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## Peltasts and Javelineers in Classical Greek Warfare: Roles, Tactics, and Fighting Methods

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PELTASTS AND JAVELINEERS IN CLASSICAL  
GREEK WARFARE: ROLES, TACTICS, AND  
FIGHTING METHODS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Humanities

By

DERRICK A. NIESE  
B.A., University of Dayton, 2007

2012  
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

April 12, 2012

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Derrick A. Niese ENTITLED Peltasts and Javelineers in Classical Greek Warfare: Roles, Tactics, and Fighting Methods BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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## ABSTRACT

Niese, Derrick A. M. Hum., Master of Humanities Program, Wright State University, 2012. Peltasts and Javelineers in Classical Greek Warfare: Roles, Tactics, and Fighting Methods.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the developing roles, tactics, and fighting methods of javelin-armed soldiers in classical Greek warfare. The chronological scope of the paper will be broad, incorporating early evidence from the eighth century B.C.E. but focusing on the fifth and fourth centuries. Throughout the thesis I will argue that javelineers and especially peltasts earned an increasingly prominent role in Greek warfare due to several interrelated factors: constant warfare occurring on increasing and unprecedented scale; professionalization of military leadership; growing frequency of large-scale campaigns waged on diverse terrain; and an overall increase in the use of mercenary infantrymen in warfare. The expanded use of the javelin soldier was part of a general development of combined arms tactics used by Greek commanders during the Peloponnesian War, the Expedition of Cyrus, and the various wars waged among the *poleis* during the early fourth century. Also taking place during this time was a trend toward specialization among leaders of javelin troops; this paper will highlight some of the accomplishments of peltasts and javelineers under such leadership in order to illustrate their potential effectiveness against hoplites and other arms in various contexts.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The hoplite, both citizen and mercenary, is the central figure in most historical investigations of classical Greek warfare. There is certainly justification for this focus, since the hoplite was numerically and tactically a key component of Greek armies. The Greeks earned a reputation among their Mediterranean and Eastern neighbors due to the quality and accomplishments of their heavy infantry, and it is therefore natural for scholarly attention to be drawn most commonly to the hoplite. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the hoplite was not the only fighter with a meaningful role in warfare. Many modern scholars of Greek warfare dismiss the significance of light-armed troops on the battlefield, following a hoplite bias that is displayed in the ancient sources themselves. For the ancient authors to ignore or minimize the light-armed men is perhaps more understandable; light-armed troops were often foreigners or poor citizens with little political or economic influence. However, any modern interpretation or reconstruction of Greek warfare that does not fully consider the role of the light-armed soldiers will inevitably lack completeness. It is necessary to gain a better understanding of the contributions of light-armed troops in order to understand more fully the true nature of Greek warfare overall.

Throughout this project I will argue that the nearly constant wars that took place during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. placed heavy demands upon the Greek city-states and resulted in significant changes in the nature of warfare. Due to a general

increase in the scale, duration, and geographic scope of conflicts during the period, a trend began that favored specialized troops, professional commanders, and more innovative tactics. This trend as well as the frequency of expeditions and operations on unpredictable and diverse terrain sparked an increase in the demand for and usefulness of light-armed troops. The most important of these soldiers were javelineers and especially peltasts (javelin troops also equipped with light shields and short swords), who took maximum advantage of range, agility, experience, and versatile armament. As combined-arms tactics developed and leaders gained a greater understanding of effective ranged fighting methods, javelin-armed troops earned a position of considerable prominence in warfare by the 360s.

The chronological scope of this project will be broad, encompassing much of Greek history prior to 362 B.C.E. in order to establish background and context adequately. The specific period of primary concern for my conclusions, however, will be 431-362 B.C.E., or the period encompassing the Peloponnesian War, the march of the Ten Thousand, and the politically turbulent years of the fourth century, ending with the death of Epameinondas at Mantinea. This period of roughly seventy years is significant for the study of javelin-armed light troops for a number of reasons. First, it was marked by nearly constant warfare. Second, and more arguably, it witnessed a transition in Greek warfare from relatively small inter-*polis* conflict to broader, more large-scale wars between coalitions and powerful states over greater distances and lengths of time. This transition will be central to my argument that specialization and professionalism brought significant implications for the tactics and contributions of javelin troops. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the period was relatively well documented by skilled

eyewitness historians who had both strong interest and personal experience in military matters.

Of the various kinds of light-armed troops that participated in Greek battles, this project will focus on the peltast and the javelineer. Both of these types of soldiers fought primarily from medium range with javelins; their fighting methods were similar, and they were thus deployed in much the same way. It would be difficult to study the roles, tactics, and fighting methods of one without taking the other into consideration as well.

Nevertheless, it will be necessary to distinguish between the two whenever the ancient sources do so (they are vague in some instances—a tendency too often followed in modern analyses) and to establish clear, separate classifications for each. Indeed, at times such a distinction will be quite important, particularly when I investigate the long-term trends toward mercenary service, professionalization of generals and fighting men, and increasing combined-arms tactics, all of which resulted in an increasingly important role for peltasts and an expansion of their use. The introductory portion of the project will provide full descriptions of javelineers, peltasts, and their respective equipment.

### Origins and Evidence, Pre-Peloponnesian War

An investigation of the origins of javelin-armed soldiers in Greek warfare is greatly hindered by a lack of historical source material. Homer's epics of course provide the earliest written evidence for javelin-armed men in Greek warfare, although it is impossible to say with certainty whether or not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* illustrate or reflect—to any degree—any real period of history. Homeric battle scenes deserve their own focused studies, and this project will not attempt to investigate the poems in great



detail. I will, however, give particular attention to features of the battle narratives that include javelin/spear-throwing fighting methods and mass tactics; the latter scenes describe to some degree the activities of ordinary fighters (non-heroes) and may actually offer a closer representation of battle in some period prior to the development of the hoplite.

Another important source that will be addressed in this section is Tyrtaios, who provides valuable evidence of fighting methods and battle tactics in the archaic period. His poetry contains exhortations not only to hoplites fighting at close quarters (Fr. 11.29-34 West), but also to light-armed men armed with javelins and other projectiles (Fr. 11.35-38 West). The nature of warfare revealed in these writings is one of relatively loose, open-order combat, with the light-armed moving about and taking cover among the heavy infantry not dissimilar to the battle scenes in the Homeric epics. Herodotus provides further evidence of javelin men in the pre-classical period, although his battle descriptions are often vague. He does provide a description of the Thracian contingent within Xerxes' army, and they are described essentially as peltasts in their arms and dress (7.75.1).

In addition to written sources, this section will also take into consideration any available archaeological evidence related to javeliners and peltasts primarily vase paintings. It is in the nature of artistic sources to be open to individual interpretation, so there are significant and potentially problematic factors that must be weighed when using artistic depictions as evidence for (real) history. Artistic license, preference for heroic scenes, and outright or unintentional incorrectness and inaccuracy must be considered, although some scholars have depended too heavily upon the truthfulness and accuracy of

vase paintings. The limitations of two-dimensional images on typically round or awkwardly shaped items also had an impact on the level of realism an artist could achieve even when he was willing and capable of representing historical reality. All of these factors do not dismiss the importance and value of artistic evidence— other factors must obviously be considered when dealing with written sources as well— but they do limit the certainty of conclusions drawn from such pieces.

The overarching purpose of this section is to construct a basic picture of the tactical use of javelineers and their role in Greek warfare leading up to the Peloponnesian War. The limitations of the sources, both in quality and in number, will make this a difficult task. However, it is important to establish this foundation as clearly as possible, primarily because it will promote the credibility of the trends and developments of later decades for which I will argue in other sections. In essence I will assert that javelineers played a very limited, supporting role on the battlefield prior to the Peloponnesian War. Up to and through the Persian Wars, they as well as other light troops (archers, slingers, stone-throwers) and cavalry were intermixed with the hoplites. Following the Persian Wars, the light troops and cavalry shifted to the flanks during battle.<sup>1</sup> There they engaged their counterparts in the opposing army and protected the flanks of their own phalanx from being riddled with projectiles. During retreat the javelineers offered what protection they could to the slower hoplites, and during pursuit they inflicted what losses they could on the opposing hoplites. The role of the javelineer was modestly important but seldom decisive, and as a result they were often ignored unless they performed poorly. As mentioned above, Thucydides is the first historical source to mention the peltast, so it is

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<sup>1</sup> Hans van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London: Duckworth, 2004; reprint, 2005), 64, 187.

difficult to determine the possible use of peltasts within Greece prior to the Peloponnesian War. Their appearance on vases indicates that they were in relatively common contact with Greeks, at least on the peripheral parts of the region nearest to Thrace. One must also keep in mind the tendency for artists to display the exotic, so it is by no means conclusive evidence that peltasts were frequently employed by the Greeks before 431.

### The Peloponnesian War: Demosthenes and Trends in Light-Armed Warfare

Although Greek warfare would continue to be dominated by the citizen or mercenary hoplite, the Peloponnesian War (431-404) did much to elevate the peltast and javelineer to a position of considerable prominence. The javelin-equipped soldier seemed to become a popular auxiliary arm in battle and on military expeditions, and he was present or even decisive in many engagements. The secondary roles javelineers had apparently played on the battlefields of previous wars continued to hold true, but the circumstances and conditions of the Peloponnesian War presented particular challenges that led to an increase in peltast deployment, an expansion in the use of javelin-armed men overall, and a development of their tactics.

In this section I will primarily discuss the increasing level of professionalization and specialization that occurred as a result of the Peloponnesian War's large scale, long duration, and wide geographic scope, as well as the implications of this trend on the role of javelin men. The early phase of the war was marked by the lack of decisive engagements or pitched battles, the expansion of the war to other areas of Greece and its periphery, and the use of more complicated tactics in the engagements that did take place.

War of this sort began to require a higher degree of professionalism and military specialization, and with the general lack of pitched battles, more skillful military leaders branched out by developing more complicated tactics and relying at times on special operations. This type of warfare was more suited to peltasts and javelineers than were set-piece engagements on flat battlegrounds, and good commanders learned to implement these light troops to maximum advantage. The Athenian general Demosthenes provides an excellent example of these interconnected trends. Demosthenes's campaigns had significant implications for the role of peltasts and javelineers, so his career and influence will be examined closely.

This section of the paper will also examine Thucydides's accounts of combined-arms tactics and the fighting methods used by javelineers and peltasts. In doing so, I will seek to illustrate an increasing level of interdependence between hoplites and javelin men. In short, the period witnessed the evolution of Greek warfare in terms of its tactical complexity, largely as a result of the increasing use of peltasts and other light-armed men. I will also discuss the overall effectiveness of the peltasts and javelineers against their enemy counterparts as well as against hoplites. I will make the basic assertion that peltasts and higher-quality javelineers had earned a significant position in Greek warfare by the end of the conflict. Their performance during the war revealed their potential, particularly considering Greece's typical terrain, which was typically well suited for light-armed operations. While the hoplite generally could not be matched (at this time) in a head-on clash on terrain favorable to him, peltasts and javelineers nevertheless had revealed their own strengths and came to be viewed as essential components of Greek armies by the end of the Peloponnesian War.

### Peltasts and Javelineers in Xenophon's *Anabasis* and *Hellenika*

At the end of the fourth century the Persian prince Cyrus hired a collection of Greek mercenaries to support his effort to overthrow his brother, Artaxerxes, the King of Persia. Xenophon was a participant in this famous campaign, and he recorded his experience in the *Anabasis* (δThe Trip Up-Countryö). This section of the paper will particularly seek to illustrate combined-arms tactics, the versatility of peltast armament, and the effectiveness of javelin-armed fighting methods on diverse and often unfamiliar terrain. Because Xenophon was personally involved in the events, the *Anabasis* provides a much more detailed, memoir-style recollection of the battles, skirmishes, special operations, and other incidents. I argue that such a detailed firsthand account is a perfect companion to works of a more historical nature, such as Thucydides or the *Hellenika*, particularly when investigating the tactics and effectiveness of certain categories of soldiers.

Peltasts were a surprisingly sizable component of Cyrus's Greek mercenary force, despite the fact that there were vast reserves of javelin troops in the East available to the Persian prince. The presence of roughly 2,500 mercenary peltasts in the army (mostly from Thrace and peripheral regions of Greece) may indicate a common perception of their quality compared to native, tribal javelineers from among Persian subjects. In any case, Cyrus's attempt to overthrow his brother ended in failure and actually reached its conclusion early in Xenophon's narrative. At the climactic battle of Kounaxa, Cyrus was killed during a reckless mounted charge aimed directly at his brother's position, and the driving motivation for the expedition was eliminated. The peltasts at Kounaxa performed

well (as did the rest of the Greek mercenary contingent) and provide a solid example of the flexibility of their fighting style. After an uneasy truce and eventual Persian treachery, the Ten Thousand were forced to reorganize and make their way home through hundreds of miles of enemy territory. During this long march the peltasts within the army demonstrated their usefulness and versatility, and I will draw upon a number of examples to illustrate the use of combined-arms tactics. I will argue that the army's flexibility and coordination of different units were essential to its survival. One example of this is when the Arkadian contingent of the Ten Thousand (all hoplites) was blockaded by a force of Thracians (peltasts as well as cavalry). Facing highly mobile, hit-and-run tactics without light-armed or mounted support of their own, the Arkadians were helpless and suffered considerably before another mixed division of the army came to their aid.

Overall the *Anabasis* supports the image of the peltast as he appears in Thucydides's account of the Peloponnesian War. The fact that the mercenary peltasts involved in the expedition were recruited not only in Thrace but in marginal parts of Greece as well indicates that the equipping of trained and experienced troops as peltasts was becoming more popular and widespread. The level of the peltasts's professionalization and specialization made them well-suited not only for traditional skirmisher tasks such as protecting flanks, advancing ahead of a main force to seize heights and key positions, and pursuing enemies in flight, but also for directly engaging forces that were unsupported by ranged troops. Although this is first seen during the Peloponnesian War, the march of the Ten Thousand confirms the effectiveness of peltasts on their own merits and reveals an increasing appreciation for unit interdependence.

Xenophon's *Hellenika* resumes Thucydides' unfinished account basically in mid-sentence and continues the history through the end of the Peloponnesian War, the Corinthian War, the rise of Thebes and Epameinondas, the decline of Sparta, and the death of Epameinondas at Mantinea (362 B.C.E.). In the narrative, peltasts continue to perform the same basic functions as they did earlier in the Peloponnesian War and during the expedition of the Cyreans, with perhaps an increased degree of effectiveness. Most of my discussion of the period will illustrate points made earlier in the paper. Although javelineers remained active in Greek warfare, the peltast became the premier javelin-armed soldier of the day. Some scholars overstate the proliferation of mercenaries in general during this period, but it is evident that the peltast was the most important type of mercenary soldier employed within Greece (hoplites more often found service abroad). Peltasts had by this point earned an important role for themselves in warfare, and their use and tactics developed accordingly. In pitched battles peltasts still were not intermixed with hoplites, since commanders continued to recognize that peltasts were most effective and valuable on the wings of the phalanx. However, there are a number of examples of peltasts engaging hoplites with little or no support from their own heavy infantry.

#### The Career and Alleged Reforms of Iphikrates

The bulk of this final section will focus on the alleged peltast reforms of Iphikrates, an Athenian commander particularly known for his leadership of peltasts. I believe it is important and useful for this project to address Iphikrates fully for two reasons. First, like Demosthenes before him, Iphikrates exemplified the trend toward professional generals who were capable leaders of specialized, non-traditional (non-

hoplite) forces. Second, Iphikrates' alleged reforms have garnered more scholarly interest than any other issue related to the peltast or javelineer. Because the notion of peltast reforms has obvious implications for the role and tactics of peltasts on the battlefield, and because these reforms are so widely accepted by scholars (in various forms and to various degrees), I feel it is appropriate to devote considerable attention to the issue.

Iphikrates first showed his skill in 392 during raids on the Phliasians and Arkadians, the latter of which became so terrified of his peltasts (after enormous numbers of the Phliasians were cut down) that they would not come out in arms against Iphikrates' men. Two years later Iphikrates won the greatest victory of his career, and the greatest in the known history of the peltast. In this battle (Lechaion), his strong and well-drilled force of peltasts attacked a contingent of Spartan hoplites on the march. Iphikrates used standard javelin-armed fighting methods and tactics, whereby the peltasts advanced to within javelin range, threw a volley, withdrew before the hoplites could reach them, and then advanced again when the enemy broke off pursuit. Iphikrates' men inflicted terrible losses on the Spartans, who were unable to come to grips with the fleet-footed javelin men. The presence of Athenian hoplites nearby also indicates a use of combined-arms tactics. The fighting methods and ranged tactics used at Lechaion were identical to those used much earlier during the career of Demosthenes,<sup>2</sup> so it is important to note that actual fighting methods for peltasts and javelineers did not seem to change during the period. Some scholars attribute the creation of new tactics to Iphikrates in 390, but tactics from various operations carried out much earlier during the Peloponnesian War argue against this theory.

