

Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece. Edited by DONALD KAGAN AND GREGORY F. VIGGIANO. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. xxv + 314. Hardcover, \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-400-14301-6.

There are two questions about hoplite warfare about which scholars have proved unable to agree. One is what the circumstances and consequences of the invention of hoplite warfare were, and the other is how hoplites fought battles. Unless we know what was special about hoplite warfare we will not understand the implications of its invention; but most of the best evidence on the nature of hoplite warfare it comes from the classical period, and the most explicit ancient theorizing about it from Hellenistic historian Polybius. This raises a further issue: did the nature of hoplite warfare change over time?

If the scholarly slate were blank, then surely one would start by analyzing the theorizing of an intelligent historian personally acquainted with warfare. From this one would work back through the relatively rich, but never more than partial and particular, descriptions of classical hoplite battle. And only from there would one turn to what very fragmentary literary testimony, plus the evidence of material remains and representations in art, can suggest about the hoplite in the archaic Greek world.

But the scholarly slate is not blank, and Kagan and Viggiano start from the existing scholarship. The conference in April 2008 on which this book is based, summoned the scholars who have been most vocal on the issues, and the book starts by re-telling, not once but twice, in the Introduction and in the editors' first chapter on "The hoplite debate," the story of scholarly views.

The point of this repeated telling of the story is to persuade the reader that understanding hoplite warfare involves a choice between "the traditional narrative" and the revisionists (see, most explicitly, xxi). The consummate statement of the traditional narrative is taken to be that by Victor Davis Hanson, not simply in the wonderful *The Western Way of War*, but in the highly problematic *The Other Greeks*. It is a reflection of this choice that the index entry for Hanson runs to 29 lines, that for Hans van Wees to 23 lines; by contrast the entry for Herodotus runs to 15 lines, that for Xenophon to 13 lines, and that for Polybius to just one line.

This way of framing the question proves unhelpful. Contributors concentrate on commenting on the scholarship rather than the evidence, and no one who does not already know the evidence will be in a position to judge their comments. The debate on whether the development of the hoplite effected a political revolution (Chapters 2 to 6) precedes the discussion of what hoplite warfare was like (Chapter 7 to 12), which makes sense chronologically but not analytically.

Several chapters are either narrow in their focus (e.g. exactly how heavy heavy armor was) or slight in their contribution—Lin Foxhall’s survey of what archaeological survey tells us about “the small farmer” is excellent, but relevant only to those who have believed Hanson’s *The Other Greeks*. John Hale’s insistence on the importance of mercenary service is well taken, but the substantive point adds little to Nino Luraghi’s 2006 *Phoenix* paper which inspired it (“Traders, pirates, warriors: the proto-history of Greek mercenary soldiers in the eastern Mediterranean”, *Phoenix* 60: 21–47). Nor is the book rendered easy to use by the failure to consolidate the bibliography—or even to apply a uniform format.

The strongest essays here are by Peter Krentz and by Hanson himself. Krentz has a measured assessment of past views that notes that there was much less uniformity to the “traditional narrative” than the editors have claimed. Hanson, though avoiding comment on areas where his views have become untenable, usefully rubs the various claims made by recent scholars up against problematic items of ancient evidence. From both of these contributions the reader begins to get a clearer notion of what is really at stake in the modern debates for our understanding of the Greek city.

There is no doubt that the dust of battle significantly impeded the ability of ancient participants to see and understand exactly what happened to give victory or bring about defeat. A lot of dust of battle is kicked up by this book, but by the end of it neither the history of modern scholarship nor the significance of the Greek hoplite is any clearer. Ironically what all contributors agree on is that from the very beginning hoplite armor was mixed, so that “only about one in ten hoplites wore a bronze cuirass” even in the archaic period; whatever hoplites were, they were not “men of bronze.”

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