JESSE OBERT

The Hoplite Hypocrisy: Teaching Ancient Greek Warfare in an American Classroom

Whenever the topics of Ancient Greek warriors, called hoplites, and democracy arise, both world historians and media content creators usually unknowingly promote a complex and highly problematic narrative.[1] Scholars within the small subfield of Ancient Military History describe this outdated system of Ancient Greek warfare as the orthodoxy. It envisions the Greek hoplite as a highly disciplined citizen-soldier who had a central role in the formation of the first democracies. This idea first emerged in the German academy in the nineteenth century,[2] following a series of liberalization movements that sought, among other things, citizenship and voting rights for Prussian soldiers. Since that time, many right-wing and authoritarian groups have latched onto the hoplite as a symbol of good government. But the evidence stacked against this narrative is indisputable--the hoplite has become something of a right-wing fantasy. Over the last two generations, historians have systematically dismantled the hoplite orthodoxy,[3] culminating in a recent handbook.[4] Unfortunately, this paradigm shift has not reached beyond the academy, and the hoplite orthodoxy still regularly appears in World History textbooks, encyclopedias, and class curricula as well as modern movies, books, video games, and political movements.

To quote Rebecca Futo Kennedy, "silence encourages acceptance and even approval of antiquities' worst tendencies in the contemporary world."[5] Continuing to present the orthodoxy without substantial clarification is clearly the wrong course of action. In what follows, I will propose highlighting in our classrooms the prevalence of enslaved people in Greek warfare. This emendation is three-pronged. First, this perspective most poignantly pinpoints the hypocrisy in bad actors' appropriations of the past. Many of the people fighting and dying on Ancient Greek battlefields ultimately had no political voice or bodily autonomy. Ancient Greek warfare was not egalitarian and Ancient Greek warriors earned no freedom. Second, David Lewis recently re-characterized Ancient Greek slave systems as being part of a broader socio-economic phenomenon that existed across the southeastern-European, northwestern-African, and southwestern-Asian world.[6] This research has spurred a flurry of scholarship, both

supporting and refuting Lewis, on the function and long-term impact of slave systems. The study of enslavement is quickly becoming one of the most prevalent in the fields of Classics, Ancient History, Classical Archaeology, and Ancient Military History, and this research often engages directly with many of the same questions that drive world historians.[7] Finally, the hoplite hypocrisy is a productive pedagogical device to explore the role and impact of human history within American culture. Ancient Greece has been weaponized and fetishized by various political leaders and movements throughout history--addressing the gap between these narratives and our primary sources illustrates many of the broader themes of World History. Slavery, inequality, and exploitation have played a major role in the history of humanity, but politically motivated actors continue to ignore or even seek to erase this reality.

The Orthodoxy in Academia

The hoplite orthodoxy envisions Ancient Greek combat from approximately 800 BCE to Alexander the Great's campaigns in the 330s BCE as a gentlemanly *agon*, or contest.[8] This is the period in which many Ancient Greek city-states created complex political systems oriented around empowering a middle or middling class, the earliest European historians started creating great literary works, and influential philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle founded their schools. Within this environment of radical social change, proponents of the hoplite orthodoxy consider hoplite warfare to be a catalyst for the democratization of political power. Ancient Greek communities depended on hoplites for survival, but hoplites had to provide their own kit and their own supplies. These communities needed to economically empower their hoplites and incentivize them to fight with socio-political concessions. And it was a numbers game: more incentives and subsidies meant larger armies and more military might. In other words, this system translated into increasing levels of political representation for a broader swath of the population and real shifts towards egalitarianism.

The orthodox model assumes that the hoplites' round shields only protected a portion of their bodies, so they must have stood should-to-shoulder to form a shield wall that protected everyone except the person furthest to the right. An additional assumption, which is rarely stated explicitly, is that everyone was using the same equipment and everyone was right-handed. Scholars describe this homogenous block of warriors as the *phalanx*, and proponents of the orthodoxy envision hoplite combat to have been a great pushing match between two *phalanges*. George Beardoe Grundy famously said that "the principle [of hoplite warfare] was very much the same as that followed by the forwards in a scrummage at the Rugby game."[9] This sports analogy continues to appear in pro-orthodoxy descriptions of hoplite warfare over a century later. In Victor Davis Hanson's influential 1989 monograph, he further argued that this messy, bloody, and infantry-oriented style of violence was uniquely Western.