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<sup>2</sup> Jan G. P. Best, *Thracian Peltasts and Their Influence on Greek Warfare* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1969), 88.



After other successes at the head of peltast forces, Iphikrates was placed in command of a mercenary army in Persian service. As shown by the earlier expedition of Cyrus, the Persians were most often in need of reliable heavy infantry, so they typically sought mercenary hoplites rather than light troops from the Greeks.<sup>3</sup> It therefore seems most likely that Iphikrates' force was predominantly an army of hoplites. The reforms attributed to Iphikrates at this time come from Diodorus Siculus and Cornelius Nepos, neither of whom is known for accuracy in military matters (among other subjects).

Diodorus describes the innovations thus: Iphikrates replaced his men's large, heavy shields with smaller oval ones, and in this way hoplites became peltasts; their spears he made half again as long, and he doubled the length of their swords; lastly, he equipped his men with *ōiphikratids*, or light boots (15.44.1-4). Nepos relates quite similar claims: Iphikrates changed the large shields, short spears, small swords, and bronze cuirasses, adopting *peltai* (making the infantry into peltasts), spears twice as long, longer swords, and linen armor (*Iph.* 1.3-4). Xenophon does not attach any sort of innovations to Iphikrates, and the rest of the *Hellenika* contains no references to peltasts equipped as spearmen or pikemen.

Many modern scholars – the majority, it seems – accept the notion of Iphikrates' peltast reforms, but they do not offer sufficient arguments to support the position. After fairly presenting other significant interpretations, I will argue against those scholars who support the notion of peltast reforms, regardless of the nature or degree. The above discussions of the Peloponnesian War, the *Anabasis*, and the wars of the early fourth century will reveal a specific and proven fighting style that had been developed to

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Trundle, *Greek Mercenaries: From the Late Archaic Period to Alexander* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40; J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 130.

incorporate the qualities of the peltast. A commander who was probably the most adept leader of peltasts in history would understand their value and uses, and it does not make practical sense for him to introduce reforms to their equipment that would make them into phalanx-fighters.

My final argument will be that Iphikrates was an innovator not of peltast equipment but of hoplite armament, and only in a short-term sense.<sup>4</sup> He was very aware of the advantages of mobility and range, and it makes sense that he would be willing to experiment with his heavy troops in order to incorporate these strengths of the peltast into his hoplite corps for his present circumstances (fighting against Egyptian heavy infantry). If this was indeed the case, then by lightening his hoplites' equipment and arming them with longer spears Iphikrates foreshadowed the later Macedonian phalanx of Philip and Alexander. It is certainly interesting to note that certain advantages displayed by peltasts during the classical period may have influenced the development of a new style of warfare that would supersede the hoplite phalanx and eventually conquer much of the known world.

Pitched battles throughout the period and to the end of the *Hellenika* were predominantly decided by hoplites, and this paper does not seek to obscure the fact that the hoplite remained central to Greek warfare. However, the above sections will seek to illustrate trends in warfare toward more specialized troops, more skilled and professional commanders of such troops, and more complicated tactics for deploying and using them. Light troops and peltasts in particular benefitted from and even contributed to this trend. The terrain of Greece and many regions nearby was conducive to light-armed tactics, and

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<sup>4</sup> My conclusion follows Stylianou's on its major points: P. J. Stylianou, *A Historical Commentary on Diodorus Siculus Book 15* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 343-45.

weaknesses inherent in the hoplite way of war allowed sufficiently trained and experienced javelin-armed men to carve out a more substantial role for themselves in warfare. The relatively large scale and long duration of the conflicts between 431 and 362 weighed heavily on the *poleis*, and older ways of fighting and carrying out the wars were not sufficient. In such a context Demosthenes, Iphikrates, and others were able to win crucial victories and shape the course of Greek history with peltasts and javeliners.

## II. ORIGINS AND EVIDENCE, PRE-PELOPONNESIAN WAR

In this section I will discuss the origins of the peltast and javelineer as well as the primary evidence of their existence in Greek warfare prior to the Peloponnesian War. First I will describe the basic arms and equipment of both, and I will also explain the basic differences between them. I will then explore the roots of the fighting style particular to the peltast and javelineer by analyzing the battle descriptions and warriors' equipment featured in Homer's *Iliad*. This is warranted because I believe that the epic provides a strong illustration and early example of the fluid, primarily ranged style of warfare for which the classical peltast and javelineer were known. I will argue that, although classical Greek warfare was centered on the hoplite (both tactically and ideologically), practical effectiveness and deep roots in epic tradition gave javelin-armed troops a firm position in Greek warfare as well.

It is important to understand the two specific types of light-armed soldiers being jointly considered in this study. Javelineers (*akontistai*) were a significant group within the overall category of light-armed troops. In the levies of the city-states these men generally were recruited from the lower classes, which could not afford the arms and equipment of the hoplite. In other cases javelineers were men from particularly rugged and undeveloped regions of the Greek-speaking world—most notably northern and

central Greece.<sup>5</sup> The javelineer was armed with a bundle of light, bronze-headed javelins, each between one and two meters long and wrapped with a leather thong that improved range and accuracy. The javelins were reliably accurate to a distance of ninety meters if equipped with these thongs, compared to half that distance without. A javelineer wore no armor and did not carry a shield, although sometimes he could wrap his cloak around his non-throwing arm for a small measure of protection.<sup>6</sup>

The peltast originated in Thrace, and Thucydides is the first historical source to make mention of his existence.<sup>7</sup> The Thracian peltasts that saw service in Greece were mercenaries, as were those peltasts mentioned by Thucydides as being from Greek islands and colonies that were geographically close to Thrace.<sup>8</sup> As mercenaries, peltasts were specialists with a high degree of training and proficiency in their native style of warfare, a fact that initially separated them from many of the abovementioned lower-class citizen javelineers.<sup>9</sup> Peltasts—particularly Thracians—were noted for their pointed foxskin cap (*alopekis*), long cloak (*zeira*), and low boots.<sup>10</sup> They were armed with a bundle of javelins as their primary weapons, although they also carried the *machaira*, a short slashing sword, for close combat, pursuit, and the guarding of captives.<sup>11</sup>

There is some debate regarding the common armament of the peltast, and although I will address this further in later chapters, the issue deserves an introduction

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<sup>5</sup> Best 1969, 15-16; Michael M. Sage, *Warfare in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 41; van Wees 2004, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Eugene Ray, Jr., *Land Battles in 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Greece: A History and Analysis of 173 Engagements* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Best 1969, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Trundle 2004, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Best 1969, 7; Hans Delbruck, *Warfare in Antiquity: History of the Art of War, Vol. 1*, trans. Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 125.

<sup>11</sup> Best 1969, 7; John W. I. Lee, *A Greek Army on the March: Soldiers and Survival in Xenophon's Anabasis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 117; Trundle 2004, 47.

here. As I outlined above, scholars generally agree that peltasts carried the *machaira* as a secondary weapon, while their primary weapon was the javelin fitted with a thong for increased range and velocity. However, Best argues that some Thracian peltasts were equipped with longer thrusting spears, basing his theory on an interpretation of certain figures depicted on Attic pottery.<sup>12</sup> Stylianou rejects this hypothesis and points out that none of the vases referred to by Best date to later than circa 490; they cannot be regarded as convincing evidence for the armament of peltasts in later periods. Also, Best fails to take artistic license into consideration.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that Herodotus describes the Thracian contingent in Xerxes' army as equipped like javelin-throwing peltasts, though he does not actually use the term ὀπeltαστή; these Thracians carry javelins, *peltai* (described below), and small daggers, and they wear foxskin caps, tunics, and deerskin boots (7.75.1). As the sections below will illustrate, the tactics and performance of peltasts in the historical sources (i.e. those recruited for service in Greece) reveal that they were indeed javelin men.

Aside from origins and level of specialization, the peltast was distinguished from the javelineer by the fact that he was equipped with a light shield, the *pelte*, from which he derived his name.<sup>14</sup> This type of shield was most commonly perceived as crescent shaped or circular; it was rimless, constructed probably with a frame of close-woven wickerwork covered in goat or sheepskin. Although there was no real standardization, the

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<sup>12</sup> Best 1969, 7; also following this notion: Godfrey Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000), 28; Victor Davis Hanson, *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Random House, 2005), 91; J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers & Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 96.

<sup>13</sup> Stylianou 1998, 346.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson 1970, 112-13; A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armor of the Greeks*, Aspects of Greek and Roman Life, ed. H.H. Scullard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 78.

*pelte* was perhaps two feet long (between the horns of the crescent, in which form the shield was carried with points facing up) and featured either a central handgrip or a handgrip and an off-center armband, and sometimes a sling for ease of carrying.<sup>15</sup> This shield was very light, perhaps a burden of only 1 kilogram (approximately 2.2 pounds),<sup>16</sup> and the lightness of this defensive equipment certainly was vital to the effectiveness of the peltast as a mobile skirmisher. In addition to being useful in close combat, the *pelte* was well suited for deflecting arrows and other missiles due to its weight and the pattern of its weaving.<sup>17</sup> In short, the versatility of their armament— shields, headgear, and short swords— gave peltasts an advantage in combat against other forms of light-armed soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

Most scholars seem to accept a two-javelin limit (perhaps judging again from vase paintings), but I see no reason to assume this was necessarily the case; Lee estimates that each javelin was roughly 1 kilogram, and three would have been the normal limit.<sup>19</sup> This is more reasonable, as a peltast reasonably could have carried one javelin in his throwing hand and either held two or three more in his other hand (if his shield had an armband) or kept extras wedged between his arm and his shield. In any case, multiple javelins would have weighed 2 to 4 kilograms; the *machaira* was another 1.5 kilograms, bringing the total burden for weapons and shield to 5.5 kilograms (just over 12 pounds, with two javelins) or slightly more (depending on the number of javelins). Peltasts at the beginning

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson 1970, 112-13; Snodgrass 1967, 78; Lee 2007, 116.

<sup>16</sup> Lee 2007, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Hunt, "Military Forces," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare, Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 120; Hutchinson 2000, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Ray 2009, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Lee 2007, 116. There does not seem to be a compelling reason for doubting that a peltast might carry into battle as many javelins as he could, as they were his primary means of attack and defense.

of the fourth century wore little to no armor, and some may have worn felt or metal *piloi* (conical helmets).<sup>20</sup> Overall, it is not difficult to see how the peltast was so mobile with such a small burden of equipment and arms, especially in comparison to the hoplite, who was weighed down by a cumbersome shield (at the very least) and possibly a helm and armor of some kind as well. Overall, it is accurate to classify the peltast as intermediate between the javelineer and the hoplite in terms of armament and tactical potential.<sup>21</sup>

Both peltasts and those javelineers who were from undeveloped, tribal regions of Greece had an advantage over the poor citizen javelin men from the *poleis*: they were natively trained in their style of warfare. This is a distinguishing characteristic, and Thucydides mentions such native tactics when describing the retreat of the 1,300 Thracian peltasts following their sack of Mykalessos during the Peloponnesian War. When the Theban cavalry attacked them, the peltasts defended themselves by forming detachments that charged and fell back in turns (Thuc. 7.30). Such tactics were not the actions of a disorganized mob of untrained men, and Pritchett is correct in pointing out that peltasts had to have a higher level of combat skill than hoplites.<sup>22</sup> Skillful and effective javelin men, both peltasts and javelineers, required relatively extensive training and experience in order to develop their agility, speed, strength, dexterity, and accuracy. Men from regions where javelin-armed fighting methods were natively exercised naturally made the best peltasts and javelineers.

As with so many other topics within the subject of Greek history, Homer is the first source to which one must look to investigate the origins of peltasts and javelineers.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 116-17.

<sup>21</sup> Hutchinson 2000, 28.

<sup>22</sup> W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, Part II (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 124.



However, to say that Homer's *Iliad* is a complex and carefully crafted piece of literature would certainly be an understatement; therefore, any investigation into its historical accuracy, main themes, or narrative components will inevitably prove quite challenging and controversial. Like much of ancient Greek mythology, the poem functions on multiple levels of significance. Most or even all of these levels of significance would have been immediately recognizable and understandable to the bard's contemporary audience, but for modern scholars they are open to conjecture. Nevertheless, warfare and combat are central features of the *Iliad* in particular, and I believe that the composer of the poem would have based his conception of war largely on the reality of his own day in order to connect with his audience's experiences. Certain elements of Homeric warfare—the chariot, for instance—were possibly creative modifications made to suit heroic warfare, thus creating a sense of epic distance. These elements could have been inspired by physical/artistic remains discovered or observed by the Greeks of the Dark Age, or they could have been inspired directly by contemporary uses by eastern neighbors (the war chariot, again). At any rate, while the *Iliad* does not portray definitive peltasts or javeliners, it does illustrate in an internally consistent manner a style of warfare with tactics and fighting methods quite similar to those used by javelin-armed troops in later historical periods. The following section will analyze the heroes' arms, equipment, and fighting methods to explore the epic roots of the peltast and javelineer.

The warriors in the *Iliad* are overwhelmingly spearmen, as any scan of the text's numerous battle scenes and individual combats/duels would reveal. However, their use of the spear is not as often in the manner of the hoplite (thrusting) as that of the javelin-armed soldier (throwing). Homer sometimes expressly gives the warriors two spears

(Agamemnon: 11.43; Paris: 3.18; Hektor: 5.495, 6.104, 11.212; Patroklos: 16.139; Asteropaios: 21.163; Nestor: 10.76; Idomeneus: 13.241; Sarpedon: 12.298), and scholars have debated the purpose of this armament. Bassett argues that the second spear or javelin is an "extra," and that the use of two spears does not constitute the usual "Homeric panoply." Achilles, Athena, Ares, Ajax, Diomedes, and the overwhelming majority of fighters are described as carrying and needing only a single spear, and only twice are two spears actually expressly used in personal combat (21.162, 16.462-479).<sup>23</sup> Given the numerous references to flying missiles during battle as well as the importance of the thrown spear even in single combat, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the nameless warriors in the background carried multiple spears as well. However, it is also feasible for warriors on one side to pick up the spears cast by the opposing side, and Homer refers to javelins stuck in the ground after having missed their mark. At close range, however, the spear was used as a thrusting weapon.

Like the peltast with his *machaira*, the warriors of the Trojan War are also equipped with swords, sheathed at the hip and hung around the neck by a separate belt (11.29, 3.334, 16.135, etc.); these were mainly used as slashing weapons. The primary weapon was undoubtedly the ash spear, and the short swords are resorted to primarily when a warrior has cast his spear—similar to the tactic available to the peltast. Both the spears and the swords are clearly described as being bronze, although it has been pointed out that several detailed and brutal feats accomplished with these weapons (beheadings and removals of limbs) would only be possible with iron weapons.<sup>24</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>23</sup>Samuel E Bassett, "On the Use of Two Spears in Homeric Warfare," *The Classical Journal* 18, No. 2 (November 1922): 104-6.

<sup>24</sup>Tim Everson, *Warfare in Ancient Greece: Arms and Armour from the Heroes of Homer to Alexander the Great* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2004), 64.

scholars have generally reasoned that the description of weapons as being exclusively bronze, and yet being capable of feats only possible with iron, represents a *ōthrowbackō* element and a form of archaizing.<sup>25</sup> Since these acts were being performed by heroes, however, it is also possible that the poet was not concerned with matters as practical as the comparative strengths of metals. In either event, the arms of the Homeric soldier are not dissimilar from those of the peltast.

The defensive equipment of the heroes is undoubtedly heavier than that used by the peltast (and the javelineer, of course). The armor used by the Homeric warriors is mostly constructed of bronze, although certain men, such as the lesser Ajax and Amphios, are described as wearing linen corslets. Everson argues that Agamemnon's armor (11.19-28) is an example of scale armor, and that its lengthy and detailed description indicates that it was not in use during Homer's own time (it deserved special attention for the audience to picture it). Furthermore, Everson supports his view by pointing out the fact that Homer describes the armor as having been a gift from Cyprus, where scale armor is known to have been used.<sup>26</sup> Most warriors wear bronze plate armor and other pieces such as the war belt and armored kilt. Overall, Homeric warriors are more heavily armed and armored than javelin-throwing soldiers of the historical periods, though this should come as no surprise. Armor represented wealth and nobility, so naturally the princes on both sides would be so equipped. Perhaps we are to assume that the nameless soldiers following these leaders were armored to a much lesser degree, more closely resembling peltasts and javelineers rather than hoplites.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; Snodgrass 1967, 37; P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *Early Greek Warfare: Horsemen and Chariots in the Homeric and Archaic Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 41.

