

THE MYTH OF THE HOPLITE'S *HOPLON*

'Hoplites are troops who take their name from their shields'.¹ 'The individual infantryman took his name, *hoplites*, from the *hoplon* or shield'.² Such is the orthodox view. This paper will endeavour to show that its basis is inadequate. Rather, we shall argue,³ hoplites took their name from their arms and armour as a whole, their *hopla* in that all-encompassing sense; so that the original and essential meaning of the word hoplite was nothing more than '(heavily-)armed (infantry-)man'.

1. The idea that hoplites did derive their name from their shield—which is to say that there was a specific shield-type called the *hoplon* that generated the word *hoplites* as a description of its bearer—is indeed received wisdom on the subject amongst modern scholars. Textbooks and reference works on warfare serve it up with monotonous regularity as if stating a simple fact,⁴ and anyone seeking reassurance from *LS-J* apparently finds it: 'the large shield, from which the men-at-arms took their name of *ὀπλίται*' (thus s.v. *ὅπλον* III.2; cf., s.v. *ὀπλίτης* II, 'heavy-armed foot soldier, man-at-arms, who carried a pike (*δόρυ*) and a large shield (*ὅπλον*)').

The literary and epigraphical testimony mustered in support of this definition will be examined in §3 below. Here our preliminary point is that virtually all modern scholars who utter on the subject are content to repeat one another without reference to ancient evidence at all, and (as a result) without awareness of the doubts to which that evidence should properly give rise.⁵

¹ F. E. Adcock, *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1957), 3.

² A. M. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: the age of experiment* (London, 1980), 103; cf. idem, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (London, 1967), 53 ('...the most important single item in the panoply of the hoplite, from which indeed he took his name, was the great round shield or *hoplon*').

³ We each conceived the original nub of the argument independently of the other, and we have each contributed ideas to successive drafts (by Whitehead) of its elaboration; but the end-product, as proffered here, is our joint responsibility (and ours alone: helpful comments and a sympathetic overall response from our friend Victor Hanson were welcome but should not be regarded as incriminating him).

⁴ See (e.g.) N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.* (edn. 2, Oxford, 1967), 110 ('the Greek heavy-armed infantryman or "hoplite" as he came to be called after his shield (*hoplon*)') and again in *The Cambridge Ancient History* III.3 (edn. 2, Cambridge, 1982), 340 ('developed "hoplite warfare" (so-called from the *hoplon* or shield)'); Y. Garlan, *War in the Ancient World: a social history* (London, 1975), 123 ('The hoplite... was defined by his armour. He carried a round shield (*hoplon*)...'); O. Murray, *Early Greece* (Brighton & London, 1980), 124 ('The shield, the original weapon from which the hoplite took his name'); J. F. Lazenby, *The Spartan Army* (Warminster, 1985), 30 ('... "*hoplon*"... had almost certainly originally given the hoplite his name'); P. Ducrey, *Warfare in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1986), 47 ('the round shield (pl. 27) (called a *hoplon*, a generic term whose meaning was to be extended to the weapons as a whole and to the hoplite himself, since it was his principle [*sic*] weapon)') with pl. 27 (caption: 'the inner side of the round shield (*hoplon*) after which the hoplite soldier was named'); V. D. Hanson, *The Western Way of War: infantry battle in classical Greece* (New York, 1989), 27 ('On the left arm of this new warrior rested a round wooden shield some three feet in diameter, the *hoplon*, so radically different from its cowhide predecessor that it was from this piece of equipment that the infantryman eventually derived his name, "hoplite"'), cf. 240 (index: 'hoplon, see shield'); V. D. Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites: the classical Greek battle experience* (London & New York, 1991), 15 (J. K. Anderson: 'the great round shield, the *hoplon* from which the hoplite derived his name') and 272 (glossary: '*hoplon* (shield from which hoplite derived his name)').

