] Indeed, such a training regime would require a prohibitive investment of time and money; scholars have rightly stressed that a properly balanced and supervised fitness programme would only have been available to the very rich.[63] It was therefore only the very rich, in fact, who had any hope of acquiring the 'best body' for military service.[64]

Clearly, even if training was only fitness, we should not overestimate a Greek levy's readiness for war. More importantly, some authors disagreed with the premise itself. Aristotle declared that mercenaries were 'like armed men fighting unarmed men, or athletes fighting amateurs', because, unlike militia, they knew how to use their weapons. The author felt no need to differentiate between types of troops on

[60] Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.5; see also *Mem.* 3.5.15.
[61] Xen. *Oik* 5.4-5 and 8; Pl. *Pol.* 556c-e.
[62] Pl. *Pol.* 404a-b, 416d; *Laws* 832e-833a; Xen. *Kyr.* 1.6.17-18. Xenophon openly laments (*Mem.* 3.5.15) that the Athenians – by which he presumably means all those who could afford hoplite equipment – refuse to adopt the Spartan training regime, including its many dietary restrictions (see *Lak.Pol.* 2.5-6, 5.3, 5.8-9).
[63] Müller, *Volk der Athleten*, 143, 161; Golden, *Sport and Society*, 27; Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 243; and especially Pritchard, *Sport, Democracy and War*, 34-83, 209-210.
[64] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 55; 'War and Society', 279.

this point; in his view, training and experience were of obvious value for every fighting style, including that of the hoplite.[65] In his description of the ideal state, Plato offers an even more blunt critique of the amateurism of citizen soldiers, in order to demonstrate the need for a professional army:

> 'καὶ ἀσπίδα μὲν λαβὼν ἤ τι ἄλλο τῶν πολεμικῶν ὅπλων τε καὶ ὀργάνων αὐθημερὸν ὁπλιτικῆς ἤ τινος ἄλλης μάχης τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον ἱκανὸς ἔσται ἀγωνιστής, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ὀργάνων οὐδὲν οὐδένα δημιουργὸν οὐδὲ ἀθλητὴν ληφθὲν ποιήσει…'
>
> *'Does a man who picks up a shield or any other equipment or tool of war instantly become a competent fighter in heavy armour or in one of the other kinds of combat practised in war, even though no other tool will make anyone a craftsman or an athlete when it is picked up?'*[66]

He reinforces this point elsewhere in a discussion of the lifestyle of women. In Sparta, he says, women exercise just like men, but they play no part in war; by consequence, even in a crisis, 'they will not be able to use a bow, like the Amazons, or use any other missile with skill; nor could they pick up shield and spear'.[67] Tellingly, even Xenophon – supposedly an advocate of the view that heavy infantry fighting is nothing but instinct and general fitness – makes Kyros' noblemen train with sword and shield to prepare themselves for the rigours of close combat.[68]

These passages show that the Greeks recognised a clear difference between general exercise and the specific training needed for battle. Indeed, there were those who saw an intensive athletic training regime as outright harmful for a warrior; it involved too much eating, too much sleeping, and too much focus on raw strength. Combat required agility more than strength, and campaigning required a willingness to go without food, drink or sleep for extended periods of time. From this point of view, those with 'the best body' might actually be the worst warriors.[69] As Golden put it, the link between athletics and military training was at best 'indirect and

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[65] Arist. *Nik.Eth.* 1116b.7-8.
[66] Pl. *Pol.* 374d; see also *Laws* 829e-830c.
[67] Pl. *Laws* 806a-b.
[68] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.1.21.
[69] Xen. *Sym.* 2.17; Arist. *Pol.* 1338b.9-11; Plut. *Phil.* 3.2-4; Nepos 15.2.4-5; Plut. *Mor.* 192c-d; Pritchett II, 215-217, 219. For earlier examples of this attitude, see Pleket, 'Sport and Ideology', 319-320; Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 242 n.43; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 92.

oblique'; at worst, gymnastic exercise and its focus on individual prowess could be seen as 'a reaction against the dominant form of war rather than a preparation for it.'[70]

It is clear that only certain forms of athletic training could be regarded as valuable preparation for war, and that even these approved types of exercise would only take a man part of the way. How, then, was a citizen to acquire the specific skills necessary to be a good fighter?

Plato himself suggests that certain forms of dance would help,[71] and modern scholars have posited that frequent practice in dances with martial overtones would have taught Greek hoplites all they needed to know.[72] The *pyrrichē,* in particular, was performed fully armed with shield and spear; it undeniably had some connection to military practice. Xenophon describes similar dances of various types and origins – some individual, some performed in groups.[73]

However, while the *pyrrichē* may have stimulated a man's reflexes and agility, it hardly seems to have been appropriate training for the conditions of hoplite combat. Plato's version involved rhythmic leaping and dodging, as if the dancer was being pelted with javelins or stones; when not focused on the avoidance of missiles, it featured motions that resembled 'launching arrows and javelins and blows of all kinds'.[74] This amounts to either a very broad military training more suited to Homeric heroes, or a specific training intended for light-armed troops. It is perhaps no coincidence that the first of the war dances described by Xenophon is performed by Thracians armed with *machairai*, and that several of the other dancers also carry light shields rather than heavy hoplite equipment, including – notably – the woman dancing the *pyrrichē*.[75] Only one of the dances, unique to the Arkadians, resembles heavy infantry drill. Centuries later, Plutarch argued that a hoplite could prepare specifically for hand-to-hand fighting by practicing boxing, wrestling and running,

[70] Golden, *Sport and Society*, 28; see also Müller, *Volk der Athleten*, 143; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 92.
[71] Pl. *Laws* 814e-815a; later sources in a similar vein are gathered in Wheeler, 'Dances in Arms', 223.
[72] Borthwick, 'Athena as Protectress', 386, 390; Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 545-547; Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 248-249.
[73] Xen. *An.* 6.1.5-12.
[74] Pl. *Laws* 815a; see also Eur. *Andr.* 1129-1136; Philostr. *Gym.* 19.
[75] Xen. *An.* 6.1.5, 9, 12.

and in his discussion we find no mention of dances like the *pyrrichē*; indeed, Plato himself claims that, of all kinds of motion, *wrestling* was most like fighting in war.[76]

Greek war dances, then, seem to have had little to do with military training, at least for hoplites. For light-armed troops, who certainly had to spend time training in order to use their weapons effectively, they would be a complementary exercise at best. In any case, as Wheeler has pointed out, 'the value of such armed dances as practical military training should not be taken too seriously' – the dances were primarily an entertaining display, practiced by no more than a small minority of the citizen levy.[77]

The alternative was actual weapons training. Müller has rightly noted that the ideal system of physical training prescribed by Plato is not a general athletic programme or a dance recital, but a set of specifically *military* exercises.[78] Plato apparently saw this as a more effective way to turn citizens into capable fighters. He advises that children should learn horse riding, archery, and the use of the javelin and the sling from the age of six; that both men and women should be taught 'all the military exercises', including the fighting styles of peltasts, hoplites and cavalry; and that they should participate in tactical drills and sham battles on a regular basis.[79] In his *Politeia*, he repeatedly refers to the products of such a training regime as ἀθληταὶ πολέμου, 'athletes of war' – not referring to the notion of sport as military training, but building on his image, cited above, of professional soldiers as expert craftsmen or athletes.[80] These athletes, he claims, would have a field day fighting the amateur 'fat rich men' who made up the armies of rival states; 'in fact it will be easy for our athletes to fight two or three times their number.'[81] A stronger endorsement of weapons training seems difficult to imagine.

This final passage, however, reveals the yawning chasm between ideal and reality. Like Xenophon, Plato takes it entirely for granted that the militia of 'rich city-states' would consist of untrained, physically unfit men. The parallel shows that

[76] Plut. *Mor.* 639d-640a; Pl. *Laws* 814d.
[77] Wheeler, 'Dances in Arms', 230-232. Ceccarelli has further noted (*Pirrica*, 18-19) that the link between dancing and warfare was neither specific nor exclusive; dances in arms could serve any number of symbolic purposes.
[78] Müller, *Volk der Athleten*, 159-161.
[79] Pl. *Laws* 794c, 813d-814b, 829a-831a.
[80] Pl. *Pol.* 416d, 422b, 521d, 543b.
[81] Pl. *Pol.* 422a-c.

this is no transparent attempt on Plato's part to glorify his proposed methods; those who saw the value of training clearly agreed that the average Greek paid far too little attention to it. Aristotle describes what must have inspired Plato's idealistic vision:

> 'ἔτι δ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς Λάκωνας ἴσμεν, ἕως μὲν αὐτοὶ προσήδρευον ταῖς φιλοπονίαις, ὑπερέχοντας τῶν ἄλλων, νῦν δὲ κὰν τοῖς γυμνικοῖς ἀγῶσι κὰν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς λειπομένους ἑτέρων: οὐ γὰρ τῷ τοὺς νέους γυμνάζειν τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον διέφερον, ἀλλὰ μόνον τῷ πρὸς μὴ ἀσκοῦντας ἀσκεῖν. (…) ἀνταγωνιστὰς γὰρ τῆς παιδείας νῦν ἔχουσι, πρότερον δ' οὐκ εἶχον.'
>
> *'And we know of the Lakonians that while they persisted by themselves in their hard exercises they surpassed all others, but now they are left behind by the rest both in gymnastic and in military contests; for they used to stand out, not because they exercised their young men like this, but only because they trained and others did not. (…) They have rivals in their education now, while they had none before.'*[82]

Writing at the end of the fourth century, Aristotle had seen Athens finally adopt a universal military training programme for male citizens.[83] Before the 330s, such a mandatory programme did not exist in any Greek state; the Spartans, therefore, were the only 'athletes of war', and their superiority was widely acknowledged. Xenophon sums up their methods by drawing the same parallel as Plato: 'all others are mere improvisers in soldiering; the Lakedaimonians are the only craftsmen of war.'[84]

By the end of the fifth century it seems the Greeks were becoming increasingly aware of this problem, for it is around this time that *hoplomachoi* first appear on the scene. These men were essentially sophists, travelling teachers-for-hire, who specialised in war.[85] They taught mainly weapons drill and unit deployment. Any man of means who wished to receive military training could hire one of these *hoplomachoi*, probably at considerable expense, to provide such training on an individual basis. In his *Laches*, Plato has Nikias promote their activities: weapons

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[82] Arist. *Pol.* 1338b.24-39.
[83] Indeed, Aristotle or his pupil is our source for the nature of this programme: see [Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 42.3-5.
[84] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 13.5. Admittedly, Xenophon makes this comment after a description of Spartan religious sacrifices on campaign, not in relation to their training regime; but given the overall tone of the work, it could easily be extended to cover any part of Spartan military practice.
[85] Wheeler, 'Dances in Arms', 224; '*Hoplomachoi*', 4; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 90.

drill is good exercise, he argues, and in battle those who have learned it 'will have the advantage everywhere'. In addition, it will increase their valour, and encourage their desire to go on and learn about tactics and generalship as well.[86]

It hardly needs stating that the instruction offered by *hoplomachoi* to the few rich men who cared for it would not have made a dent in the overall amateurism of the hoplite militia.[87] More interestingly, though, it seems that even the most enthusiastic advocates of military training were not keen on the *hoplomachoi*. Xenophon, for one, was clearly hostile to them. We have seen how he berates them in passing for their failure to understand Spartan methods; in the *Anabasis* he presents a *hoplomachos* called Phalinos, who '*claimed* to know all about deployment and fighting in armour', and now served as a faithful emissary to his treacherous Persian employer.[88] Elsewhere, he devotes a brief Sokratic dialogue to the deconstruction and dismissal of the teachings of the *hoplomachos* Dionysodoros. This man taught only the drawing up of troops, which Xenophon insists is not only insufficient, but useless on its own; the conversation ends with Sokrates sending his companion back to demand that Dionysodoros teach him the rest.[89]

Where did this negative attitude come from? Plato puts a speech against *hoplomachia* in the mouth of the general Laches, but it hardly answers our question; as Emlyn-Jones has noted, Laches' rhetoric may be compelling, but his arguments are not very strong.[90] Laches' main point is that the *hoplomachoi* are not welcome in Sparta, even though the Spartans are more concerned than any other Greeks to learn everything they can about war; since the Spartans do not care for *hoplomachia*, it must be a worthless thing. Yet if the *hoplomachoi* really regarded Sparta as 'inviolable, holy ground', the obvious explanation is that Sparta was the only place that produced drillmasters of its own, and had no need of experts from elsewhere.[91] Laches is made to stress that the *hoplomachoi* would rather go anywhere else but Sparta, 'especially to those who would themselves admit that they are inferior to

[86] Pl. *Laches* 181e-182d.
[87] Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 243.
[88] Xen. *An.* 2.1.7 (my emphasis). The verb προσποιέω often implies an intent to deceive, as at Xen. *An.* 4.3.20, where it is used to describe a feint.
[89] Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.
[90] Pl. *Laches* 182d-184c; Emlyn-Jones, *'Laches'*, 69.
[91] Wheeler, '*Hoplomachoi*', 13.

many in military affairs'.[92] How else would these sophists make a living? Laches' other argument, that he once saw a *hoplomachos* make a fool out of himself with an impractical weapon of his own devising, also falls short of explaining why a tactical innovator like Xenophon would have a problem with these instructors.

Frustratingly, Plato himself does not take a side in this debate on the merits of weapons drill; after Laches' speech, he has Sokrates take over the conversation and turn it into a broader examination of the nature of courage. We are left wondering whether it is Nikias or Laches who represents the views of his fellow citizens.[93] But even if we assume they both do – that Laches stands for tradition and conservatism while Nikias shows an innovative and practical perspective – neither view explains why Xenophon, a fourth-century veteran and military thinker strongly in favour of drill of every kind, would nonetheless look on the *hoplomachoi* with disdain. Indeed, why does Plato, who clearly favoured intensive military training, fail to endorse such training here?

A possible answer lies in the way both Xenophon and Plato would like the military training of the citizen body to be organised. Xenophon mainly advocates the adoption of the Spartan system – the constant training of all male citizens by specially selected male citizens, all striving to attain good health and military excellence for the sake of the community.[94] Similarly, when Plato describes the training system he would like to introduce – which explicitly includes *hoplomachia* – he stresses that 'for all these things there should be public teachers who get their pay from the city', carefully selected by the powers that be.[95] In both cases the system is meant to be state-sanctioned and collective, and the experts are supposed to come from within.

It seems, then, that these authors did not disapprove of the training offered by *hoplomachoi*, but of the men themselves; they saw them as buffoons and charlatans who took advantage of a widely recognised problem, travelling around to sell their

[92] Pl. *Laches* 183b.
[93] Anderson, *Military Theory*, 86;Ridley, 'Hoplite as Citizen', 528; Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter*, 95; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 90-91. In the *Euthydemos*, Plato has Sokrates engage a pair of *hoplomachoi* directly, but their military skills are mentioned only briefly at the start (271c-272a, 273c-d); once it becomes clear that the two are also sophists in a broader sense, the discussion immediately shifts to Sokrates' favourite subject, virtue.
[94] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* throughout; see also *Mem.* 3.5.15-16.
[95] Pl. *Laws* 813c-e.

half-baked courses to the highest bidder. They could not provide what the militia needed – a comprehensive, systematic training system that would raise their fighting abilities to a higher standard.[96] Unsurprisingly, when the Athenians eventually did adopt such a system, its instructors were not *hoplomachoi,* but teachers (διδασκάλοι) publicly elected for the job.[97]

A final important obstacle to weapons training is highlighted in the *Laches*. The anecdote about the bumbling *hoplomachos* and his makeshift weapon may not have swayed Laches' listeners, but it is symptomatic of a pattern in Greek discussions of military exercise, and probably formed a significant part of the attitude that Plato meant to evoke with the character. Simply put, the Greeks seem to have found military training a ridiculous idea. We have seen that Xenophon was aware of the humorous potential of formation drill; elsewhere, however, he complains that citizens not only neglect their own training, but 'laugh at those who make an effort'. Plato was similarly concerned that the exercises he proposed 'would seem laughable to some'.[98] Indeed, Laches is made to say that those who learn *hoplomachia* 'cannot avoid becoming a laughing stock', because all others would constantly be on watch for the slightest slip-up of these self-proclaimed experts.[99] We do not know if this attitude was derived from old ideals about the proper pursuits of the leisured gentleman,[100] or whether it was simply a way for the militia to gloss over their own lack of opportunity or willingness to train,[101] but the point is clear: Greek citizens institutionalised their scorn for the notion of martial skill and professional preparation for war. Those who bothered were deemed to be trying too hard. The consequence of this social stigma cannot be emphasised enough: to avoid the ridicule of one's fellow citizens, *it was better to remain untrained.*

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[96] Wheeler ('*Hoplomachoi*', 2-3) argued that they *could*, and therefore concluded that there was no solution to the contradiction in the works of Xenophon and Plato. If we bear in mind, however, that both authors envisioned alternative training programmes without the interference of *hoplomachoi*, the contradiction disappears.
[97] [Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 42.3; this is in fact the very word Plato uses for his public drillmasters (*Laws* 813e).
[98] Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.15; Pl. *Laws* 830d.
[99] Pl. *Laches* 184c.
[100] Van Wees, 'War and Society', 279-280.
[101] Christ (*Bad Citizen*, 96) stressed the negative effect of Sokrates' displays of endurance on the morale of the Athenians during the siege of Potidaia; his superhuman indifference to cold and hunger was taken as a show of contempt. Individuals who trained for war, too, had the potential to make others look bad by comparison. In such cases, it was always easier to pour scorn on the outlier than to follow suit.

In short, a set of obstructive attitudes ensured that few if any Greek citizens were properly trained to use their weapons. Actual weapon proficiency may have been popularly regarded as useless, while its poor substitute – athletic training – was only available to the wealthy few. Those who wished to introduce weapons training had to confront its reputation of being a ridiculous and needlessly strenuous waste of time. Even the Spartans seem to have held to the belief that only strength and stamina really mattered – but they could at least couple this to the basic formation drill they imposed on their troops on campaign. Among other Greeks the belief that skill at arms was unnecessary took away the only form of training they were able to provide for themselves. Voices were increasingly raised in favour of combat training for all citizens, but until the end of the Classical period these seem to have fallen on deaf ears.[102] The result was a militia army which was, by all accounts, perhaps partly composed of tough men, but mostly unfit for war.

Improvising War

This discussion of the evidence has hopefully made clear how fundamental Greek attitudes to training were to their military methods. It is essential to stress this here, firstly because it is one of the aspects of Classical Greek warfare that is furthest removed from our own contemporary assumptions, and secondly because it must affect our analysis of every aspect of the subject. Much as they may have liked to, non-Spartan commanders did not possess troops of a reliable standard of fitness or individual training, and they could not trust their forces to carry out anything but the simplest tactical plans. Moreover, the Greeks' disdain for training and their refusal to accept military discipline made it all but impossible to do anything to correct this.

A few implications must be accepted. Firstly, in reconstructions of actual tactics and battles, it must at all times be assumed that the typical Greek citizen soldier knew no weapons drill, no formation drill, and understood only the simplest of signals. Despite their initial deployment in a regular formation, Greek hoplites were really little more than an armed mob. They had no officers to keep them in check, no pattern drills to cling to, and often no way to tell friend from foe. It is

[102] This was at least to some extent a matter of money: the state could not afford to pay its citizens to devote themselves to war (see Xen. *Poroi* 4.51-52).

understandable, indeed perhaps to be expected that such armies behaved unpredictably in battle, and were liable to inertia and panic both on and off the battlefield.

Secondly, when we trace the development of military thought, we must bear in mind the restrictive effect of the sheer amateurism of Greek militia. As long as the typical Greek army remained a portion of the citizen population in arms, generals might dream of imitating Spartans or Persians, but they could never bring such dreams into practice. Those who sought solutions to imminent tactical problems had to work with the tools they were given. As we will see, many of the typical features of Greek warfare were defined by the limitations of the citizen levy, and by the efforts of its commanders to rise beyond those limitations.

Finally, the emergence of treatises on military theory in the fourth century must be seen within this context as well. It has been noted how Greek military thinkers struggled against the realities of their world – how they tried to find ways to work within the system, as Xenophon did, or simply to draw up a better one, as we see in the works of Plato. These works are often thought to represent a cynical new way of war that was the product of the brutal escalation of interstate conflict during the fourth century. In what follows, I aim to show that their authors instead placed themselves firmly within the old world of *polis* warfare, and sought desperately to fix some of its glaring problems.

2. 'The Finest, Flattest Piece of Land': Choosing the Battlefield

'When Publius Silo said to him,
"If you are such a great general, Marius, come down here and fight,"
he replied, "If you are such a great general, make me."'
- Plut. *Marius* 33.2

Traditions

Much of the orthodox characterisation of Greek warfare is derived from a single passage in Herodotos. When the Great King holds council to decide whether to punish the Greeks, Herodotos puts these words in the mouth of the prominent Persian Mardonios:

> 'καίτοι γε ἐώθασι Ἕλληνες, ὡς πυνθάνομαι, ἀβουλότατα πολέμους ἵστασθαι ὑπό τε ἀγνωμοσύνης καὶ σκαιότητος. ἐπεὰν γὰρ ἀλλήλοισι πόλεμον προείπωσι, ἐξευρόντες τὸ κάλλιστον χωρίον καὶ λειότατον, ἐς τοῦτο κατιόντες μάχονται, ὥστε σὺν κακῷ μεγάλῳ οἱ νικῶντες ἀπαλλάσσονται: περὶ δὲ τῶν ἐσσουμένων οὐδὲ λέγω ἀρχήν: ἐξώλεες γὰρ δὴ γίνονται…'
>
> *'Yet the Greeks, I hear, do wage war, and they do so senselessly, in their poor judgment and stupidity. When they have declared war against each other, they find the finest, flattest piece of land and go down there and fight, so that the victors come off with great harm – I will not even begin to speak of the defeated, for they are utterly destroyed.'*[1]

This appears neatly programmatic. The Greeks clearly had a reputation of fighting their battles on open ground, where neither side had an advantage; they decided their wars by such fair and bloody engagements. The question when and where the Greeks

[1] Hdt. 7.9β.1 – cited in full, for example, in Detienne, 'Phalange', 124; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 1; Lonis, *Guerre et Religion*, 15; Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter*, 89; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 18; Hanson, *Western Way*, 9-10; Lazenby, 'Killing Zone', 88; Dawson, *Western Warfare*, 47; Mitchell, 'Hoplite Warfare', 91; Sage, *Warfare*, 73-74; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 42; Hanson, 'Hoplite Narrative', 269.

fought their battles seems redundant in light of this speech. However, unfortunately, Mardonios' statements cannot be taken at face value.[2]

Since it is unlikely that Herodotos would have had any way of finding out what was said in Persian royal councils, we must assume that Mardonios' speech consists of what Herodotos thought he might have said. Furthermore, we know that the statement about the death toll of Greek battles is simply not true; it may reflect the goal of Greek battles, as we will see in Chapter 5, but it is a gross exaggeration of the casualty rates actually reported in the sources.[3] It has therefore been suggested that the speech is a deliberate caricature born out of Persian contempt for the clumsy Greek way of war – a point of view Herodotos also represents elsewhere.[4] Of course Mardonios would be the character of choice to express this view; both Herodotos and his audience knew that he, as commander of the Persians at Plataia, would eventually be forced to eat his words.

This interpretation explains the exaggerations of the speech while leaving its analysis basically intact. Yet it is important to take the context of the statement into account. Mardonios is trying to get Xerxes to embark on a massive and thoroughly difficult undertaking. He needs strong arguments; the Persians' last campaign of conquest did not go well, and there are voices in the court that urge caution. Elsewhere in Herodotos we find Aristagoras trying to tempt the king of Sparta to invade Persia, and one of the crucial arguments he comes up with is that the Persians are of no consequence in war: weak, cowardly, easily overthrown.[5] Could Herodotos be trying to mirror the scene, with an ambitious aristocrat attempting to lure a king into an ill-advised venture by making it seem like a walk in the park?

This would certainly explain the odd things Mardonios is made to say. The Persian way of war relied heavily on the use of cavalry armed with missile weapons – a troop type that can only function on open plains, where it has room to

[2] Delbrück, 129; Pelling, 'Archidamus and Artabanus', 132; Krentz, 'Strategic Culture', 60; 'Deception', 178; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 116; Dayton, *Athletes of War,* 52-55; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 64-65.
[3] The evidence is gathered in Krentz, 'Casualties', and discussed in Dayton, *Athletes of War,* 81-102.
[4] Detienne, 'Phalange', 124 n.21; Evans, 'The Dream of Xerxes', 124; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 42-43; Wheeler, 'Battle', 190-191; Van Wees, 'Defeat and Destruction', 99; according to Hdt. 6.112.2, the Persians deemed the Greek charge at Marathon 'suicidally insane'. Alternatively, the passage has been regarded as a criticism of Greek in-fighting (Macan, I.1, 14; Forsdyke, 'Herodotus', 235) or as a condemnation of war itself (Tritle, 'Laughing for Joy', 173-174; Raaflaub, 'Persian Army', 30).
[5] Hdt. 5.49.2. Wheeler ('Battle', 191 n.20) has pointed out the similarity between the two episodes.

manoeuvre.[6] Therefore the notion of seeking out the 'flattest piece of land' must have been familiar to the Persians. Herodotos himself says they landed at Marathon specifically because the ground there was suitable for horsemen. At Plataia they spent ten days trying to lure the Greeks down from their camp into the plain, where the Persians would have the advantage. Some eighty years later, the Ten Thousand, trapped in the heart of the Persian Empire, breathed a sigh of relief when they reached hilly terrain; finally they would be free from the Persian cavalry pursuing them.[7] The Persians in fact loved to fight on the flattest piece of land, the horseman's land, the kind of land where they held all the cards. Why would Mardonios present this habit as typically Greek – and why would he call it stupid?

If we bear in mind what he was trying to achieve, the answer becomes clear.[8] Mardonios stresses that the Greeks would do better to find the most defensible positions in their land and fight from there, but that they fail to understand this, and foolishly fight in the plains. To Xerxes this must have been excellent news. Sieges and operations in mountainous terrain are costly and time-consuming; open battle, on the other hand, was the Persians' forte, and would give them a chance to force the issue with a single blow. Of all the pitched battles fought between Persian and Greek forces up to that time, the Persians had only lost one – and that fight, at Marathon, had been a close call. The entire Greek centre had been broken before the Greeks finally prevailed. Xerxes would have been fully confident of the abilities of his men – even more so if he raised a royal army led by his elite personal guard. For the Greeks, to march down and meet the Persians in the open field would be proof of very poor judgment indeed. It is by such arguments that the Great King could be made to embark on a great new war of conquest.[9]

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[6] For recent assessments see Sekunda, *Persian Army*; Head, *Persian Army*; Lazenby, *Defence*, 21-33; Lee, 'Persian Army'; Konijnendijk, 'Battle of Plataia', 7-10 – although Tuplin has recently argued ('All the King's Horse', 178-182) that the role of cavalry in the Persian tactical system should not be overestimated.

[7] Hdt. 6.102, 9.41, 9.49-51; Xen. *An.* 3.4.24; see also Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.5, 3.4.15; Krentz, *Marathon*, 103, 139, 143.

[8] The point has been casually suggested by both Krentz ('Deception', 178) and Tritle ('Laughing for Joy', 173), but neither elaborated in any way on the observation.

[9] That is, if he could be persuaded. Artabanos, the next advisor to speak, dismisses Mardonios' appraisal of the Greeks as 'empty words' and 'nonsense': Hdt. 7.10η. For the contrast between the two characters, see especially Lattimore, 'Wise Adviser', 24, 31, and more recently Moggi, 'L'Oplitismo Secondo Mardonio'.

Should we assume, then, that anything from Mardonios' speech applies to actual late archaic Greek warfare? The link with Aristagoras' speech is particularly relevant here. If we compare Aristagoras' talk of bows and breeches to what we know of the Persian way of war, it is instantly clear how poor his characterisation is. He does not speak of the Persians' vast numbers on land and sea, does not acknowledge their eye for logistics and sieges, and completely fails to mention their war-winning horsemen. Herodotos is happy to report these Persian strengths elsewhere, but of course his conniving Milesian would say nothing of the sort in his attempt to persuade the king of Sparta. Mardonios' description of Greek warfare is of the same kind. It is an absurdly selective account driven entirely by its manipulative function: Herodotos makes Mardonios limit Greek warfare to the kind of fight the Persians are likely to win. He does not mention how Greeks may defend cities tenaciously from the walls, how they may block passes and peninsulas and use the terrain to their advantage, or how they may refuse battle and forcibly prolong a campaign. All of this they did in the course of the Persian Wars. The decisive land battle of Xerxes' campaign was not fought on the plain, because the Greeks would not come down to it as Mardonios had promised they would; the Persians, as a result, could not fully deploy their trump card, their flexible mounted force. Instead they were drawn into a heavy infantry engagement in the hills. They fought bravely and bitterly, but they lost in the end; their army was utterly destroyed.[10]

For the construction of a true picture of Greek military thought it is important to stress the significance of this ironic Herodotean narrative and its earlier parallel. Rather than prove the existence of gentlemanly rules restricting Greek warfare, it reveals the Greeks' awareness – at least when the work was written, in the decades before the Peloponnesian War – of the existence of different tactical systems with specific strengths and weaknesses that could be invoked to great effect. Some tactics and troop types offered a great advantage on particular kinds of ground. To win, one had to neutralise the enemy's advantage while maximising one's own. This was

[10] For a more detailed version of my argument against Mardonios' speech, see Konijnendijk, 'Senseless Greeks'. The full account of the battle of Plataia may be found in Hdt. 9.19-70. Veith's brief treatment of the battle (in Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 167-169) remains unsurpassed; for more detailed modern analyses see especially Lazenby, *Defence*, 217-246, 249-255; Worley, *Hippeis*, 56-58; Rusch, *Sparta at War*, 56-66; Konijnendijk, 'Battle of Plataia'.

apparently so widely known that telling blatant lies about an opponent's way of war could become a recurrent trait of archetypical bad advisors.[11]

Outside of ill-fated Mardonios' speech, there is little evidence to support the notion of a standard Greek practice in the matter of choosing a battlefield. Scholars often cite the second-century testimony of Polybios, who writes:

> 'οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαῖοι (…) τοὺς πολέμους ἀλλήλοις προύλεγον καὶ τὰς μάχας, ὅτε πρόθοιντο διακινδυνεύειν, καὶ τοὺς τόπους, εἰς οὓς μέλλοιεν ἐξιέναι παραταξόμενοι. νῦν δὲ καὶ φαύλου φασὶν εἶναι στρατηγοῦ τὸ προφανῶς τι πράττειν τῶν πολεμικῶν.'
>
> *'The ancients (…) informed one another in advance of wars and battles when they intended to fight and of the places where they would go and deploy their army. But now they say it is a bad general who does anything openly in war.'*[12]

Again, this seems plain enough by itself – but there are strong reasons for suspicion. It has been argued that Polybios' work is driven by an overriding moral agenda, extolling traditional aristocratic values as a weapon against the growing influence on society and politics of such evil types as foreigners, mercenaries, commoners and tyrants.[13] Specifically, the passage above is a condemnation of Philip V, contemporary king of Macedon. Polybios deplored his military and political methods as a threat to old-fashioned order and virtue; his actions are therefore contrasted with the supposed practices of earlier, noble Greeks – or, quite possibly, with the altogether imagined practices of Philip's predecessors.[14] It is notable that the use of trickery and deception does gain praise from Polybios when the trickster himself is a more admirable character, or when the victim is not Greek.[15]

Is there any truth to Polybios' description? It is not clear which 'ancients' he is referring to, and they may in fact be fourth-century Macedonian kings; in any case,

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[11] Raaflaub has noted that Alkibiades' defence of the Sicilian Expedition is another example of the same trope: 'Herodot und Thukydides', 24.
[12] Polyb. 13.3.2-6; see for example Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 1; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 19; Hanson, *Western Way*, 15; Mitchell, 'Hoplite Warfare', 94; Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 204-205.
[13] Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, especially 116-117.
[14] Krentz, 'Deception', 178; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 115-116; Dayton, *Athletes of War,* 150-157.
[15] See for example Polyb. 14.5.15; Eckstein, *Moral Vision*, 86-87.

as Dayton put it, 'all accounts for all periods' refute the statements he makes.[16] The only known example of a battle prearranged by its participants is the famous Battle of the Champions, fought in the middle of the sixth century between Argos and Sparta.[17] The number of warriors was fixed at three hundred on each side; no others were allowed within marching distance of the battlefield, so that no one would be tempted to interfere. This seems to confirm Polybios' statement in every particular, and must be its ultimate origin. However, as an experiment with limited war, it was a complete failure. Argos and Sparta could not agree over who had won; they ended up launching their armies into an all-out pitched battle anyway. A hundred years later, when the Argives offered the Spartans a chance for a second round, these are said to have scoffed at the very idea.[18]

There is no sign in the Classical sources of Polybios' 'giving notice' (προλέγω) of the time and place of battle. Certain fixed elements of a clash, such as the setting up of a trophy and the truce to recover the dead, are faithfully included in almost every battle description from the late fifth century onward – but there is never any mention of announcements to the enemy beforehand. The term 'μάχη ἐξ ὁμολόγου', 'battle by mutual consent', is often used in this context but is in fact first found in Polybios himself.[19] Pritchett has offered some examples of Classical Greeks who are said to have 'challenged' (προκαλέω) their enemies to battle, but these are all reported by Diodoros, likely under the influence of the tropes of Hellenistic literature. Xenophon, describing the events of the same period, does not use the term.[20] In his work, at best, 'it was already clear (πρόδηλον ἤδη ἦν) that there would be a battle' – a description of a general mood that seems to presuppose that there would *not* be a formal announcement.[21] Generally, battles in Xenophon tend to begin after one side 'went forward (ἐχώρουν)' or 'set forth to battle (εἰς μάχην ὥρμησαν)' or a commander 'began to lead against the enemy (ἤρξατο ἄγειν […] πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους)', to name just some examples; there is no fixed phrase and no indication

[16] Dayton, *Athletes of War* ,148; see also Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 27-29; 'Deception', 168-171 and 178.
[17] Hdt. 1.82; Rawlings (*Greeks at War*, 65-66) doubts its historicity.
[18] Thuc. 5.41.3; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 134; Dayton, *Athletes of War*, 48. At Plataia, Mardonios is said to have offered a similar challenge to the Spartans, which was also turned down (Hdt. 9.48).
[19] Pritchett II, 147; Hanson, *Western Way*, 4; Sage, *Warfare*, xvii; Wheeler, 'Battle', 203, 209, 212.
[20] Pritchett II, 149-150, citing Diod. 13.73.1, 15.32.6, 15.65.4, 15.68.4.
[21] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9.

that the enemy has been informed beforehand. In battles against non-Greeks, similar verbs are used.[22]

In short, the notion of a formal challenge or agreement is more than the contemporary sources allow. Wheeler's characterisation of the provocation to battle in a certain place as 'tacit' may be closer to the mark: 'one side "offered" battle to the other by deploying and awaiting the other's preparation.'[23] But how are we to interpret the fact that there was no common expression even for this tacit offer? The way Greeks reported wars apparently did not require it. This could mean it was so obvious that it needed no elaboration – or it could mean that no Greek would expect battles to be announced in any way. Indeed, as we shall see, various ruses tried by the Greeks could never have worked if battles were normally fought by agreement, yet there is no sign in the sources that such ruses were the result of a flagrant disregard for convention. The phrasing in Xenophon suggests that a battle begun when one side initiated it, regardless of whether the other side was aware of this or willing to follow suit.

It is apparent from all this that there are sufficient internal and external grounds to dismiss both Mardonios' and Polybios' sweeping characterisations of Greek warfare. They are likely to have been phrased to suit particular agendas and the extant accounts of relevant events do not bear them out. If we wish to establish what determined the Greeks' choice of where and when to fight, it is to these actual accounts that we should turn.

Practice

The earliest clash between Greek hoplite armies of which a detailed description survives is the battle of Olpai, fought in 426, five years into the Peloponnesian War. Of engagements before this time we often hear little more than that they were fought, and who won:

[22] Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11, 6.5.7, 6.4.13; in the plain of Sardis, Agesilaos 'led (ἦγεν) his phalanx against the horsemen' (3.4.23); the Battle of Kounaxa began when the Persians 'advanced evenly' (ὁμαλῶς προῄει) against Kyros' line (Xen. *An.* 1.8.14).
[23] Wheeler, 'Battle', 203; see also Connor, 'Land Warfare', 12; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 134; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 49.

‘Ἀθηναίοισι δὲ ἰδοῦσι τοὺς Βοιωτοὺς ἔδοξε πρότερον τοῖσι Βοιωτοῖσι ἢ τοῖσι Χαλκιδεῦσι ἐπιχειρέειν. συμβάλλουσί τε δὴ τοῖσι Βοιωτοῖσι οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ πολλῷ ἐκράτησαν, κάρτα δὲ πολλοὺς φονεύσαντες ἑπτακοσίους αὐτῶν ἐζώγρησαν.’

‘When the Athenians saw the Boiotians they decided to attack them before the Chalkidians. And they clashed with the Boiotians and won a great victory, and they killed many, and took seven hundred of them prisoner.’[24]

Little can therefore be said about the way Greeks chose the field of battle before the late fifth century. There is only Herodotos’ account of a Karian debate, held in 497 during the Ionian Revolt, on where to confront the Persian army. One side argued that their own troops would fight better with the river Marsyas at their backs, since it would force them to stand their ground; the other insisted they should let the Persians cross and then fight them on the riverbank, so that the enemy would not have a chance to get away. In the end, the Karians chose the latter option, and suffered a crushing defeat.[25] We could of course take this battle as a wholly un-Greek affair – but Herodotos himself steps in to stress that he thought the former plan was better. Clearly, by the mid-fifth century at least, Greeks like him were giving this matter serious thought.[26]

On the matter of *when* to fight, we have more comprehensive evidence, in the form of a large number of surprise attacks stretching back as far as recorded history allows us to see. Peisistratos famously regained his power by attacking his enemies at rest after breakfast; in the early years of the fifth century, the Phokians destroyed a force of Thessalians by attacking their camp at night. Other examples abound.[27] Such attacks of course relied on the shock of sudden danger, on forcing the enemy to fight when they were least prepared. The implication is clear: even in late Archaic Greece, control over the time of battle could be used as a weapon.

The response to Xerxes’ invasion further showed that the defenders were keenly aware of the uses of different types of terrain. They explicitly tried to avoid a

[24] Hdt. 5.77.2; for similar examples see Hdt. 1.66.3; Thuc. 1.108.1; Diod. 11.78.1-2.
[25] Hdt. 5.118-119.
[26] Hdt. 5.118.2; see also Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 64, 89-90. Tritle (‘Warfare’, 211) has asserted that ‘[p]roviding the stuffs of war and deciding where to fight were fundamentals of war that Herodotus understood.’
[27] Hdt. 1.63.1, 8.27.3-4; see Krentz, ‘Deception’, 183-199; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 131-133.

pitched battle, in which Persian numbers and mobility would count heavily against the Greeks. It has already been noted that the field of Marathon was the Persians' chosen ground; the Athenians were reluctant to fight there, and Miltiades understood the burden of responsibility he carried for giving the order to do so.[28] Such risks would not be taken again. At Plataia the Greeks waited, suffering thirst, harassment and dwindling supplies, for the Persians to attack them on the heights.[29] Before that fight they had even hoped to avoid a battle altogether, trusting in their country's nearly impassable geography. Their strategy had been to occupy a string of bottlenecks and thus negate every advantage the Persian army had. It is worth stressing that this cannot have been a new idea in Greece at the time; the Spartans narrowed the pass at Thermopylai not by building, but by rebuilding the Phokian wall.[30]

There are plenty of indications, then, that the benefits of careful positioning were well understood in Greece by the time of the Persian wars; the Greeks showed no inclination to waive these benefits in favour of a straightforward confrontation. It may of course be argued that wars against non-Greeks were fought along different lines, or that it was precisely the foreign threat that forced the Greeks to turn to unusual methods.[31] Yet it is difficult to believe that the knowledge applied to this conflict appeared out of nowhere, and none of the larger states of mainland Greece had fought major foreign wars before. Certainly they had no qualms about using the element of surprise against other Greeks. Again, the fact that Herodotos was able to conceive of the sort of judgment he puts in the mouth of Mardonios shows that at his time the matter of choosing a battlefield went far beyond simply deciding on a suitable day and an agreeable plain.

When the first comprehensive Greek battle descriptions start to appear in the late fifth century, a highly developed picture promptly emerges. Thucydides provides an especially detailed account of the fighting between Argos and Sparta in 418, and

[28] Hdt. 6.109-110.
[29] Konijnendijk, 'Battle of Plataia', 9, 13; Delbrück (94) explicitly took this to have been the lesson of Marathon.
[30] Hdt. 7.175-177.
[31] This is sometimes suggested, as for instance by Hanson ('When, Where and Why?', 211), but compare Rüstow/Köchly, 34; Lammert, 'Taktik', 21 n.1; Adcock, *Art of War*, 11-12; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 90, 97. As we have seen in the Introduction, Hanson and others elsewhere frequently insist it was the Peloponnesian War that changed the nature of warfare in Greece.

this may serve in many ways as an instructive example of what happened when two large Greek citizen armies set out to meet each other in battle.