But Hanson cited later literary sources, sometimes over five hundred years after the events described, to defend the orthodox model of hoplite warfare.[10] Grundy made a single reference to his own controversial reading of a complex and incomplete passage in Thucydides' history.[11] In Ancient Greek, the word hoplite just means "warrior,"[12] and the earliest use of the word *phalanx* seems to describe some sort a building block.[13] Although the term hoplite is common in fifth- and fourth-century BCE histories, none of our fifth-century sources use the term *phalanx* in a military context.[14] Xenophon, writing in the mid-fourth century, is the first ancient historian to do so, but he uses it to describe every army regardless of their cultural identity: Greeks, Persians, and Mesopotamians, among others.[15] For Xenophon, *phalanx* does not seem to represent a particular style or formation of fighting.

Both hoplite and *phalanx* would become important terms in later ancient scholarship to describe the types of warriors and battle formations that emerged following Alexander the Great's military conquests of northeastern Africa and southwestern Asia. The empires and kingdoms that fought over Alexander's empire used professional standing militaries--bands of warriors who earned a wage and treated their military service as an occupation--which did not exist, for the most part, before the Macedonian hegemony.[16] Although they were all using the Ancient Greek language, the Ancient Greeks before Alexander's campaign clearly had different definitions of hoplite and *phalanx*.[17] They used very different equipment and tactics in the Classical period, the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, before the adoption of professional militaries.

These sorts of inconsistencies, problems with our sources, and lack of academic rigor were already being discussed by the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, Anthony Snodgrass wrote two monographs tracing the remarkably inconsistent evidence for hoplite equipment over the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries BCE.[18] Snodgrass observed that the adoption and use of hoplite equipment, including shields, helmets, and corslets, was by no means a ubiquitous process.[19] Instead, he described the adoption of hoplite warfare as "a long drawn out, piecemeal process,"[20] whereby elite warriors chose their own equipment, invested most of their wealth into predominantly aesthetic decorations, and chose to wield a wide variety of arms and armor on Ancient Greek battlefields.[21] In many cases, it seems like hoplites intentionally tried to stand out from their compatriots in terms of the equipment that they used and appearance they presented. But if everyone had different equipment, then how could they form a shield wall or fit into a tight infantry formation? Snodgrass is careful not to push too hard against the orthodoxy and leaves these sorts of specific questions open to interpretation.

Hans van Wees was not so cautious. In his 2004 monograph, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, van Wees directly argues against the hoplite orthodoxy. This detailed volume, at 349 pages, is too important and too complicated to summarize fully, but it is safe to say that van Wees' monograph upturned the field of Ancient Military History and became the baseline for all future discussion. Proponents of the orthodoxy

were quick to label van Wees and his supporters as revisionists. Van Wees argues that hoplite technology and tactics were "gradual and on-going" processes, and he dispels the myth that hoplites' shields only protected a portion of their body.[22] They needed only to turn their bodies sideways, which is always how they were depicted in art; Grundy's tightly packed *phalanx* evidently belongs on the Rugby pitch and is completely unattested in our evidence. Moreover, the hoplite emerged relatively late in the Ancient Greek chronology--well after the socio-political changes orthodoxy scholars had identified as consequences of hoplite warfare.[23] In later publications, he further clarifies that hoplite equipment and military service would only have been accessible to the top ten to fifteen percent of society: those who owned at least thirty acres (12 ha.) of productive farmland being worked by dozens, if not hundreds, of enslaved people.[24] Rather than envisioning hoplite warfare as a great socio-political leveler in which every hoplite earned *his* political voice,[25] revisionists envision the history of the hoplite as an oligarchic response to the more egalitarian political systems of the late sixth century BCE, when democratic political ideas started appearing throughout the Greek world. As more communities became further entrenched in wars with their neighbors, our artistic and literary sources increasingly and counterintuitively promoted a culture of military amateurism. Since hoplite elites were already at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy, our sources assume that they must be naturally talented warriors who had no reason to waste time training. Roel Konijnendijk recently argued that this was the most fundamental component of Classical Greek warfare--that the hoplite was someone with a "general lack of, and even aversion to, military training."[26] They were the privileged elites who used the threat of violence to maintain their status.