⁵ An honourable exception is P. A. Cartledge, 'Hoplites and heroes: Sparta's contribution to the technique of ancient warfare', *JHS* 97 (1977), 11–27, at 12–13: 'the cardinal item of hoplite

2. What is, then, the evidential basis for the orthodox view? Unfortunately for present purposes, neither *hoplon* (in singular or plural) nor *hoplites* were the sort of terms that lexicographers and scholiasts were interested in defining; and by the same token, when hoplites first appear in the surviving sources, in the fifth century (see §6 below), they do so as a phenomenon needing—reasonably enough—no introduction.

The first and only definitional statement on the subject is accordingly a retrospective one. In the course of describing the military innovations of Iphikrates in fourth-century Athens, Diodoros 15.44.3 has this to say: *διὰ δὲ τῆς πείρας τῆς εὐχρηστίας ἀποδοχῆς τυγχανούσης, οἱ μὲν πρότερον ἀπὸ ἀσπίδων ὀπλῖται καλούμενοι τότε δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς πέλτης πελτασταὶ μετωνομάσθησαν*. One cannot help savouring the illogicality of an assertion that *peltastai* were named after their *pelte* just as *hoplitai* had once been named after their ...*aspides*! But be that (for the moment) as it may, the substantive point is the prudence of relying, for this purported information, on a writer so otherwise untrustworthy and so late. To declare him untrustworthy on this particular matter would incur the charge of begging the question at issue; so at this stage we shall refrain from doing so. His date, on the other hand, diminishes his authority here in a way less open to differences of opinion. Even if it be assumed that Ephoros was his source, that only takes us back from the first century (B.C.) to the fourth, some one hundred years on from the first surviving examples of the word *ὀπλίτης*, and perhaps three hundred since the necessity for the word had first arisen.

3. Under the *LS-J* definition of *hoplon* as ‘shield’ one is referred to eight passages, five in literary texts and three in inscriptions. Close scrutiny, however, casts doubt on the support that most of them provide for such a meaning, in any period. Here are the passages in chronological order.⁶

(i) Thuc. 7.75.5 (the Athenian retreat from Syracuse, 413): *καὶ τούτων οἱ τε ἄλλοι πάντες ἔφερον ὅτι τις ἐδύνατο ἑκαστος χρήσιμον, καὶ οἱ ὀπλῖται καὶ οἱ ἱππῆς παρὰ τὸ ἐιωθὸς αὐτοὶ τὰ σφέτερα αὐτῶν σιτία ὑπὸ τοῖς ὅπλοις*. Besides being easily the earliest of the texts at issue, special attention has been drawn to this as, it is held, the only ‘shield’ passage in Attic prose.⁷ But in truth the passage raises far more questions than it solves. First and foremost, the (in this context) vital words *ὑπὸ τοῖς ὅπλοις* do not occur in one of the best manuscripts, C (Laurentianus 69.2); and that was enough to persuade Hude (Teubner) and Forster Smith (Loeb), amongst others, to banish the phrase from their texts. Secondly, even if the tradition of manuscript B (Vaticanus 126) be preferred, some have thought that *ὑπὸ τοῖς ὅπλοις* calls for an emendation; *ἐπὶ τοῖς ὅπλοις* (Pluygers), producing the meaning ‘in addition to their arms’, is attractive and found favour with (e.g.) Poppo/Stahl and Classen/Steup. And thirdly, even if *ὑπὸ τοῖς ὅπλοις* is correct, what did Thucydides mean by it? For the *LS-J* classification and those who follow it, the presumed meaning is evidently ‘under the(ir) shields’. Such an interpretation, to be sure, is likelier than the abstract one, ‘while under arms’, adopted by Rex Warner in his Penguin Classic;⁸ but is it

equipment was the large round shield (invented by 700) from which, according to Diodorus (xv 44.3; cf. xxiii 2.1), the heavy-armed infantryman (*hoplites*) took his name’. The footnote to this then reads: ‘Cf. *peltastes* from *pelte*... But in Attic prose only Thucydides (vii 75.5) uses “hoplon” specifically for “shield” (applied to both cavalrymen and infantrymen). The Thebans are said to have used “hoplon” for breastplate: [Aristotle *fr.* 532 Rose]’. Diod. 23.2.1 actually has no bearing on the present problem. For comments on the other evidence Cartledge cites, see below.

⁶ Treating Diodorus as a source of the fourth century, not the first.