Both sides had marshalled their entire populations for the campaign, an Argive bid for supremacy over the Peloponnese. Strong allies were on the way to join the forces of each side.[32] With two armies roughly evenly matched and confident of their power, it would seem the stage was set for the kind of decisive hoplite battle for which Mardonios mocked the Greeks: a needlessly bloody slugging match on the flattest ground they could find. But what happened first was this:

> 'καὶ καταλαμβάνουσιν ἑκάτεροι λόφον: καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἀργεῖοι ὡς μεμονωμένοις τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις παρεσκευάζοντο μάχεσθαι, ὁ δὲ Ἄγις τῆς νυκτὸς ἀναστήσας τὸν στρατὸν καὶ λαθὼν ἐπορεύετο ἐς Φλειοῦντα παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ξυμμάχους.'
>
> *'Each side seized a hill, and the Argives prepared to fight the Lakedaimonians while they were alone; but at night Agis broke up his camp and slipped away undetected to join the rest of the allies at Phleious.'*[33]

King Agis of Sparta then arranged for his allies to enter the territory of Argos by different routes, surrounding the Argive army that would march in defence of its homeland. In particular, when the Argives were engaged with the Spartan main force, the horsemen of Sparta's Boiotian allies were to attack them from the rear.

> 'τὸ μὲν οὖν πλῆθος τῶν Ἀργείων καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων οὐχ οὕτω δεινὸν τὸ παρὸν ἐνόμιζον, ἀλλ' ἐν καλῷ ἐδόκει ἡ μάχη ἔσεσθαι, καὶ τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους ἀπειληφέναι ἐν τῇ αὐτῶν τε καὶ πρὸς τῇ πόλει.'
>
> *'The masses among the Argives and their allies did not see the danger they were in, but thought that the battle would be fought in a fine place, and that they had intercepted the Lakedaimonians in their own country and close to the city.'*[34]

They were saved at the last moment when two of their commanders, more alert to their potentially disastrous situation, sent to Agis to agree on a truce. Yet many on both sides were angry at what they saw as a missed opportunity to crush their

[32] Thuc. 5.58; the number and importance of the allies to both belligerents is stressed at 5.60.3-5. It has often been pointed out that most major Greek armies consisted of numerous allied contingents. The consequences of this will be discussed in the chapters below.
[33] Thuc. 5.58.2.
[34] Thuc. 5.59.4.

opponents. Both armies soon marched out again; the Spartans now invaded the territory of Argos' ally Mantineia.

'οἱ δ' Ἀργεῖοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ὡς εἶδον αὐτούς, καταλαβόντες χωρίον ἐρυμνὸν καὶ δυσπρόσοδον παρετάξαντο ὡς ἐς μάχην. καὶ οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι εὐθὺς αὐτοῖς ἐπῇσαν: καὶ μέχρι μὲν λίθου καὶ ἀκοντίου βολῆς ἐχώρησαν, ἔπειτα τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τις Ἄγιδι ἐπεβόησεν, ὁρῶν πρὸς χωρίον καρτερὸν ἰόντας σφᾶς, ὅτι διανοεῖται κακὸν κακῷ ἰᾶσθαι, δηλῶν τῆς ἐξ Ἄργους ἐπαιτίου ἀναχωρήσεως τὴν παροῦσαν ἄκαιρον προθυμίαν ἀνάληψιν βουλόμενον εἶναι.'

'When the Argives and their allies saw them, they occupied a strong and inaccessible position, and formed up for battle. The Lakedaimonians went against them immediately, and came within a stone's or javelin's throw, when one of the older men, seeing that they were moving against a strong position, shouted to Agis that he meant to cure one evil with another, meaning that he intended his present ill-timed enthusiasm to make up for his much blamed retreat from Argos.'[35]

The Spartans proceeded to stage a withdrawal in an attempt to lure the Argives down from the hills 'and fight the battle on the level'.[36] The Argive troops, however, were actually eager for battle themselves, and so the Spartan ploy worked better than expected:

'…οἵ τε Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος πρὸς τὸ Ἡράκλειον πάλιν ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ στρατόπεδον ἰόντες ὁρῶσι δι' ὀλίγου τοὺς ἐναντίους ἐν τάξει τε ἤδη πάντας καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ λόφου προεληλυθότας. μάλιστα δὴ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἐς ὃ ἐμέμνηντο ἐν τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἐξεπλάγησαν. διὰ βραχείας γὰρ μελλήσεως ἡ παρασκευὴ αὐτοῖς ἐγίγνετο, καὶ εὐθὺς ὑπὸ σπουδῆς καθίσταντο ἐς κόσμον τὸν ἑαυτῶν…'

'…and the Lakedaimonians, returning from the water to their old encampment by the temple of Herakles, suddenly saw their enemies right in front of them, all in battle formation and advanced from the hill. At that moment the Lakedaimonians suffered the greatest shock for as long as they could remember. They equipped

[35] Thuc. 5.65.1-2.
[36] Thuc. 5.65.4.

themselves in a short span of time and instantly and hastily drew up in their own order…'

The First Battle of Mantineia ensued.[37]

The patterns of this campaign can be seen throughout the Classical period. Armies that set out for battle did not make their camp in the open: according to Polybios, 'Greeks, when choosing a place for a camp, think primarily of security from the natural strength of the position'.[38] They looked for a place that would be as difficult as possible for an enemy to attack. This could be on a hill, as at Plataia, Amphipolis, Koroneia or Leuktra; it could be across a ravine, as at Olpai, or across a river, as at Olympia; it could be in a gap between protective terrain features, as the Athenians found at Syracuse.[39] If no such shelter was available, an exposed position could be fortified, as a Spartan-led alliance did inside the Long Walls of Corinth.[40] Advancing against an enemy on his chosen ground was, as the old man in Agis' army pointed out, a bad idea. It required great ingenuity and coordination; most Greek commanders did not think themselves equal to the task. They knew the result could be disastrous.[41]

Pitched battles, then, were generally only fought if the opposing armies were willing to come down and face each other. They did not do so out of a desire to fight fairly; to deploy for open battle was to choose a middle road between committing suicide and going home empty-handed. Krentz has argued that this option would only be considered if numbers on both sides were roughly equal.[42] Agis' initial retreat bears him out.

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[37] Thuc. 5.66.1-2; the battle itself will be examined in more detail in the following chapters.
[38] Polyb. 6.42.2; note Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 12.1-4; Krentz, 'War', 162.
[39] Hdt. 9.19; Thuc. 5.7.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.16, 6.4.4 and 14; Thuc. 3.107.3; Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.29; Thuc. 6.66.1. For further examples see Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 27-28; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 49 n.10.
[40] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9; see also 5.4.38, 6.5.30, 7.4.32.
[41] Xenophon praises Epameinondas for refusing to assault a strong position even with superior numbers: Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.8. According to Diodoros, Agesilaos at Thespiai also decided to break off his attack when he realised the enemy's high ground advantage: Diod. 15.32.3-6 (see Munn, 'Boiotian Campaigns', 118-121; Xenophon offers a similar story at *Hell.* 5.4.50). The battle of Mounichia (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.10-19; Diod. 14.33.2-3) demonstrates what could happen.
[42] Krentz, 'Strategic Culture', 61, 65-70; 'Deception', 177; a century earlier, Lammert ('Taktik', 16-17) carried a similar argument much further.

Moreover, when they did enter the plain to fight, the Greeks did everything in their power to unbalance their opponents and tip the scales in their favour.[43] This involved careful manipulation of both the time and the place of battle. We have seen how the Argives were glad to fight close to friendly fortifications, which could provide them with covering fire and a safe haven in case of defeat.[44] It was common to arrange for friends to come up at an opportune moment and strike the enemy in the rear; this was Agis' plan in Argos, but also the Corinthians' plan at Potidaia and the Athenians' plan at Delion, where their enemies beat them to it.[45] For the attacker, rapid marches against strategic targets could force an enemy to abandon a strong position or to commit his troops before they were ready. The Spartans in particular had a knack for this, seen not only at Mantineia, but also at the Nemea, where they pre-empted a similar move by their opponents; they did the same thing at Peiraion near Corinth in 390, at Thebes in 377, and again in the prelude to Leuktra.[46] Finally, the Greeks saw the benefit of keeping their plans secret, or to strike before the enemy could react. The Corinthians at Solygeia charged the Athenians while they were still disembarking from their ships; the Ephesians attempted something similar against them when they tried to take that city.[47] At Delion the Theban commander formed up his army behind a hill, out of sight of his enemies. At the Nemea the Spartans got another shock when they were unable to see through the tall grass that their enemies were already advancing until they were almost in front of them. At the Second Battle of Mantineia, Epameinondas fooled the Spartans into thinking he was setting up camp, then suddenly attacked; it has been suggested that his use of cavalry at Leuktra was similarly meant to cover the deployment of his phalanx with a dust screen.[48]

[43] Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 81-82.
[44] The advantage was also apparent for instance at Athens, Haliartos, Olynthos and Thebes (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.33-34, 3.5.18-19, 5.3.5, 5.4.53); it is stressed by Aineias the Tactician (16.18).
[45] Thuc. 1.62.3, 4.93.2, 4.96.5. Demosthenes' ambush at Olpai (Thuc. 3.107.3) was essentially the same ploy; Brasidas spelled out its effectiveness to his men (Thuc. 5.9.6-8) and Agesilaos specifically tried to prevent it from being inflicted on him (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.16).
[46] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.10-14, 4.5.3, 5.4.50-51, 6.4.3-4; Epaminondas tried the same ploy against them (7.5.9).
[47] Thuc. 4.43.1; *Hell. Oxy.* fr.1, 10-14.
[48] Thuc. 4.93.1, 4.96.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19, 7.5.21-22, 6.4.10 and 13; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 213-216; Buckler, 'Plutarch on Leuktra', 86-87.

Surprise attacks and ambushes remained popular ways to avoid pitched battle altogether. There were a few known windows of opportunity for strikes of this kind, as Xenophon's fictional version of Kambyses taught his son Kyros:

'…σιτοποιεῖσθαί τε γὰρ ἀνάγκη ἀμφοτέρους, κοιμᾶσθαί τε ἀνάγκη ἀμφοτέρους καὶ ἕωθεν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα σχεδὸν ἅμα πάντας ἴεσθαι, καὶ ταῖς ὁδοῖς ὁποῖαι ἂν ὦσι τοιαύταις ἀνάγκη χρῆσθαι.'

'…both sides need to prepare food; both sides need to sleep, and in the morning almost all at the same time heed the calls of nature; and whatever roads may exist, both sides need to use similarly.'[49]

When Timoleon attacked his Sicilian Greek enemies while they were setting up camp, he availed himself of essentially the same trick that Peisistratos had used more than two hundred years before. These centuries saw engagements such as Thrasyboulos' dawn attack on the forces of the Thirty and Epameinondas' assault on the pass of Oneion in 369 – the latter's troops timed their march to arrive at sunrise, at the exact moment the enemy watch was to be changed. Dionysios I also used dawn attacks to catch his enemies off guard.[50] Demosthenes, who had successfully used a night attack against an army of Ambrakiots in 426, tried in vain to force the defences of Syracuse by a nocturnal assault after a string of set-piece battles and siege operations had failed to produce a decisive result.[51] If the terrain allowed it, ambushes too could be used as a substitute for battle, as the Thebans showed the Athenians during the First Peloponnesian War; Peisistratos is said to have set a nocturnal ambush against Megarian invaders, and fourth-century generals like Iphikrates and Chabrias were masters of the craft.[52] In all of these cases, of course, the point was to strike against an enemy confused and terrified – to avoid a more difficult battle by choosing the most advantageous moment to fight. It may be out of fear of such a sudden attack that Agis, when he first encountered the Argives, chose to sneak away in the night.

The inevitable conclusion is that Greeks did not feel honour-bound to do battle at any appointed time or place. If an enemy could be goaded into the fight at a

[49] Xen. *Kyr.* 1.6.36; see also *Hipparch.* 7.12.
[50] Plut. *Tim.* 12.4-8; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.5-6, 7.1.15-16 (note also 7.4.13); Diod. 14.72.1-3, 14.104.2.
[51] Thuc. 3.112, 7.43-44; Roisman, *Demosthenes*, 26, 63, 72-74.
[52] Thuc. 1.113; Ain. Takt. 4.8-9; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.15, 4.8.35-39, 5.1.10-12.

disadvantage, that appears to have been the preferred course of action; if not, they could be surprised by an ambush or a sudden advance; failing that, battle could be postponed for a long time or even refused entirely. There are a few famous examples of armies encamped opposite each other for days without initiating combat, and this has sometimes been interpreted as a polite delay until both sides were ready.[53] Yet our sources suggest we should be more cynical in our assessment. At Plataia each army was waiting for the other to make the mistake of crossing the river between them; it is likely that the five days' delay at Olpai was due to a similar reasoning involving the ravine mentioned earlier. At the Nemea the Boiotians refused to fight until they were granted the right wing of the line, where they would not have to face the Spartans. Inside the Long Walls of Corinth a full day passed without a battle because the Argives had not yet arrived to fight one.[54]

Still, major pitched battles did take place, and most of them took place on plains. This is perhaps the only thing that appears to confirm Mardonios' deliberate lies, and is central to the notion of Greek warfare as a paradox and a conspiracy. But the examples cited here show that battle in the open field and battle by consent are far from the same thing. Armies clashed, or did not clash, when one found the other drawn up in battle array. As a practical alternative to the idea of gentlemanly agreements, the tendency of Greeks to fight on flat ground has sometimes been explained as a physical necessity for men wearing heavy hoplite armour, but Rawlings has convincingly argued that the hoplite was a more versatile and mobile type of warrior than is often assumed.[55] High ground was hardly impossible to navigate; in fact, as we have seen, hoplite forces sought refuge on the heights at every opportunity. Adcock suggested instead that battles were fought on level plains because neither side could be allowed the advantage of fighting downhill,[56] but this still supposes some sort of formal agreement, some intentional interference in the choice of battlefield. Rather, we should ask ourselves if fighting on flat land was in any way typically Greek. It has been pointed out that the Persians were always keen

[53] For the full (brief) list see Pritchett II, 154.
[54] Hdt. 9.41; Thuc. 3.107.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 4.4.9; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 134.
[55] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 244, 267; Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, 10; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 12, 25; Ober, 'Hoplites and Obstacles', 173; Wheeler, 'Battle', 202; compare Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies'.
[56] Adcock, *Art of War*, 5-6, 91; see also Lammert, 'Taktik', 11.

to fight on the plain; Wheeler has noted that the same may be said of Rome.[57] Polybios stressed the need for tight Hellenistic infantry formations to fight on flat ground without obstacles, to avoid disruption of the ranks.[58] There are many other reasons to prefer a battlefield that is naturally delineated, spacious and provides an uninterrupted line of sight. But most importantly of all, for the Greeks, battles on level ground were the result of a simple observation: if one side held a strong position, the other would refuse to engage.

Even so, it should be stressed that the sites of most Greek battles were hardly snooker tables – despite the insistence of some scholars that Epameinondas referred to Boiotia as the 'dancing floor of Ares' because it was smooth enough for the purpose.[59] The battlefield at Olpai bordered on an overgrown hollow road where Demosthenes was able to hide four hundred men. At Delion two flooded streams prevented the armies' extreme wings from meeting, and the Athenians probably fought uphill. At Syracuse the Athenians chose to fight on a field restricted by cliffs and marshes. As noted, the Battle of the Nemea was fought on that river's banks, where tall reeds and grasses almost totally obscured the view. The armies of the Second Battle of Mantineia stretched beyond the narrow plain, and the Boiotian right wing skirmished in the hills.[60] Greece simply does not contain the sort of extensive open flatlands that would make an engagement truly fair – and if it did, bearing in mind the Greeks' desire to keep a safe haven near at hand, it is unlikely they would have chosen to fight there.

Theory

Much of what has been discussed here became the explicit advice of military thinkers of the fourth century. While there is no extant guide to pitched battle and its preparation, known works on other aspects of warfare leave little room for doubt:

[57] Raaflaub, 'Mediterranean Context', 98; Wheeler, 'Battle', 202.
[58] Polyb. 18.31.2-6; see also Arist. *Pol.* 1303b12.
[59] Hanson, 'When, Where and Why', 208; Wheeler, 'Battle', 202; the line is from Plut. *Marcellus* 21.2. As Krentz put it (*Marathon*, 51), 'no plain in Greece looked like a Kansas wheat field'.
[60] Thuc. 3.107.3, 4.96.1-2, 6.66.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19, 7.5.24.

‘Επιτίθεσο δὲ τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐν οἷς ἄκων μὲν μὴ μαχήσῃ, μαχόμενος δὲ μὴ ἔλασσον ἕξεις τῶν πολεμίων. (…) πολὺ δὲ κρεῖσσον, ὡς γέγραπται, ἐνδόντα ἀφυλάκτως διακειμένοις αὐτοῖς ἐπιθέσθαι.’

‘Attack the enemy where you will not have to fight unwillingly, and where you will not be at a disadvantage to the enemy if you do fight. (…) It is much better, as I have written, to yield to them, and then attack them when they let their guard down.’[61]

‘μηχανῶ (…) τεταγμένοις τε τοῖς σαυτοῦ ἀτάκτους λαμβάνῃς τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ ὡπλισμένοις ἀόπλους καὶ ἐγρηγορόσι καθεύδοντας, καὶ φανερούς σοι ὄντας ἀφανὴς αὐτὸς ὢν ἐκείνοις καὶ ἐν δυσχωρίᾳ αὐτοὺς γιγνομένους ἐν ἐρυμνῷ αὐτὸς ὢν ὑποδέξῃ.

‘Contrive (…) to catch the enemy in disorder with your side in formation, to catch them unarmed while fully armed, to catch them asleep while wide awake, when they are visible to you but you are invisible to them, and face them when they find themselves in poor ground while you are in a strong position.’[62]

There is a good deal of focus both in Xenophon and in the work of Aineias the Tactician on the importance of seizing defensible ground, on setting ambushes and being wary of them, and of keeping constant watch against any sudden attack.[63] Aineias advises to attack invading troops while they are making dinner. Xenophon notes the high spirits of troops about to spring a trap, and the debilitating dismay of their victims; he believes that unnecessary risks should be carefully avoided, and that deceit and surprise are some of the greatest weapons at any commander’s disposal.[64]

Were these the lessons learned from practice or the cynical guidelines for a new kind of war? The fact that Xenophon takes enemy ambushes and potential surprise attacks entirely for granted speaks volumes about the realities encountered by this veteran commander. He even recommends the use of sham ambuscades, which could help cover a retreat by deliberately exploiting the enemy’s fear of being ambushed; a few men visibly ‘hidden’ could stop entire armies in their tracks. In

[61] Ain. Takt. 16.7-10.
[62] Xen. *Kyr.* 1.6.35.
[63] Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.5-13, 7.8-9; *Lak.Pol.* 12.2-3; *Ag.* 6.5-7; Ain. Takt. 1.2, 15.2-7, 16.4-20.
[64] Ain. Takt. 16.12; Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.10-15, 5.2-3, 8.19-20.

addition, he repeatedly stresses how overconfidence and recklessness could turn even the finest forces into helpless prey.[65] This is not the advice of one who is used to fighting battles at an appointed time and place. Both his military treatises and his historical accounts instead suggest a chaos of shock and opportunism, in which no army was ever safe. His idealised image of king Agesilaos of Sparta illustrates the point:

> 'ὁπότε γε μὴν πορεύοιτο εἰδὼς ὅτι ἐξείη τοῖς πολεμίοις μάχεσθαι, εἰ βούλοιντο, συντεταγμένον μὲν οὕτως ἦγε τὸ στράτευμα ὡς ἂν ἐπικουρεῖν μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ δύναιτο, ἡσύχως δ' ὥσπερ ἂν παρθένος ἡ σωφρονεστάτη προβαίνοι, νομίζων ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ τὸ τε ἀτρεμὲς καὶ ἀνεκπληκτότατον καὶ ἀθορυβητότατον καὶ ἀναμαρτητότατον καὶ δυσεπιβουλευτότατον εἶναι.'
>
> *'On the march, whenever he knew that the enemy could fight him if they chose, he would lead his army in such a formation that he could most easily defend himself, moving on as quietly as the most modest girl, believing that this was the best way to keep calm, and least vulnerable to panic, confusion, and blunders, and safest from surprise attack.'*[66]

There is no reason to assume that this approach only became relevant after the Peloponnesian War. Agesilaos' caution might have saved Peisistratos' enemies from defeat; it might have prevented the destruction of the Athenian army in a Boiotian ambush at Koroneia in 447. The speech Thucydides puts into Brasidas' mouth before the battle of Amphipolis stresses the advantages of surprising and deceiving a careless enemy instead of attacking him directly – advantages that were apparently well known and should have taught the Athenians to be more alert.[67] In fact, a good number of the engagements mentioned in this chapter may serve to support Xenophon's programmatic statement on victories in war, that 'the most and greatest were won by deceit' and not by straightforward tests of strength.[68] Shock and opportunism certainly seem very appropriate terms to characterise the overture to First Mantineia.

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[65] Xen. *An.* 5.2.28-32; *Hipparch.* 5.8, 8.15; *Hell.* 3.5.19, 4.5.12, 4.8.36; *Kyr.* 1.6.37.
[66] Xen. *Ag.* 6.7.
[67] Thuc. 5.9.2-6.
[68] Xen. *Hipparch.* 5.11, if we take deceit (ἀπάτη) to mean any attempt to influence a battle by misleading or withholding information from the enemy.

The theory of war, then, appears to follow entirely from the practice. This is no surprise if we bear in mind that the extant military treatises are based either on a lifetime of military experience or on a carefully collated repository of examples from actual history. But the fact deserves to be stressed. It has been noted that many scholars regard the Peloponnesian War as a watershed, and the works of the fourth century as the expression of wholly new principles of warfare that could not have existed before. In reality these treatises appear to be no more than articulations of facts well known for centuries to those who had seen war. They served a didactic or an antiquarian purpose but they probably did not present anything particularly new. On the matter of choosing a time and place for battle, they advise to do what Greeks had always done – to avoid risks, to seek some advantage, and to fight precisely when and where the enemy is least likely to fight well.

*

What happened when two Classical Greek armies set out to fight each other may therefore be summed up as follows. Both sides tried to obtain the best possible conditions for battle. If one force gained the upper hand – be it through numbers, surprise, the presence of allies, or a terrain advantage – it would seek an immediate confrontation. The other side could be forced to stand its ground or it could withdraw, by speed or stealth, to fight another day. When both sides felt their position was strong, the campaign would reach an impasse. Neither army would be willing to give up its advantage. Yet the Greeks were no doubt aware of the creed that 'invincibility lies in defence, but the possibility of victory in the attack'[69] – gloating and waiting for the enemy from the safety of their carefully selected ground would ultimately get them nowhere. So, whether immediately or eventually, they came down from their hills or forts, played whatever cards they had left, and fought the battle in the plain.

[69] Sūn Zi, *The Art of War*, 4.5.

3. 'Deployed to Fit the Need': Forming Up for Battle

'Battle formations are not of one but of many different kinds, depending on equipment and soldiers and terrain and enemies, and the general will have to know these when the time comes.'
- Onasander, *Strat.* 15

Worthless Hoplites

In works on Greek warfare it is traditional to speak mainly of hoplites. If the focus is not specifically on troop types such as cavalry or archers, these forces are often only briefly discussed – sometimes in isolated chapters with titles like 'The Other Warriors' – or even ignored altogether.[1] There is some justification for this; hoplites usually greatly outnumbered at least the horsemen and the specialist light-armed infantry (*psiloi*) in Greek armies, and some battle accounts from the Classical period focus on the actions of hoplite phalanxes to such an extent that it is all but impossible for us to reconstruct what their lightly equipped comrades were doing. Yet they were almost always there, and our sources carefully report this. Often they had crucial roles to play. To assume that 'only hoplites seriously counted' is to take the ancients' descriptions out of context and their narrative conventions at face value.[2] In fact, Plutarch ascribed this famous analogy to the fourth-century Athenian general Iphikrates:

'…χερσὶ μὲν ἐοίκασιν οἱ ψιλοί, ποσὶ δὲ τὸ ἱππικόν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ φάλαγξ στέρνῳ καὶ θώρακι, κεφαλῇ δὲ ὁ στρατηγός…'

[1] The trend was set by Rüstow/Köchly; see more recently Anderson, *Theory and Practice*; Hanson's combined works, which rarely contain any reference at all to non-hoplites; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*; Toalster, *Feldherren*. For intentional exceptions see Lippelt, *Leichtbewaffneten*; Best, *Thracian Peltasts*; Bugh, *Horsemen of Athens*; Spence, *Cavalry*; Worley, *Hippeis*; Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations*.

[2] The line, a strange criticism of Thucydides, is from Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars*, 250; for the sentiment see Rüstow/Köchly, 144, 182; Droysen, 95; Lammert, 'Taktik', 5-9; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 84, 87; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 253, 259, 274; Adcock, *Art of War*, 11, 16; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 1-2, 7, 42; Cartlegde, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 23-24; Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 97, 101-103; Sage, *Warfare*, xvii-xix; Runciman, 'Warrior Culture', 733; Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 204, 216; Hutchinson, *Attrition*, viii-ix; Toalster, *Feldherren*, 22, 50-52, 71. Compare Van Wees, 'Ideology', 162-165.

'…the light-armed troops are like the hands, the cavalry like the feet, the phalanx itself is like chest and cuirass, and the general is the head…'[3]

If this is a more adequate reflection of Greek military thought, then the role of different troop types in the deployment and tactics of their armies deserves more serious attention than it has received. How important were combined arms tactics to the ancient Greeks?

Before the end of the Archaic period, troop types were not separately formed up on the battlefield.[4] The interplay of light and heavy troops therefore must have been as yet inconceivable; we can no more expect Archaic Greeks to make clever use of massed peltasts than we can expect Napoleon to coordinate tactical air strikes. Nevertheless, as Hannah has recently argued, Greek art throughout the Archaic and Classical period tended to show 'mixed forces' – hoplites, *psiloi* and horsemen – in an attempt to 'capture the essence of each branch's particular forte and its contribution to the defence of the city.'[5] Awareness of this contribution had apparently long existed. The use of cavalry by the Peisistratids and of archers at the battle of Plataia shows that the emergence of troop specialisation was immediately followed by exploration of the advantages flexible forces had to offer.[6]

The Greeks soon discovered that unsupported heavy infantry was at the mercy of lighter troops. Some scholars have argued that hoplite armour was tough enough to make them all but invulnerable to missiles,[7] and that their formation was impervious to mounted assault – but this directly contradicts the ancient sources. Acknowledgement of the vulnerability of hoplites was ubiquitous. Herodotos stresses the threat of the Persian horse at every turn, and notes the casualties inflicted at Plataia by the arrows of their infantry; the battle of Malene in 493 was won by a Persian cavalry charge, and it is likely that the reckless Greek frontal assault at Marathon was meant to negate the effectiveness of enemy archers. This was

[3] Plut. *Pel.* 2.1; Polyain. *Strat.* 3.9.22.
[4] Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 34-35; *Marathon*, 59-60; 'Exclusive Phalanx', 42-43; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 64, 181-183; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 54-57, 85; Echeverría, 'Hoplite and Phalanx', 313-315.
[5] Hannah, 'Warrior Loutrophoroi', 284, 287, 291, 298-299.
[6] Hdt. 5.63.3-4, 9.22.2, 9.60. Note also the archers of Polykrates: Hdt. 3.39.3, 3.45.3.
[7] Adcock, *Art of War*, 14-16; Seibt, *Griechische Söldner*, 122, 134; Anderson, 'Hoplite Weapons', 21; Schwartz, *Hoplite*, 79-87; Aldrete/Bartell/Aldrete, *Linen Body Armor*, 103-104.

explicitly the case when hoplites faced Persian infantry again at Kounaxa.[8] Thucydides finds fault with Demosthenes for leading his few hundred hoplites against the javelin-wielding Aitolians without waiting for his light-armed Lokrian allies to arrive; when his supporting archers ran out of missiles, his hoplite force was slaughtered. In his account of the fighting on Sphakteria, Thucydides notes that Spartan helmets were useless against Athenian arrows. His focus on the power of cavalry, meanwhile, borders on the obsessive.[9] Xenophon relates how Arkadian hoplites feared Iphikrates' peltasts 'like children fear the bogeyman', and how a small group of *psiloi* once routed the vaunted Sacred Band; he also points out repeatedly that an army lacking in cavalry will be helpless against a mounted opponent, especially on level terrain.[10] Aristotle stresses that *psiloi* 'fight easily' against hoplites, and usually get the better of them.[11] Most striking of all is Plutarch's description of Agesilaos' preparations against the Persians and their elite horse: 'soon he had many and warlike horsemen,' the author notes with approval, 'instead of worthless hoplites.'[12]

Such statements may defy poetic ideals of bravery, but as far as historical accounts are concerned, the belief that the Greeks regarded missile troops as more of a nuisance than a threat seems to rest largely on two passages in Thucydides. First of these is the speech given by the Spartan general Brasidas to his mercenary hoplites in Illyria. At first glance, this speech has a very clear message:

> 'οὗτοι δὲ τὴν μέλλησιν μὲν ἔχουσι τοῖς ἀπείροις φοβεράν: καὶ γὰρ πλήθει ὄψεως δεινοὶ καὶ βοῆς μεγέθει ἀφόρητοι, ἥ τε διὰ κενῆς ἐπανάσεισις τῶν ὅπλων ἔχει τινὰ δήλωσιν ἀπειλῆς. προσμεῖξαι δὲ τοῖς ὑπομένουσιν αὐτὰ οὐχ ὁμοῖοι: (…) τοῦ τε ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθεῖν πιστότερον τὸ ἐκφοβῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἀκινδύνως ἡγοῦνται: ἐκείνῳ γὰρ ἂν πρὸ τούτου ἐχρῶντο.'

[8] Hdt. 6.29, 9.17-18, 9.21.3, 9.50, 9.51.4, 9.56, 9.61.3, 9.68.2; Xen. *An.* 1.8.18; Diod. 14.23.1; note Delbrück, 51, 71; Lorimer, 'Hoplite Phalanx', 115-116, 118; Lee, 'Persian Army'; Hanson, *Western Way*, 140; Krentz, *Marathon*, 143, 159, 173 (although this is disputed by Tuplin ['Intolerable Clothes', 223], who suggests the charge was meant to overcome fear).
[9] Thuc. 3.95.3-97.2, 4.34.3; for the threat of horsemen see 1.111.1, 3.1.2, 4.95.2, 5.59.3, but especially during the Sicilian Expedition: 6.20.4, 6.21.1, 6.22, 6.37.2, 6.64.1, 6.66.1, 6.68.3, 6.70.3, 6.71.2, 7.11.4, 7.13.2, 7.78.7.
[10] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.16-17; 7.1.19; 3.1.5, 3.4.15, 3.5.23, 6.5.17, 7.1.21; *An.* 2.4.6, 2.5.17, 3.1.2, 3.2.18, 3.3.8-9, 3.4.24, 6.5.19, 6.5.29; *Kyr.* 4.3.4-7.
[11] Arist. *Pol.* 1321a.19-20.
[12] 'ταχὺ πολλοὺς καὶ πολεμικοὺς ἔχειν ἱππεῖς ἀντὶ δειλῶν ὁπλιτῶν': Plut. *Ag.* 9.4.

'Our opponents are expecting to frighten those without experience; for indeed their numbers are terrible to behold and the volume of their shouting is unbearable and there is a clear threat in the way they wave their weapons in the air. But when they come to grips with those who stand their ground, they are not what they seem. (…) They prefer to rely on frightening you without risk rather than meeting you hand to hand; otherwise they would have done the the latter instead of the former.'[13]

The Spartan commander appears unimpressed with the local population of mobile warriors, and tells his men they will soon break through to safety. But here the context is crucial. Brasidas' hoplites found themselves suddenly abandoned by their allies in hostile territory, forced to retreat while surrounded by enemies who vastly outnumbered them. Are we to believe it was the shouting that frightened these battle-hardened troops? In reality, the speech probably does not reflect Brasidas' supposed disdain for skirmishers, but his own soldiers' very real fear of them. They had marched out with a significant number of horsemen in support, but these had disappeared; they had *psiloi* of their own, but these were apparently no match for the enemy's numbers.[14] The speech is a plea to the soldiers to maintain the protective square formation – their only hope of getting out alive. The Spartan commander may have appealed to the heavy infantry's apparent belief in their own superior courage, but he did so only to counterbalance the terror caused by their light-armed enemies – men who were, and were clearly regarded as, a real threat.[15] In the end the Illyrians did not bother to press a retreating enemy, but the hoplites' resolve and Brasidas' heroic rearguard action probably still saved his men from a darker fate. Caught in a similar situation, the Ten Thousand despaired and took heavy losses until they managed to raise their own units of cavalry and slingers on the spot.[16]

The second passage is Thucydides' account of the battle of Syracuse. His description of the skirmish preceding the battle is famously dismissive; the light-armed troops of the two sides threw their missiles at each other and ran away, 'as is usual with *psiloi*', and it was not until they had withdrawn that the battle really

[13] Thuc. 4.126.5; see especially Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 213.
[14] Thuc. 4.124.1, 4.125.2; see Xen. *An.* 3.3.7 and 3.4.27, where friendly missile troops are rendered useless by their need to seek protection among the hoplites.
[15] Crowley (*Psychology,* 101) rightly characterised the speech as 'rhetorical misinterpretation'.
[16] Thuc. 4.127-128; Xen. *An.* 3.3.7-20.

began. This account has led scholars to declare *psiloi* irrelevant to the course of major battles.[17] But we have already seen how the Athenians specifically chose the ground at Syracuse to give light troops no room to manoeuvre. The cliffs, houses and marshes that defined the edges of the battlefield gave the *psiloi* no choice but to attack head-on; their counterparts in the enemy force inevitably cancelled them out. The narrow plain simply did not allow for a better use of mobile warriors. This says nothing about the combat potential of these men.[18] Indeed, the passage only makes sense as a comment on what happened when light-armed infantry faced *each other* – in a fight with hoplites, after all, it is difficult to imagine anything like the mutual rout Thucydides describes. His accounts of other engagements make his awareness of the danger posed by light troops abundantly clear;[19] the fact that he denies them much of a role in battle at Syracuse suggests that it may have been common practice to neutralise these men in pitched battles through a deliberate choice of ground – as in this case – or through the careful deployment of light troops screening the hoplite phalanx and absorbing the blow.

When the terrain did allow for tactical mobility, flexible forces could be deployed more freely. In these cases their effectiveness increased dramatically. Thucydides himself describes the methods used against the Spartans on Sphakteria:

> ‘Δημοσθένους δὲ τάξαντος διέστησαν κατὰ διακοσίους τε καὶ πλείους, ἔστι δ’ ᾗ ἐλάσσους, τῶν χωρίων τὰ μετεωρότατα λαβόντες, ὅπως ὅτι πλείστη ἀπορία ᾖ τοῖς πολεμίοις πανταχόθεν κεκυκλωμένοις καὶ μὴ ἔχωσι πρὸς ὅτι ἀντιτάξωνται, ἀλλ’ ἀμφίβολοι γίγνωνται τῷ πλήθει, εἰ μὲν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἐπίοιεν, ὑπὸ τῶν κατόπιν βαλλόμενοι, εἰ δὲ τοῖς πλαγίοις, ὑπὸ τῶν ἑκατέρωθεν παρατεταγμένων.’
>
> *‘Demosthenes deployed* [the *psiloi*] *in units of two hundred or more, sometimes less, and made them occupy the highest points to paralyse the enemy, surrounding him on every side and leaving him with no one to march against, exposing him to*

[17] Thuc. 6.69.2; Rüstow/Köchly, 144; Delbrück, 34-35; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 274-275; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 42; discussed in Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 64.
[18] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 64. Note also the complete ineffectiveness of Iphikrates’ otherwise extremely capable peltasts when confined within the Long Walls of Corinth: Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11.
[19] Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 158-159.

the cross-fire of the swarm, struck by those in his rear if he attacked in front, and by those on one flank if he moved against the other.'[20]

This shows the relative sophistication of Greek skirmishing tactics. Without serious opposition, light troops dominated the battlefield; in small, mobile packs they held to no fixed position but answered to the advice of military thinkers like Xenophon to strike against the weakest and most exposed part of an enemy force.[21] They used their missiles to harass hoplites with impunity, attacking their unprotected sides, denying them a chance to come to grips; through exhaustion, despair and mounting casualties they would eventually break the hoplites' spirit.[22]

It is surely no surprise to hear of Spartans moaning after their defeat on Sphakteria that they had not been beaten fairly, and that archery was no proof of courage.[23] We can scarcely imagine how infuriating it must have been for these proudest of hoplites to find themselves utterly helpless against a rabble of flimsy warriors they could have dispatched with ease if they would just stand still. The hoplites' tactical response makes this frustration very clear. Hoplite forces beset by *psiloi* tended to send out their youngest men to chase off their attackers; these lower year-classes usually accomplished nothing, and suffered heavily when they turned to withdraw to the line. Yet their commanders kept sending them out again and again until they were completely exhausted.[24] To see comrades wounded and killed without being able to fight back was simply too much for them to endure. The hoplites' rage could take extreme forms. When the Ten Thousand at last struck back against their pursuers and their newly formed cavalry corps killed large numbers of enemy *psiloi*, the hoplites proceeded of their own accord to mutilate the corpses. When king Agesilaos came to Lechaion, where days before a Spartan unit had been destroyed by peltasts, Xenophon points out specifically that he did not throw down the trophy; apparently it could be expected that a less composed commander out of sheer indignation would have destroyed this normally inviolable monument of

[20] Thuc. 4.32.3.
[21] Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.14-15; for an early example of the decisive use of *psiloi* see Thuc. 1.106.1-2.
[22] The process is outlined in Hdt. 9.20-21 and described in emphatic detail in Thuc. 2.79.5-6, 3.97.3-98.3, 4.32.3-35.1, 7.79.5-6; Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.3-4, 4.5.13-16; *An.* 3.4.25-28.
[23] Thuc. 4.40.2; Paus. 1.13.5; for more on this attitude to *psiloi* see Trundle, 'Light Troops', 142-146.
[24] Thuc. 3.97.3-98.1, 4.33.2, 4.125.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.15-6; however, note the claim (4.4.16) that the Spartans had at some point managed to do this successfully. See also Best, *Thracian Peltasts*, 61; Konecny, 'Lechaion', 98-99.

victory.[25] To fully appreciate the psychological effect of the hoplites' helplessness, we should consider the fact that, far from fighting to the death, the Spartans on Sphakteria surrendered when less than a third of their force had fallen; at Lechaion, well over half survived the ordeal.[26] Both times, the loss of heart of the heirs of Leonidas shocked all of Greece.[27] These casualty figures are of course far higher than those for pitched battles, but they still show that fights of *psiloi* against hoplites were not about annihilation – they were about methodically destroying the hoplites' will to fight.[28]

It may be argued, as Van Wees has done, that light troops were only able to accomplish this if they vastly outnumbered their hoplite victims.[29] Indeed, in Aitolia, on Sphakteria and at Lechaion the side fighting with *psiloi* clearly enjoyed an overwhelming numerical advantage. But it is not clear whether this was a necessary precondition for victory. Strictly theoretically, the numbers are irrelevant; since hoplites could do nothing against the attacks of light-armed troops, these troops could inflict casualties indefinitely without sustaining losses, and would eventually triumph regardless of the initial size of their force. The hoplites would never win. This is of course no more than a mathematical fact, and it does not take into account such factors as ammunition, stamina and time; yet the utter immunity of the light-armed soldier to counterattack by hoplites must be central to our interpretation of *psiloi* tactics. Victory in their battles depended less on the attrition rate they achieved than on the perceived ability of the enemy hoplites to either strike back or reach safety. Once these options were exhausted, the hoplites would inevitably break. In Aitolia, the hoplites fought on until the archers who protected them had spent their arrows; on Sphakteria, the Spartans surrendered only when their final defensive position had been compromised by troops in their rear; the men at Lechaion did not break before the peltasts, but they fled when they saw the Athenian phalanx approaching.[30] Numerical superiority was important only in that it ensured that such

[25] Xen. *An.* 3.4.5; *Hell.* 4.5.10.
[26] Thuc. 4.38.5; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17; Demosthenes' forces suffered a similar casualty rate in Aitolia (Thuc. 3.98.4). A notable exception here is the Theban force holding the pass at Kithairon against Kleombrotos in 378; Xenophon says they were wiped out to a man by the Spartan king's peltasts (*Hell.* 5.4.14).
[27] Thuc. 4.40.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18; Plut. *Ag.* 22.2-4.
[28] Wheeler, 'Firepower', 181.
[29] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 65.
[30] Thuc. 3.98.1-2, 4.36-38; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17.

critical exhaustion of options would indeed be reached. Again, the purpose of *psiloi* was not to annihilate the enemy, but to drain his fighting spirit – a process at which even small numbers of these troops could be terrifyingly effective.

