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NOTES ON REPRESENTATIONS OF HOPLITES WITH DOUBLE SPEARS IN ARCHAIC GREEK ART AND THE USAGE OF JAVELINS AND SPEARS BY THE ARCHAIC PHALANX

Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to answer questions concerning the usage of spears and javelins by the warriors of Archaic Greece. More precisely, the possibility of the hoplites using javelins as an offensive weapon when fighting in the phalanx formation will be examined through the analysis of contemporary iconographical sources. The article will also present how depictions of hoplites with double spears could be interpreted and used within the theory of Archaic Greek warfare and examine the reliability of such images.*

Keywords: *Ancient Greek warfare; spear; phalanx; Archaic art*

This short paper presents a problem which may seem to be pretty straightforward to the reader. However, the reality is somewhat different, as is usually the case when studying Archaic Greek warfare. The issue of the usage of certain types of offensive weapons by the phalanx is just a single path in the labyrinth of warfare studies. It is a path that, after just a few steps, gets not only twisted, but also crosses numerous others representing different branches of the discipline, thus introducing chaos and confusion. This metaphor serves as an introduction to the goal of my paper: to close this particular part of the discourse by removing the javelin/spear problem from the phalanx debate. In other words, I aim to put a no entry sign on this path of the labyrinth. The constraints of this article

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prevent me from presenting extensive analysis, so this work will take a meta-level form, discussing sources as they function within certain theories. It is also limited both chronologically (I do not discuss the Classical phalanx), geographically and most importantly it does not deal with all types of sources. It is a note on the iconography and therefore a mere no entry sign rather than the complete burying of the path. Hopefully, it will nevertheless be of some value.

According to the orthodox view, the phalanx consisted solely of spearmen, who were melee fighters using thrusting spears. Skirmishers of any kind (including javelin-men) were detached from it and formed separate support formations (Ducrey 1985, 62; Anderson 1991, 18, 22; Jarva 1995, 123; Snodgrass 1999, 57-60). This simple notion is widely accepted by scholars and most popular theory states that this type of warfare, called hoplite warfare, dominated the Greek battlefield from (at least) the 7th to the 4th century BC (Hanson 1991b). Opposition to this theory, propounded by scholars such as H. van Wees (2000a) and P. Krentz (2002), believe that the phalanx is the byproduct of tendencies visible throughout the entire Archaic period and that the final emergence of the formation is the result of the Persian Wars. A detailed summary of this long lasting debate can be found in a recent article by D. Kagan and G. F. Viggiano (2013, 1-56).

But how does the spear/javelin question fit into this debate? The problem lies in the sources. Although the thrusting spear was the weapon of choice in Classical times, the case is not so obvious in the Archaic period. True, Archilochos (2) goes as far as replacing the word 'war craft' with 'spear-shaft' but Callinus (1.5-8) encourages dying warriors to throw their javelins one last time, while Homer's (*Il*. 13.159-168) warriors use their spears for both thrusting and throwing. Could this be a mere poetic construct?

Although the written sources are problematic, it is the depictions in art that pose the biggest problem for scholars. Iconography plays the most prominent role in the study of Archaic warfare as it forms the backbone of most of the theories. It is the largest collection of sources and is also less speculative than written accounts (cf. Matthew 2012, 19). The scenes which contradict the accepted usage of the thrusting spear are of two types: 1) scenes where hoplites (in this case heavy infantrymen) are using javelins[1] and 2) scenes

[1] The cases in which a hoplite is shown with a javelin are in fact quite rare (Little Master Cup, Melbourne, University, inv. no. 1930.0002; amphora by Antimenes Painter, Sydney University, Nicholson Museum, inv. no. 77.01; kylix by Euergides Painter, Toledo,

of hoplites carrying double spears (which may be taken as javelins, or at least a spear and a javelin). The latter are especially important, as some of them are scenes which represent the earliest and most representative illustrations of the Archaic phalanx.

Traditional phalanx scholars usually deal with the hypothetical use of javelins by hoplites in one of two ways. They either undermine the reliability of the sources or they accept the usage of javelins in early periods (7th century BC) as a sort of transitional phase within the phalanx period, or just before the emergence of the phalanx. Scholars who contradict the traditional phalanx view usually present the usage of the javelin as evidence of outer-phalanx warfare. The primary obstacle in examining this stance is archaeological as, unfortunately, excavated javelin-heads are not easily distinguishable from spearheads (Jarva 1995, 123-124; Snodgrass 1999, 80), leaving iconography as the only reliable source in making a distinction between them. The iconography will now be investigated to determine whether the scenes of hoplites carrying double spears could be seen as proof that actual hoplites used one (or both) of them as javelins in battle and if the usage of javelins by hoplites had a real impact on the tactics of the phalanx formation.