<sup>26</sup> Everson 2004, 49.

Shields are a universal feature among the warriors, and they are typically made of oxhide. Homer is rather ambiguous regarding the general form of this piece of equipment, however; the shield of Hektor is described as bumping against both his neck and his ankles (6.117), and Periphetes trips over the rim of his shield as he turns to retreat (15.645-7), but many are described as round. Leaf argues that such round shields were not necessarily circular, since the large ones carried by Hektor and Ajax would have been five feet in diameter if this were the case. The shields were possibly oblong and shaped like the surface of a cylinder, and the poet applied the description of roundness to an older form of shield passed down in epithets from earlier epic tradition.<sup>27</sup> There is another possibility: the shields were oblong and rounded but flat-surfaced, oxhide over some kind of wicker, and therefore similar in construction to the *pelte* ideal for warfare involving both ranged and close-quarters combat.

Helmets and greaves are also found in abundance among the chief Homeric warriors, and this is one significant difference between the heroes and later javelin-armed men. Most helmets are of bronze, and the helmets in particular are described variously as having hollow eyes, horns, or horsehair crests (although Diomedes dons a leather skull cap during the spying/raiding mission, 10.257-9). The imagery of the gleaming masses of warriors suggests that most of the men were equipped with bronze helmets along with the rest of their metal panoply (2.455-8), although worth mentioning is the boar's tusk helmet, described in detail by Homer and worn by Odysseus during the raiding mission (10.261-5).

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Leaf, "Notes on Homeric Armour," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 4 (1884): 283-85.

There are conflicting views regarding the tactics and methods of combat featured in the poem, and these deserve some attention here due to the *Iliad*'s position as a basic illustration of early (predominantly ranged) Greek warfare. The opinion of scholars such as Lendon – namely that Homeric warfare represents a confusion of fighting styles because it was simply meant to show heroes excelling in heroic virtues – is rather narrow. His claim that the mass of soldiers serves merely as ‘stage machinery’ for the actions of the heroes is less than compelling in light of the rich detail and attention devoted by Homer to descriptions of the overall battle.<sup>28</sup> In the same way Finley's assertion that Homer was interested solely in the heroes and that he brought in details of the battles only ‘to maintain the necessary realism of the background’ falls short of persuasion.<sup>29</sup> Willcock's view, that Homeric warfare consists of two fighting situations – melee and retreat/pursuit – is just too simplistic.<sup>30</sup> The assertion of Albracht seems most reasonable: Homer uses individual combat and the actions of heroes as snapshots or highlights of the overall battle scene, a dimension in which the poet is undoubtedly interested.<sup>31</sup> I will focus on the two dominant viewpoints, those of Pritchett and van Wees, as they are the most developed and are particularly relevant for a study of light-armed warfare.

Pritchett sees the dismounted men-at-arms as the heavy infantry, the masses as made up of fighting men as well, light-armed archers as fairly effective, and chariots as a means of flight and pursuit. In the course of battle one line or the other is broken, and this event results in numerous single combats or fights between bands of heroes. He attributes

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<sup>28</sup> Lendon 2005, 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 75.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Willcock, *A Companion to the Iliad* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 280.

<sup>31</sup> Franz Albracht, *Battle and Battle Description in Homer: A Contribution to the History of War*, trans. and ed. Peter Jones, Malcolm Willcock, and Gabriele Wright (London: Duckworth, 2005), 54-55.

the duels to the normal ancient Mediterranean practice of monomachy. Interestingly, Pritchett views the passage at 13.125-205 (the densely massed formation of the Greeks checking the Trojan advance against the ships) as "the most informative," and he is particularly interested in the descriptions of close array in Homeric combat.<sup>32</sup>

Pritchett's approach is also closely analytical of Homer's vocabulary and use of terms. Words such as *phalanx* and *stikhes* are sometimes used in the poem simply to describe ranks of footsoldiers, but other times seem to imply certain formation, companies, battalions, squares, and more.<sup>33</sup> The front-fighters or *promakhoi* were, according to Pritchett, "the foremost fighters among the men-at-arms," and they were actually made up of a distinct company or battalion. The champions advance beyond this group to hurl javelins or engage in single combat, and then they withdraw back to a position among the *promakhoi*.<sup>34</sup> Again, the density of formations is emphasized most by Pritchett, who even supposes that the men (particularly the Greeks) must have possessed a high level of discipline and practice in light of their seemingly dense, orderly advances. Terms used by the poet for battle supposedly lead us to the same assumption of close-in fighting as the norm. The purpose of the dense formations was to break the enemy mass, and Pritchett even surmises that the mass-shove or *othismos* was common in Homeric warfare, even though the noun is never used. Brief lulls allowed for both sides to catch their breath while throwing javelins at the other, but the fundamental feature of Homeric battle was mass combat between men-at-arms clashing in disciplined and organized formations.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Pritchett 1974, 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 27-30.

Van Wees's view is markedly different, and I agree with his conclusions for my own summary of the shape of Homeric battle. As mentioned above, van Wees's interpretation is based on the organization of the warriors into bands of personal followers, and this is most reasonable when one looks at the fluid and free movement of the heroes around the sectors of the battlefield. The numerous references to missiles flying probably indicate the presence of significant numbers of lighter-armed men, and the footsoldiers clearly were often drawn up in relatively dense crowds. However, van Wees does not take this to mean (as Pritchett does) that the men were arrayed in orderly formations, but rather that they were pressed together, at times, in an amorphous mass.<sup>36</sup> This makes the most sense of the text and the ambiguity of the terms used, since there is no clear impression of orderly ranks and files in the battle scenes. Also in contrast to Pritchett's opinion, van Wees sees the typical advance of the armies as rather loose and undisciplined: despite the efforts of the leaders, chariots pull ahead of the footsoldiers, less eager men lag behind, and the army becomes quite spread out.<sup>37</sup>

According to van Wees, the general shape of the initial clash and ensuing battle is not one of massed hand-to-hand combat, but rather of a more fluid form of fighting. The armies advance to a fairly close proximity to one another, with the masses of troops barely within missile range, while the *promakhoi* (which include more men than just the heroes themselves) range in front of the masses and fight with those of the opposing side. The *promakhoi* move in and out of the mass of soldiers behind them, rather than following Pritchett's scenario of champions moving in and out of the *promakhoi*. The front-fighters engage mostly in spear-throwing, though occasionally they are able to

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<sup>36</sup> van Wees, "Homeric Warfare," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell (New York: Brill, 1997), 674-75.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 676.

move in close enough for a spear-thrust or sword attack. There is also enough room in between the armies and among the *promakhoi* for random chariots to move freely.<sup>38</sup>

Homer seems to combine three different elements of warfare: fluid and open-order fighting among *promakhoi*, close-order mass hand-to-hand fighting, and mass exchange of missiles. Although scholars such as Pritchett have addressed this apparent confusion differently, proposing that an opening phase of massed fighting leading to the opening of space for missile combat and skirmishing, van Wees suggests that “the confusion is in our minds.”<sup>39</sup> References to “shields clashing” do not necessarily indicate massed close-combat, nor do “missiles flying” necessitate strict phases of long-range combat. Rather, the fundamental shape of battle is based upon the combat of the *promakhoi* leaping forward and drawing back into the mass, throwing javelins and meeting the enemy face-to-face with sword, spear, and stone. Breakthroughs result from collective effort or conspicuous killings, but even the latter tends to occur amid collective success. An army breaks and falls into rout, then reestablishes itself and resumes standing battle until another breakthrough occurs. There is freedom of movement for men to range side to side as well as front to rear. Van Wees sees the intensification of battle as typically stemming from the need to recover a corpse or help a comrade. However, despite the effectiveness of massing troops in dense formation for the purposes of defense, the creation of a totally cohesive formation is exceptional in the text and is followed by normal *promakhoi*-style fighting.<sup>40</sup>

Overall, the opinions of van Wees are most compelling. His theories are based on a logical reading of the text, observing the fluid nature of the battles and the poet’s overt

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 677-78.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 678-80.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 680-86.



and subtle references to the unnamed warriors. There is simply not enough evidence in the text to support Pritchett's view of orderly massed combat; he tends to overlook the significance of missiles flying during battle and the ability of light-armed archers to move in and out of protective cover, and he also seems to miss the implied presence of chariots and charioteers in the background. Certainly *promakhoi*-style combat is conveniently suitable for displaying great heroes in action, so one might therefore conclude that this form of warfare was chosen or created fancifully by the poet for this purpose. However, in a text so carefully related to the everyday experiences of its contemporary audience, it is also significant that the warriors are cast in such a detailed environment dependent upon the movements of the masses as well as of the heroes. If any examples were to be drawn from the poem or if it was important for the poet to create an image that resonated personally with his audience members, then it should be no surprise that the method of warfare in the *Iliad* appears to be plausible and internally consistent.

In conclusion, I again maintain that Homeric warfare is indeed internally consistent and does represent a basic picture of warfare as it would have been known to his contemporaries; the creative modifications made to suit the heroic war are examples of epic distancing inspired by physical and artistic remains discovered or observed by the Greeks of the Dark Age. Van Wees sees in Homeric warfare a possible "embryonic hoplite phalanx in the process of development," a reflection of a period just prior to the rise of this style of war.<sup>41</sup> Although this position is certainly not unassailable, it is a convincing view that helps to shed light on a period that is lamentably unclear. The epic

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 691-92. Though there are objections to van Wees's willingness to historicize the poem and also against his methodology, I find no compelling reason to reject his approach. See Everett L. Wheeler, review of *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, by Hans van Wees, *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 4 (October 2005): 1192-94.

is by no means exactly representative of historical reality, but I believe it does reflect a particular notion of mixed combat (ranged and close-quarters) that is important to keep in mind when investigating the murky history of javelin-armed soldiers in Greece. In short, the *Iliad* is highly informative regarding an early form or conception of Greek warfare, and this form remarkably parallels the known tactics and fighting style of later peltasts and javelineers.

With the emergence of *poleis* and hoplite armament in the eighth century B.C.E., the socially and politically dominant classes in Greek city-states such as Athens, Thebes, and Korinth began to fight exclusively as heavy infantry. In other regions that did not develop into *poleis*, including Phokis, Aitolia, Akarnania, and portions of Lokris, fighters retained the older, more fluid form of warfare based on ranged light infantry, due largely to the particularly rugged terrain in such areas where pitched battles on flatter ground were impossible.<sup>42</sup> This was of course similar to Homeric warfare, and Lendon argues that javelineers and peltasts derived ðpic legitimacy from the similarity of their fighting style to that of the Homeric heroes. Despite the fact that their tactics conflicted with hoplite ideals, the javelineer and peltast fit well within Greek military culture because of this Homeric tradition.<sup>43</sup> Hunt likewise points out that Homeric example may have alleviated some of the contempt Greeks felt regarding the peltast and his fighting methods.<sup>44</sup> Even in the city-states, however, light troops armed with javelins and stones continued to participate in warfare.<sup>45</sup> The predominance of rough terrain throughout the

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<sup>42</sup> Hutchinson 2000, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Lendon 2005, 96, 105-6, 158.

<sup>44</sup> Hunt 2007, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Snodgrass 1964, 67; Trundle 2004, 47-48; van Wees 2004, 174-75.

territory of the city-states made the presence of light infantry necessary to some degree.<sup>46</sup> These men were largely ignored or scorned in literature because they were recruited either from the poor, landless class or from semi-foreign tribes, they fought in a hit-and-run style, and they were loosely organized.<sup>47</sup> As Snodgrass observes, there was no time or inclination to train such men,<sup>48</sup> and this would certainly have had an impact on their degree of effectiveness.

Light troops as well as cavalry were likely intermingled with the hoplite phalanx as it evolved throughout the archaic period, as it was only after the Persian Wars that light-armed fighters were moved to the front and flanks of the heavy infantry.<sup>49</sup> Prior to this general shift to the flanks, light infantry would have continued to fight much like the warriors in the *Iliad*—dashing forward and out from the cover of mutual protection to cast their missiles, then falling back, all while individuals and groups of heavier armed men clashed in close-quarters combat. The hoplites themselves were still highly mobile and seemed to fight in loose formations, and they continued to use their spears as missiles as well—blurring the distinction between heavy infantry and light-armed. Up to around 640 B.C.E. vase paintings suggest that heavier-armed men continued to carry multiple spears into battle, and in the images these spears are sometimes equipped with throwing

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<sup>46</sup> Hutchinson 2000, p. 20, argues that Greek methods of warfare developed as a result of the country's topography—it was a mountainous area, so battles took place on flat plains between the ranges. This statement makes as much sense as saying that the men of a plains region would fight battles in the woods between fields.

<sup>47</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15; van Wees 2004, 65; Serge Yalichev, *Mercenaries of the Ancient World* (London: Constable, 1997), 119.

<sup>48</sup> Snodgrass 1967, 61.

<sup>49</sup> van Wees 2004, 64, 187; Peter Krentz, *The Battle of Marathon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 59-60.

loops.<sup>50</sup> The most famous of these vase paintings is found on the Chigi vase (circa 640 B.C.E.), which clearly depicts such throwing spears in the hands of hoplites.

The picture presented by the late seventh-century poet Tyrtaios reveals a new development, in which light-armed (ranged) troops and heavy-armed (hand-to-hand) troops are clearly distinguished from each other in terms of their fighting methods, though they remained intermingled (Fr. 11.35-38 West; 23a.10-14). Tyrtaios explicitly addresses the hoplites and light-armed men separately, exhorting each of them to excel in their respective methods of combat. Specifically, the poet calls upon the light-armed men to hurl their rocks and javelins while standing close to the hoplites, using the latter's shields as cover when necessary (Fr. 11.35-38). Though the two broad categories of soldiers (hoplite and light-armed men) continued to fight side by side, there was at least more distinction between their fighting methods and overall functions on the battlefield. It is also clear that an attitude was developing, at least among the landed middle class, in which the ideals and martial virtues of close combat (the hoplite's fighting method) were emphasized; men who fought from a distance were now becoming marginalized and even scorned.<sup>51</sup>

Change again took place following the Persian Wars of the early fifth century. In a new position in front or on the sides of the phalanx, light-armed men and cavalry—another secondary, marginalized group—were counted upon to guard the flanks of the army, protect the hoplites in the event of retreat, and pursue the enemy in victory.<sup>52</sup> The light troops were also useful in ravaging enemy territory.<sup>53</sup> Wheeler points out that the

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<sup>50</sup> van Wees 2004, 169.

<sup>51</sup> See Krentz 2010, 43-44.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>53</sup> Hanson 2005, 91.

wars in Greece between the late seventh and early fifth centuries generally had limited strategic goals and primarily took the form of border conflicts.<sup>54</sup> While this is certainly a generalization, it does help to explain the lack of focus on light-armed warfare in the period; the military efficiency and practicality of using light troops on Greece's rough terrain was less important than the confirmation of social and political realities offered by hoplite warfare.

Although javelin-armed men did not have a central role in pitched battles, van Wees is correct in asserting that a Greek commander could be dismissive of light-armed troops only when he had his own to negate those on the enemy side.<sup>55</sup> The new position on the flanks thus physically removed from the hoplites must have also increased the disparaging attitude commonly held against javelin-armed men. Despite the threat posed by the light troops, social and political forces up to the Peloponnesian War kept the hoplite on center stage in warfare, at least in the Greek mind. It is not certain how exclusively the ideal of the hoplite clash was actually carried out prior to the Peloponnesian War, since the evidence for the period is scanty and primarily concerned with the hoplite. A discussion of the nature of hoplite battle during this time is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is evident that commanders generally dismissed the importance and potential effectiveness of light-armed warfare.

As a result of light troops' secondary roles in warfare, it is also commonly assumed that they were rarely a decisive factor in the outcome of battles.<sup>56</sup> Lazenby goes so far as to say that "there was really no place for [light troops] in a set-piece battle

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<sup>54</sup> Wheeler, "Land Battles," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare, Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197-98.

<sup>55</sup> van Wees 2004, 64.