In my own work, I have emphasized that our fifth and fourth century BCE literary sources state in no uncertain terms that enslaved people and non-citizens regularly participated in Ancient Greek combat. This seems to be a major missing component in both the orthodox and revisionist models. At the battle of Thermopylae in 490 BCE, three hundred Spartans famously fought to the death against a massive invading Persian force. Historians are quick to remind us that there were other Greek peoples fighting alongside the three hundred Spartans, but Herodotus, our primary source for this battle, also indicates that each Spartan had an enslaved attendant with them.[27] After the battle, the Persian king invites his Greek allies to visit the battlefield to marvel at the defeated dead, and Herodotus explains that these Greeks could not distinguish between the slain Spartans and slain enslaved people: they were all mixed together where they fell in battle.[28] This indicates first that the enslaved people may have been wearing or carrying the same equipment as their masters and second that they were slain among the Spartans fighting in the front lines. They were probably acting as attendants, but regardless, they still all fought to the death beside their masters.

At the battle of Plataea, Herodotus says that there were seven enslaved combatants for each Spartan citizen.[29] Plataea was the final battle between the Greeks

and the Persians on the Greek mainland, and at the battle, the Spartans finally managed to win freedom for Greece and push out the invader. According to Herodotus' own figures, the army that won that freedom was 75% enslaved people.[30] If Herodotus is not including attendants in his figures, which he does not do for Thermopylae or anywhere else in his work, then this percentage was probably much higher.

Ancient Greek hoplites depended on enslaved combatants throughout the Classical period.[31] Athenians used enslaved rowers to power their imperial navy, Xenophon fought beside an enslaved attendant in his harrowing escape from Persia, and famous generals like Epaminondas relied on enslaved scouts and combat medics to win battles.[32] Both sides of the hoplite debate have ignored the role of enslaved people in Ancient Greek warfare, in part because enslaved people are periphery to the sorts of complex socio-political questions scholars in both camps seek to address. For our purposes, however, the prominence of enslaved combatants highlights a broader phenomenon within the history of this period, namely that ancient Mediterranean cultures were remarkably unfair and exploitative. This is the hoplite hypocrisy. Slavery was at the core of Ancient Greek economics, society, and politics.[33] The hoplites, as elite aristocrats, were committed to preserving this inequality and protecting the *status quo*, and they forced people without a political voice to fight and die on their behalf to achieve these goals. The hoplite is seen by many in America today as a symbol of individual freedoms, but historically hoplites were oligarchs trying desperately to hoard their wealth and status through the exploitation of everyone else.

The Orthodoxy in American Politics[34]

The most important pro-orthodoxy monograph, Victor Davis Hanson's *Western Way of War*, does not list the word slave or enslavement in its index.[35] Hanson was interested in the role of warfare and military service in the formation and stabilization of mixed-constitution democracies. He asked big broad questions, provided specific answers in captivating prose, and reassured Americans that they were exceptional. For Hanson, the hoplite was a citizen-soldier: two words that derive from the Latin language and do not fit very well in an Ancient Greek context.

In 1998, Frank Miller created a graphic novel fictionalizing the Battle of Thermopylae entitled *300*. In his afterword, he recommends Hanson's *Western Way of War* and Herodotus, among others. When the graphic novel was released to accompany Zack Snyder's film adaptation, Hanson wrote a new foreword. Miller, Hanson, and Snyder were not the first to introduce Americans to the Spartans and the Ancient Greek hoplite, but these media had far-reaching impacts on the whole world due, in part, to their emergence at the start of the twenty-first century. To this day, tourists can buy trinkets and clothing with references to the American film at archaeological sites and museums across Greece, even in remote locations that had nothing to do with the Spartans or the Persian Wars. The novel and film are clearly not realistic – they feature

fantastic beasts, magic, and over-the-top action – but their depictions of hoplite warfare are clearly dramatizations of the orthodox model. The graphic novel frequently depicts the Spartans forming a Macedonian-style *phalanx*, and a scene in both versions references one of the tenants of the orthodoxy. In this scene, King Leonidas explains to a disabled Spartan that he cannot fight as a hoplite because he physically cannot hold his shield high enough to protect the person standing to his left. The disabled character then betrays the Spartan position to the Persians--he is one of the villains because he cannot fight like an orthodox hoplite. It is worth noting that there is nothing in the source material to indicate that this historical figure was disabled. This is clearly American ableism and prejudice, but it is framed and rationalized within the hoplite orthodoxy.