It could be that scholars attach too much weight to the appearance, mechanics, and the precise model of operation of the phalanx. All these technical aspects may not have affected the whole idea that was behind the emergence of this formation. That is why there must be certainty that javelin throwing had a significant impact upon all tactics and that it was inconsistent the general phalanx tactics. If not, it should be treated

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inv. no. 1961.25; Siana Cup, in the manner of C Painter, Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 117187) and they are clearly a minority. Recently, Ch. Matthew (2012) published a book which could be seen as a monograph on the hoplite spear. In it he made the interesting observation that every depiction of the spear in the so-called 'overhand stance' (the most common one) is in fact the depiction of a javelin (Matthew 2012, 19-30). He believed that only lower stances indicate a thrusting spear. However, that statement is completely inconsistent with the data. First of all, he cited the Little Master Cup from Melbourne, where only one of the duelist poses in the act of throwing a javelin (as his hand indicates) and both of them use the overhand grip. On the Euergides Painter's kylix, only one of the three warriors is going to toss his spear, while the other two using the overhand grip are fighting in melee. The rest of the sources he cites are analyzed with the double spears below. The examples where the overhand grip is used for holding a spear are numerous, see e.g. red-figure krater by Niobid Painter from the Ferrara Museo Nazionale di Spina, inv. no. 2895 (Beazley archive number: 206949), where a warrior holds a spear with a butt-spike in the overhand position. See also a cup by Sabouroff Painter, from Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese, inv. no. RC2072 (Beazley archive number: 212181), and many more.

only as a secondary matter (cf. Jarva 1995, 117, who calls the thrusting spear a 'tactical' weapon and a weapon that affected the entire craft of war).

Scenes involving double spear wielding reappear continuously throughout the whole Archaic period. If we deal only with those whose dating suggests that they might have coexisted with the phalanx formation (roughly from the beginning of the 7th century BC onward) then the first prominent example would be the Protocorinthian aryballos from Lechaion (Snodgrass 1964, 138, pl. 15; Anderson 1991, 16-17, Corinth Museum), in which the warrior wearing a Corinthian helmet is holding a *porpax-antilabe* grip shield, wielding one spear in his right hand and the second along with the *antilabe* of his shield. Despite the early dating, this warrior has complete hoplite panoply, which marks him as a heavy spearmen.

The depiction of double spears on the famous Chigi vase is a cause of serious confusion, as its decoration is seen as the most canonical representation of the phalanx in Archaic art (Anderson 1991, 16-17; Snodgrass 1999, 58; van Wees 2000a, 136-139; Hannestad 2001, 111). In the battle scene, hoplites wield their second spears in their left hands with the *antilabe*. H. Lorimer (1947, 83, 90-95) tried to prove that these spears belong to the so-called ghost rank (not painted). However, given the fact that the warriors grasped (barely) visible shafts together with the *antilabe* this was clearly a misinterpretation. Furthermore, in the arming scene in the background, the artist carefully painted a pair of spears with strings attached, which would improve the range of the throw. These are clearly painted as javelins.

A similar image can be found on a Corinthian alabastron (Snodgrass 1964, 138; van Wees 2000b, 148, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. 3148) in which, along with the spear, a shorter javelin with a throwing loop is shown. In fact, double spears are quite frequent even in black figure vase painting, e.g. in the departure scene from the Würzburg amphora in which three spears are presented (Lissarague 1989, 46, fig. 65, Wurzburg, Martin v. Wagner Mus., inv. no. 1.199) and the famous amphora by Exekias (Ducrey 1985, 57, pl. 39; Vatican, Museo Etrusco Gregoriano, inv. no. 344) which shows Achilles and Ajax playing a board game. One interpretation could suggest that double spears are a reference to epics (Hurwit 2002, 14, 18; *contra* Hannestad 2001, 111) as they are strongly connected with heroic scenes in iconography. Ch. A. Matthew (2012, 31-33) went as far as connecting every javelin-throwing scene with an epic genre, with other indicators being a Beotian shield, chariot, etc. (for Beotian shield and 'epic' indicators see Boardman 1983, 27-32) and since he connects not only double

spears, but also spears held in the overhand position, with javelins, almost every Archaic scene would therefore depict 'fiction'. In contrast, van Wees (2004, 174-177, 179, fig. 22; Brussels, Musees Royaux, inv. no. R291) argues that double spears appear in scenes that are quite 'realistic' or absent from the epic genre. For example, an amphora from Brussels shows hepatoscopy before the departure of warriors. The omission of other 'Archaic' elements and the contemporary theme – hepatoscopy was purely Archaic and not a Homeric ritual (Parker 2000, 300-304; for scenes of hepatoscopy/ hieroscopy see Lissarrague 1990, 55-69) – suggests that double spears could still have been a reality rather than just used to heroise.