<sup>56</sup> Ray 2009, 14.

between hoplites;<sup>57</sup> presenting an even more extreme view, Williams declares that light troops were never important in classical Greek battles.<sup>58</sup> These positions seem merely to perpetuate the ancient bias against the light-armed, and there really is not enough historical evidence to warrant such blanket statements. In carrying out the functions above, light troops were basically meant to fill one overarching and myopic role: to cancel out their counterparts in the opposing army. Ray points out that this important but unglamorous role contributed to the light-armed soldier's image, as such men earned "undeserved anonymity in victory and over-stated notoriety in defeat."<sup>59</sup>

In summary, the role and importance of peltasts and javelineers were certainly limited prior to the Peloponnesian War. Homer's *Iliad* illustrates an early form of Greek warfare emphasizing light-armed style tactics and ranged, fluid fighting methods, and available evidence indicates that this form of warfare persisted throughout the archaic period. Hoplites themselves fought in open order, often with throwing spears as well as hand-to-hand weapons, until the later part of the seventh century, and javelin men (along with other light troops, such as archers) were mixed with them. Over the course of centuries, however, the hoplite's fighting hand to hand and in relatively close formation came to dominate the battlefields of Greece. Although the javelin soldiers were often overlooked in literature during subsequent periods, they must have been considered dangerous enough to the hoplite phalanx to justify their inclusion in the levies (even if it was more as a defensive measure). If the javelineers were ineffective, it was not due to their arms or method of fighting, but rather to the way in which they were

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<sup>57</sup> J. F. Lazenby *The Peloponnesian War: A Military Study*, Warfare and History (New York: Routledge-Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), 143.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Frances Williams, "Philopoemen's Special Forces: Peltasts and a New Kind of Greek Light-Armed Warfare (Livy 35.27)," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 53, No. 3 (2004), 262.

<sup>59</sup> Ray 2009, 14.

deployed by commanders who were primarily concerned with the clash of hoplites. Up to the Peloponnesian War, then, these troops seem to have been deployed and utilized neither creatively nor proactively in battles or campaigns.

### III. THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR: DEMOSTHENES AND TRENDS IN LIGHT-ARMED WARFARE

This section will focus on the Peloponnesian War (431-404), a critical period of increasing service and tactical developments for peltasts and javelineers. Although Greek warfare would continue to be dominated by the citizen or mercenary hoplite, the Peloponnesian War elevated the peltast and javelineer to a position of considerable prominence. As discussed in the previous section, these light-armed troops had played secondary roles on the battlefields of previous wars, but the circumstances and conditions of the Peloponnesian War presented particular challenges that led to an increase in peltasts' and javelineers' deployment, an expansion of their uses, and a development of their tactics.

In this section I will discuss the early phase of the war, the lack of decisive engagements or pitched battles, the expansion of the war to other areas of Greece and its periphery, and the use of more complicated tactics in the engagements that did take place. War began to require a higher degree of professionalism, and the Athenian general Demosthenes provides an example of this trend. Demosthenes' campaigns had implications for the role of peltasts and javelineers, so his career and influence will be of primary concern. Throughout, I will attempt to determine the overall effectiveness of these light-armed troops against both their enemy counterparts and, more importantly, against hoplites. While the hoplite still could not be matched in a head-on clash on



reasonably flat terrain, peltasts and javelineers nevertheless had revealed their own strengths and become essential components of Greek armies by the end of the Peloponnesian War.

The outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C.E. marked the beginning of a long-expected showdown between the two greatest powers in Greece. On one side were the Spartans, nearly all the Peloponnesian states, the Boiotians, and several other states outside the Peloponnese (Thuc. 2.9). The Spartans were widely regarded as the strongest land power in all of Greece, and Hanson points out that the Boiotians were the next strongest in this area.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the Spartans and their allies entered the war with a significant edge in army strength and reputation. On the other side were the Athenians and their widespread allies and tributary cities, all of which provided either ships or soldiers and money (Thuc. 2.9). The strength of Athens was in its fleet, although the city's army was considered formidable as well (1.80, 2.13). In sum, the Peloponnesian War was a strangely matched affair between two powers with very different strengths, and the exercising of these strengths determined the course of the war.

During the first phase of the conflict (the Archidamian War), the Spartans led large, annual invasions of Attika, the countryside of Athens, and laid waste to the territory. As a result, the Athenians brought into the city their rural population and all the goods they could bring with them (Thuc. 2.12-14). Perikles, the Athenian general, made it his policy to avoid a direct, pitched battle with the enemy, and instead dispatched naval expeditionary forces to raid the Peloponnese (2.23, 2.55-6). Light troops played no

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<sup>60</sup> Hanson 2005, 126-27.

significant role in any of these operations, as the Athenians used citizen hoplites and either archers (in 431) or cavalry (in 430) on their naval expeditions; for the old role of ravaging enemy territory, however, both sides employed light troops (2.29-31, 3.1). The annual invasions of Attika did not produce any decisive results for the Peloponnesians due to their inability to engage the Athenian land forces directly. A plague ravaged Athens, however, and caused immense suffering and loss of life. Put simply, neither side felt that it could sustain its initial strategy.<sup>61</sup> As a result, the war began to shift to peripheral areas and to campaigns of indirect attack, developments for which light-armed troops were to prove very well suited.

In his report of one such operation in 429, Thucydides provides the first example of the potential impact of light troops when those on one side outmatched the other. In this instance, at Spartolos (in northern Greece), unidentified Athenian light-armed men and cavalry were beaten by Chalkidian and Olynthian peltasts, other light troops, and cavalry. Initially the Athenian hoplites were successful against their opposing numbers in the Chalkidian army, but the latter's cavalry and light troops (most importantly peltasts) were in turn victorious against the cavalry and light-armed on the Athenian side. More peltasts from Olynthos arrived as reinforcements for the Chalkidians, and all these light troops, with cavalry support, launched a new attack on the Athenian army and drove it back. Whenever the Athenians would attempt to charge, the light-armed troops simply fell back and then pressed forward again as soon as the Athenians began to withdraw (Thuc. 2.79). The effectiveness of the peltasts is clear, and Lazenby notes that Spartolos is an interesting example of the way in which trained light troops and cavalry, if

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 88.

properly handled, could defeat hoplites.<sup>62</sup> The battle is perhaps an early demonstration of the peltast's superiority compared to other forms of javelin-armed men. Spartolos is also an example of how the war was being carried out indirectly through engagements in peripheral areas rather than in Attika or the Peloponnese.

In 426 the Athenians suffered a more significant defeat at the hands of light-armed troops, and this time their commander, Demosthenes, learned a valuable lesson. Demosthenes was persuaded by the Messenians of Naupaktos to invade Aitolia, a sizable Greek nation whose men fought expertly as light-armed javeliners. The Athenian general arranged for the Ozolian Lokrians to join his forces in Lokris because they were neighbors of the Aitolians and fought in the same manner (Thuc. 3.94-5). Demosthenes therefore must have considered it somewhat dangerous to fight against javeliners in rugged, unfamiliar country, but not dangerous enough: after initial successes, he advanced farther into Aitolia, against the town of Aigition, without waiting for the Lokrian javeliners. The Aitolians attacked from the hills in all directions, advancing and throwing volleys of javelins then withdrawing before the Athenians could close with them. The archers accompanying Demosthenes' forces held off the javeliners for a time, but once their arrows were spent and their captain was killed, the Aitolians were able to press hard and force an Athenian retreat. This withdrawal turned into a rout, and the fleet-footed javeliners wreaked havoc on the slower, panicked Athenian soldiers (3.97-8).

Aigition is a prime example of javelin-armed troops using terrain, range, and mobility to maximum advantage against a force ill-equipped to match them. Lazenby suggests that the battle was a classic demonstration of the folly of taking hoplites into

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<sup>62</sup> Lazenby 2004, 43.

terrain that suited light troops.<sup>63</sup> This statement is true but seems to overlook one simple fact: most of Greece is rugged and much better suited for light troops than for hoplites. The shift of the war away from the fields of Attika and the Peloponnese to less familiar terrain meant that light troops were offered a larger role with more opportunity to display their effectiveness. Demosthenes had recognized the potential threat javelineers posed to his expedition, but clearly he had underestimated the level of danger by advancing without his own javelineers as protection. As a result of this mistake, 120 Athenian hoplites lost their lives, and Demosthenes chose to remain in or near Naupaktos rather than return home to face his fellow citizens (Thuc. 3.98).

Fortunately for the Athenians, it did not take long for Demosthenes to show that he had learned from his experience against the javelineers in Aitolia. During the winter of 426/5 he was chosen by the Akarnanians to lead an allied army against a larger Peloponnesian force at Olpai. Realizing that his army would be outflanked by the Peloponnesians, Demosthenes placed 400 hoplites and light-armed troops in a hidden position on one of his wings. He also used Amphilochean javelineers actually to constitute part of his army's center and left wing. When the Peloponnesians began to encircle Demosthenes's right flank, the mixed troops lying in ambush took the enemy in the rear and put most of their army to flight (Thuc. 3.107-108).

Demosthenes's planned ambush and his use of javelineers in the battle line, rather than as skirmishers, together indicate both an increasing awareness of combined arms tactics and an increase in the specialization of Greek commanders. Best asserts that

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 61.

Demosthenes introduced ambush tactics at Olpai,<sup>64</sup> but this is difficult to accept given the centuries of warfare that had taken place in Greece prior to this occasion. Perhaps, though, Demosthenes was the first to mix hoplites and javelineers for such a purpose; Best is correct in pointing out that in all Demosthenes's successful campaigns there was some manner of collaboration between light infantry and hoplites.<sup>65</sup> Demosthenes's special tactical skills were noticed even prior to the battle, and his selection by the Akarnanians to lead in cooperation with their own generals reveals an increasing awareness of specialized skill and professionalization among commanders.

In downplaying Demosthenes's abilities regarding the effective use of light-armed troops, Roisman argues that there were other, more important educating factors in the Aitolian experience, including overambition, bad intelligence, and lack of adequate manpower. He states that Demosthenes had proceeded further into Aitolia without Lokrian reinforcements because he had reason to believe that surprise would overcome his deficiency in light infantry.<sup>66</sup> Presumably, then, the Athenian defeat at the hands of the Aitolians was a lesson not so much in the effectiveness of javelineers as in the management of an army in enemy territory. Roisman also argues that Olpai was not a clear step forward in light infantry usage or tactics, as it was primarily a hoplite battle with the javelineers playing a limited and unclear role. The keys to Demosthenes's success were local intelligence and military tactics.<sup>67</sup> While I agree that surprise and intelligence were important in Demosthenes's campaigns, it is evident that the general's use of javelineers after Aigion was remarkable. Although the javelineers at Olpai did

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<sup>64</sup> Best 1969, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph Roisman, *The General Demosthenes and His Use of Military Surprise*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 78 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993), 25-27.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 29, 31.

not do the bulk of the fighting, the fact that the hoplites were mixed with light-armed troops in the ambush and that the javelineers were deployed as more than skirmishers reveals a stronger grasp of the versatility and potential of light-armed troops.

By 425 the Peloponnesian War was being fought in a manner radically different from that which the belligerents would have anticipated. The shift of the action to unfamiliar peripheral areas meant that hoplites could not always be counted upon as the decisive part of an army. In these regions, local populations often fought effectively as javelineers, and peltasts were nearer at hand and more able to demonstrate their deadly potential. The result of this shift in geographical focus was an increasing appreciation of professional and specialized skill, both in generals and in soldiers.

The selection of troops for the operation against the Spartans on Sphacteria (in 425) provides further evidence of this increasing professionalization, though there were considerable political motivations behind the decision. After the Athenian assembly compelled Kleon to serve as general, he decided to take a non-Athenian force as his army. This was done partially to appease the Athenian public (his popularity was plummeting at the time, and this would not risk more citizens' lives) and also as part of a boast that he could defeat the Spartans with foreigners. In addition to the Lemnians and Imbrians who were in the city, Kleon selected 400 foreign archers and a force of peltasts from Ainos (Thuc. 4.28). The archers and peltasts were mercenaries, and the others were mostly light troops.<sup>68</sup> Such a mixed force, primarily non-hoplite and wholly consisting of outsiders and mercenary specialists, is indicative of a developing trend that consisted of two interrelated parts: the hiring of foreign specialists in place of citizen light-armed

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<sup>68</sup> Lazenby 2004, 75.

troops, and the use of professionals in place of amateur soldiers. The movement away from using citizen hoplites and amateur commanders was far from complete, but the process certainly began during the Peloponnesian War.<sup>69</sup>

The ensuing battle of Sphacteria is perhaps the war's most important in demonstrating the effectiveness of javelin-armed troops. Kleon chose Demosthenes as his colleague for the expedition, and it is possible that the latter had influenced the former in selecting primarily light troops and mercenaries for the undertaking.<sup>70</sup> The generals landed their 800 hoplites (most of these must have been at Pylos already) just before dawn and overran one small Spartan detachment. The rest of the force landed at dawn and included 800 archers, over 800 peltasts, armed sailors from more than seventy ships, and other contingents. Demosthenes divided these men into detachments of about 200 and positioned them on different areas of high ground; he was counting on the light troops' range and mobility to overwhelm the enemy from multiple directions.

When the Spartan hoplites advanced to engage the Athenian hoplites they were attacked by the light troops, who struck from the sides and eluded Spartan attempts to chase them down. The rough terrain of Sphacteria worked against the cumbersome, heavy-armed hoplites, and the swift peltasts and other light troops were even able to attack while retreating from their pursuers. The Spartans were overwhelmed just as Demosthenes had planned, and they fell back to a fortified position at the end of the island. A long stalemate was averted when a force of archers and light troops, creeping along a precarious but unguarded path, reached a position on high ground to the rear of

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<sup>69</sup> Yalichev 1997, 124; H. W. Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers: From the Earliest Times to the Battle of Ipsus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 20.

<sup>70</sup> Best 1969, 21.

the Spartan fort. Seeing that their position was untenable, the Spartans retreated and soon agreed to terms (Thuc. 4.31-8).

The peltasts and other light-armed troops were decisive at Sphacteria.<sup>71</sup> In fact, in a sharp reversal of the normal roles, the Athenian hoplites performed only a secondary function in drawing the Spartans forward. This situation would not become commonplace, but the interdependence of heavy and light troops did continue to increase throughout the war. As a result, superior commanders began to understand the value and importance of incorporating light troops.<sup>72</sup> Roisman, again opposing the idea of Demosthenes as an innovator in the use of javelin-armed troops, emphasizes superior numbers and luck and argues that the use of light-armed men was simply to tire the Spartans.<sup>73</sup> Numbers were certainly a factor in how quickly the light troops on Sphacteria were able to overwhelm the enemy hoplites, but it is clear that the use of light-armed tactics on favorable terrain was the key to the Athenian victory. If hoplites were not able to come to grips with their light-armed attackers, then it would certainly have been difficult for the outcome to be in the Spartans' favor, especially if the light troops were present in significant numbers. Demosthenes' hoplites were a secondary force, and the whole battle was meant to be an efficient and primarily light-armed operation.

In addition to providing yet another example of developing combined-arms tactics, Thucydides' account of Sphacteria is also the most informative demonstration of the fundamental fighting method for javelineers and peltasts. The "attack-evade-attack" tactic, which already featured prominently in Thucydides' reports of Spartolos and Aigion, seems to have been the central feature of javelin-armed fighting. This fighting

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<sup>71</sup> Hanson 2005, 91; Best 1969, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Ray 2009, 196.

<sup>73</sup> Roisman 1993, 38-40.



style, carried out most effectively on rugged terrain, would have required many physical qualities only a professional specialist could offer.<sup>74</sup> Certainly the Peloponnesian War would not have provided the Spartans or the Athenians with their first experience of this style of fighting, but its success at such crucial points and against supposedly superior forces reinforces the idea that javelin-armed soldiers had been unduly marginalized previously. Rather than consisting primarily of the poor and untrained variety, the effective javelin men in Thucydides' accounts were mostly javelineers and professional peltasts who fought with skill developed from native training. Their success on these occasions must have had an effect on standard perceptions of light-armed warfare.<sup>75</sup>

As the war continued, both sides expanded their uses of peltasts and javelineers in expeditions abroad. In the winter of 424/3, the Spartan general Brasidas made special use of his peltasts when taking the town of Torone in the Chalkidiki. After a small detachment of light-armed men had slipped into the town and opened the gates to the market square, 100 peltasts designated by Brasidas rushed into the town ahead of the rest of the army (Thuc. 4.110-11). With this action Brasidas showed himself to be a fairly skillful leader of peltast forces.<sup>76</sup> Such usage of peltasts in special detachments reflects an early appreciation of their versatility, as they were equipped for speed and armed for both long- and close-range combat. It should be noted that the Athenians also carried out a campaign in the Chalkidiki (in 423), and for this operation Nikias' army included a force of allied peltasts and Thracian mercenaries—presumably peltasts as well (4.129).