Horsemen, too, could make heavy infantry dance to their tune.[31] As noted above, ancient authors realised that hoplite armies without cavalry support were generally unable to achieve anything at all against mounted opponents on level ground. This fact was apparently so well-known and so widely accepted in Classical Athens that it became the stuff of proverbs:

'Ιππέας εἰς πεδίον' προκαλῇ Σωκράτη εἰς λόγους προκαλούμενος.'

'He who challenges Sokrates to an argument challenges 'cavalry in the plain'.'[32]

To understand what cavalry meant to the Greeks, we need only turn the phrase around. Challenging cavalry in the plain is like challenging Sokrates to an argument: it is exactly what he wants you to do, and you are going to lose.

The horseman's domination of the open field shaped Greek warfare at both a strategic and a tactical level. Strategically, the mobility of cavalry turned marching columns, supply trains and ravagers into inviting targets, allowing horsemen to utterly cripple an enemy army's ability to operate abroad. When the Athenians launched a punitive expedition against Thessaly during the First Peloponnesian War, the enemy horsemen effectively confined them to their fortified camp; they could accomplish nothing and were eventually forced to return home. Their own cavalry was able to contain the invading Peloponnesians in a similar way during the early years of the Archidamian War. Once Thrasyboulos had scraped together a force of seventy horsemen against the oligarchs in Athens, none but the enemy cavalry dared to leave the city gates to come out against him.[33] Tactically, meanwhile, horsemen were by far the most elusive and dangerous warrior type known. Cavalry could rarely be mustered in anything near the numbers of most city-states' hoplite levies, but in their case this disparity mattered even less than it did for light-armed infantry; even small groups of mounted soldiers could change the outcome of whole

[31] For a detailed examination of their methods see Spence, *Cavalry*, 107-163.
[32] Pl. *Tht.* 183d.
[33] Thuc. 1.111.1, 3.1.2; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.25-26; *Hipparch.* 7.6-15; Spence, 'Defence of Attika', 97-102; Hanson, *Warfare and Agriculture*, 122-128, 151; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 66.

campaigns with a single charge. The force of cavalry that decided the battle of Delion was no more than a few hundred strong, and it was with a similarly modest number that the Athenians hoped to tip the scales of the Sicilian Expedition in their favour. In 369, an assault by just sixty Phleian horsemen routed the rearguard of the large Argive army ravaging their land. At one point during the short-lived Theban ascendancy, the aggressive harrying tactics of a mere fifty Syracusan horsemen forced the entire Boiotian army to conform to their will.[34]

Combined arms tactics, then, were a vital necessity for the Greeks. Indeed, their tactical thought appears to have centred on an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different types of warriors, and it is frequently demonstrated how much they valued a balanced army that could adapt itself to meet any requirement. The reinforcements Gelon of Syracuse is said to have offered for use against the Persians in 480 consisted of sizeable units of light and heavy infantry, cavalry, archers and slingers; Xenophon's ideal example of good order was a well-drilled force of hoplites, cavalry, and *psiloi* of all kinds; Iphikrates allegedly described himself, not as a horseman or a hoplite or an archer or a peltast, but as one who could command *all* of these.[35] Both Thucydides and Xenophon describe how generals preparing for a campaign would seek to obtain specific reinforcements based on the threats they were going to face. Demosthenes needed javelin-throwers in Aitolia; Nikias wanted long-range missile troops to ward off the horsemen of Syracuse; Agesilaos raised a cavalry corps in Asia Minor 'so that he could fight instead of running away'. The Athenian general Hippokrates believed the Spartans would not dare to invade Athenian territory without the support of the Boiotian horse. When Athenian cavalry began to raid Spartan territory, the Spartans saw that even hoplites of their calibre could do nothing to hold them off; they promptly raised their own contingents of horsemen and archers to deal with the threat. Some decades later the Spartans decided to withdraw their hoplite army from Haliartos when they realised their horsemen were no match for those of their enemies. When Kallias and Iphikrates saw that the Spartan column on its way to Lechaion had no fast troops in support, they realised 'it was safe to attack them with peltasts'. Xenophon advised the Thracian king Seuthes to adjust his marching column based on when he would

[34] Thuc. 4.96.5, 6.96.1, 6.98.1; Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.4, 7.1.21.
[35] Hdt. 7.158.4; Xen. *Oik*. 8.6; Plut. *Mor.* 187b.

march and what sort of enemies he was likely to encounter; he instructed the Athenian cavalry commander to use light infantry in close coordination with horsemen, and never to engage strong enemy forces without hoplite support. Aineias stresses the need for hoplites defending a city to sally in organised groups able to provide mutual assistance. They were to be preceded by *psiloi* and cavalry to protect their advance.[36] Thus they could fall upon the enemy:

> '…οὕτω χρὴ αὐτοῖς προσκεῖσθαι τοῖς μὲν ἱππεῦσιν προκαταλαμβάνοντα τὰς ἀποχωρήσεις, τοῖς δ' ἐπιλέκτοις ἐνέδρας ποιούμενον, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις κούφοις ἐπιφαινόμενον αὐτοῖς, τοὺς δ' ὁπλίτας ἀθρόους ἐν τάξει ἄγοντα, μὴ πόρρω δὲ τῶν προπεμφθέντων μερῶν.'
>
> *'…attack them, cut off their retreat with your cavalry, set ambuscades of picked men, engage them with your other light troops, and bring up your hoplites* en masse *in battle formation, not far behind those already sent in.'*[37]

In other words, commanders were to make full use of the different troops at their disposal, and take care not to rely on any single one – to view their armies as limber bodies with striking hands and running feet rather than monolithic, co-dependent masses of armoured men.

The orthodox view holds that the examples listed here do not concern pitched battles of Greek against Greek, and therefore should not affect our characterisation of Greek warfare. Skirmishes, battles on broken ground, surprise attacks, ambushes, and fights against non-Greeks did not define their wars.[38] This strict compartmentalisation is meant to explain and justify the supposed primacy of the hoplite. Yet it is flawed on several levels. Firstly, pitched battles were extremely rare, and Greek armies much more often fought less 'formal' engagements on a less impressive scale.[39] Both heavy infantry and faster troops were usually involved in such clashes, and it is clear from the examples above that the former tended to be at a serious disadvantage. Hoplites therefore did not single-handedly dominate Greek

[36] Thuc. 3.97.2, 6.22; Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15; Thuc. 4.95.2, 4.55.2; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.23, 4.5.13; *An.* 7.2.37; *Hipparch.* 5.13, 7.1-4, 8.19; Ain. Takt. 15.2-5.
[37] Ain. Takt. 16.7. Picked forces will be discussed in the next chapter.
[38] Droysen, 94-97; Lammert, 'Taktik', 5-9; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 274-275; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 42; Spence, *Cavalry*, 140; Sage, *Warfare*, xvii-xix; Hanson, 'Ideology', 5-6; 'When, Where and Why?', 209, 211.
[39] Rawlings, 'Alternative Agonies', 234; *Greeks at War*, 66-69.

warfare; in fact, they were the ones who needed protection almost all of the time. Secondly, we have little reason to assume that hoplites did in fact rule supreme in the sort of full-scale hoplite battles that scholars tend to regard as the true form of Greek warfare. The clashes at Spartolos and Lechaion showed that missile troops were perfectly capable of wiping out even a formed phalanx on level ground.[40] Through manoeuvre and the psychological effect of steady attrition, *psiloi* could demolish the finest hoplites in any terrain – a fact of fundamental importance considering they must have frequently outnumbered the heavy infantry levy. Cavalry, meanwhile, did not need such numbers to impress. It was not hoplites but horsemen who ruled the plain, and those horsemen had no trouble applying their particular strengths to the conditions of pitched battle. To reduce Greek battles to hoplite combat is to focus exclusively on a fraction of the tactical system within which hoplites operated. Rather, we should regard each battle in which the fighting was apparently reduced to the clash of hoplite phalanxes as one in which the decisive interference of light troops was effectively prevented – and ask ourselves how it was done.

It should be emphasised that in all of Greek history there are almost no known battles where a phalanx of hoplites entered the field without any other troops in support. The classic example is the battle of Marathon, which Herodotos suggests was fought entirely by heavy infantry – yet Krentz believed light troops and cavalry did take part.[41] At Plataia, of course, *psiloi* are said to have significantly outnumbered hoplites in the Greek army; allusions to their presence in other major campaigns suggest that this was typically the case whenever a city-state marched to war.[42] In light of this, we must assume that even engagements such as the battle of Solygeia, where only hoplites are mentioned on the Corinthian side, may actually have involved significant numbers of lighter troops. In several cases where the action appears confined to the heavy infantry, the presence of cavalry and missile troops is in fact dutifully reported. It is only in a few highly unusual cases that a phalanx found itself entirely unsupported. One of these, the Battle of the Champions, was a unique event, as noted in the previous chapter; in another, the fight on Sphakteria,

[40] Thuc. 2.79.3-6; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.11-18.
[41] Krentz, *Marathon*, 151; see also Hunt, *Slaves*, 26-28. More recently, however, Krentz appears to have changed his mind: see 'Exclusive Phalanx', 42-43.
[42] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 65, citing evidence from the Delion campaign; note also the sudden and highly effective employment of light infantry at Megara in 457 (Thuc. 1.106.2).

the Spartans were forced to fight a battle they were not at all prepared for.[43] The battle of Tegyra is the only other definite example that comes to mind.[44] Instead, what we frequently find in the sources is accounts of armies failing to win battles precisely because they lacked light-armed troops or horsemen, or because these troops had been driven off.[45] The presence of such forces was essential. Greek warfare was never just about hoplites, but about the conscious and deliberate combination of different types of troops.

It is crucial therefore not to reduce the subject of deployment for battle exclusively to drawing up the phalanx. In Iphikrates' terms, this was merely a rump without arms or legs. The phalanx will be discussed at length below; first is an analysis of the options available to Greeks in the deployment of their whole army. This was practically never a matter of hoplites alone. The battle array was an integrated grouping of *psiloi*, heavy infantry and cavalry units, in which every troop type was expected to contribute to the best of its ability to the effort of the army as a whole.

Ways to Deploy

What types of deployment did the Greeks devise, and which did they commonly use? On this subject, scholarly views to this day seem ultimately fuelled by the disappointment of the Prussians. It is still widely held that, at least until the later stages of the Peloponnesian War, there was little for Greek generals to do beyond drawing up the phalanx and leading it into battle. All else served only to facilitate the head-on clash of the hoplites.[46] Tactically minded authors have criticised the Greeks for their failure to use light infantry and cavalry in more sophisticated ways; some have sought to characterise their warfare as ritualistic and exclusive because better

[43] Samons, 'Spartan Plan', 537.
[44] Plut. *Pel.* 17.2.
[45] For example at Potidaia, Spartolos, Solygeia and Syracuse (Thuc. 1.62.3-6, 2.79.2-6, 4.44.1, 7.5.3); note also Xenophon's comments on the helplessness of an army without horsemen (Xen. *An.* 2.4.6), which, as we will see in Chapter 5 below, were far from rhetorical.
[46] Lammert, 'Taktik', 11; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 71-72; Adcock, *Art of War*, 6-7; Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 15-16; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 13; Hanson, 'Ideology', 4-5; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 42; Tritle, 'Warfare', 209.

tactics apparently did not emerge.[47] The Greeks' supposed failure to exploit *psiloi* in battle, their simple grouping of these troops in one way or another around the phalanx, has been treated with stern disapproval.[48] Their placement of cavalry on the flanks has sometimes been described as merely 'traditional' with little consideration for this deployment's tactical purpose.[49] Yet in the professional armies of the Hellenistic kingdoms and in the forces of warlike Rome, the same 'primitive' patterns persisted. Light troops still lined up beside or ahead of the infantry; horsemen still guarded the flanks. Similarly, the centrality of the hoplite phalanx to all battle formations has been considered uniquely Greek, a product of *polis* ideology and cultural prejudice – but few variations on the theme have emerged in any culture fielding heavy infantry. Macedonians, Carthaginians and Romans, to name but a few examples, all seem to have relied on a strong central line of soldiers on foot. They knew little more than the Greeks of the 'four possible battle arrays' offered by Lammert to demonstrate Greek ignorance of tactics.[50] It might help to approach this topic from a more practical military angle and ask what else the Greeks could have done.

Hoplites naturally served as the backbone – the 'chest and cuirass' – of any army. They alone had the staying power to withstand direct assault; when they attacked, only other hoplites could stand against them. Even in engagements where one side used only missile troops, a nearby friendly hoplite phalanx could provide an essential fallback position and base of operations, as seen on Sphakteria and at Lechaion.[51] However, hoplites were also the slowest troops present, and the most vulnerable to outflanking both by the opponent's heavy infantry and by lighter troops. Their survival in pitched battle depended on their facing the enemy as an unbroken line, presenting as few opportunities as possible for attackers to strike them

[47] Many examples of this attitude have been cited in the historiographical overview in the Introduction; in addition, see Lammert, 'Taktik', 9, 14-16; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 272; and above, n.2.
[48] Droysen, 95-97; Delbrück, 109-110, 150-151; Lippelt, *Leichtbewaffneten*, 35, 43-44, 51; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 42; Garlan, *Guerre*, 108-109; Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 76; Van Wees, 'Ideology', 162.
[49] Rüstow/Köchly, 182; Beck, 'Delion', 197; Cawkwell, *Philip*, 151; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 13; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 159; Spence, *Cavalry*, 154-155; Pritchett, 'General', 116-117; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 196; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 59-60, 75-76.
[50] Lammert, 'Taktik', 9.
[51] Thuc. 4.33; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17.

from the side, force them apart, or throw them into confusion.[52] Caught out of formation, they were easy prey; on the battlefield as on the march, they had to huddle together in fear of more agile troops. To make matters worse, as we have seen, the hoplite militia was entirely untrained. This affected not only their tactical abilities, but also their reliability under pressure. Few hoplites could be trusted to make a stand unsupported. With these serious limitations in mind, the only deployment that seemed to offer some promise of safety was a continuous line of hoplites wide enough to stretch from one flank-protecting terrain feature to another, like the one the Athenians formed at Syracuse and the Spartan-led forces hoped to deploy within the Long Walls of Corinth:

> 'ὡς δὲ πολὺ διεχόντων τῶν τειχῶν ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων παραταττόμενοι ὀλίγοι ἑαυτοῖς ἔδοξαν εἶναι, σταύρωμά τ᾽ ἐποιήσαντο καὶ τάφρον οἵαν ἐδύναντο πρὸ αὐτῶν, ἕως δὴ οἱ σύμμαχοι βοηθήσοιεν αὐτοῖς.'
>
> *'But since the walls were far apart, when they formed up they thought themselves too few, and so they made a stockade and as good a ditch as they could in front of them until their allies would come to their aid.'*[53]

If the terrain offered no natural security, the flanks of the phalanx had to be protected in some other way. As will be discussed below, the disposition of the contingents of hoplites and their depth was largely determined by these attempts to secure the integrity of the line.

The weaknesses of the hoplite thus led to an apparently simplistic and inflexible tactical system. This system has been wrongly interpreted as one in which mobile troops had no place; in fact it was precisely *because* light infantry and horsemen were such a terrible threat that its restrictive form became a necessity. Untrained citizen soldiers performed best when merged into long unbroken lines drawn straight across the battlefield. This rigid core of Greek armies was as much a bulwark as it was an obstacle. If the phalanx was to be an effective armoured 'chest', no gaps could be tolerated; no other troops could be allowed to move between its

[52] Luginbill ('Othismos', 57) and Crowley (*Pyschology*, 49-53) sum up the evidence. This fundamental weakness of the hoplite phalanx is acknowledged by all scholars, although Echeverría is right to stress ('*Taktikē Technē*', 68) that phalanxes once in combat could be partly routed without losing the battle altogether.

[53] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9; see also Thuc. 6.66.1, Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.50, and note the Ten Thousand's attempts to form up with their backs to rivers (Xen. *An.* 1.10.9, 4.3.26).

parts or through it. The known variety of deployments for flexible forces was therefore limited for the same reason that it was limited in Hellenistic and Roman armies. The battle line had to be kept intact for victory to be possible. It drove the other troops to fixed positions on the flanks, in front, or behind. Iphikrates' metaphor is therefore remarkably apt; the hands and feet had no choice but to stay in front of, come up behind, or stay alongside the chest.

Unfortunately our sources are not always helpful when we try to reconstruct the resulting deployments. Their focus in many major battles is on hoplites, often blatantly at the expense of other troop types who probably did take part in the fighting. We are specifically told that fast troops were present at engagements like First Mantineia, the Nemea and Koroneia, but they completely disappear in the actual accounts of these fights.[54] A number of passages make it clear that large contingents of light-armed poor habitually marched out with citizen armies, but their actions in battle are rarely reported.[55] It has been convincingly argued that this selective tradition was the result of the political biases of the authors, who do not provide a fair account of actual battles.[56] Yet their omissions remain strange in light of their constant reference to the impact of mobile forces on a strategic and tactical scale, and indeed even in some full-scale battles the decisive contribution of faster troops simply could not be left unreported. In those cases we get a glimpse of what must have been more generally going on. Accounts of smaller engagements of every kind can provide us with the rest of the image.

There is no extant manual from Classical Greece offering instructions on how to deploy an army. However, Asklepiodotos, writing in the Hellenistic period, does discuss this to some extent – and the forms he offers all have their parallels, and may have their origins, in Classical battle accounts. The central place of the heavy infantry phalanx is never called into question, but Asklepiodotos stresses repeatedly that missile troops and horsemen ought to be 'deployed to fit the need'.[57] Thus the cavalry is often placed to protect the flanks of the phalanx, as both sides did at

[54] Spartan cavalry at Thuc. 5.67.1; cavalry and light troops of both sides at Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16-17 and 4.3.15.
[55] Hdt. 8.24-25, 9.28-30; Thuc. 1.105.6-106.2, 2.31.2, 4.93.3, 4.94.1; see Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 61-62.
[56] Van Wees, 'Ideology', 162-165, *Greek Warfare*, 65; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 59-60, 75-76.
[57] 'πρὸς τὰς ἁρμοζούσας χρείας (…) ταγήσονται': Askl. 6.1. See also Askl. 1.3, 7.1; Xen. *Hipparch.* 9.1; Spence, *Cavalry*, 155.

Delion in 424, and the Spartans at First Mantineia and Olynthos; sometimes it is used together with light infantry to protect one vulnerable flank, as the Syracusans did at the first battle outside their walls, and as Epameinondas did at Second Mantineia. In such a position it was of course ideally placed to outflank the enemy, unless opposing cavalry was deployed to stop them – prompting Onasander to claim that 'the general will not deploy his cavalry as he wishes, but as he is compelled'.[58] This did not always mean, though, that they were restricted to their own little clash on the wings. They could also be placed in front of the phalanx, 'to draw first blood and provoke the battle', as at Lynkos, Tegyra, Leuktra and the Krimesos; it is possible that the Greeks picked this up from Persian manoeuvres at Plataia.[59]

In his account of the Second Battle of Mantineia, Xenophon stresses that cavalry should not be formed up 'like a phalanx of hoplites', all lined up together as wide as possible, as some generals would command; rather, they should be placed in a deep column with direct light infantry support.[60] This would allow them to surprise their enemies with unseen numbers – the horsemen's best hope of shattering their counterparts in the enemy force. Once the enemy horse were taken out of the picture, the cavalry would of course be free to operate with impunity.

The light infantry meant to support them in this were the *hamippoi*, a particular type of warrior who ran along hidden between the mounted men and provided cavalry formations with a nasty secret weapon and some much-needed staying power. Unfortunately, even though the troop type seems to have been known to Herodotos and Thucydides, Second Mantineia is the only battle in which we see them in action, and the extent of their role in Greek warfare remains sadly unclear.[61] All we have is Xenophon's insistence that *hamippoi* are essential to cavalry operations – which should probably be taken as a sign that the concept was not as widely understood as Xenophon would have liked.[62]

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[58] Classical Greek cavalry corresponds to the type Asklepiodotos puts on the flanks (1.3); for the examples in order of appearance see Thuc. 4.93.4-94.1, 5.67.1; Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40; Thuc. 6.67.2; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.24; Onasander, *Strat.* 16; see also Rahe, 'Military Situation', 88.
[59] Askl. 7.1; Thuc. 4.124.3; Plut. *Pel.* 17.2-3; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10-13; Plut. *Tim.* 27.6-7; Hdt. 9.20-23, 49-50.
[60] Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23-24.
[61] Hdt. 7.158.4; Thuc. 5.57.2; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23-24 (note also his comments on Persian tactics at 3.4.13); Spence, *Cavalry*, 56-60. Sekunda ('*Mora* at Lechaeum', 60-64) assumes the Skiritai were *hamippoi*, but there does not seem to be any evidence to support this.
[62] Xen. *Hipparch.* 5.13, 8.18-19, 9.7.

The fact that horsemen did nevertheless often cooperate closely with other troop types is clearly demonstrated by a common countermeasure against harassment by the enemy's hands and feet. We see this tactic used for the first time by the Spartan king Pausanias at Peiraieus in 403; it was frequently employed afterwards by Spartan-led forces, suggesting a Spartan origin, but by 381 we find their enemies using it against them.[63] The tactic may be referred to as the cascading charge. In such an attack, the cavalry would be sent straight against the opposing force, followed directly and at a run by the *psiloi*, the youngest of the hoplites, and finally the rest of the phalanx, each taking advantage of the impact of the preceding charge. In practice, the number of waves and their exact order could vary depending on the troops present, and young hoplites were not always separately grouped, but this made little difference; all the fighting would be done by the first few waves. No additional momentum was required. The psychological effect of the tactic would have been devastating, as the series of successive attacks gave the enemy no time to react, and every blow struck against them was immediately followed by the next. They generally would not withstand this long enough to require the attacker to commit to hand-to-hand combat. The hoplites were explicitly sent in only to inspire confidence among the charging vanguard and a sense of dread in the target – to support, rather than be supported by, flexible troops. When Teleutias's cascading charge came up against the Olynthian city wall, he became the only commander ever known to fail with this tactic.[64]

As for the *psiloi* themselves, Asklepiodotos identifies four different deployments for them, and all but one are known from the Classical period.[65] Firstly, they could be placed in front of the phalanx, as the pre-battle skirmish suggests they were at Syracuse; we do not hear of such skirmishing in any other clash, but the cascading charge frequently featured light infantry attacking ahead of the hoplite force, and in the land of the Kolchians the Ten Thousand deployed a third of their *psiloi* in this position. Secondly, they could be stationed behind the battle line, where they could discharge missiles while protected by the heavy infantry, as Thrasyboulos ordered them to do with great effect in two of his battles. Xenophon has his Kyros

[63] Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.32, 3.4.23, 4.6.10-11, 5.3.5-6, 5.4.40; *An.* 3.4.3-4; Aineias (16.7) also recommends its use.
[64] Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.5; the Olynthians counterattacked with a cascading charge of their own.
[65] Askl. 6.1; note Arr. *Takt.* 9.1-2, 13.1-2, whose deployments of *psiloi* are exactly the same.

recommend this deployment for pitched battle. When forced to seek shelter within a square formation of hoplites, *psiloi* would in a sense be using this form as well. Thirdly, they could be placed on the flanks, sometimes with the cavalry, sometimes in their own right; at Olpai and at the Long Walls of Corinth they were part of the battle line proper, while at Delion, Kounaxa and Second Mantineia they were stationed to extend the line and prevent encirclement.[66] Lastly, according to Asklepiodotos, they could be deployed within the phalanx. This was the likely reality of Greek warfare before the segregation of troop types on the battlefield; according to Plutarch the Athenian archers still mingled with the hoplites at Plataia. There are no known examples of this practice after the Persian Wars, probably due to the unease Greeks would have felt at the thought of creating gaps in their line that enemy forces might exploit. Onasander also described in detail how this deployment greatly reduced the effectiveness of the missile troops themselves.[67] However, one similar deployment stands out: in the land of the Mossynoikoi, the archers and peltasts of the Ten Thousand were deployed between units of hoplites in a checkerboard formation.[68] This was a spectacular modification of phalanx warfare – notably in rugged terrain with no enemy horsemen present – but it is never again seen in the sources. This mercenary army's unique military situation and extensive shared combat experience probably allowed them to experiment with tactics that other Greeks were unable to replicate.

It may be true that, confined by terrain and advancing phalanxes, *psiloi* could not accomplish much. The Greeks can hardly be faulted for this; it is worth stressing that Hellenistic tacticians like Asklepiodotos apparently could not think of ways to use light troops in battle that their Classical counterparts had not at some point attempted in practice. There were only so many ways to work around a phalanx. But it is important to ask whether this really reflected a way of war dominated by the hoplite. We should bear in mind the tactics of the *psiloi* on Sphakteria and elsewhere – with a startling sense of purpose they exploited precisely the weaknesses that forced the hoplites to deploy as they did. Realising their predicament, the Spartans on the island tried as hard as they could to reduce the battle to a clash of

[66] In front: Thuc. 6.69.2; Xen. *An.* 4.8.15. Behind: Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.12, 15-16, 34; *Kyr.* 6.3.24; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.38.2; see also above, n.14. On flanks: Thuc. 3.107.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9; Thuc. 4.93.4-5; Xen. *An.* 1.8.5, 1.9.7-8 (note also 7.1.23); *Hell.* 7.5.24.
[67] Plut. *Arist.* 14.3; Onasander, *Strat.* 17.
[68] Xen. *An.* 5.4.22.

rival phalanxes; their failure to do so ultimately caused their defeat.[69] Like cavalry, *psiloi* could take complete control of a battle if the hoplites were not careful. It is in this light that we should see the premium Greek armies placed on protective terrain features and horsemen guarding their flanks.

In addition to all these variations in forming up for battle, it was a well-established tactic to hold troops in reserve. These could be used to protect the main line and to intervene decisively in a later stage of the battle:

> 'δοκεῖ μοι, ὦ ἄνδρες στρατηγοί, ἐπιτάξασθαι τῇ φάλαγγι λόχους φύλακας ἵν' ἄν που δέῃ ὦσιν οἱ ἐπιβοηθήσοντες τῇ φάλαγγι καὶ οἱ πολέμιοι τεταραγμένοι ἐμπίπτωσιν εἰς τεταγμένους καὶ ἀκεραίους.'
>
> *'It seems to me, generals, that we should draw up guard units behind our phalanx, so that in case of need we have men to come to its aid, and the enemy in disarray will run into well-ordered, intact troops.'*[70]

This was the apparent function of the Athenian archers at Plataia – to act as a mobile 'fire brigade' and appear wherever they were needed. Xenophon notes that one of the strengths of horsemen is their ability to strike promptly at any apparent weakness, and Thucydides reports this as the exact order given to part of the Athenian cavalry at Delion. The Spartan-led coalition inside the Long Walls of Corinth intended to use its cavalry in the same way. According to Diodoros, the Spartans held back a unit of Eleian cavalry at Second Mantineia, which was committed just in time to prevent the left wing of the coalition army from crumbling.[71] In all these cases the unit in reserve was light and mobile, but it could just as easily be a formation of hoplites, like the ones referred to in the Anabasis passage cited above. The Corinthians saved their left wing with a unit of hoplite reinforcements at Solygeia. During the first battle at Syracuse, the Athenians set aside half of their hoplites to act as a reserve; again, the point of this was both to support the line and to break the enemy's resolve at the right time.[72] Thucydides has Brasidas explain:

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[69] Thuc. 4.33.1.
[70] Xen. *An.* 6.5.9; see Onasander, *Strat.* 22.1; Wheeler, 'Battle', 219.
[71] Hdt. 9.22.2, 9.60; Xen. *Hipparch.* 7.8; Thuc. 4.93.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10; Doid. 15.85.8 (although Xenophon does not mention this).
[72] Thuc. 4.43.4, 6.67.1.

‘ἐλπὶς γὰρ μάλιστα αὐτοὺς οὕτω φοβηθῆναι: τὸ γὰρ ἐπιὸν ὕστερον δεινότερον τοῖς πολεμίοις τοῦ παρόντος καὶ μαχομένου.’

‘This is our best hope to frighten them, for those who show up later are more terrifying to an enemy than those he is already fighting.’[73]

Again, this beautifully illustrates the vulnerability of the hoplite. In each example, the force to be supported, the force that is expected to waver or to be unable to withstand a second onslaught, is the heavy infantry of the battle line. They were the ones who needed help, and help was offered to them in any way the terrain and the forces present allowed.

In short, the sources show clearly that hoplites did not fight alone. And how could they? The phalanx by itself was as much a daunting force of armoured men as it was a helpless mass of flesh and bronze. Even as a bulwark against cavalry it was far from perfect; a clumsy mob of amateurs, it had to maintain its cohesion to survive, and it could not strike at range. It had to be protected as much as it could protect. With very few exceptions, Greek battles therefore involved formations of different troop types supporting each other to make up for obvious weaknesses: hoplites guarded mobile troops against direct assault, while cavalry and *psiloi* guarded hoplites against missile attacks and outflanking manoeuvres. This division of labour was necessitated by the hoplites’ constant fear of being caught at a disadvantage. They used all available means to keep enemy missile troops at arm’s length until they could engage the opposing phalanx; as we shall see, they also depended on horsemen to protect them if the battle did not go their way. The matter of deploying the army therefore went far beyond the mere arrangement of the phalanx – which was itself a tactical response to the war-winning potential of faster troops.

Positions of Honour

The deployment of the hoplite force was a question all of its own. Phalanxes were rarely uniform bodies of men; most major Greek battles were fought by coalition armies, in which the participants fielded as many hoplites as they were able or required to provide. These tended to fight together as city-state units, side by side

[73] Thuc. 5.9.8: this is seen in practice at Hdt. 6.29.1; Thuc. 3.108.1, 4.96.5-6, 5.73.2-3.

with the forces of their allies. The sources suggest that the placement of these contingents in a line was a far more complicated business than we might casually assume.

For the decisive battle of Plataia, the Greeks managed to assemble a vast alliance army in which the hoplites of dozens of states were represented. None questioned the leadership of the Spartans in this campaign; it was therefore tacitly accepted that they should hold the right wing of the line. But the honour of holding the left wing was disputed. According to Herodotos, the Tegeans and the Athenians tried to outdo each other in recounting ancient deeds of valour to determine who deserved to hold the position. In the end, 'the whole army shouted that the Athenians were more worthy', and they got the left wing; still, the Spartans deployed the Tegeans directly to their own left 'to honour them'. It was not until all this had been resolved that the army could form up for battle.[74]

This passage seems to establish beyond a doubt the primacy of honour in the decision-making process, trumping any tactical considerations. It presents the right wing as the position of highest honour, preserved for the leaders of the alliance; the extreme left wing was apparently second in honour, and the place next to the extreme right was third. Indeed, the main contributor of hoplites is often found on the right wing of the line in battles of the Classical period; it is where the Thebans were at Delion, the Spartans at the Nemea, and both Thebans and Spartans at Koroneia. Herodotos also relates how it was traditional for the Athenian polemarch to lead from the right. Thucydides adds another layer to these conventions when he states that the Mantineians held the allied right at First Mantineia because the battle took place in their land.[75]

Modern scholars have held these to be the cast-iron rules of hoplite warfare. We have seen how the Prussian model of phalanx battle assumed the best troops were always deployed on the right. Lendon has recently elaborated once again the watertight sorting algorithm of honour by which contingents would be assigned their

[74] Hdt. 9.26-28 with quotes from 28.1 and 28.3; Plut. *Arist.* 12.1-3.
[75] Thuc. 4.93.4-5; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16, 4.3.15; Hdt. 6.111.1; Thuc. 5.67.2.

proper place in the phalanx, with the leaders of course holding the right wing.[76] It has been noted above how the Theban deployment on the left at Leuktra to this day inspires scholarly awe as a supposedly groundbreaking innovation. When the surviving accounts of a particular battle lack sufficient detail, authors continue to assume automatically that the army's best troops must have been deployed on the right.[77] The position of honour is sometimes given some practical justification by combining the passages above with Thucydides' famous observation that hoplites were inclined to drift to the right in battle, seeking safety for their unshielded sides; those on the right flank had to show restraint to keep the whole line from disintegrating, and simultaneously faced the greatest danger on their own unprotected right.[78] The nature of hoplite equipment thus prescribed the standard Herodotean deployment. The honour gained by holding the position was the reward for braving its dangers; only the best and most deserving could hold the right wing.

But if we look at the sources more closely, there is little to be seen of this clear-cut principle. As early as the battle of Plataia, the very scene of the only known debate over who deserved to be honoured by which place in the line, the Greeks proceeded to show complete indifference to the matter of right and left. According to Herodotos, when they discovered that the Persians had matched their finest soldiers against the Spartans on the right wing, they decided it would be wiser to move the Athenians to that position, since the Athenians had beaten the Persians once before. The Spartans would be of more use on the left, facing the Persians' Greek allies. But the Persians saw them swap the contingents around and promptly followed suit. Realising the futility of rearranging themselves in plain sight of the enemy, the Greeks then restored their original line. Now, considering the sheer number of men involved and the proximity of the enemy, it seems unlikely that this double exchange of flanks really took place; the important thing is that Herodotos felt it was worth including in his work. He saw no reason for the Greeks to stick to their carefully determined positions of honour if the conditions of battle required that they be adjusted. According to him, the Athenians were afraid to make the suggestion,

[76] Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 41-42; see Lammert, 'Taktik', 18-20; Delbrück, 161; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 84; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 270-271; Ducrey, *Guerre et Guerrier*, 66; Schwartz, *Hoplite*, 233-234; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 68.
[77] For example Ray (*Land Battles*, 136) for the battle of Tanagra, and Lazenby (*Peloponnesian War*, 100) for the battle of Laodokeion in 423/2.
[78] Droysen, 92; Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 260-261; Wheeler, 'Battle', 216; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 55-56.

thinking the Spartans would be displeased – but then the Spartans raised the issue themselves.[79]

Indeed, Spartan commanders appear to have had no qualms about leading from the left. Knemos did so during his advance on Stratos in 429; Thucydides gives no reason for this, which may make it seem like mere happenstance, but it may also mean that he saw no need to justify an apparently unremarkable fact.[80] He certainly did not play it up when it occurred again at the battle of Olpai. Modern analyses of this battle tend to focus on the ambush by which the outnumbered Demosthenes won the day; few scholars seem to have realised that the enemy commander, the Spartan Eurylochos, deliberately massed his best troops on the left to engage Demosthenes' own contingent directly.[81] Xenophon reports how the assault on Olynthos in 382 gave the Spartan commander Teleutias another practical reason to put himself and his best troops on the left:

> '…ἔθετο τὰ ὅπλα, εὐώνυμον μὲν αὐτὸς ἔχων, οὕτω γὰρ συνέβαινεν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὰς πύλας ἰέναι ᾗ ἐξῇσαν οἱ πολέμιοι, ἡ δ' ἄλλη φάλαγξ τῶν συμμάχων ἀπετέτατο πρὸς τὸ δεξιόν.'
>
> *'…he halted the army, with himself on the left, for in this way he would be the one to attack the gate from which the enemy would sally, while the rest of the phalanx of the allies stretched away to the right.'*[82]

Nothing suggests that Teleutias sacrificed honour for expedience. In fact, in this very passage, he is said to have deployed the cavalry of his Elimian ally Derdas by his side on the left flank, 'partly because he admired these horsemen and partly *to do honour to Derdas*, so that he would be glad to be there'.[83] Clearly there was more to the question of honour through deployment than a simple preference for the right wing.

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[79] Hdt. 9.46-47.
[80] Thuc. 2.81.3.
[81] Thuc. 3.107.4; see for instance Delbrück, 117; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 270-271; Best, *Thracian Peltasts*, 18-19; Hornblower, *Commentary* I, 532; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 132, 135, 196; Lazenby, *Peloponnesian War*, 64.
[82] Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40.
[83] '…διά τε τὸ ἄγασθαι τοῦτο τὸ ἱππικὸν καὶ διὰ τὸ θεραπεύειν τὸν Δέρδαν, ὡς ἡδόμενος παρείη': Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40.

Certain major pitched battles complicate the picture even more. The Mantineians on the right wing in 418 were neither the leaders of the allied army nor its finest troops; that honour must surely go to the Thousand of Argos, elite hoplites professionally trained at the expense of the state. Yet these men were deployed third from the right, not even in the second or third place of honour as defined by Herodotos. The Spartan deployment is even more peculiar: neither the Spartan king nor his local allies were deployed on the right wing. This was what Lazenby called 'the classic hoplite battle', yet its champions held the *centre* of their phalanx, with several allied contingents stationed to their right, and an unspecified 'few Lakedaimonians' at the extreme end of the line.[84] Van Wees has shown that this second detachment of Spartans may in fact have been of considerable size,[85] but king Agis was certainly not with them, and there is no indication that the force was entitled to special honours for being where they were. Effectively the Spartans split up their own contingent to cover both the centre and the right of their line – but it was the former position they privileged, and that was where their commander fought. The men on the far right may have done no more than serve the purpose suggested above, to protect the flank and keep the phalanx from drifting too far to the right.

First Mantineia is not the only example of main contingents leading their phalanx from the centre. The Athenians at Syracuse placed themselves there too, with their Argive allies holding the right. At the Long Walls of Corinth, the Argives held the centre against the men of Sikyon, with the Corinthians – in their own territory – taking the left wing; the supposed position of honour was held by Iphikrates and his mercenary peltasts, an allied garrison in Corinth and a force entirely unsuited for battle in such a confined space. Again, neither Thucydides nor Xenophon apparently felt this was worth any additional comment.[86] In fact, the latter author was happy to consider the practical advantages of this deployment:

> '…πάντες δ' οἱ τῶν βαρβάρων ἄρχοντες μέσον ἔχοντες τὸ αὐτῶν ἡγοῦνται, νομίζοντες οὕτω καὶ ἐν ἀσφαλεστάτῳ εἶναι, ἢν ᾖ ἡ ἰσχὺς αὐτῶν ἑκατέρωθεν, καὶ εἴ τι παραγγεῖλαι χρῄζοιεν, ἡμίσει ἂν χρόνῳ αἰσθάνεσθαι τὸ στράτευμα.'

[84] Thuc. 5.67.1-2; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 125.
[85] *Greek Warfare*, 245-247.
[86] Thuc. 6.67.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9; a further example is the battle at the Krimesos in 339 (Plut. *Tim.* 27.4).

'…all the commanders of the barbarians lead from the centre, thinking that this is the safest position, having their forces on either side of them, and also that if they want to pass down an order, the army will get it in half the time.'[87]

This is a straightforward tactical analysis; there is nothing here to suggest that considerations of honour should rule it out.

Placement of the best troops on the left evokes similar indifference, to the point where the fact becomes entirely implicit. Thucydides' description of the battle of Solygeia is an interesting example. The Corinthians struck first against the Athenian right, as those troops disembarked from their ships; the Athenians themselves had placed their allies on the far right, for no discernible reason, while in the Corinthian army the left was apparently their proactive wing. The Corinthians further reinforced this wing with a reserve unit of hoplites led by one of the two generals present. Thucydides, though, makes no fuss over either army's deployment, and readers are left to deduce for themselves what the battle lines must have looked like.[88] The same casual treatment has made the battle of Potidaia something of a mystery. In the Peloponnesian army, according to Thucydides, the commander Aristeus was on one wing, and the Potidaians on the other – but neither wing is explicitly named. Going by Thucydides' principles, the Potidaians ought to have held the right in this battle outside their own city, meaning Aristeus and his best troops led from the left. Was this how the Athenian general Kallias was killed? There is nothing in the account to confirm or deny it.[89] Xenophon treats such things in much the same way. He mentions casually, and feels no need to stress, that the Thirty at Mounichia placed themselves on the left; he notes that the Boiotians at the Nemea refused to fight until they got the right wing, so that they would not have to face the Spartans, but he does not spell out that this put the far stronger Athenian contingent on the left. In his descriptions of Leuktra and Second Mantineia, where the Thebans famously massed themselves on the left wing, he does not even bother to say so.[90]

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[87] Xen. *An.* 1.8.22.
[88] Thuc. 4.43-44; the implications of Thucydides' account were first noted by Hanson ('Epameinondas', 194).
[89] Thuc. 1.62-63.
[90] Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.13, 4.2.17-18; at Leuktra, he notes (6.4.12) that the Thebans concentrated their forces against the Spartan king; we assume the king was on the right, and the Thebans therefore on the left.

If the Greeks found nothing remarkable about armies being led from the centre or left, and if it was even possible to gain honour specifically by being placed on the left wing, we may be forgiven for thinking that there really were no rules or traditions governing the deployment of the phalanx. But this would make the scene at Plataia difficult to understand. In fact, all examples cited here reveal a clear pattern, and it is possible to construct a model into which they all fit.

For this we must return to Thucydides' rightward drift. If he is correct in his claim that all phalanxes tended to shift to the side as they advanced, then any two opposing battle lines would eventually end up misaligned; the two extreme right wings would see no one in front of them, while the extreme left wings would find themselves badly outflanked. The right wings could then wheel inward and begin to roll up the enemy line. This mutual outflanking indeed appears to have been a feature of several major battles, and various tactics were devised to deal with it, as we will see in the following chapter. What matters here is the basic fact. If the very mechanics of battle gave the right wing an advantage, it was there, inevitably, that the enemy would be routed first – and it was there that the battle would be decided. All else being equal, to hold the right was to get the glory.[91] It was only fair to grant this glory either to the leaders of an alliance or to the people fighting for their homes.

