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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. The argument

This book is about warfare and martiality in ancient Greece in the period between roughly the fall of the Mykenian palaces and the end of the Persian Wars, or down to around 500 (all dates are B.C. unless otherwise noted). I here take 'warfare' to encompass all activities in which fighting takes centre stage, from pitched battles to raids, from ambushes to sieges. 'Martiality' refers to the totality of martial values espoused primarily by the elite, but supported by the lower social groups within Greek communities.¹ Whereas warfare consists of violent activities aimed at obtaining one or more specific goals (riches, slaves, glory, and so on), martiality plays an important role in shaping and defining social structures in times of peace. One might say that warfare is extrovert, creating an arena in which two communities come to blows over something (or, indeed, someone); martiality is introvert, a totality of martial values used to structure and shape a specific community and its constituent social groups. Exactly what part or parts warfare and martiality played in shaping Early Greece is a question to be answered in the course of this book.

The period under examination is very dynamic. At the end of the Bronze Age, in the decades around 1200, the earlier palace civilisation that flourished in Greece met with catastrophe. Many of the palaces, which formed the heart of this society, were destroyed by unknown assailants. The following period, referred to as Late Helladic IIIC (roughly the twelfth and part of the eleventh centuries), saw the slow decay of this culture until it vanished, although there is some continuity (especially as regards chariots and warships). The Early Iron Age, the period between 1000 and 700, was a time of renewal, a formative period. A new kind of complex society slowly rose from the ashes of the earlier palace civilisation. The earliest historical period, *i.e.* a time when writing was in relatively common usage, is referred to as the Archaic period (roughly the seventh and sixth centuries). Traditionally, it ends with the so-called Persian Wars, a number of battles fought between 490 and 479 during which many of the cities of Greece joined in alliance to fend off an invasion from the mighty Persian Empire. To sum up, the period under examination sees the fall and subsequent rise of complex societies and their associated sociopolitical structures in the

1 Cf. Roymans 1996, 13-14 (on Gallic martiality).

Aegean. Will developments in warfare and martiality prove equally dynamic?

Much of Greece consists of mountains; there is comparatively little flat arable land except in Boiotia, Thessaly, and other regions further north. In Asia Minor, Greek cities were founded along the coast in river plains, close to areas under the control of larger Eastern empires. So throughout the entire Greek Aegean world, much of the available land is fragmented; add to this the many small islands that dot the Ionian and Aegean Seas. These geographical factors no doubt fostered the development of relatively small, autonomous communities following the collapse of the Bronze-Age palaces. These small communities, often consisting of a central, more or less urban settlement and its surrounding countryside, are often referred to as *poleis*, 'city-states'. As the landscape is so fragmented, it seems probable that communities differed from each other to a greater or lesser degree. What parts did warfare and martial values play in shaping these societies?

The regional variety and the dynamic history in the period under examination means that one expects the ancient Greek communities to be equally diverse. However, most modern authors present ancient Greece, including the developments in military matters, as a homogeneous entity, with innovations in one place being regarded as more or less representative for developments within the Aegean basin as a whole. Two cities in particular are often discussed by modern authors, namely Athens and Sparta. Much of the modern debate is distinctly Athenocentric, with evidence for Sparta used as a kind of counterpoint. Sparta was a bit of an oddity in the Classical period (say the fifth and fourth centuries), as its entire society was geared for war. However, during the period under examination neither Athens nor Sparta rose to prominence until relatively late. Other settlements were perhaps more powerful, such as Korinth and Argos. In this book, I look not just at Athens and Sparta, but try to trace regional developments throughout the Aegean area; the purpose is not to write yet another Athenocentric pastiche of ancient Greek warfare.

In order to capture the diversity in space and time, a different approach is adopted in this book compared to what has become the norm. I have grouped the evidence into three classes, namely the literary sources (Homer, Archaic sources, and Herodotos), the iconographic evidence (vase-paintings, and so on), and the material remains (such as weapon graves). Special emphasis is placed on regional diversity, and in many instances the evidence is discussed according to region, such as the Argolid or Euboia. Furthermore, the data is generally presented in chronological order. This approach allows the comparison of different types of evidence and evidence from different times and places. The overall purpose of my research was to produce a dynamic study on warfare and martiality, and the way these aspects helped to shape social structures and, ultimately, decide the course of ancient Greek history.

