

# VU Research Portal

## Warfare and Society in Early Greece

Brouwers, J.J.

2010

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

Brouwers, J. J. (2010). *Warfare and Society in Early Greece: From the Fall of the Mykenaian Palaces to the End of the Persian Wars*. Eigen Beheer.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

### **E-mail address:**

[vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

## English summary

The subject of this Ph.D. dissertation is warfare in ancient Greece in the period between roughly 1200 and 500 B.C. 'Warfare' is here taken to include all activities related to fighting, from pitched battles to raids, from ambushes to sieges. However, it also encompasses the concept of 'martiality', *i.e.* the totality of martial values adhered to by the elite in particular, but also supported by other social groups within Greek communities. Warfare is essentially an extrovert activity, in which violence is used to achieve specific goals; martiality is introvert and plays a part in the shaping and delineating of social structures in times of peace. What parts warfare *c.q.* martiality played in early Greek societies is explored in the course of this dissertation.

Much has already been written about warfare in ancient Greece. In the first, introductory chapter, I outline some of the major problems, as I see them, in much of what has already been published. For example, great attention has been lavished on the study of the Greek heavily-armed warrior, the so-called hoplite, while other kinds of fighters have often been ignored. Furthermore, as a result of John Keegan's influential book *The Face of Battle* (1976), there has been a tendency among scholars in the past twenty or so years to examine war from the perspective of the individual warrior on the battlefield. This emphasis on personal combat experience is unfortunate, especially because fighting itself was presumably just a small part of what made a man a warrior in the social and symbolic sense. In addition, research into Greek warfare has often been the province of historians, which means that much relevant archaeological and iconographic material have received comparatively little attention. As a result, present views on ancient Greece tend to be monolithic; there is very little room with respect to diachronic developments or regional variety. Finally, there is an ideological problem, namely the—coincidentally unjustified—idea that the ancient Greeks were our direct and enlightened forebears, who detested dishonourable ways of fighting (ambushes, surprise attacks, tricks, and so forth).

In order to avoid committing the same errors, I therefore set myself five goals, namely: (1) analyse the different types of warriors that existed in the period under examination; (2) investigate regional diversity with respect to warfare and martiality; (3) trace developments through time; (4) make a detailed study of the role of martial values in times of peace, and finally; (5) where possible re-evaluate ancient Greek terminology, with the express purpose of retrieving original meanings of significant terms and phrases. This last aspect derives from my desire to make as accurate a reconstruction of the past as possible. For example, there is a tendency to speak of Greek 'soldiers', but a soldier is literally someone who fights for pay, which is strictly untrue in the Greek sense; the word 'warrior' is a better alternate.

Aside from these specific goals I also employ a rather strict methodology: each of the different categories of evidence are discussed more or less in isolation. This method is demonstrated in abbreviated form in the second chapter, which deals with the Mykenian period, including the so-called Late Helladic IIIc period (roughly the twelfth century B.C.). In this chapter, each of the different kinds of evidence is discussed in its own section. In all of the other main chapters, only one class of evidence is discussed. In three chapters, I discuss the available archaeological material.

Warrior graves are the subject of chapter 3, in which I focus my attention mainly on the finds at Lefkandi, Eretria, Athens, and Argos. In chapter 4 I study the martial evidence unearthed at major Greek sanctuaries. These include arms and armour, but also the remains of chariots. The most important sanctuary was that at Olympia. In chapter 5 I provide an overview of Greek fortifications. The earliest of these following the collapse of the Mykenian palaces c. 1200 B.C. are found in Asia Minor; the fortifications on the Greek mainland tend to be much later (especially the sixth century B.C.).

The iconographic evidence, mainly vase-paintings, is the subject of chapter 6. In this chapter, I argue that the iconographic material can be used as a more or less reliable source of information to gain insights into the development and use of weapons and armour, as well as the use of ships, chariots, and horses. I emphasise that the notion regarding Greek 'foot-soldiers' needs to be re-assessed, as at least some warriors in the eighth century B.C. made heavy use of chariots and, from about 700 onwards, also rode to the battlefield on horseback. I also argue that the so-called Argive shield—a round and hollow shield with a double-grip—was designed specifically to be easily carried by men on horseback.

The next three chapters focus on an analysis of the textual evidence. In chapter 7 I turn my attention to the Homeric epic, with special emphasis on the *Iliad*. I also make explicit the idea that in the pre-Classical period only the aristocracy appears to have played a part in war; the lower orders of society are mostly absent. Texts from the Archaic period, especially the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., are the subject of chapter 8. These include the lyric poets (Tyrtaios, Archilochos, and so on), but also epigraphic sources, such as the inscriptions left behind by Greek 'mercenaries' in Egypt in the sixth century B.C. In many respects, the reconstructions based on the Archaic evidence are similar to what we may glean from the Homeric epics: affluent men fought with spears and shields in typically small and mobile groups (so-called 'warbands'). These warriors would also associate with each other in times of peace, taking part in feasts and related social activities.

Significant changes are noted when, in chapter 9, I turn to an examination of the *Historiai* written by Herodotos. The *Historiai* are about the Persian Wars, the collection of battles fought by the Greeks against the invading Persian Empire during the first quarter of the fifth century B.C. Herodotos mostly focuses on the Athenian army, but his descriptions imply that the armies of other Greek communities were organised along similar lines. Broadly speaking, it is clear that there has been a sizeable increase in scale: armies are larger and consist of a socially diverse group of people, who are no longer led into battle by (pseudo-)Homeric warlords, but rather by centrally-appointed officials (*stratēgoi*, *taxiarchoi*, and so on). The smallish warbands of the earlier era have disappeared.

The tenth and final chapter is the conclusion to my Ph.D. dissertation, in which the material of the preceding chapters are summarised and contrasted, and the results interpreted. After a brief discussion concerning the strong and weak points of the evidence at large, I turn to a discussion concerning the most important types of weapons and armour. This leads to an important point, namely that, for the period in question, it is misleading to speak of different 'types' of warriors. This assumes a certain level of specialisation that in the period preceding the Persian Wars apparently did not exist. Instead, warriors were very flexible. Regional diversity also plays a part;

for example, whereas some mainland Greeks used horses mostly as a mode of conveyance to get to and from the battlefield, there is some evidence that suggest the use of 'true cavalry' in Asia Minor, *i.e.* mounted men who also fought from horseback. Warriors who fought short-ranged engagements could pick a variety of weapons and armour, especially in the period between 1200 and 700 B.C. From the late eighth century onwards, there is a move toward somewhat more uniform equipment. Archers were relatively rare and appear to have usually belonged to the elite: there is no evidence to support the common assumption that they were culled from the lower orders.

In my view, pre-Classical warfare was, in the broadest sense, the special privilege of the aristocracy. Only members of the aristocracy possessed the right to bear arms and to rule over the community as a whole. In exchange for political power they had the obligation to defend their people in times of war. The lower classes possessed little to no military and political power. In other words, warfare was part of the lifestyle of early Greek high-ranking men; it determined to a considerable extent their identity and therefore their place in the world. This ideology was so strong and remained intact for so long that it was presumably supported not just by those who benefited directly from it (*viz.* the aristocrats), but probably also by the lower orders of society.