Another important scene has Leonidas defiantly yell to the Persians "come and get them" after a messenger demands that they lay down their arms. This is a reference to the apocryphal phrase *molon labe*, which Plutarch, writing about five hundred years after the battle, attributes to Leonidas.[36] The phrase is well-known to gun enthusiasts and proponents of the second amendment; it reportedly inspired many of the early adages of the National Rifle Association.[37] Literally, the phrase means "[once you have completed] coming, take [them]." The English is difficult to construe: it is an aorist active participle, *molon*, and an imperative, *labe*, both in the singular. This is not an unusual construction in Ancient Greek, but it fits neatly into Plutarch's broader assessment of Spartan idioms as gruff and compact. Regardless, the phrase is relatively common in American culture. Today, it is generally associated with alt-right organizations and important figures within recent conservative movements.[38]

Both *molon labe* and the orthodoxy associate military service and the Ancient Greek hoplite with what we might call citizenship intervention or bottom-up government. Gun-rights advocates insist that having an armed citizenry is important for healthy government because it empowers people at every socio-economic tier with the means to resist tyranny. King Leonidas fought and died (and lost) the battle at Thermopylae, and eighteenth-century Americans were able to overthrow British rule through force of arms. In 1859, George Grote argued that hoplite warfare forced everyone, the rich and poor, to stand shoulder to shoulder and fight as equals.[39] Hanson built on that idea further, arguing that the independent and armed middle-class farmer was the root of Ancient Greeks' and, by extension, Westerners' success.[40]

While there are important takeaways from both Grote's and Hanson's works, they were both working with incomplete evidence. We now have a better understanding of the primary sources. Continuing to teach the hoplite orthodoxy in our classrooms does a disservice to our students and to the field, and our silence empowers those who have weaponized the past. At the January 6th, 2021 Attack on the Capitol, members of the mob wore make-shift Greek helmets, chanted *molon labe*, and waved flags with scenes from Snyder's *300*. It is true that the Spartans promoted egalitarianism among their

ruling class, tied military service to political participation, and fought and died against whoever they perceived to be their oppressors. The Athenians also kept lists of members of the democratic assembly to conscript in times of war, and perhaps the most famous Athenian politician declared that Athens would be remembered for its military might.[41] But most of the people bearing arms in hoplite armies were enslaved--both Spartans and Athenians fought and died beside enslaved people who were forced into a situation in which they had little to gain and everything to lose. Alt-right organizations have latched onto the hoplite as a symbol, but the hoplite actually represents everything that they claim to be fighting against: privileged elites who exploit hard-working lower-class people and lie about it in public venues in order to maintain a delicate and unfair socio-political hierarchy that they created in the first place.

How to Teach the "Greek Miracle:" Greek History as a Story of Exploitation and Enslavement

History is messy, both practically and as a discipline. Within the subfield of Ancient Military History, the debate over the hoplite remains stuck in a stalemate. In 2013, Donald Kagan and Gregory Viggiano edited a compilation of papers from both sides of the debate. Giants in the subfield participated, including Hans van Wees, Victor Davis Hanson, and Anthony Snodgrass, but nothing was ultimately resolved. In their introduction, Kagan and Viggiano state that the onus is on revisionists to disprove the orthodoxy and "do nothing short of rewriting the history" of Ancient Greece.[42] In my mind, Roel Konijnendijk, Cezary Kucewicz, and Matthew Lloyd's 2021 edited volume, *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx*, attempted to do just that. But there remain several unanswered questions and gaps in scholarship. Enslaved combatants are given only a cursory mention in the volume, only one of the ten contributors identifies as a woman, and by situating their discussion "beyond" the *phalanx*, the editors acknowledge that a *phalanx* existed in the Classical period without engaging in the nuances of this term directly.

As with any debate over an entrenched paradigm, the World History teacher is left to pick up the pieces and construct some sort of salient narrative. Despite van Wees' and his followers' attempts to erode the orthodoxy, most World History textbooks continue to present the hoplite orthodoxy without context or criticism. Ryan Horne, in the World History Encyclopedia references Grote's 1859 argument that hoplite warfare led to a democratization of political power.[43] The Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History speaks at length on militarism in Ancient Greece and cites "the emergence of *phalanx* warfare" as enshrining notions of freedom and equality into the fabric of Greek culture.[44] Hanson's *Western Way of War* is the only text mentioned in the Further Readings that pertains to ancient warfare. Although slavery is mentioned as a major

contributor to the economic success of Athens and Sparta,[45] McNeill expresses awe that Ancient Greek elites used enslaved tutors, evidently unaware of their role in warfare.[46]