2. Problems and possibilities

Much has been published on ancient Greek warfare already. The reader

may wonder why anyone would want to write yet another book on so well-trodden a subject? I will try to answer that question in the following two subsections. Firstly, I will discuss some of the flaws or problems that I believe have hindered our understanding of Greek warfare and martiality. I will not provide a summary of the main points in scholarly debates; for that, I refer the reader to the detailed bibliographical essay in J.E. Lendon's recent book *Soldiers and Ghosts*.² Rather, I wish to point out major flaws in methodology. Secondly, I present the possibilities that are still available in our particular field, but which for the most part have remained untapped.

a. Problems

There is a wealth of secondary literature on ancient Greek warfare; however, much of it tends to focus on very narrow problems. In particular, much ink has been spent discussing the problems of the so-called 'hoplite phalanx'. The term 'hoplite' was applied to a specific type of heavy-armed warrior, characterised by a large round shield with a double-grip, who used a thrusting spear as his main weapon. The 'phalanx' was the rectangular battle-formation used by hoplites. The earliest 'hoplites' are thought to have appeared around 700. Questions on when, where, and how they came about, when they adopted the phalanx formation, and whether or not these developments had any political repercussions, have been at the centre of the scholarly debate up to the present moment.³

The numerous monographs and articles that have appeared on the hoplite phalanx demonstrate some of the flaws that characterise much of the available secondary literature. Emphasis is usually placed quite squarely on the literary evidence. Authors from different periods and places are often mixed together. For example, data gleaned from Xenophon's writings (fourth century) are used next to information taken from Herodotos (*floruit* around 450) to arrive at a more or less static, or 'monolithic' picture of warfare in ancient Greece. As a result, changes in time and regional developments are largely ignored. Furthermore, there is a tendency to take information from relatively late authors to fill in any gaps for earlier periods; this often unwittingly fosters the adoption of a teleological perspective. The end result is a picture of warfare in ancient Greece that is static, monolithic, and anachronistic; a pastiche, rather than an accurate reflection of complex and dynamic historical processes.

A relatively recent development is the shift in emphasis away from describing military technologies, battles and wars. Instead, a new area of investigation has emerged. Some scholars attempt to understand the experience of the individual Greek fighter in combat. These studies draw their inspiration from John Keegan's influential book, *The Face of Battle* (1976). Among modern students of ancient Greece, Keegan's most devoted follower is Victor Davis Hanson.⁴ This development is regrettable, as it only serves to further narrow the scope of Greek warfare. It misleads the reader

2 Lendon 2005, 393-409.

3 E.g., Cawkwell 1989; Holladay 1982; Krentz 2002; Salmon 1977; Snodgrass 1965.

4 See especially Hanson 2000 [1989].

in making it seem as if war only consisted of battle. Indeed, one of Hanson's edited volumes has the telling subtitle, *The Classical Greek Battle Experience*.⁵ In his review of Keegan's book in the *New York Times* (March 23, 1986), Edward N. Luttwak succinctly criticised this battle-centred approach:

Once we recognize that battle is no more characteristic of war than copulation is of marriage, we begin to understand why the upkeep of military forces in peacetime and perseverance in armed conflict can still survive the human experience of combat, instead of being swept away by the outrage of those who have been in its hell and have come back to tell the tale. Personal experience of battle can easily persuade those who participate in it that no purpose of state, not even self-defense and certainly not conquest, can justify its deadly brutalities. But those who can be so persuaded are so few—and the experience is so brief—that the impact is not lasting. Even those war veterans who have actually witnessed combat tend to recall the comradeship and the intensity of life more vividly than the horror and degradation; and they rarely become pacifists.