But all else was not always equal. According to Herodotos, it was fear of an unfamiliar enemy that inspired the Spartans to propose the flank swap at Plataia; in their original deployment, they and their Tegean allies had the honour of holding the right wing, but there would obviously be more glory in defeating other Greeks than in being defeated by the Persians. At Olpai, the principle of concentrating force against the enemy's strongest unit coincided neatly with a chance for Eurylochos to crush Messenian rebels and Athenian hoplites – the latter being the very men who proved so elusive to the Peloponnesian army that marched into Attika every year. At First Mantineia, again, the real enemies of the Spartans were the Argives, who dared to challenge their supremacy over the Peloponnese. The Argives yielded their right wing to the Mantineians and placed themselves in the centre; they put the Athenians, with whom the Spartans were formally at peace, on their far left. To settle the

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At Second Mantineia he is disappointingly vague, saying only that Epameinondas massed his men 'on his own wing' and routed his enemies 'where he struck' (7.5.22, 24).

[91] The thought process is described in Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 69-70.

business properly, the Spartans therefore had to deploy in the centre and try to face the Argives head-on. Crucially, when king Agis realised that his left was about to be encircled by the Mantineians, he did not try to shift his whole line to face them; instead, rather bizarrely, he marched his left wing further out to deal with the threat, calling on troops from the extreme right to march all the way down the line and fill the resulting gap – all to make sure he himself would not be seen marching away from his target, the Argives. At Syracuse, the situation was more straightforward: the terrain prevented any rightward drift or outflanking move, so the Athenians formed up in the centre to bear the brunt of the frontal assault. The battlefield between the Long Walls of Corinth was similarly restricted, and the Corinthians may have been given the left flank to confront the Spartans directly in a fight over their very independence. At Leuktra, the Thebans meant to decide the issue by 'conquering those around the king'; they therefore deployed heavily on the left, and the honour they won was all the greater for it.[92]

Of course, some of the motivations suggested here are only conjecture. The sources tend to focus on practical reasons to pick a particular deployment, if they explain it at all. However, it is revealing that every time the best hoplites are placed somewhere other than the right, it is always for the same reason: to be over against the enemy army's most important troops. Here tactical considerations coincided with matters of honour.[93] As noted above, the position of honour is more correctly defined as the position where the battle might be won; if the aim was to overthrow the enemy's best troops, then the position of honour would naturally be opposite those men, and that would be where the general placed himself. Battles of this kind could still devolve into a partial victory on the right for both sides, but it was no longer the primary aim, and the matter of honour was resolved in a different way. This was as true at Plataia as it was at Olynthos. At Plataia, regardless of how much was inserted by Herodotos,[94] the Spartans must have been aware of the Persian deployment in the valley below; therefore both the improbable story of the swapping of flanks *and* the original Spartan claim to the right wing represented the tactical choice to match Greece's finest against the core of the Persian force. The relative honour of places in

[92] Hdt. 9.46.1; Thuc. 3.107.4, 5.67.1-2, 5.71.2-3, 6.67.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9, 6.4.12.
[93] Note Rüstow and Köchly's cynical comment (143) that 'the sacrifices would of course recommend whatever order seemed most expedient in light of the enemy's dispositions and other circumstances'.
[94] The entire debate over the army's deployment may be an invention serving to increase the glory of Athens; see for example Flower, 'Simonides to Isocrates', 78-79.

the line was made to match this choice, and Herodotos' tale only took this fact one step further. At Olynthos, Teleutias honoured his allies with a place by his side, where they might share in the victory; in the event, their timely charge decided the battle.[95]

It seems, then, that there were two basic arrangements for the constituent parts of a coalition phalanx. Which one was selected depended on how the general intended to win. If the plan was to rely on the natural extension of the right wing to encircle the enemy, then the best troops would be deployed there, with the left wing being at times completely neglected; in theory the danger incurred there should entitle its guardians to honour, but often what happened on the left flank was a matter of little concern. If, on the other hand, the commander meant for his best troops to face and defeat a specific part of the enemy force, then the entire phalanx would be formed up accordingly. The best hoplites would win the honour by fighting the toughest fight.

Herodotos' accounts of Marathon and Plataia suggest that the first of these deployments was traditional, but the supposed swapping of flanks at the latter clash shows that at least by his own time the second type was well understood. The point of this whole operation, after all, was to match strength against strength. As early as the battle of Olpai it was possible for commanders to anticipate this deployment and prepare against it; Eurylochos massed his best men on the left, but Demosthenes planted a hidden force to strike them in the rear as they encircled him. This should serve as a warning to us not to presume to know the details of battles for which the deployment is not spelled out. Consider for example the battle of Tanagra:

> 'γενομένης δὲ μάχης ἐν Τανάγρᾳ τῆς Βοιωτίας ἐνίκων Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι, καὶ φόνος ἐγένετο ἀμφοτέρων πολύς.'
>
> *'When the battle was fought at Tanagra in Boiotia, the Lakedaimonians and their allies won, and there was much slaughter on both sides.'*[96]

The 'slaughter on both sides' could mean a mutual outflanking; it could also mean a bitter fight between opposing lines of Athenians and Spartans. Both types of

[95] Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.42.
[96] Thuc. 1.108.1.

deployment were clearly used, in all possible combinations, throughout the Classical period, and rarely provoked special comment in our sources. Some battles saw both armies focus their strength on the right; some involved two commanders placing the best troops on a collision course; some battles, such as Olpai and Leuktra, saw generals deliberately exploiting the choices they expected their opponents to make.

The Depth of the Line

Apart from its arrangement by contingent, the other major feature of a hoplite formation's deployment was its depth – that is, the number of its ranks or 'shields', one behind the other. This seemingly simple matter has provoked a vast amount of scholarly debate over the years. At the heart of the problem is the fact – noted with bafflement by Delbrück and others – that our sources rarely discuss the options and never proclaim a standard depth.[97] Many different depths are attested, from a single rank to a hundred, and scholars disagree over what exact purpose they served.

Pritchett and more recently Matthew have helpfully catalogued all the different numbers of ranks mentioned by the ancients.[98] One thing is immediately obvious: a depth of eight is easily the most widely attested. Many figures are only seen once or twice, but there are eight instances of eight ranks according to Pritchett's table. Scholars have therefore assumed that eight shields, however tacitly, was the standard depth of the phalanx. Rüstow and Köchly believed this standard was indispensable for the performance of formation evolutions; they declared any other number to be either a manipulation of this figure or a bizarre aberration.[99] The number eight is of course mathematically convenient, leading Hellenistic tacticians to posit mechanical deployments for both spearmen and *psiloi* of eight or sixteen ranks[100] – though we may wonder whether these perfect models applied to reality, and if so, whether they applied to Classical Greece. It is difficult to impose parade ground standards on essentially untrained men. Others have therefore chosen the less tactically anachronistic option of simply declaring eight ranks to be 'normal', 'the most common', 'the *Urtiefe*', 'regular', 'conventional' or 'the favoured depth', thus

[97] Delbrück, 149; Pritchett I, 140-141.
[98] Pritchett I, 135-137; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 174.
[99] Rüstow/Köchly, 118-120.
[100] Askl. 2.7, 4.4, 6.2; Arr. *Takt*. 9.6.

downplaying the occurrence of other depths.[101] This practice has become so widely accepted that the eight-rank standard is now usually assumed to apply whenever the sources are silent.

However, some authors have taken a different approach. While accepting that a depth of eight was common, Delbrück noted that to uphold this depth as a fixed standard would be 'arbitrary'. Kromayer and Veith believed in a 'depth of ranks determined by the circumstances'; Lazenby described the phalanx as 'eight, twelve or more deep, as the case might be'. Matthew stressed that the number of ranks was 'variable' and wonders whether there might have been 'a "commonly used" depth of deployment rather than a "standard" depth'.[102]

What has provoked such scholarly caution? Before all else it should be noted that in the great majority of cases the sources actually do not tell us the depth of a given phalanx. More or less specific numbers of ranks are mentioned twenty times according to Pritchett – but hundreds of engagements, great and small, are known from the Classical period. To declare a depth of eight to be standard is to assume that our small sample of attested depths is somehow representative; and if we choose to assume so, we still have to account for the fact that, if we divide the known figures into 'eight' and 'not eight', the resulting ratio is 1:1.5.[103] As noted above, none of these figures are accorded special status by the ancients themselves. In addition, the earliest surviving reliable example of an eight-deep hoplite formation is the Athenian line at Delion. While Herodotos mentions variations in the depth of the Athenian deployment at Marathon, he never once in his entire work states how deep any formation actually was. Even if we suppose a standard of eight, how far back could we safely project it?

A look at the sources only increases our doubts. When the ancients elaborate on the number of ranks in a phalanx, it often serves only to demonstrate a lack of

[101] Lammert, 'Taktik', 18; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 269; Adcock, *Art of War*, 84; Pritchett I, 137-140; Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 95 n.6; Ducrey, *Guerre et Guerrier*, 64; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 12; Cawkwell, 'Orthodoxy', 380; Hanson, *Western Way*, 171; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 185; Wheeler, 'Battle', 206; Cartledge, 'Spartan Army', 362; Lee, 'Land Warfare', 392; Crowley, *Psychology*, 53, 62.
[102] Delbrück, 149; Kromayer/Veith, Heerwesen, 29; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 37; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 176.
[103] If we include less specific indications of depth under 'not eight', the ratio becomes 1:2.25. Pritchett himself (I, 137) still regarded these as 'numerous "exceptions"'.

uniformity. According to Thucydides, when the Boiotian army deployed for the battle of Delion, 'the Thebans formed up twenty-five shields deep, the rest as they pleased.' Xenophon reports how the anti-Spartan alliance had to decide on a common depth before the battle of the Nemea, to prevent contingents making up their own minds and endangering the integrity of the phalanx. On the day itself, the Thebans disobeyed.[104] We might expect the Spartan army to show greater discipline in these matters, but at First Mantineia they let us down:

'…ἐτάξαντο μὲν οὐ πάντες ὁμοίως, ἀλλ' ὡς λοχαγὸς ἕκαστος ἐβούλετο, ἐπὶ πᾶν δὲ κατέστησαν ἐπὶ ὀκτώ.'

'…although they were not all drawn up in the same depth, but as each officer wanted, on the whole they were ranged eight deep.'[105]

When describing the deployment of Agesilaos' army in Mantineian territory in 370, Xenophon could say no more than that it was formed up 'nine or ten shields deep'.[106]

This makes it sound like even a confident verdict of 'eight deep', when it occurs in the sources, is in reality at best an approximation. In fact, many indications of depth are less precise than they appear. At Mounichia, Thrasyboulos' men were drawn up 'not more than ten hoplites deep' while their enemies stood 'no less than fifty shields in depth'. The Spartans at Peiraieus and the Thebans at the Nemea were deployed 'extremely deep'; all we know is that in the latter case this meant more than sixteen ranks. There are no clues as to what Thucydides meant when he recorded a Syracusan force of 'not a few shields' guarding a narrow pass. The famous fifty-deep Theban phalanx at Leuktra was actually, according to Xenophon, 'not less than fifty shields', facing a Spartan formation 'not more than twelve men deep'.[107] These formations may all have been intended to meet a commander's call for a specific number of ranks, but in practice no clear standard was enforced, and our authors could only offer rough estimates.

Sometimes the sources do report a straightforward command to form up in eight ranks; sometimes they show a formation unequivocally eight or sixteen

[104] Thuc. 4.93.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.13 and 18.
[105] Thuc. 5.68.3.
[106] Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.19.
[107] Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11-12, 2.4.34, 4.2.18; Thuc. 7.79.1; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12.

deep.[108] But how standard can such deployments have been, if ancient authors insist on pointing out their depth? The decision to form up eight deep was clearly not made by default, or else a mere order to form up would have done. Xenophon tells us that the remnants of the Ten Thousand, when ordered to fall into line, once formed up eight deep of their own accord; but they are shown earlier to form up 'in fours (ἐπὶ τεττάρων)' when given the same order, and on a later occasion they plainly needed the number of desired ranks spelled out to them.[109] Despite the relatively frequent appearance of phalanxes of eight ranks, there is not a single known instance of a battle in which *both* sides are said to have formed up eight deep.

It is interesting to note here that picked elite hoplites such as the three hundred Spartan *hippeis* and the three hundred Theban Sacred Band could not be neatly divided into files of eight. Rubincam has shown that picked detachments of hoplites in Thucydides are overwhelmingly either three hundred or one thousand strong; only the latter is divisible by eight, and the fact that almost all army figures are multiples of one hundred suggests that the figure of one thousand actually reflects a decimal focus.[110] It may be argued that Thucydides' numbers are the result of rounding and adding officers, but there is no reason why the dominant figures should not have been four hundred or twelve hundred to begin with. The frequency of forces three hundred strong in particular implies that formations of five, six, ten or twelve ranks may have been common. Some of the examples cited here involve formations ten or twelve deep; apparently six and twelve ranks were among the standard deployments for Spartan hoplites during the fourth century.[111]

Depth, then, appears to have been altogether flexible. While the number eight is most often mentioned in the extant sources, we have no reason to assume it applied to formations for which no depth is known. Any figure was conceivable, and many were tried. With this in mind, the crucial question is how the proper number of ranks for a particular engagement was determined. What principles of military thought were expressed by the depth of a phalanx?

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[108] Thuc. 4.94.1, 6.67.1-2; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34, 3.2.16, 4.2.18, 6.2.21.
[109] Compare Xen. *An.* 7.1.22-23, 1.2.15; *Hell.* 3.2.16.
[110] Rubincam, 'Casualty Figures', 185, 194; see also Detienne, 'Phalange', 134; Lee, '*Lochos'*, 295.
[111] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.4, assuming *enōmotia* of thirty-six; see Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 185, 243-249; Sekunda, '*Mora* at Lechaeum', 51-52. Echeverría ('*Taktikē Technē*', 58) realistically assumes a broad 'medium depth' of 10-16 shields.

No military treatise explains this to us, but the works of Xenophon contain interesting clues. When the Ten Thousand encountered the Kolchians, he himself offered them words of advice:

> '…ἢν μὲν ἐπὶ πολλῶν τεταγμένοι προσάγωμεν, περιττεύσουσιν ἡμῶν οἱ πολέμιοι καὶ τοῖς περιττοῖς χρήσονται ὅ τι ἂν βούλωνται: ἐὰν δὲ ἐπ᾽ ὀλίγων τεταγμένοι ὦμεν, οὐδὲν ἂν εἴη θαυμαστὸν εἰ διακοπείη ἡμῶν ἡ φάλαγξ ὑπὸ ἀθρόων καὶ βελῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων πολλῶν ἐμπεσόντων: εἰ δέ πῃ τοῦτο ἔσται, τῇ ὅλῃ φάλαγγι κακὸν ἔσται.'
>
> *'…if we advance formed up many ranks deep, the enemy will outflank us, using their outflanking wing as they like; on the other hand, if we are formed up a few ranks deep, we should not be surprised if our phalanx is cut through by a hail of missiles and men falling upon us; and if this happens anywhere, it will be bad for the whole phalanx.'*[112]

Other passages show these scenarios in practice. It has been noted that the allies who were to fight at the Nemea held council to decide on the depth of the line; the explicit purpose of this agreement was 'to prevent *poleis* from making their phalanxes too deep and giving the enemy a chance to surround them'. When the Boiotians made their contingent 'extremely deep (βαθεῖαν παντελῶς)' regardless, the line was critically shortened, and the Athenians on the left soon found themselves in exactly the predicament they had feared. Yet the failed Spartan attempt to take Kerkyra in 373 showed that commanders were also concerned not to make their line too thin. When the defenders sallied, one wing of the Spartan-led force bore the brunt of the assault; the men there felt their phalanx was 'weak (ἀσθενὲς)' and attempted to double its depth from eight to sixteen.[113]

These two conflicting priorities appear to have been central to the question of hoplite deployment. On the one hand, as Echeverría has recently argued, the Greeks were obsessed with protecting the flanks of the phalanx.[114] If there were no reserves or light units to guard the extreme ends of the line, Greek armies appear to have

[112] Xen. *An.* 4.8.11.
[113] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.13, 4.2.18, 6.2.21.
[114] Echeverría saw this as 'the core of Greek tactics in action': '*Taktikē Technē*', 56-58, 68, 75.

preferred to spread out as far as they could, even at the expense of their formation's depth. Marathon is the classic example:

> '…τὸ στρατόπεδον ἐξισούμενον τῷ Μηδικῷ στρατοπέδῳ, τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ μέσον ἐγίνετο ἐπὶ τάξιας ὀλίγας, καὶ ταύτῃ ἦν ἀσθενέστατον τὸ στρατόπεδον, τὸ δὲ κέρας ἑκάτερον ἔρρωτο πλήθεϊ.'
>
> *'…the army being equal in length to the Median army, the middle was only a few ranks deep, and there the army was weakest, both of the wings being strong in numbers.'*[115]

On the other hand, a line of insufficient depth could be broken by force and attrition. This is exactly what happened to the Athenian centre at Marathon, and it may be for this reason that a hoplite line with a thinly spread centre is never seen again. There are only a few examples of formations of four ranks or less, and none are led into battle.[116] True, Xenophon has Kyros argue that a formation only two shields deep would be ideal, since only the first two ranks of hoplites could really fight – but in light of the author's own tactics against the Kolchians, it is difficult to take this suggestion seriously.[117] At least some ranks of replacements were necessary for a phalanx to hold its ground.

What has puzzled scholars, though, is the sheer number of ranks the Greeks would sometimes set down. In its early days, the depth of a hoplite formation would have guaranteed its ability to resist cavalry charges, which as we have seen is likely to have been its purpose; but this would have become less of a factor once battles began to revolve around the confrontation between two such formations of infantry. Yet hoplite lines remained deep, and even seem to have become deeper. The rationale behind this phenomenon has proven surprisingly hard to pin down. It is well known that Greek battles were not won by attrition alone; casualties on the losing side averaged some fourteen percent, and many of these fell in the chase after

[115] Hdt. 6.111.3; Krentz, *Marathon*, 153-154.
[116] Xen. *An.* 1.2.15; Diod. 13.72.6; Polyainos, *Strat*. 2.1.24; the only exception is the doubtful tale of a one-rank Spartan phalanx in Isok. 6.99.
[117] Xen. *Kyr.* 6.3.21-23; compare *An.* 4.8.11, and indeed *Kyr.* 7.5.2; van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 190.

the line was broken.[118] Apparently no phalanx was ever systematically ground to a pulp. So what was the point of deploying sixteen, twenty-five or even fifty deep?

On this subject the debate is muddled by the elusive concept of the 'weight' of an infantry charge. Many modern authors almost instinctively assume that a deeper formation will strike harder, forcing its way through its enemies by sheer forward momentum – more men, more power. But as Wheeler has pointed out, 'this application of a simple principle of physics to the battlefield is more theoretical than real'.[119] Since the cutting edge of a hoplite charge is ultimately one running man and his spear, it is not clear how the number of men behind him should make any difference to the strength of the attack. A great deal of ink has been spilt over the possibility that the whole file physically forced the first man forward, reducing hoplite battle to a colossal shoving match – an explanation for the occurrence of the 'pushing' (*ōthismos*) in Greek battle descriptions. But the passionate proponents and critics of this idea remain unable to convince each other.[120] In terms of military thought, the matter is relatively simple: the ancients do not justify deep formations by emphasising their ability to push. No Classical historical work or military treatise makes any mention of depth as a way to increase forward mass. Accounts such as that of Leuktra suggest that a thinner formation could hold its own against and even force back a much deeper phalanx. It is unlikely that a higher number of ranks did anything to enhance the impact of a hoplite charge, or that such enhancement was the intention behind a very deep deployment.

It has been suggested that the rear ranks of a deep formation served instead as a reserve, kept out of the fighting by the lines of men in front.[121] Yet this theory has been dismissed,[122] probably rightly – there is no known example of a phalanx being split up or refreshed from the rear while its front ranks were engaged. The men in the

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[118] Krentz, 'Casualties', 18-19; Luginbill, 'Othismos', 59; Dayton, *Athletes of War,* 81-102.
[119] Wheeler, 'Legion as Phalanx', 347-348.
[120] Lammert, 'Taktik', 12; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 70; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 267-269; Fraser, 'Phalanx-Scrimmage'; Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 16; Cawkwell, *Philip*, 151-153, Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 96-97; Anderson, 'Hoplites and Heresies: a Note'; Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle'; Hanson, *Western Way*, 172-177; Lazenby, 'Killing Zone', 97-100; Luginbill, 'Othismos'; Krentz, 'Continuing the Othismos'; Goldsworthy, 'Othismos'; Van Wees, 'Hoplite Phalanx', 131-132; *Greek Warfare*, 188-191; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 95-97; Matthew, 'When Push Comes to Shove'; Schwartz, *Hoplite*, 163-200; Krentz, *Marathon*, 53-58; Lendon, *Song of Wrath*, 307-313; Rusch, *Sparta at War*, 17; Crowley, *Psychology*, 53-62; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 205-228.
[121] Fraser, 'Phalanx-Scrimmage', 16; Cawkwell, 'Epameinondas and Thebes', 261.
[122] Holladay, 'Hoplites and Heresies', 96 n.13; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 156-157; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 196-197; Luginbill, 'Othismos', 59.

seemingly superfluous rear ranks faced the same way as those in front and braced themselves to take part in the same fight. On the other hand, while some form of irregular replacement from the rear must have occurred, we do not actually know of any system to relieve exhausted warriors. Those in the rear of a very deep phalanx probably never fought. Similarly, it would be wrong to argue that the option of deploying many shields deep was only available to armies that could secure the width of their line in other ways. Battles like the Nemea, Leuktra and even the fighting outside Kerkyra clearly show depth as an *alternative* to width, of which the benefits were thought by some to outweigh the risks.[123] In some situations, where the terrain guarded the flanks or channelled the fighting, a deep formation could be the only way to involve all the hoplites in the clash; at Syracuse the defenders made their phalanx sixteen deep because an eight-rank formation would have left half the army out of the fight, while at Mounichia the Thirty deployed fifty deep to go up a narrow road.[124] However, in most cases the deep phalanx was not a result of the peculiarities of the battlefield; it was neither an infantry reserve nor a luxury available to the army with superior numbers. Like the deployment of the contingents in a battle line, it was deliberately chosen to suit a particular plan.

In all likelihood the reason behind very deep deployments was the same as the reason the ancients offered for the placement of their best and strongest troops: the reinforcement of the critical point of the line. Deep ranks were not meant to somehow increase the force of the charge, but to make sure the line could not break, and the attack could not fail. Even a very local breakthrough could mean victory if it led to the disintegration of the enemy force. According to Xenophon, Epameinondas massed all his best on one wing at Second Mantineia because he believed that 'if he could strike and cut through anywhere, he would destroy the entire opposing army'.[125]

This intention is not to be misunderstood. The point of concentration in depth was not to coldly sacrifice rank upon rank of hoplites until the goal was achieved. As noted repeatedly, it was not by inflicting casualties that battles were won, but by

[123] The argument is made in Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 57-58; but see Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 6.2.21-22, 6.4.12.
[124] Thuc. 6.67.1-2; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11 (note 7.5.11 where Epameinondas tried to avoid a similar situation).
[125] Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23.

breaking the enemy's will to fight. In this sense the deep deployment, like the use of mobile missile troops, could be a shortcut to victory. Krentz has argued that a very deep formation would both boost the morale of the front-rank fighters and terrify the enemy; the latter would soon realise that they had no hope of breaking through the unrelenting ranks of the column. Goldsworthy has set out in detail how the rear ranks, safely distant from brutal close combat, by their mere presence would prevent those in front from running away.[126] Xenophon stresses precisely these advantages of depth when he makes Kyros double his phalanx before the walls of Babylon:

> 'οἵ τε μένοντες εὐθὺς θαρραλεώτεροι ἐγίγνοντο ἐπὶ διπλασίων τὸ βάθος γιγνόμενοι, οἵ τ᾽ ἀπιόντες ὡσαύτως θαρραλεώτεροι: εὐθὺς γὰρ οἱ μένοντες ἀντ᾽ αὐτῶν πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους ἐγίγνοντο. (…) ἡ δ᾽ οὕτως ἔχουσα τάξις καὶ πρὸς τὸ μάχεσθαι ἐδόκει εὖ παρεσκευάσθαι καὶ πρὸς τὸ μὴ φεύγειν.'
>
> *'…those who held their places immediately became braver, because the depth was doubled; and those who had fallen back also became braver, because those who held their places now faced the enemy instead of them. (…) And this deployment seemed well-adapted both to fight and to keep the men from fleeing.'*[127]

Crucially, there is not a hint of formation 'weight' or tactical flexibility here. The focus is entirely on the morale of the troops; the main point of deploying many ranks deep was that it made a hoplite formation significantly harder to break.

This fact made a deep phalanx a uniquely powerful weapon against even the most skilled enemy force. Attrition achieved nothing if it could not dishearten those who took the place of the fallen; instinctive self-preservation on the side of the thinner line would soon take over from cruel mathematics. With no hope at all of winning – as in the battles of hoplites against *psiloi* – even Spartans would rather save themselves than go on to the death. This explains why deep formations were almost always successful. At Mounichia, the Thirty were defeated in an uphill battle covered by Thrasyboulos' well-placed *psiloi*; at Syracuse, the defending phalanx was inexperienced, confused and frightened by thunder; at the Nemea, the Boiotians were

[126] Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle', 60; 'Continuing the Othismos', 46; Goldsworthy, 'Othismos', 12-14, 23. The effect outlined by Goldsworthy was an organisational principle of the Macedonian phalanx; see Askl. 5.2.
[127] Xen. *Kyr.* 7.5.4-5.

struck when they thought the fight was already over.[128] In all other known cases, the deeper phalanx triumphed. Whatever happened elsewhere along the line, it would not break; it would not panic or be weakened by attrition; it would, if nothing else interfered, eventually shatter its target.

*

From the late Archaic period onwards, deployment for battle answered to a number of overlapping priorities: minimising the influence of enemy cavalry and *psiloi*, preserving the integrity of the phalanx, maintaining the ability to seize opportunities, and concentrating force at the decisive point. If this at times resulted in the unobstructed advance of rival phalanxes with their best troops on the right, this is more a testimony to the commanders' careful choice of conditions than it is proof of tactical conventions. Hoplites were drawn up according to a tactical plan – usually the intention to break the enemy at a particular point – and mobile forces served both to exploit what weaknesses they could find and to prevent the interference of enemy light troops with the plan. The phalanx' triumph usually decided the battle, because the general fought in its ranks, and because no army could fight with its chest and cuirass smashed in; but without hands and feet, a Greek hoplite army could do no more than roll forward clumsily to either slug it out or face eventual, agonising defeat.

[128] Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.15-16, 19; Thuc. 6.69.1, 6.70.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22-23.

4. 'Utterly Outmatched in Skill': Battle Tactics

'"So then," said Chrysantas, "you think their plan is good?"
"It is – against what they can see."'
Xen. *Kyr.* 7.1.8

Controlling Battle

If there is any consistent theme in the discussions of the last two chapters, it is that the Greeks went to battle with a plan. They sought to manipulate the time and place of the fight to secure the greatest possible advantage; they deployed their armies to nullify the enemy's strengths and maximise their own; they arranged their troops in a way that suited the particular manoeuvre by which they intended to win. But what happened after this? Greek tactics – that is, the system of known and practiced manoeuvres and responses to circumstance in battle – have often been characterised as deliberately primitive, if not outright non-existent. The battle of the Nemea, fought in 394, has been described as the first battle that 'can with any certainty be said to have been won by tactics'.[1] Many have argued that the role of Classical Greek commanders ended once their troops had been drawn up; there were no further orders to give or reserves to command, and the general's task consisted of nothing more than leading his men headlong into the fray.[2] Is this all there is to say about the execution of their careful plans? Did Greek generals' shrewd attempts to influence battle stop at the sound of the paean?

The question is not merely rhetorical. The conditions of battle and the composition of Greek armies combined to make tactical control in the heat of battle all but impossible; these challenges had to be overcome if rapid response to circumstance was to be the key to victory. An overview of the restrictive realities faced by Greek commanders appears at first sight to suggest that a pessimistic estimate of their capacity for sophisticated tactics may not be far off the mark.

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[1] Lazenby, *Defence of Greece*, 251.
[2] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 71-72; Tarn, *Military Developments*, 30; Adcock, *Art of War*, 6-7; Cartledge, 'Hoplites and Heroes', 15-16; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 13; Hanson, *Western Way*, 107-108; Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour*, 62; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 42; Mann, *Militär*, 8. It should be noted that some recent scholarship does acknowledge a modest degree of complexity in Greek tactics: see Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 124; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 238-239; Hanson, 'Hoplite Narrative', 267.

First of all, Greek generals did not have many means at their disposal to control an engaged force. In an age of limited technology, there were only a few ways to transmit orders in battle, and the Greeks do not appear to have used even these to full effect. The only audiovisual aid they employed was a type of trumpet called the *salpinx*, and Krentz has noted that they employed this instrument for just two battle signals: the charge and the retreat. All else was conveyed by word of mouth.[3] Veterans like Xenophon knew that such vocal commands could only be passed down effectively if armies were divided into a hierarchy of sub-units led by their own officers,[4] but Greek militia armies completely lacked this kind of organisation; we have no evidence of officers below the level of the *lochos*, a unit that was usually several hundred strong.[5] The fact that Xenophon still had to urge the Athenian cavalry to adopt a proper chain of command as late as the 360s shows that citizen forces tended to remain very loosely organised throughout the Classical period. As a result, the transmission of orders must have been a very haphazard affair. Most Greeks seem to have relied mainly on shouting at each other, or passing orders from man to man down the ranks like the watchword at Kounaxa.[6]

Secondly, the armies gathered for major battles were often many thousands strong, and the phalanx alone could stretch across the battlefield for hundreds of metres. Such masses of men were very hard to manage and move with limited means of communication, and their sheer size restricted these means even further. Even on the most level plain, obstacles such as houses, trees and field walls meant that there was probably no single place from which the entire army could be seen; while it was possible for all to hear the *salpinx*, shouted orders would not carry very far. Generals therefore had to rely on a long chain of small links to pass down their commands.

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[3] Krentz, '*Salpinx*', 115-116, 118; see also Anderson, 'Cleon', 1-2; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 206. Aineias the Tactician (4.1, 7.2-4, 10.25-26, 16.16) recommends the use of signal fires, but only for the defence of a city's territory, since they had to be raised in high places to be useful.

[4] Xen. *Hipparch.* 2.6; *Lak.Pol.* 11.5-6; the process is seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.66.3-4, 5.73.2).

[5] Anderson, 'Cleon', 3; Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 63; Lee, '*Lochos',* 289-290, 302; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 99-100; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 74-75; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 129-130; Toalster, *Feldherren*, 73-74. Authors such as Anderson (*Theory and Practice*, 98-100) and Matthew (*Storm of Spears*, 169-170, 197) have assumed that officer hierarchies existed in all hoplite armies, but there is no evidence for this; the only exceptions are the Spartans, discussed below, and certain elements of the Ten Thousand (Xen. *An.* 3.4.21, 4.3.26), which were clearly organised after the Spartan model (Lazenby, 'Killing Zone', 89 n.3).

[6] Thuc. 7.44.4; Xen. *An.* 1.8.16; *Kyr.* 3.3.61-62; *Hell.* 4.2.19 shows this in practice. The unreliable nature of this method in the absence of a clear officer hierarchy is stressed by Onasander (*Strat.* 25.1-2).

The stress of combat would have made this a formidable challenge. Once battle was joined, with 'no one knowing much of anything that does not go on right around him', the air filled with 'that strange noise made by anger and battle together',[7] it seems unlikely that vocal commands would be heard or heeded beyond the general's immediate vicinity.[8] Even if they were, we can hardly expect that they would be conveyed correctly from one man to another – especially if the enemy was shouting as well.[9] As a result, any attempted movement of the army was likely to lead to chaos. Xenophon is surely speaking from experience when he declares that 'the more soldiers there are, the more mistakes they will make.'[10]

Thirdly, as we have seen, Greek armies largely consisted of untrained men – typically with little to no military experience. Later tactical authors, noting how hard it is to hear words of command over the noise of battle, advise extensive use of the *salpinx,* which would require instinctive familiarity with a range of signals; Aelian further stresses the importance of silence in the ranks to make sure commands are heard.[11] Classical Greeks were not so disciplined. The silent advance of the Persian infantry at Kounaxa was a marvel to Xenophon;[12] most Greeks went into battle running and yelling. No commander would have had much faith in the ability of these warriors to carry out his orders swiftly and effectively – as Whatley cynically put it, 'I doubt whether Napoleon himself could have been clever with a fifth-century Greek army unless he were given an opportunity to train it.'[13] We have little reason to be any more optimistic about the armies of the century that followed.

Fourthly, the generals themselves tended to fight in the front rank of the phalanx. This has often been interpreted as a consequence of the lack of tactics in Greek battles – if there was nothing else for the general to do, he might as well use his spear – but it may be more accurate to regard it as its *cause*. I have noted earlier how emphatically Xenophon stresses the need for a general to lead by example if he

[7] Thuc. 7.44.1; Xen. *Ag.* 2.12; see also Eur. *Suppliants* 849-856; Hanson, *Western Way*, 152-154.
[8] Xenophon notes that even the commander of a Spartan *enomotia* of thirty-six men could not reach his whole unit with his voice (*Hipparch.* 13.9).
[9] Hanson, *Western Way*, 143. This became especially problematic during the night attack on Epipolai, with Dorian Greek spoken on both sides (Thuc. 7.44.6). This is the only time we hear of such confusion; however, considering the large coalition armies assembled by the Greeks, it must have been a common occurrence.
[10] 'φιλοῦσι δέ πως στρατιῶται, ὅσῳ ἂν πλείους ὦσι, τοσούτῳ πλείω ἁμαρτάνειν': Xen. *Hipparch.* 7.9.
[11] Askl. 12.10; Aelian, *Takt.* 34, 52.
[12] Xen. *An.* 1.8.11.
[13] Whatley, 'Reconstructing Marathon', 125.

wishes to win the respect of his men; harsh disciplinary measures were not a popular concept, but conspicuous displays of courage inspired similar behaviour.[14] Commanders therefore usually chose to be in the thick of it, rather than managing the battle from a good vantage point well out of harm's way. As a result, the generals themselves would have been among those who knew only what was right in front of them; it would have been as difficult for them to issue orders as it would have been for their men to receive them. During the fight, even the men right next to them were unable to respond to events:

> 'ὁ δὲ Μνάσιππος τοῖς μὲν πιεζομένοις οὐκ ἐδύνατο βοηθεῖν διὰ τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ καταντικρὺ προσκειμένους, ἀεὶ δ' ἐλείπετο σὺν ἐλάττοσι. τέλος δὲ οἱ πολέμιοι ἀθρόοι γενόμενοι πάντες ἐπετίθεντο τοῖς περὶ τὸν Μνάσιππον, ἤδη μάλα ὀλίγοις οὖσι.'
>
> *'Mnasippos could not help those who were hard pressed, because he was under attack by those directly in front; he was left with an ever smaller number of men. Finally the enemy all massed themselves together and attacked those around Mnasippos, who by now were very few.'*[15]

The participation of generals in combat also frequently led to them being incapacitated or killed – effectively, to return to Iphikrates' analogy, decapitating the army.[16] It is not surprising to find Plutarch using the fate of a fourth-century Greek to teach his readers that a general is too important to risk his own life.[17] Compelled to display their valour in the front rank, they could not be the battlefield managers that they may well have wanted to be.

In all these respects, the Spartans had an edge over other Greeks. It has been pointed out that we should not overstate the level of Spartan training – yet in a context of complete military amateurism their modest improvements on common practice could make a significant difference. The Spartans' unique officer hierarchy

[14] Xen. *Ag.* 6.1; *An.* 2.6.7, 2.6.19, 3.4.47-49; *Hipparch.* 6; *Mem.* 3.3.9. Various scholars have emphasised this Greek preference for the 'soldier's general' command style: see Lengauer, *Greek Commanders*, 148, 151-152; Hanson, *Western Way*, 110-112; Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 144-145; 'Battle', 215; Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 99.
[15] Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.22.
[16] For instance, Kallimachos at Marathon (Hdt. 6.114.1), Kallias at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.63.3), and most famously Epameinondas at Second Mantineia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25; Diod. 15.86.4-87.6); see Lazenby, 'Killing Zone', 98.
[17] Plut. *Pel.* 2.4-5.

allowed for the smooth transmission of orders to men who had been drilled to obey them. The Spartans notably did not charge screaming into battle, but marched in step to the sound of flutes; this allowed them to retain their formation and to mark any commands that came down.[18] Furthermore, Wheeler has pointed to various hints in the sources that Spartan kings may have been stationed away from the front rank in battle.[19] It would have been impossible for the regent Pausanias to perform the sacrifice at Plataia, or for Agesilaos to be garlanded by his mercenaries at Koroneia, if these men had been at the cutting edge of their respective armies; Xenophon's accounts of Leuktra and Kromnos show royal bodyguards fighting ahead of the kings they served.[20] Of course, the fates of Brasidas at Amphipolis and of Mnasippos at Kerkyra show that less highborn Spartan commanders still fought and died in the front rank – the privilege of a protective screen of Spartans was probably reserved only for royalty. Yet this practice would have dramatically increased the kings' ability to manage their battles.

However, in at least one way the armies led by Spartan kings were just as handicapped as the forces fielded by others. We have seen that the Greeks would only consider pitched battle as an option if they could match their opponent's numbers; despite the unwieldiness of large forces, it was a basic principle of Greek military thought that a big army was stronger than a small one.[21] The major conflicts of the Classical period saw large alliances take the field against each other, and few city-states could rely entirely on their own militia to counter such threats. As a result, the armies that fought major engagements tended to be collections of unevenly sized detachments levied for the occasion by various communities, each led by its own commander, at times reluctantly placed under the leadership of a single general or council of generals.

Unsurprisingly – and at least in part because of the noted reluctance of Classical Greeks to adopt a more militarist attitude – these contingents could rarely

[18] Thuc. 5.70.
[19] Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 148-150; however, Pritchett ('General', 138-141) disputes this.
[20] Hdt. 9.61.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17, 6.4.13, 7.4.23.
[21] Note here, for instance, Herodotos' belief that the Persians at Plataia feared the size of the Greek army (Hdt. 9.38.2, 9.41.1-3, 9.45.2), Thucydides' insistence that the Peloponnesian levy during the Archidamian War was too large for Athens to fight (Thuc. 1.141.6, 2.20.2), Xenophon's claim that Thessaly had enough peltasts to conquer the world (*Hell.* 6.1.19), and Plato's point that larger city-states usually conquer smaller ones regardless of the relative quality of their institutions (*Laws* 638a-b).

be merged into a single cohesive force. Kromayer and Veith rightly stressed their apparently almost autonomous behaviour in battle.[22] They were not always keen to follow orders even if orders reached them. Pausanias describes succinctly how this affected both sides at Leuktra:

> ‘τῷ δὲ Ἐπαμινώνδᾳ καὶ ἐς ἄλλους Βοιωτῶν ὕποπτα ἦν, ἐς δὲ τοὺς Θεσπιεῖς καὶ περισσότερον: δείσας οὖν μὴ σφᾶς παρὰ τὸ ἔργον προδῶσιν, ἀποχώρησιν παρεῖχεν ἀπὸ στρατοπέδου τοῖς ἐθέλουσιν οἴκαδε: καὶ οἱ Θεσπιεῖς τε ἀπαλλάσσονται πανδημεὶ καὶ εἴ τισιν ἄλλοις Βοιωτῶν ὑπῆν δύσνοια ἐς τοὺς Θηβαίους. ὡς δὲ ἐς χεῖρας συνῆεσαν, ἐνταῦθα οἱ σύμμαχοι τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἅτε αὐτοῖς καὶ τὸν πρὸ τοῦ χρόνον οὐκ ἀρεσκόμενοι τὸ ἔχθος μάλιστα ἐπεδείκνυντο, οὔτε κατὰ χώραν μένειν ἐθέλοντες, ἐνδιδόντες δὲ ὅπῃ σφίσιν οἱ πολέμιοι προσφέροιντο.’