Peltasts, mercenaries, and other foreigners (non-Peloponnesians) featured prominently in Brasidas' army at Amphipolis (422), revealing that the trend toward

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<sup>74</sup> Yalichev 1997, 117-18.

<sup>75</sup> Parke 1970, 17; Hanson 2005, 92.

<sup>76</sup> Best 1969, 31.

nontraditional means of fighting was occurring on both sides of the war. The Spartan general had about 2,000 hoplites and 300 Greek horsemen, but the rest of his army consisted of 1,500 Thracian mercenaries, the Edonian army of peltasts and cavalry, 1,000 Myrkinian and Chalkidian peltasts, and other peltasts stationed in Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.6). It is notable that Brasidas did not have confidence in the quality of his own troops in comparison with the Athenian soldiers (5.8), but this is no surprise considering the preponderance of peltasts in his army. Such troops were not at their best in a set-piece, pitched battle. Brasidas broke the Athenian left and center by using a stratagem, and the stubborn Athenian right was overwhelmed by peltasts and cavalry. Both generals were killed in action, and many Athenians were struck down by the horsemen and peltasts in the ensuing flight (5.10). Again, the battle of Amphipolis is representative of both the increasing presence of peltasts within Greek-led armies and the willingness to rely on nontraditional methods of fighting.

The ill-fated Sicilian expedition is another example of the effectiveness of javelin men against poorly supported hoplites on the march. The expedition is also noteworthy because it was the final chapter of Demosthenes' illustrious career. The general was one of two commanders of a relief force sent to Sicily to reinforce the Athenians' first effort, which was at this point (414/3) led by Nikias. Demosthenes spent the winter making preparations for the expedition and sailed out at the beginning of spring 413 (Thuc. 7.17; 7.26). In accordance with Demosthenes' tendency to employ light-armed specialists, he had planned to take 1,300 Thracian peltasts with him. Unfortunately, these men arrived at Athens too late, and because their wages were considered too expensive to keep them in service, the Athenians decided to send them home (7.27; 7.29). Demosthenes recruited as

best he could on the way to Sicily, and he arrived there with a considerable force of both Greek and foreign javelineers in addition to his 5,000 hoplites and contingents of archers and slingers (7.42). However, Best argues that the Athenians made a mistake in turning away the Thracians, since the quality of the Thracian peltasts would have exceeded that of the javelineers.<sup>77</sup> As it turned out, the relief force was not able to save the Athenians from disaster. After defeats on land and at sea, Demosthenes and Nicias led their forces on a massive overland retreat. Ironically Demosthenes, commanding the rear half of the army, found himself surrounded and hemmed in by Syracusans fighting at long range (Thuc. 7.81-2). The Athenian general was forced to surrender by the very sort of tactics he had done so much to expand. Demosthenes, "Sparta's greatest enemy," was put to death soon after (7.86).

In summary, Thucydides's account of the Peloponnesian War provides a basic picture of the peltast's tactical function in warfare. The victories (and final defeat) of Demosthenes, in which light-armed javelin men performed the tasks characteristic of peltasts, revealed the reality that hoplites were relatively defenseless against such light-armed troops in unfamiliar hilly country. These men laid ambushes, launched surprise attacks, performed reconnaissance, and secured dominant positions.<sup>78</sup> The geography of Greece—largely unsuited for pitched battles—suggests that this realization of the peltast's advantages had to have taken place long before the Peloponnesian War. I would argue that the ability of the peltast or javelineer to launch his missiles, withdraw in the face of the enemy's pursuit, and then return to attack again once the enemy had begun to

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<sup>77</sup> Best 1969, 28.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 19.

retire, could be used to advantage not only on rugged terrain, which already hindered the movements of the heavier hoplites, but also on flat country, where the peltasts would still be free to strike and flee beyond the reach of the heavy troops. On flat ground, however, it would be vital for the peltasts' success that the enemy be unprotected by cavalry or light-armed troops of their own, since these would nullify the advantage and expose the peltasts to the danger of being run down. Also, in such a scenario the peltasts would likely not be able to hold ground, but could only attack, withdraw, and avoid closing with the heavy-armed hoplites. The peltast could be used even against cavalry on open terrain, however, as is shown by the performance of the Thracian peltast mercenaries who sacked Mykalessos; these Thracians (the men sent home from Athens after arriving too late for the Sicilian expedition), set upon first by the Theban cavalry, ōput up a good defense by adopting the tactics of their country, that is to say by charging out in detachments and then falling back againö (Thuc. 7.30.2).

Although this tactic could have been effective if launched by spear-wielding soldiers (see Chapter Two for a brief discussion of spear-wielding Thracians), I would argue that the use of small detachments of javelin-throwers would be more conducive to the development of such a practice. At no place in the account of the Peloponnesian War is there a clear reference to the tactical, purposeful use of peltasts as close-quarters fighters, and the availability of quality close-combat troops (hoplites) on both sides also argues against the hiring of peltast mercenaries armed with spears rather than javelins. Furthermore, I doubt the effectiveness of a skirmisher-spearman against a unit of hoplites; peltasts armed in such a way could only engage the enemy on ground that was just as well suited to the hoplites themselves, and the mobility of the peltast (due to his

lighter shield) would be negated by his increased vulnerability (again, due to the lighter shield) and by the range to which he would have to close with the enemy. If peltast spearmen did exist, they probably served mostly in their native country of Thrace and attracted little interest in Greece, where spearmen were hoplites and the real need was for effective ranged fighters.

The requirements for and characteristics of being a peltast seem to be reasonably clear at this point. As mentioned previously, the amount of training required for the hit-and-run style of peltast warfare was more than what could be given to the lower classes in the Greek states in order to create effective bodies of citizen peltasts, although apparently the performance of the mercenary peltasts during the Peloponnesian War led to the arming of Greeks in the same manner.<sup>79</sup> Scholars have argued that ðpeltast warfare, relying on skirmishing, required far greater efficiency in the use of arms than hoplite fighting, where the soldier could supplement his own inadequacy by the support of the rest of the phalanx.ö<sup>80</sup> Although I would say that personal combat was quite important in hoplite warfare, it does seem reasonable to assume that the tasks of the peltast required more extensive training and experience in order to be effective. One can imagine the requirements: sure-footedness, agility, speed and athleticism, endurance, reasonable strength and accuracy with the throwing arm, dexterity, discipline (in pressing pursuit, in holding ground up to the last possible moment to bait the enemy, and in the prudent expenditure of missiles), and so forth. Units of men who were raised in the tradition of fighting in this style would obviously make the most effective peltast forces.

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<sup>79</sup> Anderson 1970, 114. One must also wonder if the exorbitant costs of hiring such mercenaries led to this development as well. The 1,300 Thracian peltasts who arrived at Athens late for the expedition to Syracuse were sent away because of their cost (Thuc. 7.27.1-2).

<sup>80</sup> Pritchett 1974, 124.

Finally, the Peloponnesian War also reveals the typical arrangement of peltasts and ranged troops on the flanks of hoplite phalanxes, where they (and cavalry) could still be available to carry out their traditional duties of protecting the phalanx's wings, covering retreats, and pursuing the beaten enemy.<sup>81</sup> This arrangement is often seen as a key to the peltast's overall effectiveness: a peltast force would be able freely to inflict losses on an enemy hoplite formation only due to the nearby presence of a reliable friendly hoplite phalanx, since the enemy could not risk breaking formation in such a situation.<sup>82</sup> I proposed above that peltasts could still be effective in inflicting damage on hoplites on open, level ground, and I argue that this would remain true even when the peltasts were not supported by hoplites. Enemy hoplites could endure their losses and try to drive the peltasts methodically from the field, but breaking formation against such elusive and light-footed enemies would negate the hoplites' defensive advantage and allow for them to be worn down and picked off (as Iphikrates' peltasts would accomplish at Lechaion; see Chapter Five). Thus, it seems more likely that the practice of deploying light troops (or cavalry) in combination with hoplites was not adopted in order to make the former more effective, but rather as a defensive measure against light-armed soldiers' independent effectiveness.

It is also argued that the Peloponnesian War marked the beginning of the end of *ōgonalō* warfare in Greece, as new developments favored deception, stratagems, and special training.<sup>83</sup> Wheeler asserts that the war did not bring new and larger roles for light infantry and cavalry, but instead began a trend in which the style of warfare already

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<sup>81</sup> van Wees 2004, 187, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson 1970, 127; Sage 1996, 143.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 196.

prevalent in the peripheral (colonial) parts of Greece replaced the agonal style of the mainland.<sup>84</sup> I do not support the theory that warfare was strictly agonal in the prior period, although it is difficult to determine one way or the other since the best military sources begin with Thucydides. In my view, however, Wheeler's particular view is somewhat illogical: even if the Peloponnesian War merely brought colonial/peripheral tactics to mainland Greece, this obviously meant that javelineers, peltasts, and other arms were being given a larger role in mainland Greek warfare than they held previously. Again, the scale, duration, and high stakes of the war brought about changes, as both sides attempted to gain whatever advantages they could in a conflict of attrition; in short, the Peloponnesian War stimulated a growth in Greek tactical and strategic thought, which were possibly lagging behind the demands of reality.

In conclusion, I argue that Demosthenes and Brasidas were brilliant tacticians, and they realized more than their peers that the Peloponnesian War required a higher level of specialization and professionalism than wars past. In their recognition of peltasts and javelineers' potential, however, they were still exceptional.<sup>85</sup> The hoplite continued to play a central role in Greek warfare, but the best generals were now those who could also integrate the other arms.<sup>86</sup> The increasing use of specialists contributed to this development, since the management of specialists required more professional leadership.<sup>87</sup> Ray argues that by the end of the fifth century, whenever hoplites were themselves driving to victory, they were usually forcing the enemy to counter with their

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<sup>84</sup> Wheeler 2007, 215, 221.

<sup>85</sup> Best 1969, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Yalichev 1997, 119.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

own armored fighters.<sup>88</sup> While this statement warrants no real disagreement, it is interesting because it indicates a degree of equalization in terms of battlefield roles and importance. As mentioned in the first section of the paper, light troops had been counted upon previously to “cancel out” their counterparts in the opposing army. The fact that hoplites were now meant to do the same, even if only in a minority of battles, suggests that the Peloponnesian War began a trend toward more diverse, specialized forces.<sup>89</sup>

The Peloponnesian War brought very significant changes in the tactics and deployment of javelineers and peltasts. These developments were not immediately continued after the deaths of Demosthenes and Brasidas, but the role of javelin-armed troops was nevertheless permanently changed. The unprecedented challenges of the war created a demand for professionals and specialists well suited for long-term warfare on unpredictable terrain in diverse regions, while the lack of pertinent skills and training (and the willingness to impart them) among the lower classes of the *poleis* created a specific need for foreign mercenaries to serve in these capacities.<sup>90</sup> The age of the hoplite was not over as long as there was still a need for heavy-armed soldiers (and there was) and as long as the hoplite proved superior in set-piece engagements; however, the hoplite’s shortcomings were now recognized by Greek commanders who sought to exploit them to the fullest extent. Javelineers and peltasts thus had earned an important position within Greek warfare by the end of the century, laying the foundation for continued development in the first decades of the fourth century.

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<sup>88</sup> Ray 2009, 284.

<sup>89</sup> Parke 1970, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Trundle 2004, 40-41, 48, 118; Hutchinson 2000, 231, 236.



#### IV. PELTASTS AND JAVELINEERS IN XENOPHON'S *ANABASIS* AND *HELLENIKA*

The image of the javelin-armed soldier found in Thucydides is consistent with that which Xenophon conveys in his historical narratives and treatises, including the *Anabasis* and *Hellenika*. Likewise, the trends toward specialization, professionalism (among both leaders and troops), and resultant combined-arms tactics continued in the confused political aftermath of the Peloponnesian War. This section will primarily be devoted to highlighting the examples of javelin troops in action during the period with the notable exception of Iphikrates, who will be the topic of the next section. Such examples will illustrate the increasing level of organization among the light-armed within larger forces, their importance on a long campaign covering diverse terrain, and their potential effectiveness against hoplites.

The *Anabasis* offers a unique and valuable perspective of a campaign abroad and the inner workings of a mercenary army albeit under atypical circumstances. Although the Greeks themselves were most often hired by foreigners as heavy infantry, it is important to note that light-armed contingents from the fringes of Greece also joined the expedition of Cyrus under Greek command. Cyrus's own native forces certainly would have included significant numbers of light-armed troops, so the inclusion of so many peltasts (approximately 2,500) and others among the Greek mercenary contingents may indicate an intention to use the Greek component as a somewhat independent, self-

sufficient and complete force within the overall army. Regardless of intentions, the army's diversity (in terms of both its ethnicity and armament) is apparent from the very beginning of the narrative. In addition to the hoplites brought to Sardis by each Greek general, there were 500 light infantry under Proxenos,<sup>91</sup> 300 peltasts under Pasion, 500 peltasts with Menon identified as Dolopians, Ainianians, and Olynthians and another 800 Thracian peltasts under Klearchos (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2); Xenophon gives the round figure of 2,500 as the peltasts' strength just before the battle at Kounaxa (1.7). Lee states that 200 hoplites transferred to light infantry sometime before the battle.<sup>92</sup> It is also possible that certain men from among the camp followers became members of the peltast forces, or perhaps smaller peltast units were included (but not mentioned initially) among the other Greek contingents or those that joined later in the march, serving under Cheirisophos or having defected from Abrokomas (1.4).

Prior to the battle at Kounaxa, these troops, along with the hoplites, marched separately under their respective commanders, an arrangement that nearly led to a skirmish at one point between the men of Klearchos and Menon (1.5). The light troops in particular were organized into *taxeis* (battalions) of unknown size, and they were probably broken into smaller groups based on ethnicity for marching and maneuvers.<sup>93</sup> Such ethnically-based units were more common among the peltasts than among the hoplites, and there was also ethnic diversity among the *taxiarchoi*.<sup>94</sup>

The fragmented command structure of the Greek force was suitable enough for the march inland, but a more unified, cooperative effort was necessary for a set-piece

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<sup>91</sup> These men may have been javeliners rather than peltasts. See Hutchinson 2000, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Lee 2007, 48.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

battle. At Kounaxa, Cyrus deployed his Greek mercenaries on the right wing of the army. Klearchos and his hoplites held the prominent far right position, and Proxenos and the other Greek generals led their contingents down the line, with Menon's forces stationed on the Greek left. Next to these hoplites were the native troops, and Cyrus positioned himself in the center with his mounted bodyguard. On the extreme right flank of the Greek force, next to the Euphrates River, were the peltasts. A thousand Paphlagonian cavalry reinforced these troops and those of Klearchos. Arrayed opposite the peltasts were white-armored Persian horsemen under the command of Tissaphernes (1.8).

In the ensuing battle, the flexibility of the peltast's style of warfare and armament is made clear. The Persian cavalry under Tissaphernes drove upon the peltasts and broke through, but according to Xenophon they did so without killing a single man. The peltasts, led by Episthenes of Amphipolis, merely opened their ranks, which were in all likelihood fairly loose from the start, and struck the enemy horsemen with swords and javelins as they rode by. Tissaphernes decided not to turn about and face the peltasts again, and instead he continued forward to meet up with the King and other Persian forces that had circled round the considerably smaller Cyrean force. Xenophon praises the skill of Episthenes, though it is uncertain whether the author was complimenting the peltast commander's personal fighting skill or tactical abilities (1.10). In any case, the peltast's actions at Kounaxa were exemplary but in no way decisive—much like the Greeks' performance at the battle overall.

The march homeward, which makes up the bulk of Xenophon's narrative, required improvisation and flexibility on the part of the Greek commanders, and the peltasts proved to be extremely valuable in the army's effort to escape hostile territory.

Early on in the march the Greeks were forced to adopt the square formation (*plaision*) as a defensive measure against Persian attack. In this arrangement, which was seen earlier during the Peloponnesian War, the peltasts worked in conjunction with hoplites in designated groups to drive off enemy slingers who out-ranged the army's archers and javelin-throwers (3.3-4). Xenophon informs us that the light troops were kept within the square, and Lee points out that the peltasts were consolidated and reorganized so that some were in the front, some in the rear, and the rest in the center as a reserve.<sup>95</sup> The peltasts were vital, though it was the newly formed corps of Rhodian slingers that made the difference at this point (3.3).

The Cyreans also depended on the peltasts to seize heights and commanding positions during the march—sometimes with hoplites and other times independently—as well as to storm enemy positions. At one point relatively early on the march home, Persian troops on a series of foothills harassed the Greeks and prevented their light troops from sallying forth. Hoplites were unable to engage the light-footed enemy on the slopes, and the Greek infantry were attacked as they descended each hill as well. A force of peltasts was sent up the adjacent mountain and onto ground that was higher than the position held by the enemy, and this forced the Persians to withdraw or risk being struck from multiple sides. The Cyreans proceeded this way for the remainder of the day, with most of the troops marching across the foothills as the force of peltasts moved parallel with them along the mountainside (3.4).