Most authors in the field of Greek warfare are historians, which explains why the literary evidence so frequently assumes centre stage in much of the secondary literature on the subject. However, archaeologists too have often adopted a limited point of view when discussing ancient Greek military matters. Most of their comparatively limited output consists of either typochronological studies of weapons and armour, or iconographic studies. Examples of the former include Anthony Snodgrass's *Early Greek Armour and Weapons* and Eero Jarva's *Archaologia on Archaic Greek Body Armour*.⁶ As regards the latter, Gudrun Ahlberg's study *Fighting on Land and Sea in Greek Geometric Art* is a good example.⁷ These studies, while valuable, generally do not stray too far from the evidence itself; questions on sociopolitical developments and martiality tend to be ignored.

Finally, there is a tendency among some classical scholars to idealise ancient Greece. After all, ancient Greece is often seen as more or less the direct precursor of the supposedly typical 'Western' way of life. The Athenian democracy of the Classical period, for example, is usually—and quite falsely—regarded as the ancestor to modern democracy. A particularly gratuitous example of how preconceptions may influence one's interpretation of ancient evidence can be found in Victor Davis Hanson's most famous book, with the telling title *The Western Way of War*. In this book, Hanson contrasts the supposedly honest and open style of fighting used by Western armies with the tactics employed by their (our?) enemies:

We have put ourselves out of business, so to speak; for any potential adversary has now discovered the futility of an open, deliberate struggle on a Western-style battlefield against the firepower and discipline of Western infantry. Yet, ominously, the legacy of the Greeks' battle style lingers on, a narcotic that we cannot put away. [...] There is in all of us a repugnance, is there not, for hit-and-run tactics, for skirmishing and ambush?⁸

5 Hanson 1991.

6 Snodgrass 1964b; Jarva 1995.

7 Ahlberg 1971a.

8 Hanson 2000 [1989], 13.

Hanson's ancient Greeks dislike hit-and-run tactics because, clearly, all us 'Westerners' find such matters repugnant. As we shall see in later chapters of this book, the Greeks found nothing particularly distasteful about skirmishing or ambush. What the modern student thinks of such matters ought not to make any difference! This example demonstrates some of the dangers inherent in equating ancient Greece with our modern world and values. But whatever our personal opinions and beliefs, these must not cloud our understanding of another culture, removed from us both in time and space, and therefore to at least some degree alien to us.

b. Possibilities

Resurrecting age-old discussions, such as those concerning the perceived rise of the hoplite phalanx, can serve no purpose other than to continue running around in ever decreasing circles. Instead, the debates must be sidestepped altogether. Issues of warfare and martiality in ancient Greece have to be examined on their own terms by returning to the primary evidence and re-evaluating it systematically. This approach will hopefully prevent us from getting sucked back into any pre-existing discussions and allow us to attempt a more accurate reconstruction of war and related matters in Early Greece.

Foregoing these narrow discussions, there is a world of possibilities left to explore. Firstly, I shall discuss all of the different kinds of fighters that existed during the chosen time period. Too much effort has been spent on studying the hoplite, the heavy-armed fighter, at the expense of other types of troops. There is no reason to assume *a priori* that only heavy-armed spearmen were the dominant or even only force on the battlefield throughout Greece and during the whole of the period under examination. A few monographs have appeared in which other kinds of fighters were the object of study.⁹ The only type of warrior about which a fair amount of studies have appeared are horsemen;¹⁰ these monographs, unfortunately, rely mostly on Classical texts and therefore deal only sparsely, if at all, with horsemen during our period. The only exception is Peter Greenhalgh's *Early Greek Warfare. Horsemen and Chariots in the Homeric and Archaic Ages*, published back in 1973.¹¹

Secondly, I shall examine regional diversity as regards matters of war, martiality, and related aspects. No study has as yet appeared in which a serious attempt is made at analysing regional diversity in matters of war and martiality. What, for example, do we know of warfare on the islands? In this book, the evidence is collected from a number of regions. These include Southern Greece (say, the Peloponnese), Central Greece (Attika, Boiotia, and so on), the Aegean islands, and the Greek inhabited areas along the west-coast of Asia Minor (*i.e.*, 'East Greece'). These regions are often considered the heart or 'core' of Greek culture, but is the area as a whole indeed culturally homogenous? Because of constraints in time and space, a