More recently, David Graeber and David Wengrow have simply avoided the hoplite debate altogether. Although Ancient Greece is a prominent character in their history of the world through the lens of indigeneity, Ancient Greek history is remarkably underrepresented. Graeber and Wengrow state in a footnote that the entire debate over the origin and nature of Ancient Greek democracy "seems to be premised on the assumption that 'democracy' was some sort of remarkable historical breakthrough, rather than a habit of self-governance that would have been available in any historical period."[47] Merry Wiesner-Hanks' *Concise History of the World* has much more to say about Ancient Greece, but she focuses her attention on non-male and non-upper-class agents. In this way, she also manages to sidestep the hoplite debate. Both Graeber and Wengrow and Wiesner-Hanks emphasize the importance of slavery in Ancient Greece and describe Classical Athens as a uniquely slave-based society,[48] but Wiesner-Hanks takes a step further and correctly observes that enslaved people participated in Greek combat.[49]

Graeber and Wengrow and Wiesner-Hanks approached World History through a filter, and these filters influenced what was addressed and what was left unsaid. For certain topics, this can be a dangerous course of action, as silence endorses popular perception. As we have seen, this is probably the case for the Ancient Greek hoplite--the popular narrative of the hoplite as a citizen-soldier fighting for individual freedoms and equality continues to dominate modern American film and media. I highlighted the World History Encyclopedia and Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History not to admonish them as strawmen, but to illustrate the ways in which a one-sided approach to the hoplite debate creates space for extremist misinterpretations. In our classes, we ought to highlight the inconsistencies between this modern narrative and our evidence, expanding perhaps on Wiesner-Hanks' approach, rather than ignore the controversy outright.

According to a popular and probably apocryphal story, a reporter once asked Gandhi for his thoughts on Western Civilization. Gandhi replied, "I think it would be a good idea." The shocking discovery that three hundred enslaved people probably died fighting alongside the three hundred Spartans presents a productive pedagogical moment. Whether we take a revisionist or orthodox position on hoplite warfare, both sides would probably agree that combat was not fair and the rich ultimately benefitted the most from hoplite warfare. Highlighting this reality and the inconsistent ways in which this information has filtered into popular depictions of the hoplite emphasizes how historical narratives can be misinterpreted or even weaponized. Hoplites did not create a bottom-up government, they were the government and they forced poorer people to fight and die to preserve the *status quo*. They owned farms, but many probably rarely stepped foot on those farms, opting instead to live in a city and have

their estates worked by villages of enslaved people. To apply this metaphor to the January 6th Attack on the Capitol, which many right-wing groups have done already with incorrect data, the more than five hundred people who entered the capitol and were found guilty of federal charges would be equivalent to the enslaved combatants. The politicians and conservative leaders who encouraged the mob, received no charges, and retained their political and economic privileges would be the hoplites. Making contrasts between the modern and the ancient highlights to our students how many of the problems and inequalities that existed 2,500 years ago still exist today. The Ancient Greeks wrote the earliest public laws in Europe, and the very first law limited how often a politician could serve as the head of the community--a political fight that many of us are still waging to this day.[50]

Ancient Greece developed the first law codes in Europe, had some of the earliest democracies, produced beautiful art, and inspired generations of intellectuals. But Ancient Greek economics, culture, and politics were deeply entangled in systems of enslavement, exploitation, and inequality. The story of the hoplite, its history of scholarship, and its politicization in modern America raises important questions about systemic inequality in both the ancient world and today. The hoplite, as a topic of study, creates a fruitful opportunity to explore questions about academic bias in our source material, how historical narratives can change over time, and how stark divides can emerge between historical understanding and popular perception. At the same time, this conversation makes students confront what they think should qualify as a just democracy and how we as an active citizenry can make our society more equal.

Suggested Classroom Activity: Exploring Mardonius' Lie

Inspired by Konijnendijk, 2016

When Xerxes became the king of Persia, he inherited his father's conflict with the Greeks. He initially decided not to invade Greece, but one of his closest advisers, Mardonius, urged him to reconsider. Mardonius says:

> *"Master, you surpass the best of the Persians, both those that are living today and those that will be, and you have achieved other great and most honorable things of note, and you will not allow the incompetent Greeks living in Europe to make a mockery of us. For it would be terrible if we, who subdued and enslaved the Sacae and Indians and Ethiopians and Assyrians and many other great peoples not for some grave injustice to the Persians but because we wished to increase our power, should not take vengeance on the Greeks for their unprovoked injustices. What should we fear? Are they the ones with a great host? Do they command immense wealth? We know how they fight and we know their power, and they are weak; we already rule their children in our lands: those called*