> *‘Epameinondas had his suspicions of some of the Boiotians, the Thespians above all. Fearing that they would desert during the battle, he allowed anyone who wanted to leave the camp and go home; and the Thespians left with their entire levy, as did any other Boiotians who felt disaffected with the Thebans. When the fighting began, the allies of the Lakedaimonians, who had never been their friends, now showed their hate clearly, by their unwillingness to stand their ground, and by giving way wherever the enemy attacked them.*’[23]

Outright desertion could be a serious threat; the campaign of Kleomenes against Athens in 507 fell apart when the Corinthians abandoned the army,[24] and the Athenians may have lost the battle of Tanagra because their Thessalian allies turned coat in the course of the clash.[25] Yet plain disobedience was a more common problem. We have already seen how the Boiotians at the Nemea disregarded all agreements made between the leaders of the coalition army, which was the direct cause of its defeat. At Plataia, the Greeks who held the centre of the line chose to interpret the order to redeploy as a license to withdraw to the safety of the nearby town, leaving their allies on the flanks to face the Persians alone. During the battle

[22] Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 83-84, 86; see more recently Pritchett II, 190, 207; Hanson, *Western Way*, 143; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 84.
[23] Paus. 9.13.8-9; see Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9 and 15; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.3.3. See also Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.2 for the general lack of enthusiasm of Boiotian troops fighting in Theban wars.
[24] Hdt. 5.75.1-76.1.
[25] Thuc. 1.107.7 – although Diodoros (11.80.2-6) did not regard the betrayal as decisive.

proper, the Tegeans forced the Spartan commander's hand by charging without orders. At Kounaxa, Klearchos showed again that Greek commanders did not always care to do as they were told, when he refused to follow his employer's instruction to march across the battlefield to his aid.[26]

We might expect better behaviour when city-states fought on their own, but it seems that in practice even the men of a single levy would not always act as one. According to Thucydides, the Syracusans chalked up their initial defeat against Athens largely to their hoplites' disorganisation and insubordination; half a century later we find Xenophon complaining that neither the hoplites nor the cavalry of Athens could be trusted to follow orders.[27] The problem here was not disloyalty or a lack of enthusiasm, as it was in large coalition armies, but rather the low level of military discipline to which Greek citizens were willing to submit. It appears such disobedience plagued even the Spartans; on at least two occasions the officers they put in place to facilitate the transmission of orders turned out at the critical moment to have a will of their own. At Plataia, the officer Amompharetos famously refused to withdraw his unit to its assigned new position, putting the safety of the entire army at risk. The disobedience of two *lochagoi* at First Mantineia again brought the Spartan army to the brink of disaster.[28] Their behaviour was not tolerated, and the pair was exiled from Sparta – but the episode clearly shows that not even a Spartan upbringing could turn these men into blindly obedient automatons. The fact that Spartan tactics both in the overture to First Mantineia and at the Nemea were influenced by unnamed Spartans shouting advice from the ranks[29] suggests an approach to military matters that may fall far short of modern expectations.[30]

Bearing in mind the patchwork nature of Greek armies and the apparent attitude of Greek levies to military authority, we clearly cannot posit a perfect tactical system in which a command and its execution were the same. Needless to

[26] Hdt. 9.52, 9.62.1; Xen. *An.* 1.8.12-13.
[27] Thuc. 6.72.4; Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.19.
[28] Hdt. 9.53.2-56.1; Thuc. 5.72.1.
[29] Thuc. 5.65.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22. Kelly ('Pitanate *Lochos'*, 34-35) notes, however, that these examples all involved old men and senior officers – men who were higher up in the Spartan social hierarchy.
[30] See generally Shipley, 'Introduction', 18-19, and on Sparta specifically Tritle, 'Warfare', 219. Lendon (*Soldiers and Ghosts*, 75-77) has argued that obedience to one's commander was just one of a set of competitively displayed virtues at Sparta, which could at times be overruled by the desire to display a different one (such as, in Amompharetos' case, obedience to the laws by refusing to retreat).

say, this would have made it even harder for Greek commanders to predict or influence the course of a battle. Indeed, they are likely to have striven to minimise the complexity of their plans to make sure they were asking as little as possible of their less reliable men.

There is an all-important distinction, then, between orders given before engaging the enemy and orders given in the course of the fight. It was relatively easy to orchestrate the initial deployment of units in accordance with a particular plan; rearranging this deployment after the plan had been set in motion was another thing altogether. This explains why so much of Greek tactical thought seems to consist of the deployment of the troops. Aware of their limited capacity for effective response to circumstance, Greek commanders made every effort to rely on it as little as they possibly could. Units that were meant to play a special role in battle were given their instructions in advance:

> 'τῷ δὲ Ἱπποκράτει (…) καταλιπὼν ὡς τριακοσίους ἱππέας περὶ τὸ Δήλιον, ὅπως φύλακές τε ἅμα εἶεν, εἴ τις ἐπίοι αὐτῷ, καὶ τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς καιρὸν φυλάξαντες ἐπιγένοιντο ἐν τῇ μάχῃ.'
>
> *'Hippokrates (…) left about three hundred horse behind at Delion, both to guard the place in case of attack, and to watch for a chance to strike the Boiotians during the battle.'*[31]

Even if a general's plan hinged on the well-timed charge of a particular contingent, he would make no attempt to call out to that contingent when the right moment had come. Only at Potidaia do we hear of a signal being raised – on top of the nearby city wall, not with the general in the field.[32] More commonly the men would be told before battle what was expected of them:

> '…σὺ δέ, Κλεαρίδα, ὕστερον, ὅταν ἐμὲ ὁρᾷς ἤδη προσκείμενον καὶ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς φοβοῦντα αὐτούς, τοὺς μετὰ σεαυτοῦ τούς τ᾽ Ἀμφιπολίτας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους

[31] Thuc. 4.93.2; see also, for example, Thuc. 4.32.3-4, 5.71.3; *Hell. Oxy.* 11.4; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23-24.
[32] Thuc. 1.63.2. The only example of a tactical signal raised by a commander in battle occurs in Diodoros' account of the battle of Sardis (Diod. 14.80.3) – but Xenophon does not mention this, and DeVoto's detailed reconstruction has the commander of the ambushing force acting on his own initiative ('Sardis', 49-50). Signals did of course feature more frequently in naval warfare. Pritchett, 'General', 127-129, offers a list of attestations.

ξυμμάχους ἄγων αἰφνιδίως τὰς πύλας ἀνοίξας ἐπεκθεῖν καὶ ἐπείγεσθαι ὡς τάχιστα ξυμμεῖξαι.'

'"…and you, Klearidas, afterwards, when you see me already engaged and likely terrifying them, take with you the Amphipolitans and the other allies, and suddenly open the gates and rush out at them, and hurry into the fray as quickly as you can."'[33]

Crucially, directives of this kind relied in the final instance on a subordinate commander's own battlefield awareness and judgment. Reserves and supporting forces fought at their own discretion.[34] Decisive manoeuvres were not left to depend on the deeply problematic means of battlefield communication and control outlined here. Instead, as much as possible was decided and arranged before a single blow was struck; generals took their place among the ranks in the knowledge that they had already done what could be done.

Yet they risked everything by doing so. If part of the army abandoned the plan, as at Plataia and the Nemea, those who did follow orders were left in the lurch. If one side anticipated the other's deployment, as at Olpai and Leuktra, the battle was as good as lost. Worst of all, if an army came under surprise attack and did not have time to prepare, it was utterly helpless unless some semblance of order could be restored.

Therefore, despite the difficulties, the Greeks never simply resigned themselves to the notion that they could do nothing to change the outcome of a battle once it had begun. There are several known instances of commanders giving new orders as their circumstances changed. At Plataia, where the vast Greek army probably stretched across the hills for several kilometres, messengers on horseback are seen riding back and forth between different contingents in the overture to the final confrontation; this probably explains how the Spartan commander was able to send a final plea for aid to his Athenian allies while already under attack by Persian horsemen.[35] At Delion, the Theban general Pagondas – his own wing heavily engaged – managed to order part of his cavalry to ride around a hill and fall upon the

[33] Thuc. 5.9.7; see also 3.107.3, 5.58.4; Xen. *An.* 6.5.11; Diod. 13.109.5.
[34] Thuc. 4.43.4, 5.73.1, 6.67.1; *Hell. Oxy.* 11.5; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10, 5.2.41; Paus. 3.5.4; Wheeler, 'Battle', 219.
[35] Hdt. 9.54.2-56.1, 9.60.1.

Athenian rear as they rolled up the other end of his line. At First Mantineia, when his officers refused to fill the gap he had created, king Agis ordered his left to turn back and restore the line; the enemy reached them before they could do so, but Agis was later able to wheel his own wing and march across the battlefield to the rescue. At the Nemea the Spartans had more control: when the enemy had already started to advance, they calmly led their entire line off to the right to encircle them – a tactic Plutarch suggests they tried to repeat at Leuktra. At Kynoskephalai in 365, the Theban Pelopidas appears to have successfully called back his cavalry from their victorious pursuit, sending them crashing into the rear of the enemy phalanx.[36] At Potidaia and Koroneia, the losing side was able to pull the remains of their phalanx into a tight formation, while the Spartans at Tegyra managed the opposite, thinning out their ranks.[37] Apparently, Greek generals *could* sometimes shape battles with commands given on the spot.

The essential question, of course, is what made the difference. What was it that allowed some commanders to control their units in battle while others could no longer alter their plans? A closer look at the examples cited above is instructive. It is not surprising that many of them involve Spartans; further instances could be mentioned that involve mercenaries trained by Spartans.[38] The effort they made to organise their armies and safeguard their kings clearly paid off in practice. Their advantage is very apparent in the fact that, of all the examples listed here, only the Spartan orders to wheel at First Mantineia and to march out in column at the Nemea required the participation of allied hoplites further down the line. No one else seems to have even attempted such manoeuvres. Instead, in all non-Spartan cases of orders given in the course of a battle, these orders concerned only the troops surrounding a general, or specialists such as the Boiotian and Thessalian cavalry. In other words, the only ones who could match the Spartans' abilities were crack troops or units that could be commanded directly. This leaves us with a clear overall pattern. The forces that could be relied upon to follow orders in battle had to meet one or more of a few criteria: they had to be trained, organised, loyal, and grouped around the general.

[36] Thuc. 4.96.5, 5.72.1-73.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19-20; Plut. *Pel.* 23.1-2, 32.3-7.
[37] Thuc. 1.63.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18; Plut. *Pel.* 17.3-4.
[38] Xen. *An.* 1.10.6-14, 6.5.29-31; *Hell.* 5.3.3-5, 6.2.21.

By contrast, the large, untrained and unwieldy bodies of hoplite militia that made up the bulk of Greek coalition armies were never asked to change their initial role. They were simply lined up in their appropriate order and launched at whatever they found in front of them. It is interesting to note here that when the manoeuvre attempted by the Spartans at First Mantineia went awry and their left wing was destroyed, Thucydides considered them 'utterly outmatched in skill'[39] – outmatched, apparently, by an enemy who did nothing more sophisticated than charging straight at them. For the Athenian author, the Spartan king's efforts to rearrange his line would have seemed not merely ill-advised, but plainly impossible; the ensuing events proved that once the enemy had begun their advance, the time for manoeuvre was over. Agis should have realised it was too late for Spartan ingenuity to come into play. The more skilled force was the one that stuck with the plan.

Indeed, it seems to have been increasingly felt that even this minimal effort was too much to ask of the hoplite militia. At Haliartos the Spartans are already said to have regarded their allies as a liability; at the Nemea and Leuktra they consequently ignored their allied contingents' fates entirely, focusing all their efforts on winning the battle by themselves on their own flank.[40] The Thebans at Second Mantineia showed just how little faith they had in their allies when they deployed them in echelon to prevent their inevitable rout from discouraging the rest of the army.[41] Athenian writings, meanwhile, show that even the reliability of a city's own militia was not always taken for granted. We have seen how Xenophon was harshly critical of the citizen soldiers' lack of discipline; Plato and the Old Oligarch also appear to have had only disdain for the city's infantry.[42] Thucydides admittedly once

[39] Thuc. 5.72.2. The Greek of this passage ('ἀλλὰ μάλιστα δὴ κατὰ πάντα τῇ ἐμπειρίᾳ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἐλασσωθέντες τότε τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ ἔδειξαν οὐχ ἧσσον περιγενόμενοι') is not entirely clear. Hornblower (*Commentary* III, 189), leaning on Jowett here, translates τῇ ἐμπειρίᾳ ἐλασσωθέντες 'deficient in tactical skill', suggesting the Spartans are being judged relative to their own past deeds; Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (*Thucydides* IV, 120-121) have pointed out that Thucydides' focus is on the way in which the Spartans, after their humiliation on Sphakteria, restored their reputation for bravery. However, Thucydides gives us no clear point against which to measure Spartan skill. It seems more sensible to me to assume they are being compared in both aspects to their Argive enemies, who indeed show themselves τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ ἧσσον when Agis advances upon them. The Loeb translation reads 'inferior in point of tactical skill' – not 'lacking' in a general sense, but 'inferior', which ought to refer to the Argives. I have tried to bring this out in my translation.

[40] Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.23, 4.3.20, 6.4.14; Anderson (*Theory and Practice*, 142) called this battle plan 'calculated selfishness'. For the Peloponnesian League's lack of enthusiasm for Sparta's wars, see also for example Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18; Isok. 14.15; Plut. *Ag.* 26.3-4; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.1.20-21.

[41] Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23; later sources (Diod. 15.55.2; Plut. *Pel.* 23.1) claim that this deployment in echelon was already used at Leuktra.

[42] Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.19; Pl. *Laws* 4.706b-d; [Xen.] *Ath.Pol.* 2.1.

refers to Athenian forces as 'the first in skill of all the Greeks', but the context, crucially, is a speech in which Hermokrates of Syracuse tries to convince his fellow citizens to do something about the poor quality of their own militia. The speech is indirect, and Hornblower has suggested that the words come from Thucydides, not Hermokrates; considering the frequency in Thucydides of parallels between Syracuse and Athens, and between Hermokrates and Perikles, we should perhaps read it instead as advice for the *Athenians*, who were indeed caught up in a war with the best fighters of Greece. Seen in this light, his advice to reduce the number of generals and to start properly training the hoplites seems remarkably apt.[43] All this may run counter to civic ideology – Perikles boasted that the Athenians' courage made up for their lack of training, and Aristotle proclaimed that citizens, while inferior in skill, would always fight longer and harder than mercenaries – yet many examples could be cited of panic and disorder in the Athenian ranks, and at Tamynai in 349/8 some of their hoplites seem to have been unwilling even to stand by their own fellow citizens.[44] It should not be surprising if earlier commanders had already had their doubts about these amateur soldiers.

We have no reason to assume that the armies of other city-states were any more reliable, unless they felt particularly committed to the outcome of the battle at hand. Occasional displays of suicidal tenacity notwithstanding,[45] hoplite levies from unwilling allies or an ill-disciplined *demos* simply could not be trusted to keep order and stand their ground – much less to carry out additional commands in the heat of battle. Greek generals therefore prepared their armies for the clash as carefully as they could, and then sounded the charge, hoping for the best.[46]

It has been stressed several times that the size and amateur nature of the levy were some of the main reasons for its clumsiness in battle. It should follow that smaller armies did better. There is in fact some ground for the assumption that the more modestly sized expeditionary forces sent out by Athens in the fifth century may have consisted of better fighters than the levy as a whole. Firstly, these forces were

[43] Thuc. 6.72.3; see Hornblower, *Commentary* III, 22, 34, 483-486.
[44] Thuc. 2.39.1; Arist. *Nik.Eth.* 1116b.7-9; Plut. *Phok.* 12.
[45] Kimon's one hundred friends fought to the death at Tanagra (Plut. *Kim.* 17.4-5), as the Thespians did against the Athenians at Delion (Thuc. 4.96.3), and the men of Pallene against the Thespians at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.20).
[46] Whatley, 'Reconstructing Marathon', 133; Lazenby, *Defence of Greece*, 250; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 46.

drafted ἐκ καταλόγου, 'from the list' – that is, from the ranks of the leisured elite eligible for hoplite service. These men at least theoretically had time to train for the task. Secondly, selection from the list was not random, and Wheeler has argued that the men chosen by their generals to accompany them on campaign would have been reliable veterans.[47] Several authors have suggested that the overall quality of Athenian armies deteriorated when, at some point during the fourth century, they replaced selection 'from the list' with a draft system based on year-groups.[48] All this seems very plausible – but there is no evidence for the superior performance of these men.[49] To be sure, the twelve hundred hoplites under Kleon at Amphipolis attempted to wheel (ἐπιστρέψας) their whole right wing,[50] but this remains the only example I have been able to find of an army not trained by Spartans attempting such a manoeuvre, and the ensuing events show that Kleon's troops did not actually possess the required tactical skill.[51] The move led to confusion and chaos in the Athenian force, which Brasidas immediately exploited to great effect. Other expeditionary forces, such as the armies dispatched to Potidaia and to Spartolos, did not show any tactical ingenuity despite their relatively small size. Even extended service in Sicily apparently could not turn the Athenians 'from the list' into disciplined soldiers capable of battlefield manoeuvre; they are not seen doing anything more sophisticated than forming a hollow square. There is no sign of unit subdivision or subordinate officers at any point. From this we may conclude that militia armies remained essentially unwieldy packs of untrained warriors regardless of their numbers. To properly control a battle, Greek generals knew they needed troops of a different sort.

[47] Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 143; see also Hamel, *Athenian Generals*, 25-26; Christ, 'Conscription', 401-402; *Bad Citizen*, 52.
[48] Tritle, '*Epilektoi*', 56; Hamel, *Athenian Generals*, 26-28; Bertosa, 'Hoplite Equipment'; Crowley, *Psychology*, 27.; for a description of the system see Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter*, 86-87; Christ, 'Conscription', 409-412.
[49] Christ ('Conscription', 417-418) argued that the new draft method would actually have created *better* armies, but in fact there is no discernible change in the tactical abilities of the Athenian militia.
[50] Thuc. 5.10.4.
[51] Anderson ('Cleon', 3-4) blamed Kleon for the ensuing chaos, failing to recognise that the attempted manoeuvre was unique for Athenian hoplites.

The Tools of the Tactician

The Classical sources are littered with references to detachments called *logades*, or, from Xenophon onwards, *epilektoi* – the 'chosen ones'. Yet these picked troops have never been fully integrated into modern characterisations of Greek warfare. Droysen was the first to describe them as a counterweight to the tactical ineptitude of the general levy; however, his view was not adopted by later scholars, and it was not until Pritchett compiled a list of examples of these units that authors in the English-speaking world began to acknowledge their existence.[52] Despite the ensuing studies by DeVoto and Tritle,[53] gathering references and analysing the functions of these troops, more recent works still do little more than point out the phenomenon without systematic study of its tactical purpose.[54] This seems to me a great oversight. The appearance and spread of the concept of picked troops during the Classical period both follows logically from the problematic realities of battle outlined above, and demonstrates the ways in which Greek military thought developed to deal with them.

Down to the late Archaic period, battle appears to have been an affair of individual warriors and small bands operating more or less independently; it is unlikely that the aristocratic armies of this period drew themselves up in deliberate formations or that they fought their battles according to an overall plan. All this changed drastically when massed hoplites and true cavalry appeared at the end of the sixth century.[55] Large hoplite armies, to be effective against enemy hoplites and horsemen, needed to hold the line; they needed to retain their cohesion and play whatever part they were given in a concerted effort to win. Yet the merging of untrained forces into a single formation meant that any change in the conditions of battle could be fatal. The militia was incapable of manoeuvre; it was too large to be commanded directly; if any part of it collapsed, it could drag all the rest down with it. How was the army to be protected against the uncertainties of battle? How were

[52] Droysen, 36-37; Pritchett II, 221-225; note their complete absence in Grundy, *Thucydides*, and Adcock, *Art of War*. Modern authorities such as Anderson (*Theory and Practice*, 158-159) and Hanson (*Western Way*, 124-125) discuss only the Theban Sacred Band. The more extended analysis of Detienne ('Phalange', 134-138) focuses on the origin and political role of these units.
[53] DeVoto, 'Sacred Band'; Tritle, '*Epilektoi*'.
[54] See for instance Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 59-60; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 144-145; Wheeler, 'Battle', 220; in this they follow the example of Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 44, 65.
[55] Greenhalgh, *Early Greek Warfare*, 96-145, 147; Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations*, 58-60; Sheldon, *Ambush*, 44-47; Van Wees, 'Farmers and Hoplites', 240-244.

particular tactical missions to be carried out by a force that drew its strength from its sheer massive size?

This background serves to explain the emergence of picked troops soon after large hoplite armies were first put to the field. Herodotos refers to the volunteers sent to relieve the Megarians in the prelude to Plataia as 'the three hundred *logades* of the Athenians'[56] – suggesting it was no coincidence that out of the whole army it was these men who stepped forward. There is nothing in the text to indicate that these hoplites had been specially trained; since they are seen only here, and are not mentioned even in Thucydides' enumeration of Athenian military strength at the start of the Peloponnesian War, it seems unlikely that they were a standing force. Yet even as a unit of ordinary hoplites their appearance has important implications. First, they were picked from the mass of the army for a special purpose. If this was done by their commander, they were presumably selected for their strength or skill or the quality of their equipment; if they volunteered, it means they stood out because of their eagerness to serve. As a result they must in one way or another have been more effective fighting men than the regular hoplite militia. Second, they were a separate detachment of three hundred men taken from an Athenian force of eight thousand. As we have seen, the number of three hundred was popular when it came to units of picked men, for reasons that remain obscure to us;[57] what matters here is that they were a small force, and that they were led by their own commander, implying that they were meant to be more easily managed and more flexibly employed than the main body of hoplites.[58]

These two features define the practice of forming special detachments of hoplites and light troops – a practice that became ubiquitous in Classical Greece. The men were specially selected, and they were selected to deal with particular problems. Unfortunately we never find out how the selection process actually worked, and what made a man eligible to be picked; Aineias the Tactician suggests physical

[56] Hdt. 9.21.3; Plut. *Arist.* 13.3; called *epilektoi* in Diod. 11.30.4. Pausanias (1.27.1) claims they were cavalry.
[57] Rubincam ('Casualty Figures', 185) expressed her hope to examine this phenomenon at some point, but to my knowledge she has not yet done so.
[58] The difficulty of moving large masses of men and the relative manoeuvrability of smaller units is stressed in Delbrück, 7; Pritchett II, 230 (citing Machiavelli); Goldsworthy, '*Othismos*', 5; Lee, '*Lochos*', 302-303.

fitness was the decisive factor.[59] However, the reason for raising a force of *logades* is often very explicit:

> 'καὶ οἱ μὲν (…) ἐξέτασίν τε ὅπλων ἐποιοῦντο καὶ ἑξακοσίους λογάδας τῶν ὁπλιτῶν ἐξέκριναν πρότερον (…) ὅπως τῶν τε Ἐπιπολῶν εἶεν φύλακες, καὶ ἢν ἐς ἄλλο τι δέῃ, ταχὺ ξυνεστῶτες παραγίγνωνται.'
>
> '[the Syracusans] *held a review of their hoplites, from whom they first selected a picked force of six hundred (…) to guard Epipolai, and, if help was needed anywhere, to gather and get there quickly.*'[60]
>
> 'οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι (…) τριακοσίους μὲν σφῶν αὐτῶν λογάδας καὶ τῶν ψιλῶν τινὰς ἐκλεκτοὺς ὡπλισμένους προύταξαν θεῖν δρόμῳ ἐξαπιναίως πρὸς τὸ ὑποτείχισμα, ἡ δ' ἄλλη στρατιὰ δίχα (…) ἐχώρουν…'
>
> *'The Athenians (…) chose three hundred picked men of their own, and some well-armed light troops, to run suddenly to the counterwork, while the rest of the army (…) advanced in two parts...'*[61]

Early in the Peloponnesian War the Eleians sent a picked force of three hundred men to deal with Athenians ravaging their territory. Aristeus had picked troops around him at Potidaia, which he used to dash back to the city straight through his Athenian enemies when the rest of his army was defeated; Brasidas used one hundred and fifty picked men to open the battle of Amphipolis with a solitary charge against the Athenian centre. While Thucydides does not refer to them as *logades,* the four hundred hoplites and light troops placed in ambush by Demosthenes at Olpai must also have been specially selected for the purpose. During his campaign in Illyria, Brasidas was not content merely to use his youngest hoplites to chase off his light-armed enemies; he also created a picked unit three hundred strong, with which he fought a successful rearguard action. Nikias attempted to force a strong position at Mende by taking a small detachment of picked hoplites and missile troops and dashing up the slope. When Agesilaos besieged Phleious in 380, a picked force of

[59] Ain. Takt. 1.5; this is seen in practice at Xen. *An.* 4.3.20.
[60] Thuc. 6.96.3. These six hundred Syracusan picked troops may have had an earlier predecessor, if Diodoros (11.76.2) is not simply projecting Thucydides' testimony backwards in time.
[61] Thuc. 6.100.1.

Phleiasians – again three hundred strong – kept order and stubbornly defended the city against him.[62]

In short, *logades* were formed to complete missions that a large, barely controllable mob of warriors such as the hoplite levy could not carry out. The inclusion of particularly strong or skilled warriors was not as important as the formation of the unit as such – the placement of a distinct group of men under the direct command of a single officer, often the general himself. The small size of units of *logades* meant that they were able to retain good order and move quickly, making them perfect as a reserve or as a striking force to seize the tactical initiative. It is these units that reveal to us the true dimensions of Greek tactical thought.

The finest example of a unit of this kind was raised from the ranks of the Ten Thousand. All the roles given to *logades* in the examples above were taken on at some point by the six *orthioi lochoi*, the 'straight units',[63] each composed of smaller sub-units led by a detailed hierarchy of officers. Originally created to prevent chaos in the marching formation when the army made its way across a bridge or through a narrow defile, they served in the course of the journey as a tactical reserve on the march, as shock troops of the vanguard and protectors of the rearguard, and eventually as the components of a chequered first and a withheld second battle line.[64]

These unique deployments for battle in particular evoked the admiration of the Prussians and continue to astonish scholars to this day.[65] The *orthioi lochoi* therefore tend to be regarded as an anomaly. Several of the Prussians struggled to offer some explanation as to why these units' evidently brilliant tactics failed to reappear at any point in Greek history. However, in light of all the points raised above, the *orthioi lochoi* seem neither a strange development nor a puzzling dead end; rather, they are only the most extreme exponent of the common Greek practice of selecting and organising small groups of soldiers for specific tasks. No doubt their particular skill and ingenuity resulted from the fact that they were drawn from an army that already consisted of Spartan-led veteran mercenaries to begin with. Even

[62] Thuc. 2.25.3, 1.62.6, 5.4.4, 3.107.3, 4.125.3, 4.127.2, 4.129.4; Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.22.
[63] Xen. *An.* 4.2.11, 4.8.12; Plutarch (*Dion* 45.3) uses this term to describe the units assaulting Syracuse with Dion in 356, but these were not picked troops and do not appear to have had commanders below the *lochos* level.
[64] Xen. *An.* 3.4.21-23, 3.4.43, 4.2.11, 4.8.12-19, 6.5.9.
[65] Rüstow/Köchly, 155-158; Droysen, 47-48; Delbrück, 138-139; Lee, '*Lochos*', 299-300; Wheeler, 'Battle', 219.

so, it should be stressed that the more sophisticated of their tactical innovations occurred only in the later stages of the march, when the *orthioi lochoi* had served together through near-constant mortal danger for months on end. It does not seem all that strange to suggest that their tactics remained unique simply because no other Greek force ever attained the necessary degree of discipline, experience and unit cohesion to adopt them.[66]

The Ten Thousand, then, were forced to develop their skills over time by the dire needs of circumstance. Dedicated training was the safer alternative. At Delion the Thebans already seem to have fielded a picked unit indicated specifically as the three hundred 'charioteers and chariot-fighters' – the distinct name implying that it was permanently established.[67] While nothing is known about the unit, it may have suggested to the Argives the benefits of raising *logades* to the next level. Where all other picked troops appear to have been no more than temporary responses to circumstance, the Argives now created a standing force no less than a thousand strong, trained and maintained at the expense of the state.[68] The decades that followed saw the proliferation of this idea, with elite standing units being raised in Thebes, Elis, Phleious, the newly formed Arkadian League, and possibly, at an unknown date in the fourth century, at Athens.[69] These units were a very different creature from the ad-hoc *logades* of earlier times. As Tritle put it, they were 'not just a volunteer force of eager citizen soldiers, but rather a veteran force best described as shock troops'.[70] The famous Theban Sacred Band exemplifies their functions – and the overlap with those of earlier picked units is striking. Initially raised to provide the Theban phalanx with an unflinching first rank, the three hundred Sacred Band fought alone at Tegyra, protecting Boiotian territory with only some cavalry in support; if Plutarch is to be believed, they were first upon the enemy at Leuktra, and they are also likely to have been 'the *epilektoi* of the Thebans' seen assaulting the

[66] It may be objected that the Spartan army would have been able to match the abilities of the *orthioi lochoi*, but nothing suggests they ever did. While the Spartiates probably trained together in tightly knit groups from an early age, their documented reluctance to actually go out and fight (Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 45, 83-85; Ray, *Land Battles*, 287) meant that few of them would have had much combat experience.
[67] Diod. 12.70.1.
[68] According to Diodoros (12.75.7) this happened in 421; they are first seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.67.2, 5.73.2-3).
[69] For lists of attestations see Pritchett II, 221-225; DeVoto, 'Sacred Band', 5-6; Tritle, '*Epilektoi*', 54-55. Christ ('Conscription', 418) rejected Tritle's view that the Athenian *epilektoi* were a standing force.
[70] Tritle, '*Epilektoi*', 57.

gates of Corinth in 369. At Chaironeia, they held the extreme right of the Greek line, possibly anchoring the army's flank on the Kephisos river, where Alexander destroyed them.[71]

It may be tempting to take the appearance of *epilektoi* as a sign of increasing professionalism in Greek warfare; some city-states were clearly willing to invest in standing forces to enhance their overall tactical capabilities. However, we will do well to bear in mind Pritchett's sobering remark that 'the emergence of such elite corps is mute testimony to the amateur nature of the remainder of the troops'.[72] *Epilektoi* are as much a sign of increasing reliance on skilled soldiers as they are an indication of Greek awareness that they could not rely on their militia to perform any but the simplest tasks in war.

In support of this interpretation we may note the complete absence of these types of picked troops at Sparta. The Spartan army's unusual level of organisation and discipline meant that, in situations where other city-states tended to field picked forces, the Spartans were satisfied to use the component units of their regular phalanx. To guard a pass, garrison a city, or seize a strategic position, they deployed their own *lochoi* or *morai*;[73] there is no indication that even the one hundred men led by Brasidas to save Methone from Athenian raiders were specially selected.[74] The Spartans' faith in the general quality of their hoplites is exemplified by the fact that the men sent to Sphakteria were not hand-picked, but ἀποκληρώσαντες, 'chosen by lot'.[75] Where particular fitness was required – usually to ward off light-armed attackers – Spartan armies were arranged in such a way that the youngest of the hoplites could be ordered to charge out from the ranks at a moment's notice.[76] Generally speaking, Spartan militia armies seem to have been able to respond to

[71] Plut. *Pel.* 17.2, 19.3-4, 23.2; Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.18-19; Diod. 16.86.2-4; Plut. *Pel.* 18.5; *Alex.* 9.2, 12.3. The range of tasks they performed argues strongly against DeVoto's view ('Sacred Band', 6, 11-15, 17) that their exclusive purpose was to charge at the enemy's leading troops in pitched battle.
[72] Pritchett II, 221; the point was made earlier by Droysen (36-37).
[73] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.17, 4.5.3-5, 5.4.46, 7.1.15-17, 7.4.20-21.
[74] Thuc. 2.25.1. Brasidas did use picked troops during his campaign in Thrace, as noted above; arguably this was because his forces did not consist of Lakedaimonian militia. His methods, however, were certainly not 'orthodox Spartan tactics' (Wylie, 'Brasidas', 86-87).
[75] Thuc. 4.8.9.
[76] Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.14-16, 5.4.40, 6.5.31; only the last of these appear to have been selected in advance. Mercenary forces led by Spartan commanders were apparently trained to function in a similar way: see Thuc. 4.125.3, 4.127.2; Xen. *An.* 4.2.16, 6.5.4, 7.3.46; *Hell.* 3.4.23.

circumstance perfectly well with the forces they had at hand. What use did they have for *epilektoi*?

Indeed, when we look at the elite troops of the Spartan army, we find that they were units of a very different nature. The famous three hundred picked Spartiates called *hippeis*, first seen in 479, were an honour guard; their name has led scholars to believe they must have been the successors of an Archaic unit of aristocratic cavalry, and their high status is never questioned.[77] There is only one possible occasion, as early as the 460s, where they may have served as an 'elite strike force' similar to the *epilektoi* fielded by other city-states in later decades – but it is not at all clear whether the three hundred men involved were in fact the *hippeis*.[78] In all other cases where they figure in a combat situation – and there are only two – their role is that of a royal hoplite bodyguard. They are stationed around the king in the battle line; they are not given separate orders at any point; they are never seen performing any manoeuvre independent from the rest of the phalanx.[79] It seems more fitting to compare these men to the thousand picked Immortals at Plataia than to any of the detachments mentioned here.

As for the other elite unit, the enigmatic Skiritai, these appear to have been more like other picked troops – but they were different in two important respects. Firstly, while Diodoros once plainly refers to them as Spartiate *epilektoi*, the account of Thucydides makes it clear that they were in fact *perioikoi* drafted from a particular part of Lakonia.[80] This means they were neither Spartiates nor picked troops – unless they were 'picked' in the same sense that the five thousand *perioikoi* at Plataia were 'picked', that is, taken from a population that could potentially send more.[81] They were not a standing force of citizens, but a regional levy assigned a specific function in large Spartan armies. Secondly, while the ancients credit the Skiritai with a range of military roles typical for picked troops, these roles are all remarkably specific, and

[77] Hdt. 8.142.3; Worley, *Hippeis*, 23-25; Figueira, 'Spartan *Hippeis*', 61, 67-68; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 144 n.162; Sidnell, *Warhorse*, 28.
[78] Hdt. 9.64.2, as interpreted by Figueira ('Spartan *Hippeis*', 60).
[79] Thuc. 5.72.4, 5.73.2; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14. Kelly ('Pitanate *Lochos*', 37-38) has suggested that the men led by Amompharetos at Plataia were misidentified by Herodotos and were actually the *hippeis*, but there is no real evidence to support this.
[80] Diod. 15.32.1; Thuc. 5.67.1. Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (*Thucydides* IV, 103-104) argued that they were actually Arkadian allies (see also Sekunda, '*Mora* at Lechaeum', 60, 64), but this requires us to reject Thucydides in favour of a gloss by Hesychios.
[81] Hdt. 9.11.3.

it is notable that all of them are assigned categorically rather than in response to a particular situation. The Skiritai always held the left of the line according to Thucydides; they scouted the way and guarded the camp according to Xenophon; they acted as a tactical reserve according to Diodoros.[82] These are the sort of tasks for which other city-states might select a unit of picked troops, yet the Skiritai – again, neither specially selected nor a standing force – appear to have specialised in them. Xenophon assures us the Spartans worked them to the bone.[83] It seems, then, that the Spartans on campaign availed themselves of a mobile infantry elite that compared to the *epilektoi* of other states in much the same way that Spartan hoplites compared to most Greek heavy infantry. They were not a professional force to be used when the need arose; they were a militia unit whose specific duty was to make sure the need never arose. It is a shame that we know almost nothing about their actual operational history,[84] for the hints we are given suggest that the Skiritai represent a fascinating alternative direction in the development of Greek specialist troops.

Thanks to the abilities of their ordinary troops and the efforts of the Skiritai, the Spartans did not need to field *logades*; there is no sign that they ever did. The transformation of particular units into standing forces never occurred at Sparta. For other city-states, however, the selection of *logades* and the later formation of units of *epilektoi* were crucial ways to provide their community and their armies with a reliable, readily available force of infantry capable of more than just head-on charges. The elaboration of this idea, and the allocation of state funds for the purpose, was one of the most significant military developments of the Classical period.

It should be stressed, though, that units of *logades* – the few who could be trusted to do more than the bare minimum required of a Classical Greek warrior – never made up more than a very small minority of the army; indeed, that their small size was essential to their ability to function better than the army as a whole. The other thousands formed a brave mob at best, and a reluctant and panicky one at worst.

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[82] Thuc. 5.67.1; Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 12.3; Diod. 15.32.1.
[83] Xen. *Kyr.* 4.2.1.
[84] They are only seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.1-3) and briefly during Agesilaos' Theban campaign of 377 (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.52-53). Scholars in fact disagree over what troop type the Skiritai were; it is generally assumed that they were hoplites, but Wheeler ('*Hoplomachoi*', 7) seems to have believed they were cavalry, while Sekunda ('*Mora* at Lechaeum', 61-64) has rather implausibly argued that they were *hamippoi*.

It is against this background that we should examine the battle tactics actually employed by the Greeks.

How to Win

It has been one of the great virtues of recent scholarship on Greek warfare to acknowledge that, contrary to the old Prussian model, 'almost all of the large battles of the fifth and fourth centuries BC were characterised by manoeuvre of some form.'[85] Admittedly, many of these manoeuvres were planned out in advance; units were set out in such a way that they would almost automatically play the role they were intended to play. This hardly serves to create an image of Greek tactical sophistication. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the battle plans behind the Greeks' careful deployments tended to take one of just two forms: either the enemy was to be encircled, or his best troops were to be directly engaged and destroyed. But this is where tactical responses to circumstance come into play. Strikingly, all examples of battle tactics found in the sources can be explained as deliberate attempts to prevent the enemy from succeeding at one or the other of these two basic plans.

The earliest battle described in our sources may have been won by tactics. After the initial charge of the Greeks at Marathon, their victorious wings turned inward, crushing the Persian force that had just overrun their weak centre. The sheer apparent genius of this manoeuvre has led some to assume it was premeditated, or at least carefully orchestrated during the clash; seen in this way, the battle becomes a prime example of a tactical response to a critical breakthrough.[86] This seems too optimistic an interpretation of such an early engagement; in his description of the deployment for battle, Herodotos states only that the Greeks managed to match the width of the Persian line, which cost them the depth of their centre. But it is hard to deny that the decision to march to the aid of the rest of the army seems to have been consciously made by both the Plataians on the left and the Athenians with the polemarch Kallimachos on the right. This implies notable battlefield awareness and

[85] Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 90; see Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 81-85; Wheeler, 'Battle', 215-219; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 45-47.
[86] Hdt. 6.113; for discussion see Lazenby, *Defence of Greece*, 250; Krentz, *Marathon*, 157-158.

tactical control. Herodotos stresses that both wings allowed their fleeing opponents to escape – no mean feat for men flush with victory – in order to turn and save the part of the line that was in danger.[87] Perhaps the manoeuvre was made possible by the fact that both wings were relatively small in size, and were led by their own commanders; however this may be, their undoubtedly independent action effectively countered the Persian exploitation of a serious flaw in the Greek deployment. We do not know if their initial preoccupation with formation width was a response to their experiences in earlier large-scale battles; all we can say is that Marathon would have shown them the dangers of going too far down this path. By the time of Plataia, the Athenians were clearly on guard against threats to the integrity of the line. It was the imminent collapse of the Megarian contingent that prompted the Athenian *logades* and archers to rush into action.

When the fog lifts on the general course of battles, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the system of tactical responses to typical plans already appears to be fully developed. At Potidaia, the Corinthian general Aristeus arranged for his mounted allies to strike the Athenians in the rear as they advanced on his army; when prompt Athenian action forestalled this, Aristeus, who had won the infantry clash only on his own flank, was able to pull his picked hoplites together in a tight body to break through Athenian lines and reach the safety of the city. At Olpai, five years later, Demosthenes prepared against the Peloponnesians who were set to envelop his right wing by selecting four hundred hoplites and light troops to place in ambush, hidden in a hollow road alongside the battlefield, ready to charge into the enemy's backs. He himself chose to face the danger on the right wing of the line until the trap was sprung. At Solygeia, when the Corinthian left began to crumble, a *lochos* arrived to reinforce it; if this unit was the detachment that Thucydides reports was initially left behind to guard the town, it is clear that it served as a mobile hoplite reserve rather than a passive defence. Still, in the end, the Corinthians' lack of cavalry proved their undoing – though unfortunately Thucydides does not tell us exactly how. He is clearer on the role of horsemen at Delion the following year. As the Theban commander's deep right wing slowly crushed the Athenians, he noticed his line being rolled up from his shattered left; he consequently ordered two units of

[87] Hdt. 6.111.3, 6.113.2. Lazenby ('Hoplite Warfare', 60) suggested that after their long charge the hoplites were simply too exhausted to pursue their fleeing enemies – but this is odd, since they later did (Hdt. 6.113.2).

cavalry to gallop around the hill behind him and fall upon the encircling Athenians' rear. The Athenians, already in confusion due to their clumsy wheeling manoeuvre, saw the horsemen coming and panicked. They were unable to recover.[88]

It is notable that the manoeuvres of these early battles involve small detachments only. This may well be the reason why scholars have traditionally ignored them in their accounts of Greek tactical developments; it is not until First Mantineia that we see something resembling large-scale manoeuvre, and not until the Nemea that this appears deliberate. The assumption is therefore that the clumsy experiments of the former engagement were a lesson learned by the time of the latter, and that the fourth century saw the first battle plans worthy of the name.[89] Yet such an analysis does no justice to the efforts of countless Greek commanders to deal with the military realities outlined above. For six decades, between Plataia and First Mantineia, we get no details of any pitched battle involving the anomalous Spartan army; it is no surprise that they turn out on their reappearance to do things that other hoplite armies have never done, but it does not mean that they were alone in their ability to conceive of such things. The difference was merely that a far larger part of their army had the organisation and training required to contribute to their manoeuvres.