9 E.g., Best 1969; Vos 1963.

10 Anderson 1961; Bugh 1988; Gaebel 2002; Spence 1993; Worley 1994.

11 Greenhalgh 1973.

number of areas cannot be surveyed in much detail and will only be mentioned in passing. These include Krete, Makedonia, and the Greek colonies outside the Aegean basin, such as in Southern Italy and along the shores of the Black Sea. Only one area outside the Greek 'core' is discussed to serve as a test case to contrast and compare the evidence with, namely Thessaly.

Thirdly, I shall trace diachronic developments. Many modern authors largely ignore changes in time.¹² Hanson, in his edited volume on 'Classical' warfare, is one of the few writers who actually says so explicitly. He states that 'it is essential to remember that conflict between the classical Greek city-states for over two centuries (*ca.* 650–431) usually focused—at least on land—on one encounter, a day's collision between phalanxes of heavily armed infantry.'¹³ Aside from his peculiar usage of the term 'Classical' (from the seventh century onwards?), his assertion that fighting during a period of more than two hundred years remains largely the same is dubious; it arises only because of his uncritical use of the literary evidence, in which he freely mixes older and younger literary sources. This approach is not adopted in this book. After all, does the evidence provided by, say, a seventh-century poet from Paros apply to the situation in the Argolid at the end of the sixth century? The frequently adopted approach assumes that Greece as a whole changed little in the course of time. Is this assumption warranted?

Fourthly, I shall try to look beyond aspects of fighting itself and examine the use of military kit and related martial aspects—*i.e.*, martiality—in times of (relative) peace. The emphasis in much of the secondary literature is put too heavily on warfare itself; *i.e.*, the equipment, the tactics used, the goals and causes of wars. Little has been written on martiality and the role of violence in shaping Greek social structures and maintaining distinctions between different social groups. A few exceptions may be noted briefly. Hans van Wees has written an important monograph on the importance of violence in Homeric society.¹⁴ Along similar lines, W.R. Connor has demonstrated how war may not have been as endemic as is commonly thought, but rather had powerful symbolic connotations that provided Greek communities with a sense of self.¹⁵ Along similar lines, Moshe Berent considered Greek societies 'stateless' and fragmented, held together especially by martial ideals.¹⁶ Writing more generally on the evidence gleaned from European weapon graves, Paul Treherne has noted how armour was used to provide the warrior-elite with their own clear identity.¹⁷

Finally, aside from re-evaluating the evidence itself, I will also critically re-examine ancient Greek terminology itself as it pops up along the way. Too many authors uncritically apply terms and phrases from one period to another. The hoplite phalanx again provides the clearest example. The term

12 Cf. Snodgrass 1964*b*, 189.

13 Hanson 1991, 3.

14 Van Wees 1992.

15 Connor 1988.

16 Berent 2000.

17 Treherne 1995.

'hoplite' itself does not appear, for example, in Homer, nor in any of the early Greek poets. The term *hoplitês* probably first appeared in Pindaros and Aischylos.¹⁸ Earlier writers used other words to denote what modern authors refer to as 'hoplites', such as called *aichmētês* ('spearman') and *panoplos* ('armoured man'). Similarly, the word *phalanx* as a technical term, 'was first generally applied to the Macedonian phalanx';¹⁹ *i.e.* only from about the fourth century onwards! If we are to understand Early Greece we ought to discuss it using concepts that were familiar to people who lived back then. What those concepts were, will emerge in the course of our examination of the evidence.

3. The structure of this book

The next chapter looks at warfare in the period immediately following the collapse of the Mykenaian palaces in order to gain an understanding of continuity and change into the Iron Age. The core of this book, divided into seven chapters, then follows. Burials with arms are discussed in chapter 3, followed by a discussion on the dedication of weapons and armour at (Panhellenic) sanctuaries. Fortifications are briefly surveyed in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I discuss the available iconographic evidence, with a heavy emphasis on figurative scenes found on painted pottery; the chapter is based on the material listed in the appendix. I then turn to an examination of the textual evidence, namely the Homeric epics in chapter 7, the Archaic evidence—including some inscriptions—in chapter 8, and finally the evidence gleaned from Herodotos in chapter 9.