> *the Ionians and Aeolians and Dorians. I myself contended with these men, when I marched against them by your father's command, and I marched as far as Macedonia and not far from Athens itself, yet no one came out to meet me in battle.* ***But the Greeks are accustomed, as I hear, to make the most senseless wars in their foolishness and exceptional awkwardness. When they go to war with each other, they search out the best and most level ground and there they fight, so that the victors come off with great harm; and of the vanquished I will say nothing, for they are utterly destroyed. As they speak the same language, they should end disputes with heralds and messengers and anything other than fighting; or if it is absolutely necessary to fight, they should discover their strongest component and press with this. The Greek custom is not effective****; and when I marched as far as the land of Macedonia, they did not think to fight me. But against you, oh king, who would face you when you march forth, leading all the armies and navies of Asia? But, it seems to me,* ***there is no courage among the deeds of the Greeks****; and if I turn out to be a liar, and they are foolish enough to meet us in battle, then they will learn that we are the best at war. But let us not leave it untested; for nothing happens by accident, and all good things for mankind derive from action."*[51]

In the twentieth century, some politicians and authors celebrated this passage for describing what they called the "Western" way of war. Mardonius, a Persian, calls the Greeks foolish because they fought on equal footing and never backed down. However, modern scholars like Roel Konijnendijk[52] have pointed out that Mardonius is clearly wrong. Herodotus was writing in Greek to a Greek audience who would have immediately understood that Mardonius was incorrect in his claim about Greek warfare. Every major battle in Herodotus' history--Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea--takes place on uneven terrain, and the Greeks repeatedly press their strongest advantage against the Persians. The interpretation of this passage remains an open question: was Mardonius seeking to deceive his king or was he just a fool?

In small groups, have students breakdown Mardonius' claim. Here are some suggested discussion questions:

- What is the structure of Mardonius' speech? How does Mardonius address his king, and how could the Greek method of fighting be understood as a good reason to invade? Does Mardonius lull Xerxes into a false sense of security? Is he persuasive or not?
- Is Mardonius a fool or liar? What might this speech imply about Mardonius as a character in the narrative? What does it imply about Xerxes as a king?

- Mardonius lists several groups that the Persians have subdued and enslaved, but he makes no mention of the Greeks' slaves. Later in Herodotus' history, we learn that the Spartan army was 75% enslaved combatants.[53] Why might Mardonius omit the Greeks' enslaved people? What might this say about the normalcy or frequency of enslaved warriors in the ancient world?
- How might Mardonius' speech fit into nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives about "Western Civilization"? Does it matter today that Mardonius was wrong? Is it hypocritical to perpetuate a historical narrative if the ancient author, Herodotus, intended for us to know that it was false in the first place?

Jesse Obert is an interdisciplinary scholar working primarily in the fields of ancient history, archaeology, classics, and digital humanities. He completed his doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology and also holds an MA from University College London in Ancient History. He is currently the Digital World History Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Pittsburgh and Part-Time Faculty in both the Department of History and Department of Classics. Jesse studies violence, warfare, enslavement, exploitation, and inequality in the ancient Greek world. As an archaeologist, he has worked on excavation and survey projects in both Italy and Greece. In the last five years, he has been working as an archaeometallurgist on Crete and in the Peloponnese. His current book project explores the nature of violence on the Greek island of Crete in the Archaic and Classical periods, the use of arms and armor as expressions of masculinity and social identity, and the role of warriorhood in the formation and development of some of the earliest Greek city-states. He can be reached at jesse.obert@pitt.edu.

Notes

[1] I was inspired to draft this paper after visiting Ruth Mostern's *Teaching World History* graduate seminar. Thanks Ruth!

[2] Roel Konijnendijk, *Between Miltiades and Moltke: Early German Studies in Greek Military History*, (Boston: Brill, 2023), 3-5.

[3] cf. Peter Krentz, "Fighting by the Rules: The Invention of the Hoplite Agôn," *Hesperia* 71, no. 1 (2002): 23–39; Hans van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London: Duckworth, 2004); Fernando Echeverría, "Hoplite and Phalanx," *Classical Philology* 107 (2012): 291–318; among many others.