The move seen at First Mantineia, then, was much like the others in principle, if significantly larger in scale:

> 'δείσας δὲ Ἆγις μὴ σφῶν κυκλωθῇ τὸ εὐώνυμον, καὶ νομίσας ἄγαν περιέχειν τοὺς Μαντινέας, τοῖς μὲν Σκιρίταις καὶ Βρασιδείοις ἐσήμηνεν ἐπεξαγαγόντας ἀπὸ σφῶν ἐξισῶσαι τοῖς Μαντινεῦσιν, ἐς δὲ τὸ διάκενον τοῦτο παρήγγελλεν ἀπὸ τοῦ δεξιοῦ κέρως δύο λόχους τῶν πολεμάρχων Ἱπποονοΐδᾳ καὶ Ἀριστοκλεῖ ἔχουσι παρελθεῖν καὶ ἐσβαλόντας πληρῶσαι…'
>
> *'Afraid that his left might be surrounded, and thinking that the Mantineians outflanked it too far, Agis signalled to the Skiritai and Brasideioi to lead out until they were even with the Mantineans, and told the polemarchs Hipponoidas and*

[88] Thuc. 1.62-63, 3.107.3-4, 4.42-44, 4.96.3-8.
[89] Grundy, *Thucydides*, 273; Adcock, *Art of War*, 88; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 141-142; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 125, 143; *Defence of Greece*, 250-251 (although others have stressed the unusual features of Delion in particular: see Delbrück, 117; Beck, 'Delion', 195-196; Hanson, 'Epameinondas', 196-197; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 83).

Aristokles to fill the gap by throwing themselves into it with two lochoi *from the right wing…'*

In other words, designated units were sent to salvage a threatened flank, as they had at Olpai, Solygeia and Delion, and as they would again many years later at Second Mantineia.[90] The difference was that they refused to go. The Skiritai and the Brasideioi moved left, but the two *lochoi* would not leave their stations to fill the gap. As a result, the isolated left wing was surrounded and cut to pieces – but this is where king Agis performed the feat that genuinely makes this battle remarkable. Once the Argives and others deployed over against him had been routed, he managed to wheel *his entire army* to go to the rescue of his left wing.[91] Again, this is not conceptually different from what happened at Solygeia and Delion – but the sheer scale of it had not been seen since Marathon, where it happened only as the cumulative effect of local decisions. Here, it was deliberate. This manoeuvre was far beyond the ability of any other hoplite levy; only the Ten Thousand would later be able to contemplate similar moves in an ongoing battle. When they saw him coming, Agis' enemies promptly fled.[92]

As an expression of military thought, Agis' initial shift to the left does appear to have been unique in one respect. According to Thucydides, it was carried out specifically to correct the phalanx's tendency to drift to the right, which exposed the left wing to encirclement. This tendency sounds like it ought to have been a matter of some concern to all Greek commanders, yet there is no other recorded instance of anyone giving it any thought. Indeed, at the Nemea and – according to Plutarch – at Leuktra, the Spartans intentionally made the rightward drift *worse*, marching out to the right in column to ensure that their entire right wing would be free to wheel inward and strike the enemy in the flank.[93] Why was Agis' approach so radically different?

A closer look at the conditions of the battle may serve to explain his tactics. It has already been noted that at the Nemea and at Leuktra the Spartan centre and left

[90] Thuc. 5.71.3; Diod. 15.85.8.
[91] Thuc. 5.73.2: Agis 'παραγγεῖλαι παντὶ τῷ στρατεύματι χωρῆσαι ἐπὶ τὸ νικώμενον'.
[92] Thuc. 5.73.3; Xen. *An.* 1.10.6 and 9-10.
[93] Thuc. 5.71.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19; Plut. *Pel.* 23.1-2; see Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 211-213; Lazenby, *Spartan Army*, 134, 139-140, 143; Hutchinson, *Art of Command*, 170; Wheeler, 'Battle', 217-218; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 67.

were held by unreliable allies whose troops were of a far lesser standard than the Lakedaimonian hoplites themselves. The Spartan plan in these battles was therefore to use their allies as little more than bait while they performed the crucial manoeuvre themselves, encircling the enemy's left flank and rolling up his line from there. At First Mantineia, the situation was different. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Spartan king placed himself in the centre of his line in order to face the Argives head-on; he did not care to achieve flank overlap for his own right wing, because that was never how he meant to win the battle. Moreover, a breakthrough on his left would seriously threaten his own Spartan contingent in the centre. In these particular circumstances, we can understand his choice to try to save his left rather than extend his army further toward the right. Agis' original intention also explains why he felt compelled to achieve this by ordering a complicated sideways manoeuvre instead of simply marching his whole army left in column. If he marched away from the advancing Argives, it could all too easily be taken as cowardice or flight.[94] He had to find a less conspicuous way to rearrange his line. In the event, his manoeuvre failed, and his left was lost; yet Agis' forces were still able to respond to this, while his enemies lacked the discipline to recover from their success.[95]

Again, though, despite their inability to emulate the Spartans' general manoeuvres, it is clear that commanders from other city-states understood their purpose perfectly well. In his account of the battle of the Nemea, Xenophon claims the Boiotian rightward drift was just as deliberate as that of the Spartans they faced:

> '…ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἦγον ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιά, ὅπως ὑπερέχοιεν τῷ κέρατι τῶν πολεμίων: οἱ δ' Ἀθηναῖοι, ἵνα μὴ διασπασθείησαν, ἐπηκολούθουν, καίπερ γιγνώσκοντες ὅτι κίνδυνος εἴη κυκλωθῆναι.'

[94] According to Xenophon (*An.* 4.8.16-19), the Kolchians, drawn up against the Ten Thousand, moved troops away from their centre in an attempt to reinforce their flanks; the Greek centre assumed they were running away and charged, routing the enemy army.

[95] Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 70-71; note, too, how the victorious parts of the allied army at the Nemea were unable to respond in any way to the Spartans sweeping across the battlefield (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.21-22; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 148-149), and how the victorious Argives at the Long Walls of Corinth promptly panicked and fled when they heard that the intact Spartan contingent was advancing on their rear (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11-12).

'…and they led off to the right, in order to encircle the enemy with their wing; and the Athenians, to avoid being separated, followed after, although they knew they were in danger of being surrounded.'[96]

It is worth emphasising the assumed level of tactical awareness here. The Thebans set out to win the battle by rolling up the enemy's left flank, which the Athenians recognised for the reckless plan that it was – an observation likely shared by the Eleians on the extreme left of the Spartan line as the command came down to follow towards the right. Yet they could do nothing to salvage the situation. No picked troops or reserves are reported; considering the establishment of a fixed depth among the allied contingents, which served specifically to prevent a general encirclement, it seems likely that all hoplites were committed to ensure the maximum width of the line. It is not known what happened to the more than fifteen hundred allied cavalry reported by Xenophon (a force more than twice the size of the mounted element in the Spartan army); somehow they were rendered incapable of influencing the fight.[97] The Athenians were left no other option but to march to their doom according to the Boiotian plan. They lacked the training to do what the Spartans could do – to control the movement of the entire hoplite line and turn it towards the oncoming threat.

There are of course examples of single contingents making their own tactical decisions when overall battlefield cohesion had broken down. We have seen how Aristeus' picked hoplites drew themselves together for a final dash back to Potidaia after the rest of the army had been defeated. At Koroneia, the Thebans similarly decided to tighten their formation and face Agesilaos head-on after they discovered that the rest of their army had fled to the slopes of a mountain that was now behind the Spartan line. Both sides suffered heavy losses, but some Thebans managed to get through.[98] At Tegyra in 375, when Pelopidas' heavily outnumbered Sacred Band decided on a frontal charge of the same kind, the Spartans who opposed them understandably assumed that these Thebans, too, were only trying to get away to

[96] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18.
[97] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16-17. Anderson (*Theory and Practice*, 148) suggested that perhaps all Spartan cavalry was deployed on the right flank to block their Athenian counterparts, but he still could not explain what happened to the Boiotian horse. Unsuitable ground may have been more of a factor (Sidnell, *Warhorse*, 54). Diodoros (14.82.10-83.1) claims the cavalry on both sides was only five hundred strong, making it plausible that they cancelled each other out – but such a low total of Boiotian and Athenian horsemen is difficult to believe.
[98] Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18-19 (although curiously the essential word συσπειραθέντες, 'formed up close together', does not appear in the otherwise identical account of Xen. *Ag.* 2.11-12).

safety; by consequence, when the leading Spartan officers were killed, the remaining ones resolved to do what Xenophon says Agesilaos should have done at Koroneia – they opened up the ranks, hoping to cut down the enemy as they passed. Yet when they increased their file interval, Pelopidas seized his chance to destroy the Spartan formation from within.[99] At Kerkyra in 373 we see mercenaries in Spartan service respond in a very different way to an imminent breakthrough:

> 'ἄλλοι δ' ἐκδραμόντες καθ' ἑτέρας πύλας ἐπιτίθενται ἀθρόοι τοῖς ἐσχάτοις: οἱ δ' ἐπ' ὀκτὼ τεταγμένοι, ἀσθενὲς νομίσαντες τὸ ἄκρον τῆς φάλαγγος ἔχειν, ἀναστρέφειν ἐπειρῶντο.'
>
> *'Others ran out by the other gates and massed to attack those at the far end of the line. These men, who were drawn up eight deep, thought the outer end of the phalanx was too weak, and tried to swing it around on itself.'*

Unfortunately this scheme backfired as well. The manoeuvre involved first countermarching half of the unit, then moving it behind the line, so as to double its depth; yet the enemy interpreted their about-face as the beginning of a rout, and as they charged into the mercenaries' backs, it became one.[100]

A clear pattern emerges from these engagements. While Echeverría was right to stress that phalanxes could continue to operate effectively even when partly broken,[101] the inspired actions of individual detachments could not change the outcome of a battle if the army was already falling apart. It required the intelligent use of a substantial contingent still in good order to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Spartans famously managed to do just that at First Mantineia and the Nemea; through superior tactical control they effectively countered their enemies' initially successful encirclement on the right. At the Long Walls of Corinth, too, they were able to make up for the collapse of their entire centre by wheeling and striking the victorious Argives in the flank.[102] Yet at Tegyra, Leuktra and Second Mantineia they proved unable to defend themselves against the other of the Greeks' two basic

[99] Plut. *Pel.* 17.3-4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19.
[100] Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.20-21.
[101] '*Taktikē Technē*', 68.
[102] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11.

battle plans – the direct assault on the leading part of the enemy force. The greater effectiveness of this plan was made clear especially at Second Mantineia, where the Thebans appear to have tried both expedients at the same time. Their cavalry surrounded and routed the left of the enemy phalanx while their massed hoplites charged against the right; but an Eleian cavalry reserve ended up thwarting their encircling move on the left, while Epameinondas' head-on assault did succeed in breaking the Spartan right.[103] It seems reasonable for the Greeks to have concluded that brute force yielded better results than manoeuvre. But how could this crude and well-known approach repeatedly confound the finest hoplites of Greece?

Part of the answer of course lies in the fact that the Theban vanguard did not consist of typical hoplites; at Tegyra, at Leuktra, and probably also at Second Mantineia, the Spartan line was directly attacked by the *epilektoi* of the Sacred Band.[104] The Spartans had not had to grapple with so formidable an opponent for generations. At First Mantineia, while the Thousand of Argos did manage to break the extreme left of the Spartan contingent, the Argive militia deployed over against king Agis fled without fighting at all; at Koroneia, again, the Argives chose to run rather than face their Spartan enemies in combat. At the Nemea, the Spartans manoeuvred themselves into a position from which they could immediately surround and rout the Athenians who opposed them; Agesilaos was later told that only eight Lakedaimonians had been killed.[105] Xenophon appears to have felt that the efforts of the Corinthians who faced the Spartans at the Long Walls of Corinth were unworthy of being recorded.[106] Spartan defeats before Tegyra were invariably the result of surprise attacks, ambushes, or attacks by light-armed troops. Simply put, the Spartans were not used to being resisted in pitched battle. The Theban citizen hoplites had tried it to their cost at Koroneia – but the Sacred Band was more equal to the task.[107]

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[103] Xenophon's account (*Hell.* 7.5.24-25) barely discusses the allied left, and credits Athenian cavalry with its protection; Diodoros (15.85.4-8), however, describes the changing fortunes on the wing in some detail.
[104] Plut. *Pel.* 17.2, 23.2; DeVoto, 'Sacred Band', 15.
[105] Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.1.
[106] He mentions their place in the line (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10) but we hear nothing more about them. The Spartans are shown wheeling towards the centre, suggesting that their immediate opponents had already fled.
[107] If the martial fervour noted by Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.23) lasted long after Leuktra, the whole Theban contingent at Second Mantineia may have been significantly more capable than the average

The Theban deployment for battle was even more significant. At Tegyra and Leuktra, their cavalry was launched ahead of the hoplites to disrupt the Spartan formation in the manner of a cascading charge. They were particularly successful at Leuktra, where they drove the Spartans' own cavalry back into the ranks of the phalanx, no doubt causing considerable confusion.[108] Next, at Leuktra and Second Mantineia, they advanced rapidly with their hoplites formed up in a deep phalanx. It has been underlined repeatedly that the Spartans' chief advantage in battle with other Greeks lay in their ability to command and manoeuvre large groups of men; it is a fact of military history that a column is more easily maintained and more easily moved than a line,[109] and the Theban deep formation may well have been drawn up in part because it helped to give the Thebans some semblance of the cohesion and manoeuvrability that otherwise remained a Spartan privilege. It would certainly help to explain the speed with which the Theban left fell upon the Spartan line at Leuktra. Once contact had been made, of course, the Spartans could no longer manoeuvre unless they could somehow manage to disengage – which might well have resulted in a rout of the kind seen on Kerkyra. They were forced to slug it out with the Thebans in the hope of breaking them and getting their hands free. But we have seen in the previous chapter that this was exactly the sort of fight for which a deep formation was ideally suited – the sort of fight, in fact, which it could not lose. The Spartans' only hope at this point was to try to get orders through to those parts of the phalanx that were not fighting the narrow Theban column, to wheel around its flanks or otherwise come to the aid of the embattled *morai* around the king.

To extinguish this last hope is the true meaning of Epameinondas' professed aim to 'crush the head of the snake'. Xenophon may have insisted that Spartans could fight well even when their battle order was lost, but in fact the strong focus of their upbringing on unquestioning obedience made them unusually vulnerable to the decapitation of their chain of command. Not knowing what to do, they tended to make bad decisions, or no decisions at all. This is what gave Pelopidas the victory at Tegyra; it gave the Arkadians the victory at Kromnos in 365, when the second in command to a wounded Archidamos made a truce despite outnumbering the

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hoplite militia –which may have allowed them to try new expedients like forming up in echelon (*Hell.* 7.5.23).

[108] Plut. *Pel.* 17.2; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10-11.

[109] As implicitly noted by Xenophon (*An.* 4.8.10-13); see Delbrück, 32; Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 322; Goldsworthy, 'Othismos', 7-8, 24-25; Rusch, *Sparta at War*, 198.

enemy.[110] It has often been pointed out in general terms that the Theban plan at Leuktra and Second Mantineia was to attack the enemy general and the core of his army,[111] but nothing has been said about the fact that this plan was tailored specifically to counter the main tactical advantage of the Spartans in battle. The very fact that the Spartans normally *retained* the ability to manoeuvre meant that the loss of their general and his immediate replacements could paralyse the rest of the army – or at best reduce it to being driven by inertia, like an ordinary Greek militia army. Such an army was no great challenge for a deep Theban phalanx spearheaded by *epilektoi* and supported by a strong cavalry force.

In this way the Thebans responded effectively to Spartan methods that had clearly become predictable by the time of Leuktra. Yet their own plan remained very simple – as Lazenby put it, 'all the Thebans had to do was advance'.[112] The main component of their army was still a large, untrained citizen militia, of which little more could be expected; Theban tactics still fit entirely within the familiar framework of the two basic approaches to pitched battle. The battle plan was built on tried and tested expedients: the deep formation, the strike against the enemy's main force, and the age-old practice of leaving tough tasks to picked troops. There is nothing new here. While the Thebans appear to have abandoned the older notion of using detached reserves to decide the issue – relying instead on turning their main hoplite contingent into a slightly more manoeuvrable column – they still cannot be shown to have introduced any element to the known parameters of Greek warfare. Simply put, they formed up many ranks deep to guarantee the success of their head-on charge; they rushed at the leaders of the enemy army to ensure that no encircling wing could be brought to bear against them. In this way, their victories are a perfect example of how Greek tactics developed to meet its own particular challenges – the limitations of militia armies, the common tactical forms that emerged as a result, and the daunting presence of the Spartans, who always remained one step ahead of everyone else.

[110] Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 11.7; Plut. *Pel.* 17.3-4; Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.24-25; Humble, 'Disorder', 227-229.
[111] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 319-322; Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 240; DeVoto, 'Leuktra', 116-117; Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 146; DeVoto, 'Sacred Band', 6; Buckler, 'Epameinondas and Pythagoreanism', 106; Hutchinson, *Art of Command*, 169, 172.
[112] Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 71.

Theory

Several of the passages cited in this chapter show that at least by the second half of the fifth century there was a lively discourse on who did and did not possess the 'skills' (ἐμπειρίαι) needed in war. The notion that sheer courage offset these skills is a common theme in Greek writings; it is frequently claimed that a force lacking good order or overwhelmed by the enemy's tactical ability could still fight bravely, and thereby win glory and admiration. But it is very clear from their context that such claims served only as a consolation prize. Perikles placed courage above skill to raise the spirits of Athenians, who knew they faced war with the finest fighters of Greece; Hermokrates is similarly made to argue, after the Syracusans' first defeat against Athens, that at least the citizens' courage had not been found wanting. Thucydides emphatically describes the men of Demosthenes' army who were wiped out by Aitolian javelin throwers in 427 as 'the best men of the city of Athens who were destroyed in this war'.[113] Xenophon argues that Agesilaos' suicidal tactics at Koroneia at least showcased his bravery; in his description of Iphikrates' ambush of Anaxibios near Abydos, the author puts a good deal of emphasis on the latter's heroic last stand. At Leuktra, both during and after the battle, he stresses the eager fighting spirit of the utterly beaten Spartan force. Aristotle praises the courage of citizen hoplites to mitigate his point that mercenaries are obviously the better fighters – but in doing so he inadvertently shows that the militia had an edge only if things had gone so badly wrong that a fight to the death was at hand.[114] The hierarchy is clear: if skills were not in evidence, valour would have to do.

Herodotos interestingly already framed the Persian invasion in much the same terms. He stressed that the Immortals were 'neither less brave nor weaker', but that they lacked the tactical ability to beat the Spartans; they were 'ignorant' (ἀνεπιστήμονες) in battle against an enemy who 'knew thoroughly' (ἐξεπιστάμενοι) how to fight.[115] In reality it was only the Spartans' stubborn bravery that allowed them eventually to triumph over a battle-hardened Persian army that had

[113] Thuc. 2.39.1, 6.72.3-4 (see also 6.69.1), 3.98.4. There seems to be a general pattern in Thucydides where specifically Athenian hoplites facing defeat are singled out for great praise: see Thuc. 4.73.4, 5.8.2, 6.31.3.
[114] Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19, 4.8.38-39, 6.4.14; Arist. *Nik.Eth.* 1116b.9.
[115] Hdt. 7.211.3, 9.62.3.

outmanoeuvred them in every possible way.[116] This demonstrates precisely the value of courage in Greek military thought. The winner did not need to be told he had been brave; the winner was *skilled*. Only the loser might need to be called courageous.

Conspicuous bravery, then, could perhaps save the honour of the forces involved – but it hardly sufficed to win battles. None of the various Greek forces that held on to the bitter end ever managed to change the outcome of the battles in which they took part. First Mantineia appears to be the only engagement in which the Classical Greek juxtaposition of skill and courage fell out in favour of the latter: while the Spartans were 'utterly outmatched in skill', Thucydides says, they 'showed that they had not been bested in terms of courage', since they fought on regardless of the destruction of their left wing, and managed to win in the end. But we have already seen that the Spartan victory was in fact due to a spectacular display of tactical control. Indeed, Thucydides himself praises the Spartans' 'careful training' in his account of their deployment for battle. His statement on courage therefore seems very strange, and we should probably understand it only as a deliberate contrast with the Spartans' earlier defeat at Sphakteria; by claiming that they won the day through sheer bravery at Mantineia, Thucydides completes the narrative of the loss and restoration of their reputation as the most fearsome warriors in Greece.[117] Going by his own description, however, it was not just valour that won this battle either. Indeed, courage alone could be dangerous; it was well understood that an excess of self-assured courage could lead to rashness, and from there to disaster.[118] Skill, instead, was the trait worth cultivating.[119]

So what were these 'skills' that were so essential to victory? It has already been mentioned repeatedly that the Classical military treatises that have come down to us rarely discuss battle tactics directly, but once again they are full of signs that military theory followed entirely in the footsteps of practice.

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[116] Veith in Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* IV, 167-169; Lazenby, *Defence of Greece*, 238, 249-253, 257-259; Lee, 'Persian Army'; Konijnendijk, 'Battle of Plataia', 13-17.
[117] Thuc. 5.72.2; see 5.69.2, 5.75.3. Diodoros (12.79.6) notably claims that the defeated Thousand of Argos were the ones who were 'foremost in bravery (ταῖς δ' ἀνδραγαθίαις προεχόντων)'.
[118] Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 192-193; Corvisier, 'Incompétences Militaires', 41-42; see Thuc. 5.9.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.12, 4.8.36; *Mem.* 3.5.5-6.
[119] Note especially Plato's *Laches*, in which Sokrates is made to expose the folly of blind courage in battle, and the need to complement it with an informed judgment of one's situation. For other references along these lines see Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 104 n.35.

This is apparent first of all in the emphasis on organisation and training. Aristotle's famous statement that 'without orderly formation the hoplite body is useless'[120] is easily understood in light of the clumsy reality of Greek battle outlined above, and it should not cause surprise that much of the theoretical work of Xenophon in particular is focused on the importance of formations and detailed officer hierarchies for the proper functioning of armed forces in the field. We have seen how urgently he wished to impress upon his audience that Spartan infantry drill really is not difficult to learn. In the *Kyroupaideia* he describes at length what is required to create a strong force of infantry out of untrained men, emphasising that drill in arms should be the one and only activity of the troops. He does not limit this kind of advice only to those who would lead infantry; elsewhere we find him arguing that the Athenian cavalry commander, too, should subdivide his horsemen into files with file-leaders and half file-leaders and file-closers, noting that this will make it easier to pass down orders, to manoeuvre, and respond to surprise attacks. Training for horsemen should be constant as well – 'for my part I cannot think of anything that should be worked on more than matters of war.' [121]

Yet these were the ideals of the expert, and the fact that Xenophon still had to offer such advice shows that these ideals were far removed from reality. At a more down-to-earth level, theoretical works therefore offered the same solution chosen by many Greek armies in practice: the creation of small, flexible units led by trusted men to take the burden of manoeuvre and tactical response off the shoulders of the hapless militia. When attacking a stronger force, Xenophon says, the cavalry commander must not risk all his troops, because many of the slow and poorly trained ones will be lost in the retreat; rather, he should pick out 'the strongest of his horses and men', who will be able to strike and withdraw quickly.[122] Aineias the Tactician even more faithfully echoes the arguments for the formation of units of picked troops found in historical accounts:

> 'ἔπειτα λοιπὸν ἀπολέγειν σώματα τὰ δυνησόμενα μάλιστα πονεῖν, καὶ μερίσαντα λοχίσαι, ἵνα εἵς τε τὰς ἐξόδους καὶ τὰς κατὰ πόλιν περιοδίας καὶ τὰς τῶν

[120] Arist. *Pol.* 1297b.19-20.
[121] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.5-7; *Kyr.* 2.1.20-24; *Hipparch.* 2.2-9, 4.9, 8.1-7; Lengauer, *Greek Commanders*, 163, 167.
[122] Xen. *Hipparch.* 8.12-14.

πονουμένων βοηθείας ἢ εἴς τινα ἄλλην ὁμότροπον ταύταις λειτουργίαν ὑπάρχωσιν οὗτοι προτεταγμένοι τε καὶ δυνατοὶ ὄντες ὑπηρετεῖν.'

'Next, one must pick out those most capable of physical exertion, and divide them into lochoi*, so that for sallies, for patrolling the city, for helping those hard pressed, or for any other duty like this, these men are ready and able to serve.'*[123]

He goes on to advise that the younger and stronger men should be chosen from the rest for guard duty on the walls. The remaining 'mob (ὄχλος)' is only to be trusted to keep watch in public spaces. Admittedly, Aineias emphasises the political aspect – loyalty to the city's ruling regime – as one of the main criteria for the selection of dependable troops; yet the prominent inclusion of strength and fitness among these criteria reveals purely military considerations as well. As his scenarios for the defence of a city unfold, it is consistently the picked troops who do the hard work – setting ambushes, guarding prominent officials, checking on sentries with the general at night, and forming an active reserve when the city is under assault. [124]

This kind of 'thinking with picked troops' finds its expression in the authors' advice for actual battle. The focus is on tight control of small units, on readiness and rapid response. Aineias stresses the need for all detachments defending a city's territory to be sent out in good order, in mutually supporting groups; they are to remain in communication with each other and with the commander through signal fires, allowing them to work together and force the enemy, caught in unfamiliar ground, to dance to their tune.[125] Xenophon similarly urges the cavalry commander to keep his troops always in formation, to hide his strength from the enemy, and to strike against any detachment or position that seems weak, 'even if it happens to be far away'.[126] It was the duty of the general to 'always be mindful of whatever comes up', and to adjust his plans accordingly.[127] All this beautifully sums up the tactical doctrine of the independently operating reserve forces seen so often in Greek battles.

Only Xenophon actually describes a theoretical battle on a grand scale – yet this fictional account of the battle of Thymbrara is so relevant to the tactical

[123] Ain. Takt. 1.5.
[124] Ain. Takt. 1.6-9, 16.7, 17.6, 26.10, 38.2.
[125] Ain. Takt. 15.2-6, 16.7-10, 16.16-22; this is seen in practice at Gela in 405 (Diod. 13.108.7).
[126] Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.1-5.9, 7.8-15; much of his advice echoes Brasidas' speech at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.9.2-8).
[127] Xen. *Hipparch.* 9.1.

problems encountered in Greek battles that Anderson went so far as to regard it as a deliberate study of the relative merits of Theban and Spartan battle plans.[128] Kroisos of Lydia, vastly outnumbering his Persian enemies, is made to attempt a double encirclement of their army by marching out his wings in column like the Spartans did on their right at the Nemea. His centre is held by an Egyptian phalanx drawn up a hundred deep. Kyros responds by massing his whole army, including his siege towers and baggage train, behind a front line of chariots and hoplites, and driving the whole vast column straight into the trap. The basic Greek tactical principles of encirclement and direct attack are very much in evidence here, and it seems initially obvious which one will come out on top. Yet, with a relatively small reserve of a thousand infantry and cavalry on each flank, Kyros manages to save the day: he charges into the exposed flanks of the enemy's encircling wings as they advance, routing them and surrounding the deep Egyptian formation in turn.

This manoeuvre, of course, is essentially the same as the ones that won the battles of Olpai and Delion. The main difference is its scale – but even so, it is worth stressing the modest size of the forces Kyros chose to carry out his plan. The vast majority of his forces were ordered simply to move forward. His enemies are shown wheeling their formation and even about-facing in the heat of battle, but his own troops show no such tactical skill.[129] Again, Kyros and his generals clearly *understand* what is going on, but they make no attempt to perform similar manoeuvres; instead, they leave the decisive charges to small detachments controlled by the general himself and his most trusted deputy. In this way, the fictional battle serves as a rejection both of predictable Spartan grand manoeuvres and of easily outwitted Theban brute force; it harks back to earlier tactical solutions to the problems of leading large, insufficiently professional armies to victory.

*

Greek battle tactics, then, developed in response to two interrelated problems: firstly, the general lack of battlefield control Greek commanders possessed over their oversized masses of largely untrained men, and secondly, the effectiveness of the basic battle plans that followed from the deployments outlined in the previous

[128] Xen. *Kyr.* 6.3.18-34, 7.1; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 165, 181-191, 211-212, 217-219.
[129] Xen. *Kyr.* 7.1.5, 7.1.23-24 and 37.

chapter. The Greeks were forced to find ways to mitigate the former problem in order to address the latter; without some capacity for manoeuvre, the known basic battle plans made up the full range of their armies' options. Yet they rose enthusiastically to the challenge. As early as the Persian Wars, they are seen fielding small units of picked troops which provided their armies with the responsiveness and manoeuvrability large forces lacked; by the end of the fifth century, good cavalry could be trusted to take on this role, while several states appear to have turned their picked hoplite formations into standing units. In battle, these small independent units could act decisively to disrupt an attempted encirclement or stem the tide of a breakthrough. For a while, the Spartans held sway in pitched battle due to their tactical control over the whole of their hoplite line, but it was only a matter of time before others discovered the right combination of careful deployment, combined arms and the use of picked troops to neutralise their advantage. Such tactics were perhaps a poor substitute for the meticulous sweeping manoeuvres of a fully professional force – but they were the most efficient way to turn the amateur militia of a Greek city-state into an army that could hold its own in battle.

5. 'No Shortage of People to Kill': The Rout and its Aftermath

'The field of battle is a land of standing corpses;
Those determined to die will live;
Those who hope to escape with their lives will die.'
- Wú Qǐ, *Wuzi,* 3.2.2

Fight or Flight

Despite the efforts of Greek generals to rely as little as possible on the performance of the hoplite militia, most major battles still ultimately hinged on a single clash between rival lines of heavy infantry. The previous chapters have revealed the structural reasons for this. Firstly, to protect the phalanx, restrictive terrain was often chosen for battle; secondly, for the same reason, horsemen and light troops were usually deployed primarily to cancel out their counterparts in the opposing army. Both tendencies set the phalanxes of each army on a collision course. Thirdly, the hoplites were the only troops with the staying power to face down a charge and rout the enemy in hand-to-hand combat – yet the untrained hoplite body was capable of little more than a head-on assault. As a result, even though the Greeks were wholly aware of the amateurism and unreliability of the hoplite levy, they were forced nevertheless to retain the frontal clash of phalanxes as a central feature of battle.

With this in mind, it seems strange that many modern accounts of Greek warfare treat the moment of truth, the clash and rout, as a mere moment in the course of a typical battle. They rarely describe this critical event in much detail, and practically never consider its potential as an aspect of military thought.[1] This surely means that our picture of tactical thinking as a response to battlefield realities is incomplete. The encounter of the hoplites, after all, presented commanders with a serious tactical problem. If the outcome of battle was to depend on the sheer perseverance of the hoplites, the willingness of these men to stand together and face the spears became far more important than it had been in the fluid battles of the Archaic period.

[1] See for example Rüstow/Köchly, 144; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 14; Lazenby, 'The Killing Zone', 91; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 191; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 97; Wheeler, 'Battle', 211-212.

The pressure to do something to increase the reliability of hoplites must have been significant. The untimely crumbling of the line was fatal to any battle plan; our sources suggest that, once the rout began, it was almost impossible to reverse. Given the hoplites' lack of training and discipline, and the absence of a hierarchy of officers to rally the men, a phalanx that was 'turned' tended to shatter beyond repair. There are only two known exceptions. At Solygeia, both the Athenians and Corinthians managed to regain control over one wing of their phalanx; at the battle of Kynoskephalai in 365 Pelopidas' forces were repulsed three or four times before finally putting their enemies to flight.[2] In the former case, this was due to the nature of the terrain: the retreating Corinthians rallied when they reached the safety of a wall on a nearby hill, while the fleeing Athenians were driven straight into the surf and had no choice to but to stand and fight. In the latter case, according to Plutarch, Pelopidas' inspiring leadership and the troops' hatred of their enemy kept the army in the fight. In all other battles of which we hear, the flight of the phalanx was final. Routed armies did not stop running until they reached their camp or a friendly city wall. It follows that generals who wished to retain some control over the battle had to give serious thought to how that flight could be prevented.

To make matters worse, the phalanx was an extremely fickle thing. The importance of group psychology in holding the hoplite body together meant that the effect of a sudden panic in the ranks could be dramatic.[3] On a number of occasions, significant parts of a hoplite line broke and fled before the two sides even met.[4]

The Greeks appear to have blamed such sudden collapses of the battle line on the gods,[5] but in practice it seems to have been more commonly caused by the Spartans. Admittedly, part of the Spartan Derkylidas' army in Asia Minor once chose to flee rather than fight the Persians, but in all other cases of which we know, the ones running away before coming to blows were facing Spartans or Spartan-led troops.[6] At Amphipolis, half of Brasidas' Athenian enemies preferred to scatter rather than face him with their formation in disorder. As noted in the previous

[2] Thuc. 4.43.2-4 (as noted in Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 191 n.35); Plut. *Pel.* 32.2-7.
[3] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 318-319, 328-333; Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 100-102.
[4] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 330, 332; Hanson, *Western Way*, 102-103; Lazenby, 'The Killing Zone', 91; Christ, *Bad Citizen,* 100; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 94; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 61.
[5] Eur. *Bakchai* 303-304; Hanson, *Western Way*, 103.
[6] Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.17; for the examples that follow, see Thuc. 5.10.8, 5.72.4; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17, 7.1.31; Diod. 15.72.3; Plut. *Ag.* 33.3-5.

chapter, the Argive militia at First Mantineia and Koroneia refused to stand its ground against the Spartans, as did the Corinthians at the Long Walls of Corinth. In 368, the forces of the Arkadian League similarly fled before a Spartan army, so that the engagement went down in history – in this case clearly written by the victors – as the Tearless Battle. Winning was never so easy for other Greeks.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Spartans made a uniquely terrifying opponent; their disciplined advance into battle was an unnerving sight to those who relied on battle cries and mad charges to overcome their fear of the fight.[7] Notably, however, the Spartans were aware of the psychological effect they had,[8] and appear to have done everything in their power to make it worse. We are told that they paid careful attention to their personal appearance and to the shine of their shields before battle, both to showcase their indifference to imminent danger and to make the men look more intimidating once they took their place in the line. Xenophon claims it was Lykourgos who told the Spartans to wear red tunics, carry bronze-clad shields, and grow their hair long – all to make them look 'taller, nobler, and more terrifying'. The resulting army was a daunting presence when drawn up for battle, their front 'a solid mass of bronze and red', rolling on slowly, the men marching to the blaring tune of flutes.[9] Xenophon stresses elsewhere how the Ten Thousand, decked out in red and bronze like Spartans, made an equally dreadful sight – and at Kounaxa they, too, routed their enemies without shedding a drop of blood.[10]

The Spartans, then, deliberately used a number of scare tactics in order to intimidate their opponents into giving up; their good order, their disciplined movement, the polished gleam of their bronze weaponry, and the fierce individual appearance of the men all contributed to an image of undaunted and unbreakable fighting power. No wonder that we hear of other Greeks dreading the thought of

[7] Kromayer/Veith, *Schlachtfelder* I, 332; Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle', 60; Hanson, *Western Way*, 100, 149; Tuplin, 'Intolerable Clothes', 223; note the evocative scene sketched by Xenophon (*Kyr.* 3.3.57-63), which seems to draw on his account of the Tearless Battle (*Hell.* 7.1.31).
[8] Plut. *Lyk.* 22.3; Xenophon (*Oik.* 8.6) stresses the imposing spectacle of an army marching in good order.
[9] Hdt. 7.208.2-3, 7.209.3; Plut. *Lyk.* 22.1-3; Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.3; *Ag.* 2.7; Thuc. 5.70. The Spartan uniform was probably meant primarily to prevent ostentatious display in dress and armour, enforcing the outward homogeneity of the Spartiate 'equals' (Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 54). However, in light of Xenophon's testimony, we should not suppose that its military advantages were merely an accidental side effect, and the Spartans' choice for these particular colours is surely no coincidence.
[10] Xen. *An.* 1.2.16-18, 1.8.19, 1.10.11 and 13.

facing Spartans in battle.[11] This fear was as much their weapon as the training that largely inspired it; as Plutarch notes, their reputation for invincibility soon became a self-fulfilling prophecy.[12]

Despite Xenophon's pleading, other Greeks would not adopt Spartan dress or Spartan drill, and therefore could not replicate the effect. Perhaps the appearance of uniform shield blazons during the Classical period[13] betrays efforts on the part of some city-states to make their hoplite militia look more intimidating, but for the most part the offensive use of fear in pitched battle remained a Spartan prerogative. Other armies were limited to features of battle that served as much to frighten the enemy as to keep the nerves of their own men in check – the paean, the war cry and the headlong charge. The effect of these was largely cancelled out by the enemy doing the exact same things. It was only through the use of surprise, or through tactics like a deep deployment or the maintenance of a mobile reserve, that Greek armies could exert psychological pressure. If Diodoros is right to credit Chabrias with forcing Agesilaos to withdraw simply by standing firm against the Spartan king's advance, this encounter – during the campaign of 378 – is the first and only known attempt to use something like the Spartans' own intimidation methods against them.[14] Chabrias' force, however, consisted of mercenaries, supported by the *epilektoi* of the Sacred Band. Ordinary hoplites could not hope to match their skills.

Instead, they focused their efforts on the other side of the coin: defence against sudden panic. It was well known that such panics could break out without provocation in beleaguered cities and army camps, especially at night;[15] Aineias the Tactician devotes nearly an entire chapter to listing countermeasures.[16] Most of these relied on the imposition of order and routine – for instance, commanding affected troops to shout a predetermined watchword – to calm the men down and nip the

[11] Thuc. 4.34.1; Lysias 16.15-17; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 4.4.16; Plut. *Pel.* 17.6. The anecdote of Pasimachos' stand at the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10) shows the same phenomenon, but by inversion: Spartans carrying Sikyonian shields appear less frightening to their enemies than they rightly should be.
[12] Plut. *Pel.* 17.6; Lazenby, 'The Killing Zone', 104-105.
[13] Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 140; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 54.
[14] Diod. 15.32.5-6; see also Nepos 12.1; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.1.2; Xenophon does not report this. The exact nature of Chabrias' ploy has long been controversial: see for example Rüstow/Köchly, 170; Parke, *Mercenary Soldiers*, 77; Anderson, 'Statue of Chabrias'; Munn, 'Boiotian Campaigns', 118-119; Matthew, *Storm of Spears*, 217-219.
[15] Thuc. 4.125.1, 7.80.3; note Plutarch's claim (*Mor.* 192c) that the Theban army never suffered a single panic while Epameinondas was its general – apparently a remarkable achievement.
[16] Ain. Takt. 27.1-14.

crisis in the bud. It was not so easy to manage the situation if panic were to break out among hoplites drawn up for battle. The threat was obviously far more real, and a commander's attempts to convince his troops that their fear was groundless were likely to fall on deaf ears. How could a premature flight nonetheless be prevented?

This crucial question provides the context for the importance of courage in the Greek view of what was needed for victory. The purpose of morale-boosting customs such as the pre-battle speech, of course, was precisely to prevent a fatal collapse of the kind described here. Without officers to manage troop morale at the smaller unit level, the phalanx relied on its individual members to keep spirits high:

> 'ἐπεὶ δ' ὁ παιὰν ἐγένετο, ἅμα πορευόμενοι οἱ ὁμότιμοι φαιδροὶ πεπαιδευμένοι καὶ παρορῶντες εἰς ἀλλήλους, ὀνομάζοντες παραστάτας, ἐπιστάτας, λέγοντες πολὺ τὸ ἄγετ' ἄνδρες φίλοι, ἄγετ' ἄνδρες ἀγαθοί, παρεκάλουν ἀλλήλους ἕπεσθαι. οἱ δ' ὄπισθεν αὐτῶν ἀκούσαντες ἀντιπαρεκελεύοντο τοῖς πρώτοις ἡγεῖσθαι ἐρρωμένως. ἦν δὲ μεστὸν τὸ στράτευμα τῷ Κύρῳ προθυμίας, φιλοτιμίας, ῥώμης, θάρρους, παρακελευσμοῦ, σωφροσύνης, πειθοῦς…'
>
> *'When the paean was over, the Equals marched forward, beaming, moving expertly, checking on one another, calling those beside and behind them by name, repeating, "come on, friends," "come on, brave men," encouraging each other to advance. And those behind, hearing them, in turn called on the men in front to lead on with gusto. In this way Kyros' army was filled with enthusiasm, ambition, strength, courage, cheering, self-control, obedience…'*[17]

Yet such practices offered no guarantees. Encouraged in broadly similar ways, some militia contingents fought to the death while others fled before a blow was struck. Legislation existed in several city-states to serve as a deterrent against fleeing from battle,[18] but it was of little help in preventing mass rout, because in such cases, for

[17] Xen. *Kyr.* 3.3.59; the account is of course fictional, but it shows what we may assume was Greek practice in more detail than any historical account. For various specific points see Hanson, *Western Way*, 100; Wheeler, 'General as Hoplite', 144-147; Krentz, 'Continuing the Othismos', 45; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 132; Crowley, *Psychology*, 109-126.