Of course, a rigorous treatment of the evidence is useless if the source material itself is somehow tainted. Indeed, how much stock should we put in our evidence? Can the Homeric epics, for example, be used as historical documents for one or more specific periods? Do vase-paintings provide us with accurate 'pictures of the past'? Is the contents of a weapon grave representative for the kit of the average warrior in this-or-that period? I avoid these questions for the time being, adopting the same, somewhat agnostic standpoint as Hans van Wees does in his book *Status Warriors*. This means that I assume, for the moment, that the different pieces of evidence in themselves are consistent. Some evidence, at least, no doubt contains a measure of either hyperbole or fantasy. Many scholars, for example, consider the nudity in some vase-paintings to not be an accurate reflection of contemporary practices, but rather a device used by a painter to identify the subject as 'heroic'.²⁰ But as Van Wees points out regarding research into the Homeric epics:

There is a risk here of succumbing to the temptation of calling fiction everything that does not suit one's favoured view of the history contained in the poems. To counter this danger, we must [...] explain the role of fantastic elements whenever their

18 Pindaros *Isthmian* 1.21–23 (c. 470) and Aischylos *Seven Against Thebes* 465–467 and 717; see Lazenby & Whitehead 1996, 46. My thanks to Prof. Hans van Wees for pointing this out to me.

19 Adcock 1957, 3 n. 5.

20 *E.g.*, Bonfante 1989 provides an interesting study.

existence is posited.²¹

In chapter 10, the conclusion to this book, I try to answer the questions posed in the present chapter in an attempt to present a more varied, more dynamic, and hopefully more accurate overview of warfare and martiality in ancient Greece than has hitherto appeared.

21 Van Wees 1992, 22 (original emphasis).

Chapter 2

The Mykenaian prelude

1. Introduction

Most books on the ancient Aegean focus either on the Bronze Age or on the Iron Age and later periods. In order to provide a context for the developments after *circa* 1000—particularly as regards (dis)continuity!—it is necessary to give a brief overview of the major characteristics and developments in martial matters (as defined and specified in this book’s introduction) during Mykenaian era, specifically the so-called ‘Palatial’ and ‘Postpalatial’ periods. Warfare emerges as an important theme in the art, architecture, and burial customs of the Mykenaians from the earliest stages of the Late Bronze Age.

2. The Palatial period

The Palatial age corresponds to the Late Helladic IIIA2 and IIIB periods; the emphasis is put on the last period in this chapter, roughly the thirteenth century and especially its second half, *i.e.* the run-up to the destruction of the palaces that marks the dividing line between the Palatial and Postpalatial periods. Burials with weapons and armour are a feature of Late Helladic I through Late Helladic IIIA1, and again of Late Helladic IIIC (especially during its Middle and Late phases).²² During the Palatial period, the heyday of the Mykenaian civilisation, burials with arms appear to have been rare.²³ However, this lack of evidence may be attributed to the activities of grave-robbers. For example, between Late Helladic IIA and early Late Helladic IIIB, some members of the elite were buried in so-called *tholos* tombs.²⁴ Because the *tholos* monuments are rather conspicuous features in the landscape, virtually all of them have been rifled by tomb raiders.

a. Fortifications

Iakovidis points out that fortifications underwent little change down to about 1400. By that time, some settlements continued to use earlier fortifications, although others, such as Kea, updated theirs with the addition of towers. The walls consisted of stone sockles, made of large stones or

22 De ger-Jalkotzy 2006, 175 (Late Helladic IIIC graves).

23 De ger-Jalkotzy 2006, 152.

24 On *tholos* tombs, see Dickinson 1994, 222–227; Preziosi & Hitchcock 1999, 175–177.