Peltasts were also called upon to capture high ground in the face of enemy troops, which made for much more dangerous and strenuous work, particularly given the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 54.

footrace (or climbing race) that ensued. On one such occasion, the Greek vanguard led by Cheirisophos found that enemy forces had seized strategic heights overlooking the road a short distance ahead. At the same time, Tissaphernes was approaching from the rear, a fact that was noticed by Xenophon and the rearguard. Cheirisophos requested that Xenophon bring his peltasts to the front in order to drive the enemy off the heights, but Xenophon did not think it wise to leave the rear unprotected and rode forward without the peltasts to tell Cheirisophos of Tissaphernes' approach. The generals decided to make an attempt at seizing the mountain summit above the heights on which the enemy was positioned, and Xenophon himself led forth the peltasts from the vanguard, those in the middle of the square, and a picked force of 300 hoplites. These men raced to the summit and arrived there before the enemy troops, causing the latter to abandon the heights and scatter (3.4-5). It seems most likely that the picked hoplites were men chosen for their strength and agility, given the climb they faced, and that the hoplites were taken along to form a solid body of troops who would be nearly impossible for the native troops to dislodge.

It is noteworthy that the peltasts were viewed as so essential to the army's safety that taking them away from the rearguard would leave it unprotected. Certainly, on such terrain and against mobile and ranged enemy forces, peltasts and the like were much better suited to protecting a host on the march than were hoplites. The hoplite still remained the best heavy infantry in the known world, but perhaps their dominance against foreign adversaries was so great that few enemies could or would stand against

them (at this point in time).<sup>96</sup> Against those enemy forces that instead confronted them—cavalry and light infantry—other types of troops were not only more effective but actually vital to the survival of the army as a whole. On open terrain peltasts could outrun and outmaneuver hoplites, on rough terrain peltasts could do the same with even greater effect, and on any terrain sufficiently disciplined and supplied peltasts could strike from afar and move without resorting to their secondary weapons and shields. Set piece battles were the place for hoplites to show their value, but they were vulnerable on the march or against an enemy that had no intention of meeting them in a head-on clash at close range.

Another prime example of the tactical use of peltasts and other light troops is in covering the army as it crossed the river Centrites into Armenia in the face of enemy troops to the front and rear. As Cheirisophos and the vanguard crossed at one ford, Xenophon and the rearguard made a feint toward a different ford in order to deceive the enemy cavalry on the opposite bank. The ploy worked, and the peltasts and cavalry in the vanguard together pursued the enemy horsemen. Xenophon positioned his troops facing the Karduchi (who were advancing on the Greeks' rear), and Cheirisophos sent back across the river his peltasts, slingers, and archers for Xenophon to command as he saw fit. Xenophon placed these men in the river at the ready, while his hoplites made a charge to drive the Karduchi back. The natives were put to flight, and the hoplites quickly turned about and crossed the river under the cover of the peltasts and ranged troops' missiles (4.3).

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<sup>96</sup> The Chalybes were a notable exception, whom Xenophon describes as the most warlike of the tribes the Cyreans were to encounter. The Chalybes were willing to come to grips with the hoplites, as they wore linen body armor with thick, twisted cords beneath, as well as greaves and helmets. They were armed with long spears and daggers. Because of the Chalybes' martial skill and fortified settlements, the Greeks were unable to take anything from them while passing through their territory (4.7).

Xenophon also provides other examples of peltast contingents charging the enemy both independently and with hoplites acting in support. In one case, after the army had crossed through some mountains, the peltasts at the front of the army moved forward to storm the camp of Tiribazos without waiting for the hoplites to come up in support. The enemy did not stand against them after hearing their approach, and some were killed despite their early flight (4.4). On another occasion, a mixed force of peltasts and hoplites seized key heights overlooking a road and engaged the enemy troops positioned there. On the plain below, another force of peltasts advanced at the double against the native forces, ahead of the hoplites following at a quick pace. The enemy on the plain broke when they saw that their comrades on the heights were having the worse of the fighting (4.6). At a later time the peltasts, along with an unspecified number of spearmen,<sup>97</sup> ranged about half a mile ahead of the rest of the army and attacked a fortified position. Their initiative was not enough to overcome the place's defenses, and Xenophon and the hoplites had to come up in support (5.2). Hutchinson sees a potential laxity in command,<sup>98</sup> but allows for the possibility that initiative was allowed.<sup>99</sup> On such a protracted campaign in unfamiliar territory and against diverse, often-unknown enemies, initiative would have been essential, and it is difficult to imagine how the army could have survived without improvisation and individual daring on the part of both the hoplites and light troops.<sup>99</sup>

One of the peltasts' more interesting actions took place against the Mossynoeci. The generals advanced against the native troops with the Cyrean army arranged with companies in columns and archers between the gaps. The archers and peltasts drove off

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<sup>97</sup> These spearmen were either lightly armed hoplites or other light infantry who were equipped with spears. Hutchinson 2000, 81.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>99</sup> The peltasts charging forward from the flanks of the battle line without orders, and being driven back (6.5), would of course be an example of the negative side of initiative.

the opposing light-armed troops, and then the peltasts engaged the Mossynoeci infantry at close quarters until the latter fled at the approach of the hoplites. The peltasts and hoplites together pursued them to their city and then drove them from their positions (5.4).

Hutchinson correctly sees in this action "more sophisticated tactical thinking than the period in question has attested elsewhere," with the peltasts not fighting as skirmishers but as the "cutting edge of the attack."<sup>100</sup> This engagement thus illustrates a tactical advantage of the peltast over other forms of light infantry, namely his ability to close a distance rapidly and engage a mobile enemy at close quarters (rather than only at longer range as skirmishers). Hoplites may not have been able to come to grips with the Mossynoeci due to the greater weight of their shields and armor, while other types of light troops (namely slingers and archers) did not have suitable arms or defensive equipment to fight at close quarters, even against other light-armed. The peltast was indeed in his element fighting against many of the native forces encountered by the Ten Thousand, particularly with the heavy support of the hoplite arm close by.

The best example provided in the *Anabasis* to illustrate the effectiveness of peltasts against unsupported hoplite formations is when the Arkadian and Achaian contingent of the Cyrean army was blockaded by a force of Thracians. Only days after Cheirisophos was chosen as supreme commander of the army, the Arkadian and Achaian hoplites split from the rest and formed their own body, about 4,000 strong. As a result, Xenophon and Cheirisophos further divided the army in two, with Xenophon commanding 1,700 hoplites, 300 peltasts, and 40 cavalry, and Cheirisophos leading 1,400 hoplites and 700 peltasts, including the Thracians who had served under Klearchos (6.2).

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<sup>100</sup> Hutchinson 2000, 84-85.



The three divisions entered Thrace separately, and the Arkadians and Achaians soon found themselves in trouble after attacking a series of villages. The hoplites had divided into ten companies for the attacks and looting, and two were destroyed by Thracians before they could rendezvous with their comrades. Emboldened by their success, the Thracians gathered their forces from the area— all peltasts and cavalry— and massed around the hoplites' hilltop camp in large numbers. There they were able to advance, cast their projectiles, withdraw, and attack pursuing hoplites from a different direction at will, since the Arkadians and Achaians had no light troops or horsemen for protection. After being cut off from their water supply, the hoplites began to negotiate a truce, but their attempts came to nothing. Only the approach of Xenophon's army convinced the Thracians to withdraw (6.3).

I have already demonstrated that peltasts were highly effective against unsupported hoplites, but there is perhaps no better example than this incident. It is not difficult to see that, without Xenophon's intervention, the Arkadian and Achaian hoplites in all likelihood would have been wiped out or forced into an unconditional surrender. This was a case of hoplites operating outside their element— on terrain without sufficient confining features, without the mobile protection provided by peltasts or other light troops that were so often seemingly taken for granted on the battlefields of Greece, fighting an enemy that had no reason or need to meet them in close quarters combat. Within Greece itself the hoplite was most effective, sometimes even without support, due to the limited number of available battlefields, the relatively confined nature of these

plains, and the general lack up to this point of suitably disciplined and proficient light troops that were available to meet them in battle there.<sup>101</sup>

Overall the *Anabasis* confirms the image of the peltast as I have described him in previous sections. He was a hybrid (mid-) ranged soldier, armed with javelins and a sword, often recruited from locales (such as Thrace or central Greece) where the men were traditionally experienced and well-trained in a fluid and evasive form of skirmishing combat. This made the peltasts particularly suited for protecting flanks (as at Kounaxa and at later, smaller engagements on the march), advancing ahead of a main force to seize heights and key positions, pursuing enemies in flight, and even directly engaging forces that were unsupported by ranged troops or cavalry.

Anderson argues that peltasts were undeniably valuable for the Cyrean expedition and retreat after Kounaxa, but that their importance was somewhat less than that of the slingers and archers in the army. He points out that hoplites and peltasts (who had mid-range capabilities) could only endure the attacks of slingers, archers, and cavalry; in order to combat them effectively, the hoplites and peltasts had to have at least a small force of cavalry and some long-range troops on their own side.<sup>102</sup> This is certainly true for the situation in which the Cyreans found themselves; after all, the same factor that made the peltast such a threat to unsupported hoplites could in turn be used against them by troops with even greater range and equal mobility. The slingers and archers in the army were indeed more vital during the portion of the retreat when the Cyreans were facing the Persians in relatively open country, but the peltasts in turn seem to have become more

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<sup>101</sup> This was changing too, of course. Examples from the Peloponnesian War attest to this, and the actions of Iphikrates, detailed in the next section, reveal the hoplites' limitations even on the terrain of Greece.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson 1970, 115.

important when the army was marching through the difficult terrain inhabited by various hostile native populations.

In Xenophon's *Hellenika* we find peltasts serving the same functions with basically the same degree of effectiveness as earlier in the Peloponnesian War and during the expedition of the Cyreans. One notable performance is that of a force of Bithynian peltasts who fought against Greek hoplites shut up within a stockade. The peltasts approached within throwing range of the stockade and began hurling their javelins at the vulnerable hoplites from all possible directions (the stockade was only head-high). The desperate hoplites charged out at various places and times, but the peltasts were easily able to give ground and strike at them from a distance. Out of 200 hoplites, only about fifteen managed to escape the slaughter (Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.3-4). This again is clear evidence of the typical, javelin-equipped peltast tactic of attack, withdraw, and counterattack.

In the *Hellenika* Xenophon provides an example of the 'atypical' arrangement of battle for a combined arms force: when arranging his army in preparation for a battle against the Persians, Derkyllidas positioned his peltasts and cavalry on the flanks of his hoplite phalanx (3.2.16). Obviously, specific circumstances would dictate decisions about deployment of forces, but it seems clear that commanders viewed peltasts as most effective and valuable on the wings, where their javelins could both keep the enemy light troops occupied and harass the main enemy force from the sides. In contrast, however, is Agesilaos' use of peltasts in conjunction with the other arms in a skirmish near Sardis during the year 396/5. On this occasion, the Spartan brought his phalanx into position facing a Persian force which, notably, was entirely cavalry and ordered his hoplites in the 20-30 age group to charge at a run, with his peltasts charging ahead of them. In front

of the peltasts were cavalry, whose charge the Persians withstood. The enemy broke, however, when the infantry closed on them. Xenophon tells us that some of the enemy were killed on the spot while trying to cross the river, and the rest fled and abandoned their camp (3.4.23-24). Agesilaus likely selected this arrangement because he was facing unsupported cavalry, which is not well suited for holding ground against massed infantry, but he must have seen some use in having peltasts follow the cavalry. Their greater speed would have allowed them to follow the horsemen more closely, and their javelins likely had a disruptive effect on the orderly ranks of Persian cavalry (such as they were while receiving the Greek mounted attack). This may have made the Persians all the more ready to retreat in the face of the oncoming infantry. In any case, Agesilaus's tactics here are reminiscent of some of the Ten Thousand's deployments.

Javelin men had slightly more limited roles in most of the campaigns in Greece. As a Spartan-led army entered Korinthian territory, it suffered considerable casualties from arrows and javelins fired from the heights overlooking the route. However, this threat was overcome once the army reached lower, level ground by the sea (4.2.14-15). At the ensuing Battle of Nemea (394 BCE) Xenophon does not specifically mention any peltasts on either side, despite identifying forces of archers and slingers with the Spartan army. He does state that the majority of the light troops on the allied side were with the Korinthian contingent, including Ozolian Lokrians, Malians, and Akarnanians (4.2.17), and these likely would have been javelineers or peltasts. Light-armed troops were not a factor in the outcome of the battle in any case, nor were their actions even described in the account.

It is notable that at the Battle of Koroneia, one of the great hoplite battles of the period, Xenophon reports that the Spartans had a large superiority in peltasts (4.3.15). It is not certain whether or not this superiority had an effect on the battle, though Best contends that the peltasts (among the foreign troops under Herippidas) acted as *ōshock* troops at the opening of the battle.<sup>103</sup> These men, together with some hoplites, charged forward from Agesilaus' phalanx and induced the enemy to flee once they had come within striking distance. After the battle it was the Spartan army that suffered from javelins and stones when Gylis led the army to Phokis and then into Lokris. The Lokrian javelin men first harassed the army from behind; after the Spartans managed to drive off the Lokrians and inflict some losses, the javelineers took to the heights overlooking the march and continued their attacks. Among the numerous hoplite losses were about eighteen Spartan officers, including Gylis (4.3.21-23).

Agesilaus himself also suffered at the hands of enemy peltasts in Akarnania. After making camp on the slope of a mountain, a strong force of peltasts arrived and attacked from the ridges above. Agesilaus moved his army down the slope and into the plain below, at which time the peltasts withdrew. During Agesilaus' march out of Akarnania the peltasts struck again from the heights surrounding the low-lying road. The attackers ranged farther down the slopes and made their assault so fierce that the Spartans and their allies could not proceed. At first Agesilaus sent out hoplites together with cavalry to drive them off, but the peltasts easily escaped harm. When the Akarnanians came in close on his left side, Agesilaus had his young hoplites charge with the cavalry as he followed with the rest of the army. The closest of the enemy were routed and killed, but the

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<sup>103</sup> Best 1969, 84-85.

Akarnanian hoplites and most of their peltasts were formed up in battle order near the summit of the mountain. This force withstood the cavalry charge but broke and ran before the Spartan hoplites could come to grips with them (4.6.7-11).

This incident, though rather inconsequential, is particularly interesting because it illustrates the fundamental realities of land warfare on the sort of rough terrain that is prevalent in Greece. The Akarnanian peltasts were unstoppable when they occupied high ground with slopes too steep or rugged for hoplite or mounted counterattacks. Under the hailstorm of javelins and stones Agesilaus' men were quite powerless to proceed or even fend off their attackers, so it could seem like this sort of territorial defense would have been perfectly suited to the terrain of Greece. However, the hoplites seemed to be out of immediate danger when they encamped on the plain below the mountain, and the bold peltasts who approached Agesilaus' army too closely were still struck down as they fled across less steep and rugged ground.

If this is a reasonably typical example of light-armed fighting methods being used to defend territory against heavy infantry and cavalry, then we must conclude that a defensive strategy based on ranged attacks and harassment from high ground was unable to defeat combined-arms tactics decisively or reliably, at least not on its own. Perhaps with sufficient numbers and better discipline the Akarnanians might have whittled Agesilaus' army down to nothing, but as long as peltasts faced hoplites and cavalry on ground that was sufficiently accessible for the latter two types to close the distance, the peltast was still potentially vulnerable on his own. The fact that the *poleis* did not defend themselves solely by means of peltasts, javelineers, and other light infantry in passes and mountainous routes is evidence for this. Krentz also points out two other factors: first,

most Greek passes could be turned or bypassed along other routes. Second, most of the major *poleis* were on the sea, which meant that hoplite forces could be landed via transports.<sup>104</sup> Relying on a defense of light troops holding passes and high ground was too risky.

By the 370s the tactical potential of the peltast seems to have been fully realized, though this potential was more often achieved by professional commanders who were experienced and specialized peltast leaders. Aside from Iphikrates' actions, during this period we see peltasts and javelineers ambushing enemy forces (under Chabrias; *Hell.* 5.10-12), charging in close support of cavalry (5.3.6), guarding and clearing passes (5.4.14), and hemming in heavy infantry on the march (5.4.43). Peltasts are present both at Leuktra and at Mantinea (362 B.C.E.), though, just as at the Nemea, they do not seem to have been a decisive factor. In pitched battles on relatively level ground the hoplite was still the decisive arm, as evidenced by Xenophon's accounts. We should be careful, therefore, not to overstate the increased importance of the javelineer and peltast, at least in terms of their uses in pitched battles.