[18] Best attested at Athens (Lysias 14.6, 14.14-15; Aischines 3.175; Balot, *Courage*, 219-220) and Sparta (Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 111-112; Ducat, 'Spartan "Tremblers"', 29-30; Humble, 'Disorder', 224).

pragmatic and political reasons, the rules were never enforced.[19] At the end of the fifth century, therefore, some commanders appear to have turned to an older but more reliable way to keep a battle line in the fight.

Long before the rise of the hoplite phalanx, the Greeks had realised that it was useful to post especially brave men at the rear of a battle line; they could help to drive the line forward, and their presence would block any attempts by the men in front to run away.[20] The concept must have been widely known, and it was easily applied to hoplite formations. Yet we do not hear of any phalanx explicitly organised in this way until the very end of the fifth century. Xenophon is the first and only Classical author to mention *ouragoi* or 'file-closers', men specially chosen to form the last rank and hold the formation together. The appearance of a proper name for these men is significant. If *de facto* file-closers had existed before, as an inevitable result of the emergence of formations in rank and file, they were now apparently no longer an incidental feature, but an appointed group with recognised responsibilities. Xenophon applies the concept to both hoplites and horsemen; in his view, those at the rear should always be 'the oldest and most sensible', so that every rank could rely on the men behind them.[21] He regards their presence as vital:

> '…φάλαγγος οὔτ᾽ ἄνευ τῶν πρώτων οὔτ᾽ ἄνευ τῶν τελευταίων, εἰ μὴ ἀγαθοὶ ἔσονται, ὄφελος οὐδέν.'
>
> *'…unless its first and its last are brave men, the phalanx is good for nothing.'*[22]

This seems an overstatement, but it highlights the significance of *ouragoi* as a tactical response to the unpredictable behaviour of massed formations. They represent a received method, institutionalised after the rise of the hoplite phalanx, to increase the reliability of a battle line without requiring any additional drill or

[19] This is true for both Athens (Hamel, *Athenian Generals*, 59-63; Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 105, 116-121, 141; Hunt, 'Military Forces', 131-132) and Sparta (Thuc. 5.34.2; Plut. *Ag.* 30.2-4; Ducat, 'Spartan "Tremblers"', 32-33, 47).
[20] Hom. *Il.* 4.297-300. This is not quite the same principle as that of the deep phalanx; the strength of such formations derived from the power of depth (that is, numbers) to encourage the front ranks and frighten the enemy. The principle seen here is that of selecting the men at the rear for their *quality*.
[21] Xen. *Hipparch.* 2.3-5 (with quote at 2.3); *Kyr.* 2.3.22; *Mem.* 3.1.8; the principle is explained again, but without the specific term, at *Kyr.* 7.5.4-5. Several scholars have noted the connection between *ouragoi* and the prevention of panic flight: see Krentz, 'Hoplite Battle', 60; Hanson, *Western Way*, 104; Crowley, *Psychology*, 57.
[22] Xen. *Kyr.* 6.3.25.

discipline. As such, they were a partial solution to a pertinent tactical problem that was perfectly tailored to the values and capabilities of Greek militia armies.

Yet, as with several other tactical concepts Xenophon never tires of explaining in detail, we should not assume *ouragoi* were common; rather, we should assume that he was trying to *make* them common. The origin of the term is unknown. Only once, during the retreat of the Ten Thousand, do *ouragoi* appear in a historical context.[23] It is possible that they were yet another feature of Spartan military practice that was applied to the Ten Thousand by its Spartan commanders and then adopted by Xenophon; on the other hand, *ouragoi* make no appearance in Xenophon's description of Spartan drill. All that the works of Xenophon suggest is that the term first appeared in the final years of the fifth century, but failed to be adopted in Greek military parlance. Perhaps the Greeks felt no need to give a name to such an obvious aspect of infantry organisation. However, the fact that *ouragoi* did become a standard feature of the Macedonian phalanx suggests that they may have been another element of a more professional and systematic approach to warfare that the hoplite levy simply rejected.[24]

In the end, commanders could do little more than try to cause panic among their enemies before it took hold of their own men.[25] In this sense, again, it was the vulnerability of the hoplite phalanx that propelled tactical innovation; the raising of picked troops and the use of cavalry are clear examples of attempts to relieve the pressure on the main body of hoplites. The more a general could rely on specialist units and surprise, the less he would need to rely on the endurance of the phalanx. Indeed, the Spartans' unique skills and the effect these had in battle may well explain why they were so late in raising their own cavalry and archers, why they never deployed picked units for special tactical missions, and why they focused their efforts instead on the management of the battle line as whole. More than anyone, they *could* rely on their phalanx, and they knew that its very presence did half the work in breaking the enemy. Undoubtedly, part of the shock of Leuktra was that a non-Spartan hoplite force had somehow managed to exert greater psychological pressure than the Spartans themselves.

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[23] Xen. *An.* 4.3.26.
[24] Askl. 2.2 (who also prescribes them for cavalry: Askl. 7.2); Aelian *Takt.* 5.1.; Arr. *Takt.* 5.4.
[25] Echeverría has argued ('*Taktikē Technē*', 71-72) that the shock charge of the hoplite phalanx was in itself an attempt to win in an instant and avoid the uncertainties of prolonged hand-to-hand combat.

If both sides retained their cohesion, and no forces could be summoned to interfere with the clash, a fight between rival phalanxes devolved into a battle of will and attrition. Such battles could locally end with the total destruction of one side, but they were more generally decided when one of the two phalanxes collapsed and an army was 'turned'.[26] This crumbling of an entire battle line resulted from the cumulative effect of local crises:

> 'τὸ νικῶν τῶν Ἀθηναίων κέρας, νομίσαν ἄλλο στράτευμα ἐπιέναι, ἐς φόβον καταστῆναι: καὶ ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἤδη, ὑπό τε τοῦ τοιούτου καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Θηβαίων ἐφεπομένων καὶ παραρρηγνύντων, φυγὴ καθειστήκει παντὸς τοῦ στρατοῦ τῶν Ἀθηναίων.'
>
> *'And the victorious wing of the Athenians, thinking another army was bearing down on them, fell into a panic; and then, on both sides, due to this and due to their line being broken by the advancing Thebans, the whole Athenian army took to flight.'*[27]
>
> 'ἐπεὶ μέντοι ἀπέθανε Δείνων τε ὁ πολέμαρχος καὶ Σφοδρίας τῶν περὶ δαμοσίαν καὶ Κλεώνυμος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἵπποι καὶ οἱ συμφορεῖς τοῦ πολεμάρχου καλούμενοι οἵ τε ἄλλοι ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου ὠθούμενοι ἀνεχώρουν, οἱ δὲ τοῦ εὐωνύμου ὄντες τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ὡς ἑώρων τὸ δεξιὸν ὠθούμενον, ἐνέκλιναν:'
>
> *'But when Deinon the polemarch and Sphodrias the king's tent companion and Kleonymos his son had been killed, the* hippeis[28] *and those called the aides of the polemarch and the others fell back under the pressure of the mob, while those who were on the left of the Lakedaimonians, when they saw the right wing being pushed back, gave way.'*[29]

If such accounts seem unbalanced or facile, it is probably because few of the participants would have had a clear idea of what had happened, and the exact sequence of events eluded even the ancients themselves.[30] At the very least, however, these passages make clear that no single fixed process could account for the collapse

[26] Connor, 'Land Warfare', 14; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 97; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 191.
[27] Thuc. 4.96.5-6.
[28] An old and uncontroversial correction of the received text, which reads 'ἵπποι' (horses).
[29] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14.
[30] Whatley, 'Reconstructing Marathon', 120-123; Whitby, 'Reconstructing Ancient Warfare', 54-55.

of a hoplite formation. The final 'turning' was triggered by a range of factors that varied according to one's place in the line.

The rout of a phalanx – the decisive phase of battle – was therefore not a moment, but a gradual process that was all but impossible to predict or control. It spread from man to man and from contingent to contingent, sometimes starting in several places at once. This was undoubtedly part of the reason why hoplites could rarely be rallied; even if the general was still alive at this point, there would have been little opportunity for him to stop a rout spreading through distant parts of the line. At some point, and by an unknown mechanism, the battle was generally understood to have been lost – even if some contingents were able to retreat from the battlefield still in good order.[31] It was at this point that the bloodiest phase of Greek battle began.

A Divine Gift

For well over a century, it was the common opinion of scholars of Greek warfare that the Greeks did not pursue their fleeing enemies. It was argued that their way of war did not require such bloody work; once one side was on the run, it was clear who the victors were, and no further violence was needed.[32] The main evidence is that Thucydides tells us this was the Spartan way:

> 'ἡ μέντοι φυγὴ καὶ ἀποχώρησις οὐ βίαιος οὐδὲ μακρὰ ἦν: οἱ γὰρ Λακεδαιμόνιοι μέχρι μὲν τοῦ τρέψαι χρονίους τὰς μάχας καὶ βεβαίους τῷ μένειν ποιοῦνται, τρέψαντες δὲ βραχείας καὶ οὐκ ἐπὶ πολὺ τὰς διώξεις.'
>
> *'Yet the flight and retreat were neither violent nor long, for the Lakedaimonians fight long and hard, standing their ground until the turning, but having turned the enemy, they pursue only briefly and not far.'*[33]

[31] For example, the Mantineians at Olpai (Thuc. 3.108.3) and the Spartans at Megara in 409 (*Hell. Oxy.* 1.1).
[32] Rüstow/Köchly, 145; Droysen, 93-94; Delbrück, 37-8; Kromayer/Veith, *Heerwesen*, 85; Adcock, *Art of War*, 7-8, 78-79; Whatley, 'Reconstructing Marathon', 122; Detienne, 'Phalange', 124; Connor, 'Land Warfare', 14; Hanson, *Western Way*, 35-36 (despite the account at 178-184); Mitchell, 'Hoplite Warfare', 94; Runciman, 'Warrior Culture', 731; Ober, 'Rules of War', 56; Hanson, 'When, Where and Why?', 219.
[33] Thuc. 5.73.4.

Pausanias claims that this was mainly for tactical reasons: afraid to encounter enemy reserves or rallied troops while they were themselves in disorder from a headlong chase, the Spartans refused to pursue their beaten enemies at all. Plutarch insists that they did so rather out of the moral conviction that it was wrong to cut down men who had already ceased to resist.[34] Either way, this apparent aspect of Spartan battle tactics confirmed the beliefs of the Prussians and later scholars regarding the course of Greek battles and the conventions of Greek warfare; it was therefore extended to include all Greeks and canonised as a general rule of war.

Thucydides' statement, however, is part of his account of First Mantineia, which is marked by his repeated emphasis on the ways in which the Spartan approach to battle was unique. Unlike other Greeks, the Spartans had an elaborate officer hierarchy, did not see the point of pre-battle speeches, and marched in step, accompanied by flute music.[35] Each of these features is carefully explained – a clear sign that Thucydides expected his readers neither to know about them nor to understand their purpose. Given this pattern, it seems sensible to assume that his comment on the Spartan reluctance to pursue was meant to highlight yet another Spartan custom that would seem bizarre to other Greeks. His failure to provide a proper explanation in this case may be what prompted later authors like Pausanias and Plutarch to hazard their own guesses as to why the Spartans, according to such a reputable source, apparently acted in this way.

Normal Greek practice was different. As Krentz noted in a brief section of his seminal article on the supposed rules of Greek warfare, our sources for the Classical period offer many examples of the prolonged pursuit and indiscriminate slaughter of routed enemies.[36] Only once do we hear of moral compunctions about this. According to Xenophon, the Tegeans did not pursue their fleeing opponents in the civil war of 370, because their leader 'was the type not to want to kill a lot of his fellow citizens'. It is clear that this decision fit exclusively within the context of *civil* rather than interstate war – and even there, a massacre could apparently only be

[34] Paus. 4.8.11; Plut. *Lyk.* 22.5.
[35] Thuc. 5.66.3-4, 5.69.2, 5.70.
[36] Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 30-31; for more detailed treatments see Dayton, *Athletes of War*, 73-76; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 72-73; and especially Van Wees, 'Defeat and Destruction', 71-76.

prevented by a particularly conscientious commander.[37] In the event, his mercy sealed the victors' fate. The defeated faction recovered, obtained help from Mantineia, and executed their magnanimous opponent.[38]

No other examples of leniency are known. If anything, the pursuit of the losing side seems to be one of the most reliably typical elements of pitched battle: nearly all engagements of which a description survives ended with relentless chasing and butchering of the defeated. The Spartans at Samos in 525 pursued the sallying Samians back to the gates, killing many; in 511, the people of Kroton wiped out the invading Sybarites nearly to a man. After the collapse of their battle line, the Persians at Plataia were driven into their camp and slaughtered. At Megara in 457, the Athenians trapped a large number of fleeing Corinthians in a field surrounded by ditches and stoned them to death. At Olpai, the Ambrakiots first routed their enemies and pursued them until they reached the safety of their city walls; when the Ambrakiots returned to find that their allies had been defeated, they themselves fled, suffering heavily on their way to the refuge of the nearby town. The Thebans returned from their pursuit of Sparta's allies at the Nemea only to fall victim to the Spartans in turn.[39] Thrasyboulos fought a battle on Lesbos in 390 of which we know nothing except that 'Therimachos was killed on the spot and many others were killed as they fled'. At Olynthos, when Teleutias' army was thrown into confusion and routed, the Olynthians 'pursued them in every direction and killed a vast number of men'. Plutarch called the aftermath of Leuktra 'an unprecedented rout and slaughter of the Spartans', and Diodoros tells us that at the Tearless Battle more than ten thousand men were killed in the chase.[40] Many other examples could be cited. Often it was only the fall of night that protected routed forces from further harm.[41]

What does this tell us about the principles of Greek warfare? It may be argued that this abundance of evidence demonstrates no more than that the chase was a sadly common reality – one that the Greeks would have regarded at best as a

[37] Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.7. Herodotos tells us (1.63.2) that Peisistratos also allowed his enemies to escape after their rout at Pallene; in his case, it was a shrewd show of mercy meant to break their resistance for good.
[38] Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.8-9.
[39] Hdt. 3.54.2; Diod. 12.10.1; Hdt. 9.70.4-5; Thuc. 1.106, 3.108.2-3 (a similar turning of the tables occurred earlier at Potidaia: see Thuc. 1.62.6-63.1); Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22-23.
[40] Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.29, 5.3.6; Plut. *Pel.* 23.4; Diod. 15.72.3. The pursuit of the Carthaginians at the Krimesos, too, was spectacularly bloody: see Plut. *Tim.* 28.5.
[41] Thuc. 4.96.6-8; Xen. *An.* 6.5.31; *Hell.* 4.3.23, 5.4.45.

necessary evil. Yet the sources suggest something different. Xenophon describes the sense of purpose felt by the Spartans when the Argives at the Long Walls of Corinth broke into a panic and fled:

> ‘οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι οὐκ ἠπόρουν τίνα ἀποκτείνοιεν: ἔδωκε γὰρ τότε γε ὁ θεὸς αὐτοῖς ἔργον οἷον οὐδ᾽ ηὔξαντό ποτ᾽ ἄν. τὸ γὰρ ἐγχειρισθῆναι αὐτοῖς πολεμίων πλῆθος πεφοβημένον, ἐκπεπληγμένον, τὰ γυμνὰ παρέχον, ἐπὶ τὸ μάχεσθαι οὐδένα τρεπόμενον, εἰς δὲ τὸ ἀπόλλυσθαι πάντας πάντα ὑπηρετοῦντας, πῶς οὐκ ἄν τις θεῖον ἡγήσαιτο;’
>
> *‘The Lakedaimonians had no shortage of people to kill; for then the god granted them an achievement beyond their wildest prayers. To have a crowd of enemies delivered into their hands, terrified, panic-stricken, showing their unshielded sides, none of them caring to put up a fight, but doing everything they could to aid in their own destruction – how could anyone not see it as a divine gift?’*[42]

Far from a moral outrage, Xenophon describes the chase as a glorious opportunity that was eagerly embraced. Here we see Nietzsche’s ‘tiger-like urge to destroy’; here the Spartans had a chance to engage in the sort of brutal display of military strength Van Wees called ‘conspicuous destruction’.[43] Such behaviour was both morally and strategically prudent.[44] The pursuit allowed the victors to wipe out an enemy army rather than just breaking its will to fight – to exact due vengeance and to kill without fear of being killed. Once tactics and combat had broken the enemy, pitched battle turned into the gleeful and systematic destruction of the enemy’s ability to carry on the war. Elsewhere, Xenophon makes this point even more clear:

> ‘αἱ μὲν γὰρ πόλεις δήπου ὅταν κρατήσωσι μάχῃ τῶν ἐναντίων, οὐ ῥᾴδιον εἰπεῖν ὅσην μὲν ἡδονὴν ἔχουσιν ἐν τῷ τρέψασθαι τοὺς πολεμίους, ὅσην δ᾽ ἐν τῷ διώκειν, ὅσην δ᾽ ἐν τῷ ἀποκτείνειν τοὺς πολεμίους, ὡς δὲ γαυροῦνται ἐπὶ τῷ ἔργῳ, ὡς δὲ δόξαν λαμπρὰν ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ὡς δ᾽ εὐφραίνονται τὴν πόλιν νομίζοντες ηὐξηκέναι. ἕκαστος δέ τις προσποιεῖται καὶ τῆς βουλῆς μετεσχηκέναι καὶ πλείστους ἀπεκτονέναι…’

[42] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.12.
[43] *Greek Warfare*, 240; ‘Genocide’, 250-256; ‘Defeat and Destruction’, 105-106.
[44] Van Wees, ‘Defeat and Destruction’, 74-76.

'For when cities defeat their opponents in battle, words fail to express the joy they feel in the turning of the enemy, in the pursuit, in the killing of the enemy – such pride they feel in the work! Such shining glory they gain, such happiness at the thought of having enhanced their city! Everyone claims that they had a share in the plan, that they killed the most…'[45]

This, he makes Hieron say, is one of the 'pleasures (ἡδέα)' of being at war.

The fact that pursuit was a practically universal feature of Greek battle shows that Xenophon was not pushing a dissident opinion here. The attitude he describes no doubt resonated as much with the Spartans at the Long Walls of Corinth as it did with any other victorious Greek force. Part of this attitude, of course, was the necessary release of warriors who had faced mortal danger but now saw their enemies on the run; the former threat was rendered helpless, and, as Echeverría put it, 'fear and fatigue turned into an enthusiastic explosion of joy'.[46] Yet the focus on the *achievement* of slaughter in the passages cited above shows that this was not the whole story. A second significant motivation was the strategic opportunity presented by the enemy's moment of vulnerability. The pursuit gave the victors a chance to do real damage to an opponent's military reputation and resources. Battles where the chase was prevented tended to have a relatively low body count: at Solygeia, where Corinthian reinforcements compelled the victorious Athenians to flee, the defeated lost just two hundred and twelve men, and at Syracuse, with cavalry covering their retreat, the Syracusan dead numbered only two hundred and sixty.[47] By contrast, a long pursuit frequently pushed the death toll into the thousands on the losing side.[48]

These two motivations for the chase could go hand in hand. Hoplites are sometimes said to have pursued their enemies over a considerable distance,[49] suggesting they may have done a lot of damage; at Marathon they chased the Persians all the way back to the beach, allegedly killing them in their thousands and

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[45] Xen. *Hieron* 2.15-16.
[46] '*Taktikē Technē*', 72; see also Dayton, *Athletes of War*, 76; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 97-98.
[47] Thuc. 4.44.6 (although the force involved was probably small), 6.71.1. Krentz ('Casualties', 18-19) further notes the low losses on both sides at Koroneia (given only by Diod. 14.84.2). However, in this early work, he still followed orthodoxy on the matter of pursuit, denying its frequent occurrence (20).
[48] For instance at Delion (Thuc. 4.101.2) and at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.1; Diod. 14.83.2); see also n.40 above. At Spartolos (Thuc. 2.79.7), the Athenians lost over 20% of their force 'and all the generals'.
[49] For instance at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.62.6), at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.3), and at Kounaxa (though without success: Xen. *An.* 1.10.4 and 12).

even burning seven of their ships.[50] The Spartans seem to have inflicted some of their most famous bloodbaths – at the Nemea and the Long Walls of Corinth – with the very forces that fought the initial clash. Given the chance, hoplites could decisively crush their enemies in the process of venting their frustration.

Yet such results were the exception. As many scholars have pointed out, hoplites may have desired to wreak havoc among their fleeing enemies, but they were poorly suited to the task. Their equipment weighed them down, and they would have been too exhausted from the charge and the fight itself to pursue their opponents effectively.[51] In addition, defeated troops could throw away their shields, while the victors had to hold on to them; the resulting chase would have been a lot like the futile attempts of unsupported hoplites to chase off attacking *psiloi*. It is worth pointing out that the Spartans at the Nemea caught their enemies by surprise when they thought the battle was already over; the fight was between a fresh and disciplined Spartan phalanx and a series of confused and tired masses of heavy infantry. At the Long Walls of Corinth, the enemies of the Spartans were panicking and had no means of escape. It was only in such conditions that the hoplites could do their own killing. If the enemy could scatter at will, heavy infantry had little hope of inflicting serious losses.

Indeed, hoplites who pursued too far and lost their cohesion became just as vulnerable as their targets. In the aftermath of the battle of Plataia, the Megarians and Phleiasians ran up in disorder to join the pursuit of the fleeing Persians; a detachment of Theban cavalry saw its chance, charged them, and killed six hundred men. During one of the battles outside the walls of Syracuse, the victorious Athenian *logades* were routed mid-pursuit by a cavalry counterattack. At Haliartos, rallying Spartans turned on their pursuers in the hills, leaving more than two hundred dead. The enthusiastic pursuit of routed Mantineians by the mercenaries of Polytropos in 370 ended in his death when the Mantineians regrouped and counterattacked. Fighting for their homes against Epameinondas in 362, some Spartans ‘pursued

[50] Hdt. 6.113.2-115, 6.117.1.
[51] Droysen, 93-94; Grundy, *Thucydides*, 267-268; Adcock, *Art of War*, 7; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 149; Spence, *Cavalry*, 157-159; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 97; Wheeler, ‘Battle’, 212.

further than they should (ἐδίωξαν πορρωτέρω τοῦ καιροῦ)'; the Thebans swiftly cut them down.[52]

Little could be done to prevent such reverses. Tactical control of pursuing troops seems to have been all but impossible; battles such as Delion, First Mantineia and the Nemea show that victorious contingents usually proved unable to respond to their changing tactical situation.[53] Unguided and unsure what to do, they became liable to panic and fragmentation. Pausanias is therefore probably right to claim that Spartan methods were ultimately rooted in their fear of being caught in such a state.[54] At Kounaxa we see the principle in action: the pursuing Greeks shouted to each other not to run out and break formation, and as a result their pursuit was wholly ineffective.[55] It was only at the initial collapse and 'turn' that the hoplites had a chance to kill large numbers of the enemy; to continue beyond that point was both ineffective and dangerous.

The Greeks, therefore, used other troops. As we have seen, when the phalanx became a homogenous formation and took on the role of the 'chest and cuirass' of the army, light infantry and horsemen became crucial in screening the heavy infantry and protecting it against their opposing numbers in the enemy force. This explains the emergence of increasingly organised units of such troops from the early fifth century onwards. Yet this shift in army organisation also meant that, for the first time, relative speed became a decisive factor in the tactical roles of different types of troops; hoplites, while superior in close combat, were slow and vulnerable both on the march and on the run. The chase was therefore yet another aspect of battle in which light troops soon proved to be of tremendous tactical value.

Light-armed infantry had no trouble overtaking hoplites in flight; if the advance of the phalanxes had forced the *psiloi* to withdraw to the flanks and rear of

[52] Hdt. 9.69.2; Thuc. 6.101.4-5; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.20, 6.5.13-14, 7.5.13.
[53] Thuc. 4.96.5, 5.73.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22; see Lazenby, 'Hoplite Warfare', 70-71; Anderson, *Theory and Practice*, 148-149; Ehrhardt, 'Two Notes', 1-2; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 191. The battles of Marathon (Hdt. 6.113.2) and Kynoskephalai (Plut. *Pel.* 32.3) are unique in that they apparently involved pursuing troops being reined in and redirected.
[54] Krentz 'Fighting by the Rules', 30; Dayton, *Athletes of War*, 71-73; Echeverría, '*Taktikē Technē*', 73; Van Wees, 'Defeat and Destruction', 71-72; Toalster, *Feldherren*, 50, 52; Sheldon, *Ambush*, 109. Fear of enemy reinforcements also prevented the Thebans from pursuing the fleeing Spartans at Tegyra in 375 (Plut. *Pel.* 17.4).
[55] Xen. *An.* 1.8.19.

the army, we may assume they now rushed forward again to fall upon the routed enemy.[56] Thucydides tells us how well suited they were for this:

> 'οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοὶ ἐσακοντίζοντες πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ τροπῇ κατὰ πόδας αἱροῦντες ἄνθρωποι ποδώκεις καὶ ψιλοὶ διέφθειρον…'
>
> *'The swift-footed and light-armed Aitolians used their javelins against many of the men they overtook in the turning, and wiped them out…'*[57]

In one notable case, the losses inflicted by pursuing *psiloi* were so incredibly high that Thucydides refused to record them.[58] The missiles of these troops were especially useful against a cornered enemy, as at the battle near Megara mentioned above; in addition, of course, light troops could simply outrun fleeing hoplites and cut them down with any weapon they had to hand. They appear at times to have done so with reckless abandon. The peltasts and *hamippoi* of the Thebans at Second Mantineia ended up far ahead of the rest of their army, where they were caught and destroyed by enemy forces that turned out not to be broken after all.[59]

Yet the real killers, again, were the horsemen. Their speed and manoeuvrability made them the perfect troops for pursuit. During campaigns, as we have seen, cavalry could compel unsupported hoplite armies to huddle together in fear of being picked off; during the chase, they could ride down an already scattered phalanx with impunity. Ancient authors frequently single them out for their particular lethality:

> 'Βοιωτοὶ δὲ ἐφεπόμενοι ἔκτεινον, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ἱππῆς οἵ τε αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ Λοκροὶ βεβοηθηκότες ἄρτι τῆς τροπῆς γιγνομένης:'
>
> *'The Boiotians hunted and killed them, the cavalry most of all, which included them and the Lokrians, who had come to help at the exact time of the turning.'*[60]

[56] The process is never described, but light troops often explicitly take part in the pursuit: see for example Thuc. 1.106, 5.10.10; Xen. *An.* 4.8.18; *Hell.* 5.3.6; Plut. *Tim.* 28.5; note also Lippelt, *Leichtbewaffneten*, 59.
[57] Thuc. 3.98.2.
[58] Thuc. 3.113.7; at 3.112.6 he specifies that this was because they were *psiloi* fighting hoplites.
[59] Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25.
[60] Thuc. 4.96.8; see also 2.79.6, 6.68.3.

‘ἐπεὶ μέντοι ἡγεῖτο ὁ Ἀρχίδαμος, ὀλίγοι μὲν τῶν πολεμίων δεξάμενοι εἰς δόρυ αὐτοὺς ἀπέθανον: οἱ δ᾽ ἄλλοι φεύγοντες ἔπιπτον, πολλοὶ μὲν ὑπὸ ἱππέων, πολλοὶ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν Κελτῶν.’

‘And when Archidamos led on, only a few of the enemy awaited the spears and were killed; the others were cut down as they fled, many by the horsemen and many by the Celts.’[61]

‘…οἵ τε ἱππεῖς προσελάσαντες ὅλην ἐτρέψαντο τὴν φάλαγγα καὶ διώξαντες ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐνέπλησαν νεκρῶν τὴν χώραν, πλέον ἢ τρισχιλίους καταβαλόντες.’

‘…and the cavalry, charging up, turned the entire phalanx, and pursued them a long way, filling the country with corpses, cutting down more than three thousand of them.’[62]

The division of labour is clear. While the hoplites may have done the initial damage, it was the horsemen who had the range and stamina to take the pursuit as far as it could go. In addition, they had the advantage of being fast enough to catch up with fleeing enemy light troops, and even with other cavalry – a unique skill that often made them the most celebrated participants of a successful pursuit.[63] Xenophon notes that effective pursuit is all but impossible without horsemen:

‘…καὶ δὴ τρεπόμενοι ποίους ἢ ἱππέας ἢ τοξότας ἢ πελταστὰς ἄνευ ἵππων ὄντες δυναίμεθ᾽ ἂν φεύγοντας ἢ λαβεῖν ἢ κατακανεῖν; τίνες δ᾽ ἂν φοβοῖντο ἡμᾶς προσιόντες κακοῦν ἢ τοξόται ἢ ἀκοντισταὶ ἢ ἱππεῖς, εὖ εἰδότες ὅτι οὐδεὶς αὐτοῖς κίνδυνος ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν κακόν τι παθεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν πεφυκότων δένδρων;’

‘…and when we have turned them, how could we, without horses, catch or kill fleeing horsemen or archers or peltasts? And what archers or javelin throwers or horsemen would be afraid to come up and harm us, knowing full well that they are in no more danger of being harmed by us than by those trees growing over there?’[64]

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[61] Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.31; see also 5.3.6, 5.4.54, 7.2.14.
[62] Plut. *Pel.* 32.7; see also *Tim.* 31.2-4.
[63] Xen. *An.* 3.4.4-5, 6.5.28; *Hell.* 4.3.6-8, 5.3.2. Note, however, the battle of Sardis according to *Hell. Oxy.* 11.6, where the more lightly equipped Persian horse archers still managed to escape.
[64] Xen. *Kyr.* 4.3.5; the speech was no doubt inspired by the experience of the Ten Thousand, discussed below.

Cavalry ensured that the chase was more than a clumsy and risky release of stress for embattled hoplites. They could turn the enemy's rout into the destruction of his army.

Their frequent appearance in this stage of battle confirms the impression we get from Xenophon that the pursuit was an important aspect of Greek tactical thought. If we assume the Greeks regarded it as no more than the regrettable result of victorious hoplites' stress-induced bloodlust, it would be difficult to explain why they would allow *additional* forces to take part in it. Light troops and cavalry rarely had a share in the 'turning' when two phalanxes faced off, so why would they have a role to play in the chase? Indeed, why would the Greeks praise them specifically and repeatedly for their effectiveness in this role?

The answer must be that the slaughter of the enemy was the desired outcome of battle. As noted above, this may have been primarily a matter of inflicting righteous punishment, but there were obvious military advantages to this ostentatious display of vengeful power. Conspicuous destruction worked by discouraging enemy action in the future, but also by crushing any remaining potential for such action in the present.[65] The deliberate use of light troops and cavalry in the pursuit demonstrates that this *strategic* aspect of the chase – its potential to cripple the enemy war effort and deter further aggression – was of primary importance in Greek thinking about the purpose of battle.

There were only two ways to survive the onslaught. The first was, quite simply, to stay calm and keep one's head, 'for generally those who behave this way in war will not be touched'.[66] Several sources recount the story of Sokrates' heroic behaviour during the Athenian flight at Delion: with his calm demeanour and confident stride he kept all pursuers at bay, saving both his own life and the lives of those around him.[67] Indeed, troops chasing fleeing enemies are likely to have focused on opportune targets, and units that retreated in some semblance of order seem to have suffered far less than those that collapsed completely.[68] This probably explains Xenophon's belief that the Spartan ideal of fighting to the death actually

[65] Van Wees, 'Defeat and Destruction', 74-76.
[66] Pl. *Sym.* 221b.
[67] Pl. *Laches* 181b; Sym. 220e-221c; Plut. *Mor.* 581d-e.
[68] See above, n.31. At Megara in 409, the Athenians are explicitly said to have left the retreating Spartans alone, and to have gone after the men of Megara who were fleeing in disorder (*Hell. Oxy.* 1.1). Diodoros (13.65.2), however, claims this was only because the Athenians wanted revenge for the recent recapture of Nisaia.

saved lives.[69] Yet in the absence of officers to enforce unit discipline, keeping order required an almost superhuman effort of self-control on the part of individual hoplites. The ancients' admiration for Sokrates shows how exceptional his behaviour was. Flight was primarily a matter of instinctive self-preservation, and to most men this would have meant getting as far away from the enemy as possible before anyone got a chance to strike them down.

The second countermeasure was more reliable: using horsemen as a covering force.[70] Such troops could make pursuers think twice about rushing after their enemies and exposing themselves to counterattack. Their presence could save entire armies:

> 'καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι (οἱ γὰρ ἱππῆς τῶν Συρακοσίων πολλοὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀήσσητοι εἶργον, καὶ ἐσβαλόντες ἐς τοὺς ὁπλίτας αὐτῶν, εἴ τινας προδιώκοντας ἴδοιεν, ἀνέστελλον)…'
>
> *'The Athenians did not pursue far, for the Syracusan cavalry were many and undefeated, and they hemmed them in, attacking and pushing back any of the hoplites they saw pursuing ahead of the rest…'*[71]

At First Mantineia, the Athenian contingent nearly ended up surrounded and destroyed – but their cavalry ensured that they got away unharmed. At Orchomenos in 370, when Polytropos fell and his troops scattered, 'very many of the fleeing men would have been killed', if allied Phleiasian cavalry had not appeared in the nick of time to save them. By contrast, when Dionysios withdrew the horsemen supporting his unruly mercenary infantry at Syracuse in 396, it was intended as a death sentence; the Carthaginians obliged him by wiping out the infantry to a man.[72]

Cavalry, then, had a dual role in the final phase of battle that made their presence critically important even if they had played no part in the fighting up to that point. No one expressed this more clearly than Klearchos in his speech to the Ten Thousand:

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[69] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 9.1-2.
[70] Spence, *Cavalry*, 159-162; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 196.
[71] Thuc. 6.70.3.
[72] Thuc. 5.73.1; Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.14; Diod. 14.72.2-3.

‘οὐ μὲν δὴ ἂν μάχεσθαί γε δέῃ, ἱππεῖς εἰσιν ἡμῖν ξύμμαχοι, τῶν δὲ πολεμίων ἱππεῖς εἰσιν οἱ πλεῖστοι καὶ πλείστου ἄξιοι: ὥστε νικῶντες μὲν τίνα ἂν ἀποκτείναιμεν; ἡττωμένων δὲ οὐδένα οἷόν τε σωθῆναι.’

‘And if we need to fight, we have no horsemen to help us, while the enemy's horsemen are very many and very skilled. So, if we win, whom could we kill? And if we lose, not one of us can be saved.’[73]

The focus here is entirely on the role of cavalry in the chase. The enemy has horsemen and the Greeks do not; therefore, for the Greeks, winning battles is pointless, and losing is fatal. Conversely, if the enemy are defeated, they will safely escape; if they win, their victory will be total. The examples cited throughout this section show that these are no empty words. Xenophon later repeats the same point in a summation of the hopelessness of the Greek plight, and then shows how it was confirmed in practice: the mercenaries failed to ward off a constant barrage of missiles because Persian horsemen made it impossible for them to stray too far from the phalanx. Without cavalry to support them, they could be harried relentlessly, while they themselves could not pursue. It was not until the Ten Thousand raised their own unit of cavalry that they were able to strike back against the Persians harassing them.[74]

When the Ten Thousand later encountered a Persian army in Bithynia, the truth of Klearchos’ words was demonstrated again. During the battle, the advance of the veteran phalanx swiftly routed the enemy, but the Greek cavalry corps was too small to be everywhere at once. On the right wing, where they were stationed, they ‘killed as many as they could’, but on the left wing the unsupported Greek peltasts achieved nothing in the chase on account of the presence of enemy horse.[75] The looming threat of a cavalry counterattack meant that the Greek left wing had not really won the battle at all; they could not risk abandoning their formation and destroying the enemy in detail. The hoplites and light troops stationed there finally

[73] Xen. *An.* 2.4.6.
[74] Xen. *An.* 3.1.2, 3.3.8-10, 3.3.20, 3.4.4-5. Admittedly, at another point in the narrative (*An.* 3.2.18-19) Xenophon appears to dismiss the Persian horse as useless, but his speech – like Brasidas’ comments on Illyrian light-armed troops, discussed in Chapter 3 above – was clearly no more than misleading rhetoric meant to restore the confidence of the troops. Like the words of Brasidas, it only confirms that the troop type being mocked really was perceived as a threat. For this interpretation see Worley, *Hippeis*, 124.
[75] Xen. *An.* 6.5.27-29.

decided they had no choice but to charge the Persian and Bithynian cavalry in the desperate hope of driving them off. When they attacked, however, to their surprise, the enemy promptly fled – 'as if they were being chased by horsemen'.[76]

Klearchos' speech tells us much about the prominence of cavalry in Greek warfare – but it tells us even more about the importance of the chase in Greek conceptions of battle. Apparently only an army with troops fit for pursuit could hope to win a meaningful victory. In principle, cavalry is not essential to this; as long as neither side had any horsemen, light infantry could play the same role.[77] The crucial point is that the relative speed of different unit types became a defining feature of tactical thought specifically because it indicated the chances of successful pursuit – and nothing was more important than this. An enemy who was routed but not pursued would simply regroup and fight again. Conversely, armies without adequate units to cover their retreat could fully expect to be annihilated if the enemy ever put them to flight. Both the greatest chance for glory and the greatest danger of death appeared *after* the clash of the hoplite lines. The events of the Sicilian Expedition illustrate the point: the Athenians won a string of nominal victories outside the walls of Syracuse, but the Syracusan cavalry made it impossible for them to chase and destroy the enemy army. As a result, the battles they won were not decisive, and they could not win the war.[78] This was precisely the situation Klearchos feared as commander of the Ten Thousand: one in which hard fighting brought no results, and victory meant nothing. If there could be no chase, the battle itself might as well not have been fought in the first place.

If this interpretation is correct, it may well explain the phenomenon – mentioned in Chapter 3 above – of units of light troops and cavalry disappearing from ancient battle accounts after their presence in the order of battle has been noted. If the pursuit was the crucial phase of battle, and each army would need fast troops

[76] 'ὥσπερ ὑπὸ ἱππέων διωκόμενοι': Xen. *An.* 6.5.31. This remark seems to have puzzled the Loeb translator, who added a confused note about terrain types. In fact Xenophon's meaning seems perfectly clear: the Persians, who knew their escape would be difficult due to the presence of a gorge to their rear, surprised the Greeks by fleeing as if they were in genuine danger of being caught – which they were not, because the Greeks had no horsemen on that wing.

[77] Note for example the successful joint action of peltasts and hoplites to rescue ravaging light troops at Pygela in 409 (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.2-3). The main weakness of *psiloi* was that they were themselves just as vulnerable to cavalry counterattack as hoplites; the faster the troop type, the greater its advantage. This must be why Xenophon focuses on horsemen in this context.

[78] Thuc. 6.70.3, 6.71.2, 6.101.5, 7.5.3, 7.6.2-3, 7.11.2-4.

for that phase whether the clash of the phalanxes fell out in their favour or not, it would make sense to hold such troops back from the initial engagement even if they could potentially play a major role in it. Rather than risk the horsemen in a charge from which they might not return, it would have seemed prudent to hold them back until the moment when their intervention would make the greatest difference. In defeat, they could save the army; in victory, they could win the war. If the Greeks therefore did not always integrate such troops in their battle plans, it was not because they intended to limit their battles to a hoplite charge; it was because horses and light troops had far more important things to do than simply fight. The breaking and 'turning' of the enemy was only the opening phase of battle. Far from being reprehensible to the Greeks, the pursuit was a defining feature of their way of war.

Last Rites

The final death toll, however, was not the way to determine who had won. The actual custom is somewhat puzzling in light of the shrewd ruthlessness that seems to characterise Classical Greek military practice in general. At Solygeia, the victorious Athenians had to abandon the battlefield when enemy reinforcements arrived; they could not recover all the bodies of their own fallen before their hurried withdrawal to their ships. Two bodies remained on the shore, and the Athenians were forced to request a truce to collect them. This, in their eyes, meant that they had been defeated.[79] This conclusion requires explanation. Could this, at last, be evidence of tacit rules shaping the Greek way of war?

During the Classical period, the Greeks followed up practically every engagement with two acts: the victors set up a trophy, and the defeated requested a truce to recover their dead. First attested in the second quarter of the fifth century,[80] these fixed elements of battle formally ended the fighting and made its outcome official. Simply put, those who were in a position to set up a trophy had won, while those who had to ask for a truce to collect the fallen had lost. The origin of these practices is unknown, but the fact that Thucydides and Xenophon faithfully report

[79] Thuc. 4.44.2-6.
[80] Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 32-34. Regarding the origin of truces to recover the dead, Krentz cites no evidence; the first historical instance is in fact the battle of Potidaia in 432 (Thuc. 1.63.3).

them in formulaic sentences at the end of nearly every battle account plainly demonstrates their importance.[81]

The truce, always requested by a herald from the losing side, allowed the defeated army to collect and bury its dead. The request by its very nature implied that the bodies could not be recovered by force. As such, it amounted to a formal admission of defeat.[82] The decision to ask for a truce was therefore a momentous one; beaten troops whose spirits were still high would sometimes demand a second battle over the dead, unwilling to admit that they had lost. Some Spartans apparently raised this possibility at Leuktra, and the Spartan king Pausanias was in fact condemned to death in part for his failure to fight for the fallen at Haliartos in 395.[83] Yet no actual example of such a second battle is known. As a rule, Classical Greek battles ended when the victors granted the truce.

