

Warfare and Society in Ancient Greece

Lecture 5 The birth of the hoplite I



The birth of the hoplites

Aristotle, *Politics* IV.1397b 5

It is proper that the government should be drawn only from those who possess heavy armor.

Aristotle, *Politics* IV.1397b 16-28

The first political regime after the monarchies was composed of warriors and originally drawn from cavalry, for strength and superiority in warfare belonged to the cavalry. Without order heavy infantry is useless. In early times there was neither sound empirical practice in these matters nor rules for it, with the result that mastery on the battlefield rested with the cavalry. When the cities increased in population and number with arms became larger, then they took a share in the governing process. For this reason the constitutions we now call polities the ancients called democracies, for the middling class were few in number due to the smallness of the population, and consequently before this there was a small middling class, and given the form of contemporary military organization the people more easily tolerated being commanded.



Cultural heritage of hoplitisism

Diodorus 15.44.3

Those who had previously called hoplites, from the shield they carried had their name changed to peltasts from the name of their new shield, the pelta.



Hoplite ethics and the shield

Plutarch, *Moralia* 220A, *Sayings of the Spartans*

When someone asked Demaratus why the Spartans disgrace those who throw away their shields but not those who abandon their breastplates or helmets, he said that they put the latter on for their own sakes but the shield for the sake of the whole line.



The cost of being a hoplite

GHI² no. 14, ll. 9-10 (decree concerning Samos, late sixth century BC)

Each colonist is to provide arms himself to the value of thirty drachmae. When they are under arms, the archon shall pass the arms in review.

Aristophanes, *Peace* 1224-1225, 1250-1253

Arms seller: What use will I, in my wretched state, make of my 1000 drachmae corselet wonderfully joined? ... O hard-to-satisfy wretched, how you ruin me! What will we do now? Who will buy these helmets for which I paid a hundred drachmas?