The problem of the double spear and scenes from 'myth' and 'real life' are extremely complicated issues that are well outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the presence of double spears in scenes that are supposed to be a representation of the phalanx seems to be inconsistent with the current interpretation of such images. How can the same scene present both reality and an epic? Why would it portray both the contemporary and epic mechanics of combat together? It seems that the double spear could have been used in reality and sources for the occurrence of this practice are too substantial to be dismissed by the vague explanation of heroising.

It is also possible that problems with double spear interpretation could be caused by the binary theory of combat, in which melee fighting and skirmishing are two completely different styles of fighting with different weapons involved. A melee warrior armed with a javelin is seen as a contradiction as a javelin implies fighting at a distance. This sharp distinction in theory results in the bending and ignoring of sources (see Lorimer 1947, 90-95), or at the very least in the construction of additional theories about the gradual change in tactics (Anderson 1991, 18-22; Snodgrass 1999, 57-60). Even van Wees (2000a, 148), who believed that double spears are not only an echo of the epics, but also a battlefield reality, has fallen into the same theoretical trap. According to him, the usage of the javelin is almost equal to operating in loose and open formations which predate the emergence of the phalanx, as it requires space and a good degree of mobility.

V. D. Hanson (1991b, 74-75) made an interesting point in this discussion, as he believed that some types of equipment were present as a result of close-ordered phalanx warfare. One of them was the butt-spike. The *suaroter* or *styrax* (Hanson 1991b, 71-74; Matthew 2012, 4-5), spears fitted with bronze spikes, were useless as javelins and were used as an additional weapon in the case of shaft breakage. This was quite a common misfortune

in the melee and it of course implies that the warrior carried only one spear. The appearance of the butt-spike would therefore indicate that at least one of the spears was meant for thrusting. However, this element appears rarely in the 7th century BC (when it was mistaken for a spearhead), and only emerges in the following century (Snodgrass 1965, 133). It is also not very often depicted in 6th century iconography, when a typical spear is no different to a 7th century one.

When examining such theoretical considerations one must ask whether it is merely a way of forcing a pattern onto warfare. Patterns are not always an accurate way of representing reality. A Roman legionary armed with a *pilum* is definitely a melee fighter, not a skirmisher, even if he carries a javelin as his primary weapon. The notion of a similar usage of the spear by hoplites is somehow appealing. Attacking a heavily armoured warrior with a javelin could be an indirect attack, as if it hits the enemy shield, the warrior would be forced to throw it away. Since the Archaic javelin is not a *pilum*, it is not very effective at distance, because the enemy warrior could simply remove the missile from his shield before the actual fight. The simplest and most effective tactic would be a massive javelin hurl from a very short distance, just before the engagement (Andreson 1991, 19 comes up with a similar idea, but later discards it;[2] see Miścicki 2012, 98-99). This theory presents the javelin as a melee, or pre-melee weapon, particularly useful against armoured opponents. The decline of this tradition could be connected with the introduction of the spear-butt in the 6th century BC. Speculative as it may be, this point logically connects the use of javelins with the typical melee indicators of the hoplites, namely a large shield and heavy armour.

So, after considering the sources, is it possible to drop the idea of javelin usage by hoplites? It seems not. And does the usage of javelins have a real impact upon phalanx tactics? Again, it seems not. The javelin does not change heavy infantry into skirmishers. Armour and a shield imply melee tactics and it must be stated that any type of melee would suit the phalanx. Javelin throwing is not inconsistent with this just because it requires space and mobility. If it broke the unity and coherence of the formation it would be, but javelins and mass, heavily-armoured warfare could be carried out

[2] Van Wees (2000a, 146) also considers this option, but then rejects it, as he believes that javelin hurling requires space. However, when reconstructing the stance of the warrior and intervals in the ranks of the phalanx, he opted for large six-foot intervals (van Wees 2000a, 127-130), which could give the hoplite the necessary space.

alongside it. To sum up, it is fair to say that potential usage of the javelin in the phalanx was plausible, but that the discussion is of secondary importance.

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