The trophy (τρόπαιον), meanwhile, consisted of little more than a suit of armour nailed to a post.[84] In land battles it was set up at the site of the 'turning' – indeed, its name is derived from this word (τροπή). If battles had several focal points, sometimes the victors set up two trophies.[85] The trophy appears to have been dedicated to one deity or another as a thank-offering, and was therefore considered inviolable; its destruction may have been seen as an act of sacrilege.[86] Even if the losing side regained control of the battlefield, they were to leave the trophy intact. Late sources tell us that, as a compromise, the victors were supposed to construct it out of perishable materials so that the marker would eventually decay and fall apart – but we do not know if this rule actually applied in Classical Greece, or whether this is yet another example of Hellenistic and Roman authors idealising the past.[87]

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[81] Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 97, 192. Nevin has argued ('Military Ethics', 115) that it was in their accounts of the aftermath of battle that Greek authors displayed what was important to them for their own narrative purposes, but the ubiquity of trophies and truces speaks against the notion that our sources were being pointedly selective in reporting them.
[82] Plut. *Nik.* 6.5-6; Pritchett IV, 246-249.
[83] Leuktra: Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14. Haliartos: Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.25; Plut. *Lys.* 29.1-2; Westlake, 'Haliartus', 130-131. When Agesilaos heard of the massacre at Lechaion, he rushed to the scene to seize the bodies, and was dismayed to find that they had already been recovered under truce: Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.7-8. After a cavalry skirmish outside Athens in 431, both sides recovered their dead without a truce: Thuc. 2.22.2.
[84] Pritchett II, 264-269, lists all known attestations.
[85] Thuc. 5.3.4, 7.45.1; Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.10.
[86] Ducrey, *Guerre et Guerrier*, 274. Pritchett accepts that trophies were inviolable (Pritchett II, 258-259), but notes that their religious meaning remains unclear and contested (247-249).
[87] Diod. 13.24.5-6; Cic. *Inv.* 2.69-70; Plut. *Mor.* 273c-d.

Indeed, it seems none of the conventions surrounding trophies were written in stone, and the sources show them being met with a range of disrespectful responses. Plutarch tells us that Epameinondas openly laughed at the trophy set up by Chabrias after the latter's light troops killed a few reckless Thebans outside the walls of Corinth; some of the beaten Spartans at Leuktra meant to prevent the Thebans setting up the marker for their victory. King Agis is said to have called on the Athenians to sally and fight for possession of a trophy they had set up outside their walls – his unchallenged taunts and possession of the field effectively nullifying the Athenian victory. Worse could happen if the outcome of a battle was seen as an insult. Xenophon regarded it as a sign of Agesilaos' remarkable self-control that he did not destroy the trophy his enemies had set up at Lechaion to mark the massacre of the Spartans at the hands of Iphikrates' peltasts; the clear implication is that a lesser man would have thrown it down. This could actually happen if those who had set up a trophy were no longer able to protect it; the Milesians destroyed an Athenian trophy in 412 after the Athenian fleet left their land.[88] Finally, if the outcome of a battle was disputed, both sides might set up a trophy. In such cases, of course, the markers signified the opposite of what they were supposed to.[89]

Truces were sometimes treated with similar cynicism. The Thebans repeatedly tried to use the enemy dead as strategic bargaining chips,[90] and Epameinondas is said to have used the truce as an opportunity to humiliate the Spartans at Leuktra by making them gather their bodies last, so that all their allies and enemies could see how many of them had died.[91] In two cases – although both reported only by later sources – the victors despised their defeated enemies so much that they refused to grant the truce at all.[92]

Nevertheless, both truce and trophy have long been regarded as genuinely 'agonal' aspects of warfare, defining the behaviour of the Greeks. The truce was a self-imposed limitation of the brutal violence of Archaic warfare, showing a newfound respect for the dead. The trophy, meanwhile, was an expression of the

[88] Plut. *Mor.* 193e-f; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14; Diod. 13.73.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.10; Thuc. 8.24.1.
[89] Thuc. 1.105.6, 4.134, 7.54; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.26; Diod. 15.87.2.
[90] Thuc. 4.97.2-101.1; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.24; see Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 136-137, and especially Nevin, 'Military Ethics'.
[91] Paus. 9.13.11-12.
[92] Namely, Lysander at Aigospotamoi in 405 (Paus. 9.32.9; this is neither confirmed nor contradicted by Xenophon) and the Lokrians after a skirmish with Philomelos in 355 (Diod. 16.25.2-3).

victor's final possession of the battlefield; it represented one of the ways in which land warfare was formalised and restricted in space and time once the clash of phalanxes had become the typical way to fight a battle.[93] The trophy was an inviolable assertion of both the end of the fighting and its winner. Neither could be called into question. Trophies therefore served as the great symbolic prize of a form of warfare in which control of the battlefield had become an end in itself. As such, trophies carried immense prestige; ancient authors used them as a shorthand for victory, conquest and glory. This provides the reason for the Greeks' wrangling over who could rightly set them up and when.[94]

Yet this interpretation is incomplete. The features of the new form of battle certainly serve to explain the date of the first trophies, their name, and their typical location on the battlefield[95] – but they do not explain *why* they appeared. Why did the Classical Greeks consider it necessary to confirm the outcome of battles with a marker? Why would the possession of a field full of corpses matter to them? Why was there a need for any kind of formal custom here, when the distinction between victors and defeated was usually obvious either way?

A possible explanation lies in the stretch of time between the 'turning' and the construction of the turning-point marker. While it may be naïve to take at face value the conventional grouping of trophy and truce as the final scene of many battle accounts, it is nevertheless clear that the trophy was not set up 'as soon as the enemy had fled'.[96] Whenever the sources give us any indication of the moment at which the trophy was set up, it usually reveals that a significant amount of time had passed since the enemy was routed. Sometimes we are told that the victorious army had to march back to the place where the rout had begun:

> '…οἱ ἡττώμενοι τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἔφευγον πρὸς τὰ τείχη: ἔπειτα δ' εἰρξάντων Κορινθίων πάλιν κατεσκήνησαν εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον στρατόπεδον. Λακεδαιμόνιοι δ'

[93] Garlan, *Guerre*, 40; Lonis, *Guerre et Religion*, 138; Vaughn, 'Battle-dead', 48; Ober, 'Rules of War', 56; Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts*, 42.
[94] Pritchett II, 273-275; IV, 246, 248; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 137-138; Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 110, 112-113.
[95] Krentz ('Fighting by the Rules', 34) and Van Wees (*Greek Warfare*, 183) have taken trophies as evidence for the rise of phalanx battle; in the fluid battles of earlier times, no single decisive 'turning' could be marked.
[96] Jackson, 'Hoplites and the Gods', 239.

αὖ ἐπαναχωρήσαντες, ἔνθα τὸ πρῶτον τοῖς πολεμίοις συνέμειξαν, ἐστήσαντο τροπαῖον.'

'…the defeated first fled to the city wall; but when the Corinthians shut them out, they went back to their old camp. The Lakedaimonians, returning to the place where they first engaged the enemy, set up a trophy.'[97]

'τούτου δὲ γενομένου οἱ Κορίνθιοι τοὺς νεκροὺς πρὸς τὸ τεῖχος ἑλκύσαντες καὶ ὑποσπόνδους ἀποδόντες τροπαῖον ἔστησαν.'

'After this the Corinthians dragged the bodies to the wall, and, when they had given them back under a truce, they set up a trophy.'[98]

In some cases, the trophy was not set up until the following day, or even later.[99] Clearly, despite its direct connection to the fighting effort of the hoplite body, the turning-point marker was not an instant celebration of a job well done.

What was the victorious army doing in the intervening period? The previous section has made this abundantly clear, and Thucydides helps us connect the dots:

'καὶ ἡ ἄλλη στρατιὰ ἀναχωρήσασα μετὰ τοῦ Κλεαρίδου ἐκ τῆς διώξεως νεκρούς τε ἐσκύλευσε καὶ τροπαῖον ἔστησεν.'

'The rest of the army, returning with Klearidas from the pursuit, stripped the dead and set up a trophy.'[100]

'…ἐπακολουθήσαντες δὲ ἀθρόοι ὅσον ἀσφαλῶς εἶχε πάλιν ἐπανεχώρουν καὶ τροπαῖον ἵστασαν.'

'[The Athenians] *bunched together and pursued them as far as they safely could, and then turned back and set up a trophy.'*[101]

Whatever the moral value of trophies, the pursuit was an overriding priority. If it was possible to chase the fleeing enemy, the trophy was never set up first.

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[97] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.23.
[98] Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.19; the episode involved dragging the bodies over seven hundred meters to the city wall, and then going back over a hundred meters out from the wall to set up the trophy.
[99] See for example Thuc. 1.105.6; 3.109.2; 8.24.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.21.
[100] Thuc. 5.10.12.
[101] Thuc. 6.70.3.

This makes perfect sense if we accept that the pursuit was the intended result of Greek battles – but it should also make us rethink the concept of the trophy. What we effectively see in many surviving battle accounts is a victorious army going through all the possible stages of battle, including a pursuit carried on as long as daylight allowed, *and then* setting up a trophy. It was invariably the last thing that happened. As long as the enemy had been decisively beaten, it did not matter if it had to wait until morning. The winners could build a trophy at their leisure, and even make a show of it, as Agesilaos did at Koroneia, forming up his men with garlands on their heads as flute-players played.[102]

What, then, did a trophy stand for? Despite its name, it clearly did not symbolise the end of the fighting; there are no grounds for the modern view that it represented a supposed Greek habit of limiting battles to the clash of the hoplites. In fact, its construction only after the end of the chase suggests the opposite – that it was meant to celebrate the final phase of battle most of all. Thucydides actually puts it even more strongly:

> ‘μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο Συρακόσιοι μὲν τῆς τε ναυμαχίας τροπαῖον ἔστησαν καὶ τῆς ἄνω τῆς πρὸς τῷ τείχει ἀπολήψεως τῶν ὁπλιτῶν, ὅθεν καὶ τοὺς ἵππους ἔλαβον, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἧς τε οἱ Τυρσηνοὶ τροπῆς ἐποιήσαντο τῶν πεζῶν ἐς τὴν λίμνην καὶ ἧς αὐτοὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ στρατοπέδῳ.’
>
> *‘After this the Syracusans set up a trophy for the naval battle and for the hoplites they had cut off at the wall, where they captured the horses; and the Athenians set up a trophy for the infantry the Tyrrhenians drove into the marsh, and for their own pursuit with the rest of the army.’*[103]

This passage allows us to reconsider the meaning of trophies entirely. They did not mark the successful completion of battle, but the successful completion of slaughter; the reference to the ‘turning’ in their name does not refer to the end of the fighting, but to the beginning of the killing. The trophy, dressed up in arms that were stripped from the enemy dead, was an offering of the fruits of this work. It perfectly symbolises the fact that the point of Greek battle, and the aim of Greek tactical thought, was not to rout the enemy, but to annihilate him.

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[102] Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.21.
[103] Thuc. 7.54; the Athenian pursuit is reported at 7.53.3.

This interpretation makes it easy to explain conflicts over the right to set up a trophy. If neither side felt they had been decisively defeated, it would seem natural to challenge the enemy's claim to have achieved this. An enemy trophy was a statement of superiority, a celebration of unrestrained bloodshed; it seems inevitable that its implied humiliation would occasionally serve as a source for further conflict. When some of the Spartans at Leuktra thought of interrupting the construction of the Theban trophy, it was because their army still outnumbered the Theban force, and they did not agree that the matter had been decided. In battles where both sides set up rival trophies, it was because both sides believed they should be the ones to commemorate the losses they inflicted; for the Corinthians in 460, it apparently did not matter that twelve days passed before they could march out to do so.[104]

In most cases, however, the defeated were made to acknowledge the victors' status by force. The massacre itself, as conspicuous destruction, was meant to achieve this. If it could not, the victors possessed a great alternative in the form of the enemy dead. These, as several scholars have pointed out, had to be recovered.[105] Citizen soldiers attached immense value to the proper treatment of every last one of their fallen peers; moreover, as Onasander makes clear, no troops would fight reliably without the assurance that, if they fell, their remains would be handled correctly.[106] We have seen how Nikias was willing to give up his claim to victory at Solygeia in order to recover the two bodies that remained on the beach; the Athenian generals who won the battle of Arginousai were famously condemned to death because a storm prevented them from collecting all of the dead.[107] This obligation meant that those who had lost control of the battlefield had no choice but to ask for a truce to retrieve the dead, and thereby accept the outcome of the battle and the construction of a monument to their slaughter.

Inevitably, the power this gave to those who possessed the dead soon made that possession an end in itself. Tactical thought was promptly applied to the question how the enemy dead could best be secured. In the aftermath of First Mantineia, the Spartans formed up their army in front of the enemy dead; at

[104] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14; Thuc. 1.105.6.
[105] Vaughn, 'Battle-dead', 39-40; Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 138; Krentz, 'War', 175; Rawlings, *Greeks at War*, 98-99, 193-194.
[106] Onasander, *Strat.* 36.1-2.
[107] Thuc. 4.44.5-6; Plut. *Nik.* 5-6; Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.4-34; Diod. 13.100.1-4, 13.101, 15.35.1.

Koroneia they moved the dead within their lines.[108] At Corinth in 369, as we have seen, Corinthian light troops dragged the bodies all the way to the cover of the city wall. In each case they were pointedly taken out of the enemy's reach, forcing the losing side to request their return. In this way a defeated enemy could be compelled to recognise his loss and face humiliation.[109] This could serve as a neat substitute for the sort of undeniable victory that resulted from extensive massacre of the enemy – especially in cases like First Mantineia and Koroneia, where the pursuit was short and apparently fruitless.[110] The truce was therefore not a limitation to Greek behaviour out of respect for the dead, but a deliberate use of the dead as leverage in order to obtain the enemy's formal admission of defeat. The phenomenon mentioned above of Thebans adding further demands before returning the enemy dead is really only a logical extension of this principle. The fact that the truce was normally granted shows only that, when it was requested, the enemy dead had served their purpose, and nothing further could be gained from holding on to them. In short, the truce – always requested by the defeated, never offered by the winners – was not a generous concession to the tacit rules of war, but a contrived display of power meant only to confirm the status of the victor and further humiliate the losing side.

The trophy and truce, then, formed an interlocking set of customs meant primarily to broadcast the victors' successful massacre of the enemy. None of this seems 'agonal' or restrictive in the slightest. However, the Greeks appear to have been trapped in this abusive system due to their overriding moral imperative to take care of their own dead. Tellingly, no Classical Greek military treatise says anything about the rituals at the end of battle. While Aineias the Tactician is happy to discuss ways in which religious festivals could be used as an opportunity for a coup or a surprise attack, for example, and Xenophon reports several times how the Argives 'pleaded the sacred months' in order to escape Spartan ravaging,[111] there is not a hint of the notion that post-battle truces could be used to one's advantage in similar ways. The silence of military thinkers on this subject strongly suggests that here, for once,

[108] Thuc. 5.74.2; Xen. *Ag.* 2.15 (though this detail does not occur in the parallel account of *Hell.* 4.3.21).
[109] Pritchett II, 260-262.
[110] At First Mantineia, Thucydides (5.73.1 and 4) tells us as much; at Koroneia it can be surmised from the surprisingly low death toll on the losing side (just six hundred according to Diod. 14.84.2; see Krentz, 'Casualties', 18-19).
[111] Ain. Takt. 4.8, 17; Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2-3, 5.1.29; for further examples see Goodman/Holladay, 'Religious Scruples', 153-154; Krentz, 'Fighting by the Rules', 26 n.14.

a restriction on military action was actually widely acknowledged and respected. If Onasander is right to claim that the proper treatment of the dead was essential to maintaining troop morale, it follows that lost bodies simply had to be recovered, and that no plan to take advantage of the enemy's preoccupation with their own dead could be contemplated. Only if they were considered guilty of some terrible crime, like imperial cruelty or temple-robbing, could men be refused their right to a proper burial.

*

In the decisive moment of battle, the hoplites' amateurism caught up with them; untrained, uncontrollable and liable to panic, they were not a reliable backbone for armies in battle, even if they were more suited for this task than any other troop type known to the Greeks. As in the case of all previously discussed aspects of battle, however, the Greeks seem to have applied all possible ingenuity to this problem from the moment it first emerged. They did everything in their power to keep the hoplites in the fight until the enemy's morale could be critically weakened, whether by hoplite dispositions and attrition or by the intervention of other troops. When the enemy broke, Greek armies revealed their true face: they were not agents of fairness, fighting short and sharp battles for limited gain, but butchers, seeking to do maximum damage to the enemy in his moment of weakness. This was their purpose when going into battle, and this was what they confirmed by setting up a trophy at the end. Even in victory, their preferred treatment of the enemy was to comprehensively destroy their capacity to resist, and then force them, in a humiliating ritual, to acknowledge that they had lost.

Conclusion

The Context of Tactical Thought

New research is transforming our understanding of Greek warfare. Much scholarship has appeared in recent decades to challenge the old notion that the Greek way of war was 'agonal', game-like, circumscribed by gentlemanly rules that restricted its scope and its impact on society. Neither the view itself nor its socio-political underpinnings now remain uncontroversial. Yet the new 'heretical' scholarship has barely covered tactics or tactical thought. The present work has tried to fill that gap. Our new interpretations of the social background and underlying values of Greek warfare invite a new analysis of its tactical principles, and I have tried to build such an analysis from the ground up. How do we characterise Classical Greek tactical thought? What were the ideals that shaped it, and to what extent did such ideals conflict with pragmatic approaches to battle?

The context of tactical thought is an essential element of the answer. The central premises and problems of military theory, after all, are set by military practice – and at the beginning of the Classical period that practice had been recently and drastically altered by developments in the political and economic organisation of Greek city-states.[1] While mass levies of infantry were already a feature of warfare in the Archaic period, it was not until the very end of the sixth century that large hoplite armies first appeared on the scene. From this time on, the hoplite body began to exclude other troop types from its lines and fight in an increasingly regular formation. Cavalry, specialist light troops, and the hoplite phalanx itself were therefore new features of warfare at the time of the Persian Wars. The shape of battle had changed beyond recognition. For the first time, citizen levies were organised around a substantial core of heavy infantry that collectively engaged the enemy in close combat. City-states now relied on these hoplites to win their battles, as they had done in spectacular fashion when the Persians invaded Greece.

[1] For the essential account see Van Wees, 'Farmers and Hoplites', 236-244.

Nothing could therefore be more fundamental to Greek tactical thought than the fact that the hoplite militia was completely untrained. Throughout the Classical period, they remained ignorant of formation drill; they were not subdivided into manageable tactical units, so that even their lowest-ranking officers led groups of several hundred men. They appear to have known how to form up in ranks and files in preparation for battle, and nothing else. No official programmes existed for the practice of weapon proficiency either, so that hoplites knew little more about using their equipment than what they were willing to learn by themselves – and their enthusiasm for such private instruction was low. The rich may have treasured athletic training, but this was of questionable value in war; meanwhile, specifically military training was ridiculed as a pointless exertion that only encouraged arrogance and false expectations. Most Greek citizens learned how to fight from their sparse experience alone. Their states counted on generals to win battles with armies made up of amateurs who improvised all aspects of war.

In this environment, Sparta was the very embodiment of the proverb that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. The military abilities of the Spartans are easily overstated; like other Greeks, they fielded a militia army led by amateur officers, whose methods were informal and unregulated, and whose obedience was not guaranteed. They appear to have disdained weapons training, focusing their exercise programme exclusively on fitness and endurance; they only drilled their men in a few basic formation evolutions once they were already on campaign. Nevertheless, they derived an enormous advantage from the fact that they bothered to organise and train their men at all. Their ruthless upbringing made Spartans willing to accept military authority where it was needed; they were used to following orders issued by their detailed officer hierarchy, and they recognised the value of measured collective action in battle. The result was an army that, unlike any other Greek force, could march in step, obey the commands of the general in battle, and manoeuvre as one. Their training made Spartan-led forces capable of a few simple but essential feats of tactical prowess that no other Greek army ever learned to match.

With these forces the Spartans caused a dangerous imbalance in the Greek tactical system. The writings of Thucydides, Xenophon and Plato show that others were very aware of this; they described precisely what made the Spartans so effective, and Xenophon in particular went out of his way to advertise Spartan

methods to his audience. Both Xenophon and Plato envisioned an ideal world in which the militias of other states would adopt a similar system of training and discipline. This would correct the imbalance, reduce the uncertainty of battle, and give ambitious city-states an edge in their ongoing wars against other Greeks.

Yet the efforts of these tactically minded authors were in vain. The hoplites of the Greek world chose to believe that, for the rare occasions when they were called upon to fight a pitched battle, courage and strength would suffice. They rejected the hard work of drill, laughed at those who trained for battle, and attacked generals who tried to impose discipline either in court or in person. Only the most persistent and inspiring commanders had any hope of convincing their men to commit to basic military training. A few states eventually raised small standing units of hoplites, but we do not know what instruction they received. It was not until the very end of the Classical period that a mandatory training programme was finally introduced at Athens.

As a result, all Greek tactical thought outside Sparta arose from a context of self-imposed, stubborn amateurism. The hoplite militia preferred to remain a clumsy mob – and this mob, the heart of the city-state in arms, had to be preserved at all costs. Modern scholars have often characterised Greek armies as collections of highly trained and effective heavy infantry led by generals whose notion of tactics was primitive, and whose role consisted of nothing more than leading the hoplite charge. The opposite seems closer to the truth. Generals whose understanding of tactics may have been comprehensive were forced nevertheless to adopt the crudest of approaches to battle and to risk their own lives in frontal assaults because their men were incapable of anything more sophisticated than that.

Greek tactics, in short, were necessarily limited; commanders and tactical theorists had fundamental problems to overcome, and they had to do so with little more than their own ingenuity. This is reflected in the battle accounts we find in the sources. We should bear this context in mind whenever we find tactical elements that appear at first sight to be primitive or restricted.

A New Model of Hoplite Battle

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Prussians drew up a template of phalanx battle intended to sum up the tactical forms of major engagements from the beginning of the Classical period down to the time of Epameinondas. It seems they did this primarily to create a simplified narrative of Greek tactical developments – a straightforward progression from primitivism to Alexander – which served their conceptual and didactic purposes. Yet the template stuck. For decades it was faithfully repeated and refined in all major works, and to this day there are those who insist that all Greek pitched battles essentially took the same form. Two armies met at a prearranged time on a specially selected patch of flat land; both lined up all their hoplites in monolithic formations, eight ranks deep, with their best troops on the right. In the advance, both armies drew to the right, so that each right wing ended up surrounding and routing the enemy's left. The two victorious right wings proceeded to either face off for a decisive second clash, or to go home, content with their partial victories. There was no pursuit. Light infantry and cavalry were deliberately excluded from these battles; they were fair, open, 'short but sharp' engagements of hoplite phalanxes, by which whole wars were decided in an afternoon.

This model has little to recommend it. While each point can arguably be supported with some examples, to claim that any of them were standard practice is to disregard the bulk of the evidence. One of the enduring flaws of much modern scholarship on Greek warfare has been its tendency to build its theories and assumptions on this set of unjustifiable generalisations. But is it possible to update the model? Can we create a new, more accurate template that describes the usual features of Greek battle in similar detail?

If our aim is to draw out the various units and their movements in neat coloured blocks and arrows on a tactical map, the answer is no. The deployments and formation depths used by the Greeks are too varied, and our detailed examples too few, to allow for any schematic rendering of a 'normal' engagement between Classical armies. We may know enough about a handful of major battles to sketch diagrams of the combatants' dispositions and manoeuvres, but the result would only testify to their diversity; in most cases, we simply do not have all the data we need. Even Hanson, the most passionate defender of the view that Greek warfare was

bound by strict rules and conventions, has conceded that in this sense 'there is no typical hoplite battle'.[2]

Yet this is not the only possible approach to the question. We should not be tempted, like the Prussians, to make Greek warfare conform to the terms and visualisations of the contemporary military academy. There are other, more abstract ways in which the Classical Greek approach to battle clearly did follow certain patterns. These patterns are already visible in Herodotos' description of the Persian Wars, and remain consistent throughout the works of Thucydides and Xenophon. They resulted from the context of amateur warfare described above, and from the efforts of commanders and tactical thinkers to work effectively within that context. The following summary of these patterns constitutes what I believe to be the closest we can get to a new model of hoplite battle.

First, Greek armies intending to fight a battle would do everything in their power to ensure that the odds were stacked in their favour. To fight fairly was to court disaster; if the decision came down to sheer force of arms and will, all would depend on the thoroughly unreliable hoplite levy, and victory could not be guaranteed. Fair fights in the open were therefore carefully avoided. Wherever possible, armies sought to face the enemy on favourable ground, with superior numbers, and with supporting forces coming up from behind. Catching the enemy off guard was known to be particularly effective, and so battles were begun without warning, sometimes from a hidden position, and ideally when the enemy was entirely unprepared. Alternatively, cunning generals would try to compel their enemies to rush into a fight at place and time of their choosing.

Most pitched battles involved some manipulation of their time and place to the greater advantage of either side. If many of them still ended up being fought on plains, with both sides having time to deploy, it was only because armies would normally refuse to engage an enemy whose advantage was clear; sometimes the odds had to be levelled to some extent if a battle was to take place at all.

In such cases, a second priority took over: safeguarding the hoplite phalanx. The phalanx formed the backbone of most armies in battle, but it lacked training,

[2] 'Hoplite Narrative', 267.

organisation and discipline; it was vulnerable to missiles, liable to panic, and easy prey if it fell into disorder. Moreover, when hoplites marched into the plain, they were out of their comfort zone. In open ground, horsemen had the advantage over all other troop types; only the tight cohesion of a hoplite formation gave it any chance at all against mounted attack. If the battle was to hinge on them, the hoplites desperately needed protection.

The best option was to draw up the heavy infantry in a single line from one protective terrain feature to another. Plains narrowed by hills, rivers, marshes or walls were favoured positions. If this was impossible, the hoplites could rely on the other detachments of their army. Phalanxes practically never went into battle unsupported; most armies contained sizeable contingents of light troops, often including some smaller units of specialist peltasts or archers, and many would bring their own cavalry to the fight. It is a commonplace of modern scholarship that the Greek historians looked down on such troops and neglected to mention their contributions, but in fact they report on their actions and strengths repeatedly and in detail. Light infantry, the bane of hoplites caught alone, could serve as a protective screen or cover the flanks of the phalanx. Horsemen were invaluable as a guard against their counterparts in the enemy army, and frequently played a decisive role, whether on the march or in battle.

Once the integrity of the line and the flanks of the phalanx were secured, the next priority was to come up with a plan to defeat the enemy. This may seem entirely obvious, but it is important to emphasise that Greek commanders appear to have assessed each upcoming battle according to its particular circumstances and challenges. Of course, militia armies did not have the training to perform even the most basic manoeuvres in battle, so most plans consisted of little more than drawing up the troops in a certain order and depth and sending them forward – yet even here, the Greeks made deliberate choices each time, rather than relying on a restrictive traditional template.

The plans they came up with may be grouped into two basic forms. The first, perhaps the older of the two, was to outflank the enemy with the right wing of the phalanx and roll up his line. This plan generally involved the commander placing himself and his leading contingent on the right wing, where they would obtain the

glory of victory. The second plan was to engage the enemy's best troops head-on, in the hope of breaking them and forcing the collapse of the entire enemy army. Such a plan required the general and his most reliable troops to take up a position opposite the enemy's main contingent, wherever this happened to be. As a result, some of the earliest battles of which we have a detailed description already show armies being led from the left wing or from the centre. The question of honour in the deployment of contingents in a phalanx appears to have depended entirely on which plan was chosen; whichever unit would get to claim a greater share in the victory would consider its position one of honour.

At some point during the fifth century it was discovered that a deeper formation yielded more reliable results in either scenario. Depth usually formed an effective remedy to the skittishness of the hoplite levy; at the same time, a formation that appeared unlikely to break under pressure would have a great psychological impact on its opponents. Coupled with the need to protect the flanks of the phalanx, this created one of the defining dilemmas of Greek tactical thought – the search for the perfect balance between width and depth. Throughout the Classical period, the problem remained unresolved, and no standard depth was ever declared.

There were other ways, however, in which generals sought to respond to the basic scenarios sketched here. Commanders were handicapped by the fact that they had almost no control over the large and semi-autonomous contingents of their line, and that the militia was not trained to respond to changing orders even if those orders could somehow be passed down. However, it was soon realised that smaller units *could* be directly controlled, and that carefully coordinated groups of a few hundred infantry or cavalry could have a disproportionate impact in battle. Generals therefore did what they could to anticipate the enemy's tactical plans, and to use ever more professional and capable detachments of elite troops to sabotage those plans. From the Persian Wars onward, we see skirmishes and battles being decided by the timely arrival or well-directed charge of picked hoplite units and horsemen.

Forces trained by Spartans were the only ones capable of manoeuvres on a larger scale. As long as the chain of command remained intact, this gave them a great advantage in battle against less organised hoplite militias. Yet we should not be tempted to overstate Spartan exceptionalism in terms of tactical thought; for the most

part, Spartan armies followed the exact same patterns in battle as the forces of other Greek city-states. Spartans, too, sought to engage in a favourable place at a favourable time; they too relied on terrain features and support troops to safeguard their phalanx; they too picked one or the other of the two basic plans that determined the shape of hoplite battle. The main difference was that their phalanx was much better prepared to play its part. As long as the vulnerability of the hoplite body made it necessary for all sides to manipulate the battle so that nothing could interfere with its advance, Spartan-led armies had a structural advantage over all their opponents. Several battles were decided by the ability of Spartan levies to respond to the circumstances of battle with sweeping manoeuvres carried out by thousands of men at once.

More often, though, the decisive element was not their tactics, but the terrifying sight of their approach. Hoplite levies – untrained, poorly organised and led by brave example – behaved unpredictably in battle; the hoplites' awareness of their dependence on each other made them unlikely to stand their ground if they noticed any part of their line giving way. Phalanx battle therefore hinged on morale. As we have seen, many Greeks thought fighting skill so secondary to courage that they did not find it worth cultivating at all – yet these Greeks were wrong, because a display of Spartan discipline and tactical skill could quickly deflate the courage of the average hoplite. In this way the Spartans warped the typical course of Greek battle to such an extent that they regularly won without having to fight at all.

Once the enemy had been put to flight, however – and despite Thucydides' claim to the contrary – the Spartans seem to have fallen once again into the same pattern followed by other Greeks: the ruthless pursuit and slaughter of their defeated enemies. Of all the elements of battle, this comes closest to being a general rule. It was so universally and enthusiastically carried out that we should regard it as the tacit goal of every pitched battle. The Greeks seem to have wanted nothing more than to take advantage of the enemy's moment of helplessness and inflict maximal damage at minimal risk. First, the embattled hoplites vented their frustration on anyone they could catch. Then, light infantry and horsemen – at times probably held back for this very purpose – chased the scattered enemy as far as they could, killing at will. Only the arrival of reinforcements, the proximity of friendly city walls, or the fall of night could save them.

When the massacre was over, the victors set up a trophy to celebrate the achievement. This monument marked the point at which the killing began – the point at which tactics had achieved their intention and the victors could reap their reward. The defeated, meanwhile, were put in a difficult position by the pressing need to recover the bodies of the fallen from ground they no longer possessed. This universal obligation was exploited by the victors, who sometimes forcibly took control of the dead in order to use them as a guarantee that the enemy would acknowledge their claim to victory. Far from a generous and gentlemanly act of respect for the dead, the granting of the truce was therefore only a way to obtain formal and symbolic confirmation of what tactics and slaughter had achieved.

These were the typical features of pitched battle during the Classical period. Taken together, they add up to a reasonably comprehensive new model of the principles that shaped such engagements – and, where their focus overlaps, the contrast with the old model is striking. Not only does the Prussian template appear clearly and consistently inaccurate, but on a number of points our sources actually suggest *the exact opposite* of its claims. Instead of prearranging battles, the Greeks often struck when it was least expected. Instead of fighting on open plains, they tried to bait their enemies into attacking a strong position, or at least tried to find ground that would cover their flanks and their retreat. Light troops and cavalry, far from being irrelevant to hoplite battle, actually shaped and defined it by their complete superiority over hoplites in any but the most carefully restricted conditions; our modern impression of a way of war dominated by hoplites is largely the result of Greek tactical skill at creating these conditions for their hoplites' sake. Moreover, in the aftermath of battle, heavy infantry could neither exploit a victory nor survive a defeat without the support of horsemen and missile troops. Finally, the pursuit, which the Prussians claimed had no place in the wars of the Greeks, appears to have been the greatest hope and desire of all Greek armies that resolved to fight a battle.

Still, it should be stressed that few of the elements of this model are so singular in nature or so consistently attested that they could allow us to fill in the gaps of less detailed battle accounts with as much confidence as scholars using the Prussian model have often done. The conscious or unconscious use of the Prussian template as a *prescriptive* model has been the cause of much distortion in modern scholarship on Greek warfare. We have seen how this distortion has affected the

historiography of the battle of Leuktra: scholars continue to presuppose groundbreaking innovations that appear to be little more than a self-inflicted mirage. The greatest flaw of the old model, then, is not its set of individual clauses, but its widely repeated claim to universality. If the summary of typical features presented here tells us anything, it is that the temptation to search for unwritten rules, rigid traditions and moments of revolutionary change should be firmly resisted.

The viability of the new model therefore rests on the extent to which it accommodates different options. The only way to do justice to Greek military thought and practice is by acknowledging that Greek armies and their commanders, though they operated within a broadly similar set of parameters, approached each battle as a unique problem. They assessed the capabilities of their enemies' forces and their own, and acted accordingly. Variables such as terrain, the relative numbers of opposing armies, the identity of contingents present, the availability of missile troops and cavalry, and the extent of the enemy's alertness meant that battles could take radically different forms.

The goal, however, was always the same: to do massive damage to the enemy at the smallest possible cost in friendly lives. This point is crucial. If we ask ourselves to what extent Greek warring methods were defined by restrictive ideals, the answer offered by this model is clear: at no point until the formal end of battle did the Greeks allow their behaviour to be dictated by unwritten rules. Unfair advantages were actively sought; surprise attacks were par for the course; deployments were chosen purely for practical reasons; commanders explored a range of tactical expedients in their constant attempts to outwit the enemy. Routing the opposing army was not the aim of battle, but the means to an end. That end was slaughter. From the choice of the moment of battle to the use of mobile reserves, the aim of all tactical decisions was to remove the enemy's ability to fight back, and then kill him. Fairness and deliberate limitations had no place in this. Greek tactical thought was driven by pragmatism; the Greeks fought to win, and their ideal was to use their limited means with the greatest possible courage and ingenuity to achieve this.

The Greek Way of War

What does this tell us about Greek warfare as a whole? For one thing, it shows the inaccuracy of the common developmental model in which a restrained and traditional form of fighting suddenly escalated into ruthless and bitter warfare during the drawn-out Peloponnesian War. With a few controversial exceptions,[3] fairness was not a guiding principle of Greek warfare in any period. The few general claims to the contrary that we find in the sources are patently rhetorical and false. Instead, from the first appearance of hoplite-heavy militia armies around the time of the Persian Wars, we see Greeks using such armies to win battles by any available means. By the early years of the Peloponnesian War, the common battle plans that resulted from this approach were already well enough understood that they could be anticipated and countered. The Classical period saw some modest professionalisation, for example in the creation of standing units of *epilektoi*, and a few tactical innovations, like the cascading charge – but generally speaking the Greeks ended the period with the same military realities and tactical toolbox that they had at the beginning.

What we see instead is city-states coming to grips with the new tactical system that emerged at the end of the Archaic period. Large hoplite armies had great potential, but they also posed new challenges of organisation and control, and their many weaknesses meant that a whole new approach to campaign and battle had to be constructed around them. The typical features of hoplite battle gradually crystallised as the Greeks got into the habit. At the same time, however, they tried all expedients they could think of to exploit the vulnerabilities of the new system, and to perfect its elements to increase the chances of a successful outcome in battle. Some elements, such as the amateurism of the hoplite levy, could not be changed; they remained constant factors in Greek tactical thought and practice until the end of the Classical period. Other elements, such as the need for cavalry and a dependable hoplite elite, resulted in the increasingly structural and often state-supported formation of specialist troops from either the citizen body or the mercenary market. Tactical needs

[3] I am referring here to such things as the treaty banning missiles during the Lelantine War, which may or may not be historical (see especially Wheeler, 'Prohibition of Missiles'), and the Battle of the Champions, discussed in Chapter 2. The unifying theme seems to be that these attempts to impose restraint were limited in scope, unique, and (in the case of proposals to do battle with even numbers) spectacularly unsuccessful.

were recognised, talked about, and responded to. Throughout the Classical period the Greeks got better at fighting the kind of battle the rise of homogenous unit types and combined arms warfare had dictated.

The bigger picture, then, is one of Greek city-states lumbering into organised warfare. They did not all do so at the same pace or by the same route; in some ways, Sparta was ahead of the rest for most of the fifth and fourth centuries. Still, generally speaking, the tendency was not towards a breakdown of traditional rules, but towards an increase of means to achieve the same destructive goals as before. As the Greeks learned to wield their large hoplite levies – forming them up in phalanxes, supporting them with organised units of light troops and cavalry, and exploring the possibilities of reserves, manoeuvre and training – they were increasingly forced to recognise that an effective army needed a strong command structure with a general who knew what he was doing, and a strong financial structure that could supply the army's needs. Such realisations will have fuelled developments in state organisation and state control, which would in turn have influenced warring methods.

An analysis of campaigns and wars in a wider sense has regrettably fallen beyond the scope of this study. However, my conclusions on Greek tactics and tactical thought suggest what we might expect to find there – and the sources at first sight seem to support these suggestions. First, the vulnerability of the phalanx in open ground implies that pitched battle, far from being the only proper way to fight a war, would in fact have been seen as a gamble a sensible commander would try his best to avoid. It was the least controllable type of engagement, and with the greatest potential for disaster. Greek awareness of the terrible risk involved is beautifully illustrated by Alkibiades' boast that he 'made the Lakedaimonians stake all they had on a single day's fighting at Mantineia', and by the outrage of the Athenians who, after the battle at Megara in 409, accused their generals of 'playing dice with the city at stake'.[4] We should not be surprised, therefore, that pitched battles were rare. Campaigns described by Classical authors more commonly involved ravaging, skirmishing with light troops and cavalry, ambushes, attacks on camps, and other forms of warfare usually referred to as 'irregular'.

[4] Thuc. 6.16.6; *Hell. Oxy.* 1.2.

Second, if it is right that victory in battle was considered largely pointless if a massacre did not ensue, it should follow that pitched battles could not decide wars unless very severe losses were inflicted. Without a significant death toll, defeat in battle would only serve to enrage the losing side even more. Indeed, cases of single battles resolving entire conflicts are few and far between; more often than not, city-states defeated in the field would nevertheless let the war drag on. This in turn suggests that the goal of war was not to obtain a symbolic admission of inferiority in battle, but to devastate the enemy's land and manpower to such an extent that he would submit to any demands. The aim of all military developments is therefore likely to have been to enhance the city-state's ability to do massive violence in order to win its wars – whether through increased spending on standing forces and mercenaries, fortification of its borders, improvement of its siege techniques, or, in Athens' case, through a two-year state-funded programme of military training for all citizens.

All this casts serious doubt on the belief that hoplite battle was the defining feature of Greek warfare – and that this made the Greeks the founders of a 'Western way of war', as Hanson famously argued in his 1989 book of that name. As we have seen, the development of Classical Greek tactical thought catered to their particular military practices, which were not born out of lofty ideals but out of the pragmatic exploration of a newly emerging tactical system. In other words, their tactics are tied inextricably to their historical context. This context prescribed the avoidance of open battle, the exploitation of unfair advantage, and the infliction of crippling losses by any means. All of this directly contradicts Hanson's ideal. In terms of combined arms warfare and the management of large armies, the Greeks clearly lagged behind the Persians, who might more plausibly be identified as the founders of a military tradition that privileged the deployment of maximum force in decisive pitched battle.[5]

The military treatises of the Classical period certainly fit within this bigger picture. They do not represent the bitter lessons of a new age of warfare – a fourth-century free-for-all in which sophisticated forms of fighting had become necessary instruments to ensure the survival of city-states. Rather, they reflect a military

[5] Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars*, 103-105; Konijnendijk, 'Battle of Plataia', 7-11.

thought that answered precisely to the realities of war from the early years of the fifth century onward. The advice of military writers does not conflict with military practice, but confirms it; their treatises offer, not a bleak vision of a new age, but a constructive effort to spread ideas that had already proven their effectiveness. The pragmatic focus of Greek tactical thought suggests that it may have been demand for such treatises that caused them to appear. After all, these works clearly served their military context – one in which victory had to be won with imperfect means, and any way to increase the chances of victory was worthy of consideration. In this sense, they are both the direct result and the clearest symbol of a defining feature of Greek warfare – the ideal of pragmatism in Greek military thought.

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