[4] Roel Konijnendijk, *Classical Greek Tactics: A Cultural History* (Boston: Brill, 2018); and Matthew Lloyd, Roel Konijnendijk, and Cezary Kucewicz, "Introduction: Beyond the Phalanx," in Roel Konijnendijk, Cezary Kucewicz, and Matthew Lloyd, eds., *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx* (Boston: Brill, 2021), 1–16.

[5] Rebecca Futo Kennedy, "We Condone It by Our Silence," *Medium*, accessed February 1, 2024, https://eidolon.pub/we-condone-it-by-our-silence-bea76fb59b21.

[6] David M. Lewis, *Greek Slave System in Their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800-146 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-5.

[7] In 2022, the European Research Council awarded a multimillion-dollar grant to a project entitled *SLaVEgents: Enslaved persons in the making of societies and cultures in Western Eurasia and North Africa, 1000 BCE – 300 CE*. The international team of twenty scholars plan to host numerous conferences, publish at least three edited volumes, and support three PhD dissertations at the University of Crete over the next few years.

[8] This chronology and the description that follows is largely paraphrased from Kagan and Viggiano's (2013b) summary of the hoplite orthodoxy, what they call the "sudden-change theory." See Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, "The Hoplite Debate," in Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013b).

[9] George Beardoe Grundy, *Thucydides and the History of His Age* (London, 1911), 268.

[10] Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 175. In particular, he cites Aelianus Tacticus 14.6; Arrian *Tactica* 10.12; Asclepiodotus 5.2; Livy 30.34; Polybius 18.30.4; Theocritus 24.125. He also cites Thucydides (4.96) who describes hoplites assembling a "pushing," *othismo skuneistekei*. However, it is unclear whether Thucydides is referencing a physical pushing or a metaphorical pushing, see Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides, Vol. II: Books IV-V.24* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 304-305).

[11] The passage in question is Thuc. 5.71. In this passage, Thucydides says the hoplites were trying to be *euskepastotatos*. Based on the prefix and root of this word, we can probably interpret it as meaning "most well-protected," but this is the only time it appears in the Ancient Greek language, before another complicated deployment of the term in the Roman era (Cassius Dio 49.30). It is very difficult to interpret what this word means exactly and what Thucydides meant to say in this passage.

[12] Literally, hoplite means "person who manipulates *hopla*." *Hopla* are weapons and armor, but also many other tools like rope. Aristotle uses *hopla* to reference scales, shells, or the thick hides of animals. In defending the natural superiority of humans over other animals, he summarizes his opponents' arguments that humans are inferior to other animals because they are born barefoot, naked, and without a *hoplon* in case of a fight (Aristotle *De partibus animalium* 687a). By Aristotle's time, therefore, the term *hopla* seemingly encapsulated anything that could be used in a fight.

[13] Homer is the earliest author to use the word *phalanx*, although primarily in the plural (e.g. Homer *Iliad* 13.125-135). In book thirteen of the *Iliad*, the *phalanges* stop Hector from rolling down the hill like a dislodged boulder (13.136-146). In book sixteen, Homer compares *phalanges* of men to a stone wall that will keep out a chill wind (16.212-216). Hesiod, Mimnermos, and Tyrtaios also use the term to describe the first line of hoplites in the battleline (Hesiod *Theogony* 676, 935; Mimnermos 13.3; Tyrtaios 12.21-22). These are not the only uses of the term, but early Archaic poets clearly felt comfortable using the term as a metaphor to describe groups of warriors.

[14] Thucydides never uses the word; Herodotus uses it to describe blocks or logs of ebony (Herodotus 3.97); and Aristophanes, a comic poet, uses the word to describe small insects, perhaps spiders (Aristophanes *Frogs* 1314; *Wasps* 1509).

[15] For example, see Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.1-6.

[16] Our best ancient source for these military systems is Asclepiodotus' *Tactics*, which was probably written in the first century BCE. Unfortunately, this was about two hundred years after Alexander's death, so there is good reason to read Asclepiodotus with a critical eye.

[17] Roman sources describe the Macedonian phalanx as an invention that returned to Homeric styles of warfare (Diodorus Siculus 16.3.2, Polybius 18.29). In their minds, there was an important distinction between Classical hoplite formations and the Macedonian *phalanx*.

[18] Anthony M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons: From the End of the Bronze Age to 600 B.C.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964); Anthony M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armor of the Greeks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).

[19] This is the thesis of Snodgrass' first monograph (1964). Using a much broader range of evidence, van Wees confirmed this observation forty years later. See van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, 48-50.