The decades following the Peloponnesian War saw the continued development and frequent use of peltasts on long campaigns and in specialized roles suited to their qualities, but if Greek commanders were learning anything during the period, it was the effectiveness of combined arms forces on varied terrain. Hutchinson argues that an army of hoplites with cavalry was better than one of hoplites with peltasts, as the former combination was more mobile and the latter could still be vulnerable. The best option, of

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<sup>104</sup> Peter Krentz, "War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare, Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 160.

course, was a balanced force including peltasts, cavalry, slingers, and archers.<sup>105</sup> I agree with these conclusions, though it is important to recognize that a hoplite army supported only by cavalry could also be vulnerable on particularly rugged terrain, where light infantry can be more surefooted than horses. As I mentioned above, the first several decades of the fourth century saw the full realization of the peltast's potential, particularly when the peltasts were in the hands of professional, specialized commanders. The most famous of these generals, Iphikrates, is the subject of the following section, not only because he was the most skillful and accomplished of the leaders, but also because he is often credited with the introduction of a reformed version of the peltast.

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<sup>105</sup> Hutchinson 2000, 93.



## V. THE CAREER AND ALLEGED REFORMS OF IPHIKRATES

From a modern perspective, Greek warfare in the early fourth century B.C.E. is as unclear and convoluted as the era's politics, if not more so. One could also point out that this relative degree of confusion was widespread among early historians and chroniclers as well, and even among contemporaries. Xenophon's closing words in the *Hellenika* are evidence enough for this. Nevertheless, one characteristic of the period that is certain (within the realm of military history) is the prominence in the historical tradition of key individuals, each tied to great accomplishments and victories, the advancement of certain trends, and the conception of brilliant innovations. One such individual, and one who fits within the scope of this larger survey of javelin-armed troops, is the Athenian general Iphikrates.

Both ancient authors and modern scholars have widely regarded Iphikrates as a skilled commander and brilliant innovator who, with his alleged reforms of the peltast's equipment and arms, made an indelible mark on the Greek way of war and foreshadowed or even inspired the Macedonian phalanx of Philip and Alexander. I believe the era's widespread confusion, mentioned above, combined with imprecise use of terminology among ancient writers, contributed to the rise of this theory of peltast reform. Before evaluating the validity of this assumption, this section will briefly explore the earlier portions of Iphikrates's military career in order to establish background. In

regards to his alleged reforms, I will argue that the innovations in equipment and armament were applied not to peltasts but to hoplites, and that these changes were a temporary tactical measure for a specific situation, rather than a permanent step in the evolution of the Greek way of war. By the end of the period (circa 362), the peltast remained as he had always been: a mid-ranged, javelin-armed light infantryman.

We come upon Iphikrates leading peltasts in 392, as he was in command of such a mercenary force operating in and around Korinth. The Athenians held the Isthmus with this mercenary force, which was raised in the Hellespontine region (near Thrace) by Konon and Pharnabazos during the winter of 394/3, and Iphikrates was likely put in command of the mercenaries in summer 393.<sup>106</sup> Best surmises that while there were probably Thracians among this force, the majority were likely recruited in the Greek cities of the region. The whole force may have amounted to several thousand men, although Parke places the number at about 1,500.<sup>107</sup> Iphikrates was a young man at this time but may have been seen as particularly qualified to command peltasts because of his alleged familial connections to Thrace.<sup>108</sup> He also may have served under Konon at the battle of Knidos, and so could have received the appointment from the man who raised the force.<sup>109</sup>

Iphikrates first proved his value in raids on the Phliasians and Arkadians, the latter of which became so terrified of the peltasts (after enormous numbers of the Phliasians were cut down) that they would not come out in arms against Iphikrates' men. Here Xenophon makes it clear that Iphikrates' men were indeed javelin-throwing peltasts.

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<sup>106</sup> Parke 1970, 50-51; Best 1969, 85.

<sup>107</sup> Best 1969, 86; Parke 1970, 52.

<sup>108</sup> J.K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families, 600-300 B.C.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 249; Parke 1970, 52; Best 1969, 86.

<sup>109</sup> Parke 1970, 52.

The Spartans, for their part, scorned not the peltasts who were terrified of the Spartans but rather their own allies who feared the peltasts so greatly. This dismissive attitude on the Spartans' part and fear on the peltasts' arose because some younger Spartans had caught up with and killed some peltasts on one occasion (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.15-7). This at least shows that the common peltast tactics were not always successful: particularly energetic hoplites (in this case young), despite being weighed down by their cumbersome shields, could overtake peltasts who were either exhausted, overconfident in their own speed, or simply unlucky.

The most significant action of Iphikrates' career took place during the Korinthian War, at Lechaion in 390. The Spartan garrison commander at Lechaion took both his regiment of hoplites and that of cavalry out of the city in order to escort some of his men (Spartans from Amyklai) back to their homes for a religious festival. The route of their march would take them past Korinth, where Iphikrates' peltasts as well as Kallias' Athenian hoplites were stationed, but the Spartans were confident that the enemy would not come out to engage them. The polemarch turned back with his hoplites near Sikyon and sent the cavalry onward to continue escorting the men of Amyklai. He reckoned incorrectly regarding the enemy forces in Korinth: Kallias drew up his phalanx close to the city, while Iphikrates led his peltasts against the Spartans.

The peltasts began to cast their javelins, and after some Spartans fell, the polemarch ordered his younger hoplites to charge the peltasts. The charging hoplites became disorganized in their futile pursuit, and they were hit again by javelins from behind and from the unshielded side. The polemarch ordered a second charge with more of the younger hoplites, but with the same result. After this the cavalry returned, but they

helped the third pursuit and retreat only to the extent of keeping pace with the hoplites (they did not press ahead of the infantry ranks). The peltasts increased their pressure with each successful attack, and eventually the desperate Spartans formed up in a body on a small hill, which did nothing for their plight. Kalliasømen began to advance against them, and the Spartans broke and fled completely. 250 of the 600 were killed, and the only men to escape õnscathedö were the attendants who early in the fighting were ordered to bear the Spartan dead and wounded back to Lechaion (4.5.11-7).<sup>110</sup>

It is clear that Iphikrates used the same tactics at Lechaion as the Aitolians had against Demosthenes, and Demosthenes against the Spartans.<sup>111</sup> The victory did not result from any revolution in tactics or in the arrangement of troops, but instead resulted from the action of the regular javelin-throwing peltast; the only novelty was in peltastsø apparently high rate of success during the course of the fighting.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to see how Hamilton identifies as õnew tacticsö the familiar method of casting javelins and withdrawing before the advance of the slower hoplites.<sup>113</sup> At any rate, very important factors in the effectiveness of Iphikratesøpeltasts were the high degree of training and discipline they had received from their commander and the level of esprit-de-corps that resulted from the unusually long duration of their consistent service together.<sup>114</sup> This uninterrupted training and continual service, even throughout winter quarters, was made

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<sup>110</sup> Hunt states that most of the Spartan survivors were those who were wounded and carried away early in the battle, rather than those who fled by running or swimming. Xenophonø wording is clear, however, in that the attendants were the only men who survived with their honor and well-being intact. See Hunt 1998, 155.

<sup>111</sup> Best 1969, 88.

<sup>112</sup> Parke 1970, 54.

<sup>113</sup> Charles D. Hamilton, *Sparta's Bitter Victories: Politics and Diplomacy in the Corinthian War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 282.

<sup>114</sup> Parke 1970, 54; Williams 2004, 265.

possible by Persian gold.<sup>115</sup> As mentioned in an earlier section, the level of training required in order to create a reliable and effective peltast force was already considerably higher than that required for hoplites due to the nature of peltast tactics. Iphikrates' peltasts were trained well enough to operate in precise formation even though they fought in open order.<sup>116</sup> The added advantage of serving as a cohesive unit for such a relatively long period of time would increase the effectiveness of any fighting unit.

Much is also made regarding the importance of the Athenian hoplite phalanx at Lechaion. Williams argues that these hoplites followed the peltasts and actually concluded the battle, and that Iphikrates' peltasts fought in conjunction with a phalanx and not on raids.<sup>117</sup> Anderson also claims that it was the Athenian hoplite phalanx that prevented the Spartan cavalry from pressing the attack on Iphikrates' men. This combination of arms worked in the peltasts' favor, since they needed the support of reliable hoplites in order to be effective, and the tactics used by Iphikrates would not have been successful if the Spartans had been strong enough to engage the Athenian phalanx.<sup>118</sup> Sage sees the victory at Lechaion as clear evidence of what combined light- and heavy-armed troops could do in lesser engagements.<sup>119</sup> Along the same lines, Wheeler states that light infantry, including Iphikrates' peltasts, worked best in conjunction with hoplites; Iphikrates' men were effective at Lechaion only because the Athenian hoplites provided a tactical base for hit-and-run tactics.<sup>120</sup> Finally, while

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<sup>115</sup> Pritchett 1974, 123; Williams 2004, 269.

<sup>116</sup> Yalichev 1997, 152.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-70. I do not see how this second part is a tenable position, since Xenophon has already told us that Iphikrates raided the territories of Phleious and Arkadia.

<sup>118</sup> Anderson 1970, 125-26. Hutchinson makes a similar argument, stating that the Athenian hoplites acted as a deterrence of Spartan pursuit. Hutchinson 2000, 158.

<sup>119</sup> Sage 1996, 144.

<sup>120</sup> Wheeler 2007, 220.

Parke sees the hoplites' role as one of passive support (perhaps similar to Anderson), Best disagrees and emphasizes the fact that the Spartans only broke when the Athenian phalanx began to approach.<sup>121</sup>

However, it is important to keep in mind Xenophon's statements prior to the battle: Kallias and Iphikrates noticed that the Spartan force was not only relatively small but also unprotected by peltasts or cavalry, and so they decided that it would be safe to attack them with their own peltasts (4.5.13). The two commanders saw that the peltasts would be able to attack the exposed sides of the Spartan hoplites with their javelins as the Spartans marched on the road, and the peltasts would easily be able to evade the hoplites (4.5.13). Of course Xenophon was not present during their deliberations, but it is still noteworthy that he does not mention any explicit purpose for the hoplite phalanx; he simply writes that Kallias formed up his phalanx in close proximity to the city walls while Iphikrates and the peltasts ranged farther out to launch their attacks (4.5.14).<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the Athenian hoplites' role as heavy support was assumed, since they were arranged in battle formation, but Xenophon does not indicate that their presence prevented the Spartans from taking any other form of action than the one they did. As Lendon points out, the Athenian hoplites were seen to be approaching only once the Spartans had retreated to the hill.<sup>123</sup>

At first it may be reasonable to accept the argument that Kallias' hoplites passively prevented the Spartan cavalry from pressing a pursuit, but Xenophon makes it

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<sup>121</sup> Parke 1970, 53; Best 1969, 89.

<sup>122</sup> Underhill states that the Athenian hoplites were quite far off when Iphikrates first attacked the Spartans. G. E. Underhill, *A Commentary on the Hellenica of Xenophon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 147.

<sup>123</sup> Lendon 2005, 94.

clear that the Spartan cavalry was mismanaged (4.5.16).<sup>124</sup> I find it difficult to accept both arguments at once—either the cavalry was mismanaged (as Xenophon states), as it should have pursued the peltasts more vigorously, *or* the Athenian hoplites prevented such pursuit, which would have excused the management of the horsemen. I am inclined to trust Xenophon's assertion, so I argue that the Athenian hoplites were present at a distance only as a precautionary measure, and Iphikrates's men were able to deal with the Spartans independently. Kallias's men do not seem to have been a necessary part of finishing the enemy, as the peltasts were clearly in control of the situation, and the Spartans were helpless and exhausted. Lechaion is therefore an example of the success capably led and disciplined peltasts could achieve against hoplites— even on relatively open ground— when those hoplites were not supported by their own light-armed or mounted forces, since the cavalry that was present did not fight effectively. All of this does not preclude the battle from providing an example of combined-arms tactics, but without more detailed evidence regarding the role of the hoplites, there is no certainty that Iphikrates's and Kallias's men acted in conjunction once the fighting started.

In any event, Iphikrates won considerable fame for his victory, and he followed it up with more successful operations against Spartan strongholds (4.5.19).<sup>125</sup> Two years later (in 388), after Iphikrates was back in Athens, he was sent with 1,200 peltasts to the Chersonese; Xenophon tells us that most of these men were from the force he had commanded at Korinth (4.8.34), which helps to explain their ensuing success. In

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<sup>124</sup> Hutchinson argues simultaneously that the Spartan cavalry was mismanaged and that Iphikrates used Kallias's hoplites as a deterrence of pursuit. Hutchinson 2000, 93, 106, 158, 236.

<sup>125</sup> Parke states that this victory gave the peltast a new reputation for deadliness, and as a result they became present in all armies for the next half-century and superseded all other types of light troops. See Parke 1970, 54. Best points out, more convincingly, that the development of the peltast as the most important of light troops had set in long before Iphikrates's victory at Lechaion. See Best 1969, 89.

Abydene territory, near Kremaste, Iphikrates set an ambush with his force and waited for the enemy army to leave level ground and begin its descent on a long slope. When Anaxibios and his Spartans (who were positioned at the rear of the force) were just beginning their descent, Iphikrates' men charged them and killed the Spartans either where they stood or while they were fleeing; the rest of the army suffered considerably in its flight to Abydos (4.8.35-9).

Although Xenophon does not mention Iphikrates between the years 387 and 373, we learn from Diodorus Siculus (15.29.4) that he was sent by Athens as *strategos* to act in alliance with the Persians in 377/6. Diodorus informs us that Iphikrates commanded 20,000 mercenaries as part of a coordinated effort with Pharnabazos to bring Egypt back into the fold of the Persian Empire (15.41.1). The size of this mercenary force is unreliable and probably exaggerated, and Diodorus does not provide any clue as to whether peltasts were a contingent within the army. As evidenced by the earlier expedition of Cyrus, the Persians were most often in need of reliable heavy infantry, and so they typically sought mercenary hoplites from the Greeks rather than forms of missile-armed light infantry.<sup>126</sup> With this in mind, it seems likely that Iphikrates' force, whatever size it was in truth, was predominantly an army of hoplites, though (like the Cyrean army and typical Greek armies of the day) it may have had an attached contingent of Greek or Thracian peltasts for support.

As to the reforms attributed to Iphikrates at this time, our original sources are Diodorus Siculus and Cornelius Nepos (following their source, Ephorus). The former describes the innovations thus: Iphikrates replaced his men's large, heavy shields with

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<sup>126</sup> Trundle 2004, 40; Anderson 1970, 130.



smaller oval ones, and in this way hoplites became peltasts; their spears he made half again as long, and he doubled the length of their swords; lastly, he equipped his men with õiphikratids,ö or light boots (15.44.1-4). Nepos relates quite similar claims: Iphikrates changed the large shields, short spears, small swords, and bronze cuirasses, adopting *peltai* (making the infantry into peltasts), spears twice as long, longer swords, and linen armor (*Iph.* 1.3-4). Xenophon, the most reliable source for the period, does not attach any sort of innovations to Iphikrates, and the rest of the *Hellenika* contains no references to peltasts equipped as spearmen or pikemen.

Many modern scholarsö the majority, it seemsö accept the notion of Iphikratesø reforms to the peltast. Pritchett simply recognizes the improvements to the peltastø equipment without question or comment.<sup>127</sup> In a similarly vague manner, Yalichev states that Iphikratesø innovations may have had a major effect on the fighting style of light-armed troops, but then points out how there is no contemporary evidence for the extent to which the reforms were adopted or used.<sup>128</sup> Sage acknowledges the problems associated with the alleged reforms, but he accepts that the men thus equipped were indeed peltasts; since Iphikrates needed soldiers who could close with the enemy (this is assuming, I suppose, that his entire force was of peltasts), he took Greek and Greek-trained men who had some experience in fighting hand-to-hand and armed them in the manner stated by the sources and thus created the equivalent of a light-armed hoplite.<sup>129</sup> This idea seems to be shared by van Wees, who states that Iphikrates õappears to have created a hybrid soldierö equipped with a light shield, light armor, light peltast boots, a long sword, and a longer spear (10-15 feet in length), and that this type of soldier created a different style of

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<sup>127</sup> Pritchett 1974, 125.

<sup>128</sup> Yalichev 1997, 161.