[20] Anthony M. Snodgrass "The Hoplite Reform and History," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 85 (1965): 110–22, 110.

[21] These observations are most succinctly stated in the conclusion of Snodgrass' 1964 monograph. See Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons: From the End of the Bronze Age to 600 B.C.*

[22] van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, 168-169, 232-233.

[23] van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities*, 232-233.

[24] van Wees, "Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development," in Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 222-255, 236.

[25] Proponents of the orthodoxy are very intentional with their pronouns.

[26] Konijnendijk, C*lassical Greek Tactics: A Cultural History*, 39.

[27] Herodotus 7.229. In this passage, Herodotus highlights that the enslaved person fled while their master perished, which probably indicates that fighting beside one's master was the norm. Herodotus tells us this detail because it was abnormal and supported his own objective of lionizing Spartan martial culture.

[28] Herodotus 8.24.2-25. In this passage, Herodotus just calls the viewers of the dead the allied men, *symmachoi andres*. But immediately before this scene, Herodotus specified that the best of the king's allies, *aristous ton basileos symmachon*, were Ionians and Karians from Greek-speaking Asia Minor (Herodotus 8.19). These parts of the Greek world were part of the Persian Empire at that time.

[29] Herodotus 9.28-29.

[30] According to Herodotus, the Spartan wing of the army, which was the only wing to engage the Persians directly, consisted of 1,500 Tegeans, 5,000 Perioikoi, 5,000 Spartans, and 35,000 enslaved people (Herodotus 9.28-29).

[31] W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Greek State at War Part I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 49-51; van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities,* 68-71.

[32] Athens: *Inscriptiones Graecae* I[3] 1032; Thucydides 7.13; A. J. Graham, "Thucydides 7.13.2 and the Crews of Athenian Triremes." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 122 (1992): 257–70; Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume III: Books 5.25-8.109* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 563. Xenophon: Xenophon *Anabasis* 4.2.20-21, 7.3.20. Epaminondas: At the battle of Mantinea, Epaminondas asked his enslaved shield bearer, *upaspistes*, to report on what was happening in the field as he was being patched up (Diodorus Siculus 15.87.6, Pausanias 8.11.7, Xenophon *Hellenica* 7.5.25; see also Plato *Laws* 944a for context explaining how this is a medical scene).

[33] Lewis, *Greek Slave System in Their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800-146 BC.*

[34] Much could be said about the impact of the orthodoxy on European politics, including for terrorist organizations in Greece like the Golden Dawn party, but the focus here is on the United States of America.

[35] Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*. As far as I can tell, Hanson also does not address the regular practice of enslaving defeated enemies in his final chapters on the aftermath of battle.

[36] Plutarch *Apophthegmata Laconica* 51.11.

[37] Matthew A. Sears, "What the Ancient Greeks Can Teach Us about Gun Control," *The Washington Post*, accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/02/21/what-the-ancient-greeks-can-teach-us-about-gun-control/.

[38] Sarah E. Bond, "This Is Not Sparta," *Medium*, accessed February 1, 2024, https://eidolon.pub/this-is-not-sparta-392a9ccddf26.

[39] George Grote, *History of Greece, Vol. 3* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 31.

[40] This is the central thesis of his second monograph, see Victor Davis Hanson, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[41] Thucydides 2.35-46.

[42] Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, "Introduction," in Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013a), xi–xxi, xxi.

[43] Ryan Horne, "The Military and Athenian Democracy," in Alfred Andrea, Carolyn Neel, William E. Mierse, and Kevin M. McGeough, eds., *World History Encyclopedia. Era 3: Classical Traditions, 1000 BCE-300CE* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 5:333.

[44] William H. McNeill, *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History* (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Pub Group, 2005), 3.858-865.

[45] McNeill, *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History,* 3.863.

[46] McNeill, *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*, 3.1095.

[47] David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021, 580 ft. 99.

[48] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, 575 ft. 50; Wiesner-Hanks 2015, 110-115.

[49] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *A Concise History of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 110-111.

[50] This law is called the Dreros Constitution. For an English translation and commentary, see Michael Gagarin and Paula Perlman, *The Laws of Ancient Crete: C. 650-400 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford Classical Text, 2016), Dr1.

[51] Herodotus 7.9. This translation is my own. There are many open-access translations of this passage online, such as Godley 1922.

[52] Konijnendijk 2016.

[53] Herodotus 9.28-29.