<sup>129</sup> Sage 1996, 147.

static warfare. Although the notion did not gain support in Athens, Philip of Macedon followed the example in his creation of the Macedonian phalanx.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Hutchinson asserts that Iphikrates created hybrid phalangites by getting rid of greaves and equipping his men with laced leather boots, quilted linen armor, small leather-covered shields, and a longer (3.5-meter) spear to cancel out the disadvantage of having lighter armor.<sup>131</sup> However, some of these changes (abandonment of greaves and increasing use of quilted linen armor) had already taken place before Iphikrates's time.

Hamilton sees the reformed equipment as taking the form of heavier javelins, which caused more damage on impact, and modified boots. In his opinion, Iphikrates's tactical innovations "almost revolutionized warfare."<sup>132</sup> I do not see evidence to support this notion of heavier javelins, as it is clear from the sources that the reforms supposedly focused on increasing the length of the spears. Doing so naturally would have made the javelins heavier, but there is no indication that greater weight and destructive force were the goals. Nor is it clear in what way the innovations "almost" revolutionized Greek warfare. Snodgrass is cautious about trusting Diodorus and Nepos but does state that the adoption of Iphikrates's reforms may have led to a temporary eclipsing of the original form of peltast—particularly of the Thracians.<sup>133</sup> There is no evidence of this, however. If actual Thracians were employed in decreasing numbers by Greek cities, which is difficult to determine in the first place, it was more likely because typical peltast armament was spreading more and more to parts of Greece itself. At any rate, I do not see any indication that Thracian peltasts lost any of their reputation as the finest peltasts available.

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<sup>130</sup> van Wees 2004, 197.

<sup>131</sup> Hutchinson 2000, 235-36.

<sup>132</sup> Hamilton 1979, 281-82, 279.

<sup>133</sup> Snodgrass 1967, 110.

Lendon believes that Iphikrates' reforms involved a change in peltast fighting method; in addition to the round *pelte* and longer swords, some of the peltasts were given thrusting spears.<sup>134</sup> He offers an interesting perspective in support of these reforms, arguing that Iphikrates' changes drew inspiration and received legitimacy from epic tradition. In addition to serving a practical purpose, longer swords and spears as well as round shields were the common weapons of Homeric heroes. Along with the peltast's typical style of fighting (charging forward, attacking as individuals, withdrawing and regrouping, clustering for common protection), such new armament would have formed a strong link to the epics.<sup>135</sup> Peltasts thus fit more into Greek military culture than archers and slingers overall, and they even possessed a sort of heroic code.<sup>136</sup> While this perspective is interesting and worthy of consideration as a way of explaining the spread of peltast service within Greece, it is not a strong argument in favor of Iphikrates' reforms. I see no indication that Greek commanders actively sought epic legitimacy through the armament of their men. It would also seem odd that if the Greeks were so inclined to value Homeric images in contemporary warfare, such changes in equipment were made to peltasts rather than to hoplites, who were the focus of Greek imagination and central to their perception of Hellenic warfare.

Anderson and Parke offer more detailed support of the reforms. Anderson accepts that Iphikrates' innovations came late in his career, and (like others above) acknowledges that there are no contemporary accounts of their use or clear examples of peltasts using them. Since the new equipment was more suited to infantry drawn up close, Diodorus is correct in attaching the reforms to Iphikrates' Persian service in Egypt. The Egyptians

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<sup>134</sup> Lendon 2005, 413.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

were known for using long spears (Xen. *Anab.* 1.8.9; *Cyr.* 6.2.10, 7.1.33), so Anderson argues that Iphikrates must have made his peltasts into pikemen in order to deal with them while also retaining the *peltai* as their shields.<sup>137</sup>

Parke sees the Iphikratean peltast as not a skirmisher or a supplement to the old version but as a complete improvement and replacement. He also proposes that the peltasts' success at Lechaion may have led Iphikrates to find a more regular employment for them (ignoring the very basis of their success— that is, their ranged, hit-and-run fighting method). Parke also favors the idea of gradual change, and says that the reforms could even have been brought about by both Iphikrates and Chabrias.<sup>138</sup> This new type of peltast, with a standardized shield, was capable of wielding a pike within a massed formation.<sup>139</sup> Somehow, in Parke's view, the peltast simultaneously "freed warfare" from the hoplite's dominance, gave skirmishing a new degree of importance, and became (after Iphikrates' reforms) an improvement of and replacement for the hoplite's close-combat role.<sup>140</sup> I am in cautious agreement with the first claim, since it is difficult to determine the actual extent to which the hoplite truly dominated warfare. The second claim is in my view too general, for the peltast and other light-armed troops did find increasing use during the period beginning with the Peloponnesian War; the central point of significance regarding their developing role, however, is that they began to operate as much more than simple skirmishers. Lastly, Parke's third point has no concrete evidence beyond Diodorus and Nepos.

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<sup>137</sup> Anderson 1970, 129-31.

<sup>138</sup> Parke 1974, 79-81.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 236, 79.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

J. G. P. Best is the primary opponent of the notion of peltast reforms, and he points out that if ancient authors described fourth-century peltasts as the same as before, then this is reason enough to reject the notion that a new type emerged and superseded them.<sup>141</sup> The alleged reforms were not a matter of equipment standardization, troop denationalization, or the creation of completely new type of peltast. In fact, there is no justification for assuming any kind of reforms on Iphikrates's part: his new peltast was really a variant of an already existing type of Thracian peltast (a thrusting-spear-wielding variety). Best then attributes the confusion of innovations to the author on whom Diodorus and Nepos depended.<sup>142</sup>

Griffith and Stylianou offer more reasonable theories that do not reject the reforms out of hand, but instead accept them with some major (but logical) adjustments. For his part, Griffith asserts that Iphikrates likely brought the *ōiphikratidsō* from Thrace, probably dating back to the 390s. The Athenian was leading mostly hoplites during the campaign in 374, and since he was confronting Egyptian infantry, he converted not peltasts but hoplites into pikemen. There is no sign of the longer spear in use by the Greeks afterward, although the innovation may have had some influence on Philip of Macedon (not necessarily a decisive influence, however).<sup>143</sup>

Stylianou's opinion is in my opinion the most compelling, and it goes as follows. It is most likely that Diodorus and Nepos misunderstood their own source, Ephorus, especially if Iphikrates did indeed equip some of his hoplites in a new manner to suit the

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<sup>141</sup> Best 1969, 110-11.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-5.

<sup>143</sup> G. T. Griffith, *ōPeltasts, and the Origins of the Macedonian Phalanx,ō* in *Ancient Macedonian Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson*, ed. Harry J. Dell (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981), 164-65. Griffith's opinions differ in this work from those expressed in an earlier book, in which he argues in favor of the reforms. Griffith, *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1975), 5, 17, 239.

conditions of the Egyptian campaign. The new equipment was meant to combine the best of light- and heavy-armed features: the long spear and sword for hand-to-hand combat, and the *pelte* and light armor for mobility. There is no evidence for peltasts of this sort in use during the fourth century, and there is every indication that battles in Classical and Hellenistic Greece involved traditional hoplites and peltasts that were (as far as we can tell) of the old javelin-throwing type. However, the specific context for Diodorus' claims indicates that there must be some substance to them, and Ephorus would not have invented the idea of equipment reforms. Since Iphikrates' army in Egypt would have been predominantly hoplite, it is quite possible that he equipped at least some of these men in order to outreach and also outmaneuver the heavy and unwieldy Egyptians. After all, Diodorus and Nepos tell us not that the javelin was replaced by the long spear, but that the spear was lengthened; hoplites were better suited for close combat already and would have been more adept at managing the pike. As for the lighter linen armor, it was far better than metal or leather for the hot and humid climate of Egypt, so this makes sense as well. Iphikrates' reforms were probably temporary and specific to the conditions of the campaign; the boots and his professionalism were his truly lasting innovations.<sup>144</sup>

I am in agreement with Stylianos on all major points. The discussions in Chapter Three regarding the use of peltasts and javelineers in the Peloponnesian War, and in Chapter Four regarding the wars of the early fourth century, are meant to show how a specific and proven method of fighting had been developed to fit the qualities of the peltast. A commander who was probably the most adept leader of peltasts in history would understand their value and uses more than anyone, and it does not make practical

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<sup>144</sup> Stylianos 1998, 343-45.

sense for him to introduce reforms to their equipment that would make them into phalangites. One key is the understanding that Iphikrates led mostly hoplites in Egypt, not solely peltasts as before at Korinth and elsewhere. Another key is the more obvious reading of Diodorus and Nepos: javelins<sup>6</sup> which were certainly the weapon of the peltast<sup>6</sup> did not give way to long spears, but rather shorter spears (i.e. hoplite ones) were replaced with longer ones. In a sense, hoplites did *become* peltasts, but only temporarily, in a very specific area and time, and only in the literal meaning of becoming men who carried *peltai*. Iphikrates was very aware of the advantages of mobility and range, and it makes sense that he would be willing to experiment with his heavy troops in order to incorporate these strengths of the peltast into his hoplite corps. Iphikrates was an innovator not of peltast equipment but of hoplite armament, and only in a short-term sense.

In summary, Iphikrates appears to have been a very capable leader of peltasts, worthy of a prominent position among the many skilled commanders of the early fourth century. His accomplishments in the Korinthian War, primarily at Lechaion, highlight the best qualities of peltasts as well as the place they had earned for themselves in Greek warfare, which extended beyond simple skirmishing. Like the great Theban general Epameinondas, however, Iphikrates was not truly a tactical innovator<sup>6</sup> at least in regards to his use of peltasts<sup>6</sup> and we therefore should not attribute all fourth-century developments in light-armed warfare to him alone. While Epameinondas skillfully synthesized and implemented numerous developing tactics (and political strategy) that represented, for his time, the most advanced application of hoplite warfare possible,

Iphikrates likewise used peltast tactics and fighting methods that were already conceived and put to use prior to his time, but did so with remarkable proficiency.



## VI. CONCLUSION

In any focused study of a particular historical group there is some risk of overemphasizing or glorifying the subject. This paper has likely followed this tendency to a certain degree in several places throughout, but I have made every attempt to emphasize that peltasts and javelineers by no means replaced hoplites as the central figures in Greek warfare. Despite the fact that Greek topography is well suited for the tactics and fighting methods of light-armed troops, the tactical strengths of the hoplite phalanx on the economically vital plains within the *poleis* as well as strong social and cultural factors guaranteed continued prominence for the heavy infantryman right down to the period of the Macedonian conquest and the development of that military system. However, the extent to which the hoplite dominated the battlefields of his day should not be overstated.

Epic tradition established a certain level of legitimacy for the javelin-armed soldier; indeed, the battle descriptions found in Homer's *Iliad* illustrate a fluid, primarily ranged way of warfare that closely resembles the fighting methods of later javelineers and peltasts. The warriors in the Homeric battles are variously armed and equipped, but generally tended to be armored spearmen who most often fought from afar by casting their weapons at the enemy. One can rather easily imagine how such a system, based on bands of troops lending support to *promakhoi*, evolved into the earliest form of hoplite warfare, in which heavier-armed spearmen armored as hoplites but fighting both from a

distance and hand to hand<sup>6</sup> were mixed with light-armed troops such as javelineers in a style of combat reminiscent of the battles of the Trojan War. As the *poleis* and the hoplite class grew, their way of war changed to emphasize the heroic virtue of close combat; the combat described by the seventh-century poet Tyrtaios clearly reveals a distinction between light, ranged fighters and the close-fighting hoplites, though they continued to be intermixed.

The wars of very limited scope and duration throughout the archaic period hindered the development of javelineers' specialized role and tactics. During the Persian Wars we first see the light-armed troops arrayed separately from the hoplite phalanx, which made tactical and organizational sense. However, the javelin men (and other light-armed troops) were a somewhat marginalized arm, useful for pursuit, skirmishing, and preventing their counterparts from peppering the phalanx with missiles. Given how potentially crucial these responsibilities were, it is difficult to determine if this marginalization was stronger in the primary sources than in actual practice, but without a doubt the javelineer was viewed as a completely secondary fighter with little independent effectiveness. The shifting of auxiliary troops to the flanks of the hoplite phalanx likely reinforced this perception of inferiority<sup>7</sup> even though it was a tactical improvement<sup>8</sup> since men of the hoplite class could view it as removing the light troops from the real hazards of the battle. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which these perceptions influenced actual practice among Greek military leaders, the hoplite bias in the literary sources<sup>9</sup> some of whom were themselves hoplites and generals<sup>10</sup> certainly suggests that tactics were prejudiced toward the hoplites' role.

Some of these perceptions began to change during the Peloponnesian War, as the unprecedented scale and geographical scope of the conflict created new demands for specialized forces as well as professional troops and commanders. Indeed, the increasing use of mercenaries went hand in hand with the rising prominence of javelin troops overall and of the peltast in particular. In a sense the rise in total mercenary service, including hoplites, also devalued the idealized perception of the hoplite's honor and heroic virtue, a change that may have removed some of the prejudice against peltasts as non-citizen hirelings (though not the stigma that many faced as non-Greeks).

As the war progressed and expanded to the periphery of Greece, peltasts and javelineers found themselves fighting under circumstances and conditions that were more favorable to their fighting methods. In the notable battles at Spartolos, Olpai, Sphacteria, Amphipolis, and Aitolia, light-armed soldiers were undeniably decisive and proved their effectiveness with hit-and-run tactics (evading counterattacks), advantageous use of rugged terrain against slower opposition, and even as fighters within the main battle line (mixed with hoplites). The general Demosthenes emerged as an innovative leader of light-armed troops, and he seems to be the earliest Greek commander to seek proactively the various ways in which seasoned javelineers and peltasts could be put to use. By the end of the war, peltasts and javelineers seemed to be viewed as essential components of any Greek military operation, both within and outside of Greece proper.

This development is made clear by the prominence of the peltasts during the Expedition of Cyrus and throughout the wars of the early fourth century. The Cyrean peltasts fought commendably at Kounaxa, and they became an indispensable arm of the remaining mercenary force that embarked on the long march home following Cyrus's

death. The march of the Ten Thousand was certainly an extraordinary campaign that did not necessarily reflect the normal methods of waging war; at the same time, however, it was a perfect opportunity for both the application of combined arms tactics and the continuation of their development that began during the Peloponnesian War. Within the new system of Greek warfare, peltasts and javelineers were not merely helpful (to fend off opposing missile troops during a pitched infantry battle, for example) but were truly vital for the protection of the slower hoplites against more mobile, ranged enemies, no matter the terrain. The peltasts proved this numerous times during the Cyrean expedition, and the disastrous experience of the Arkadian/Achaian hoplites against the Thracians without peltast support is further evidence.

The numerous conflicts of the early fourth century did not necessarily witness the development of more advanced tactics for the peltast and javelineer as much as it brought the continued application of those tactics developed during the Peloponnesian War and the Expedition of Cyrus. Most of the great hoplite battles of the period seemed to have relatively little involvement on the part of javelin men, but peltasts and javelineers did continue to carry out their specialized roles with great effectiveness. The most notable example is at Lechaion, where Iphikrates—the greatest of all peltast commanders—scored a decisive victory over a force of Spartan hoplites. Many scholars ancient and modern credit Iphikrates with initiating a revolution in the arming of peltasts, turning his javelin troops into pikemen of sorts. I have argued that this alleged reform did not take place at all—at least among the peltasts. It is more plausible that Iphikrates armed his hoplites with *peltai* and longer spears in order to confront Egyptian infantrymen more

effectively. His reforms seemed to be temporary and limited to the campaign in which he was engaged.

It is interesting to note, however, that the peltast and javelineer did not become more effective and useful as a result of any improvements to their arms and equipment, as is so often the case when military tactics evolve. Javelins (and for the peltast, a short sword, cap, and *pelte*) remained the tools of the trade for these troops, and it does not appear that there were any significant changes to this equipment during the period. Instead, the development of effective tactics and specialized roles for the javelineer and peltast followed the general refinement of combined arms tactics used by professional generals. The changing context of Greek warfare, involving relatively large alliances and leagues of states waging wars on diverse terrain with and against heterogeneous forces, also contributed to the increasing reliance upon specialized light infantry.

The peltast and javelineer gained a more prominent position within Greek warfare through both the effective execution of new tactics and the improvement of their traditional roles. In Thucydides and Xenophon we see the full range of actions associated with these old and new roles: skirmishing, flanking and protecting of flanks, ambushing hoplites and mixed forces, guarding passes, seizing and defending high ground, raiding, storming positions, charging among or at the head of hoplites, pursuing an enemy in flight, and more. When serving under capable, specialized commanders such as Iphikrates, peltasts in particular became the period's light troops *par excellence* and established themselves as an exceptionally formidable and versatile infantry arm.

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