⁷ See above, n. 5.

⁸ Thuc. does not otherwise use the phrase *ὑπὸ τοῖς ὅπλοις*, and he had other ways of saying ‘while under arms’: *ἐν ὅπλοις* (e.g. 6.56.2, 6.61.2), *ξὺν ὅπλοις* (e.g. 5.11.1, 5.50.3), even *μεθ’ ὀπλων* (5.55.1). In addition to the different prepositions, an obstacle to Warner’s interpretation

better than 'under the(ir) breastplates'? (For *hoplon* as breastplate see below.) Taking the view that neither, in all honesty, makes much sense, we leave that question open. If Thucydides really did write any phrase mentioning *hopla*, it was more probably ἐπὶ τοῖς ὅπλοις; but we are unconvinced that he did.

(ii) Diod. 15.44.3 has been quoted above (§2), and it presents the paradox stated: that hoplites were named 'from the(ir) shields' is claimed without use of the word *hoplon* or *hopla* as such. We do not feel entitled to argue that by dint of that curiosity alone the (unique) claim condemns itself as bogus; all the same, its strangeness as a matter of logical expression does nothing for its credibility as an authentic item of information.⁹

(iii) Diod. 17.18.1 (Alexander the Great at the temple of Athena Ilias, 334): τὸ μὲν ἴδιον ὅπλον ἀνέθηκε τῇ θεῷ, τῶν δ' ἐν τῷ νεῷ κειμένων ὅπλων τὸ κράτιστον ἀναλαβὼν καὶ τοῦτω καθοπισθεὶς ἐχρήσατο κατὰ τὴν πρώτην μάχην. The interpretative key to this comes three chapters later, in 21.2: δύο μὲν ἔχων εἰς τὸν θώρακα πληγὰς, μίαν δὲ εἰς τὸ κράνος, τρεῖς δ' εἰς τὸ καθαυρεθὲν ὅπλον ἐκ τοῦ νεῷ τῆς Ἀθηναίης. So whatever the actual facts of the case (and Arrian's are different: *Anab.* 1.11.7–8), here the singular *hoplon* removed from the temple—and by implication the one dedicated there in its place—is differentiated, in a context of defensive armour, from both a breastplate and a helmet. It can thus be nothing other than a shield. (Did Diodorus necessarily, though, take the word ὅπλον from his source?)

(iv) Nicostratus fr. 29 Kock and (v) Menander, *Mon.* 433, cf. 619. They may be taken as a pair because both these practitioners of New Comedy, as *LS-J* indicates, are using, for sententious purposes, a metaphorical sense of *hoplon*. Nicostratus' character rhetorically asserts that freedom of speech is the working man's *hoplon* (ἀρ' οἶσθ' ὅτι τῆς πενίας ὅπλον ἢ παρρησία.); an elaboration then seems to gloss *hoplon* as *aspis* (ταύτην ἐάν τις ἀπολέσῃ, τὴν ἀσπίδ' ἀποβέβληκεν οὗτος τοῦ βίου). Our comment here is that another legitimate way to construe the second line would be to see it not as a gloss but as a shift towards greater specificity and concreteness. As to Menander's dictum, it is preserved in three variants—for besides *Monostichoi* 433 and 619 there is another version in the Byzantine collections—the authenticity and priority of which need not concern us here. The notion common to them all is that something (ἀρετή, λόγος, χρήματα) is mankind's μέγιστον ὅπλον. 'Shield' is, clearly, a possible rendering but not the only one. Again 'breastplate' would serve equally well, if it were held that the thought requires, of itself, only a general orientation towards defence rather than attack. On the other hand why should it be so held, when words and money, at any rate, can be readily put to offensive use?¹⁰

(vi) IG XI.2, 203, B, line 99 (hieropoeic inventory from third-century Delos): ἱμάτιον, παραπέτασμα, ὅπλον στύππινον παρέδομεν. 'Quid sit nescio' was

of 7.75.5 is the definite article used there; the closest parallel would be 4.14.2, ἐπαισβαίνοντες ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν ξὺν τοῖς ὅπλοις, but that has precisely the concreteness Warner chooses not to see in 7.75.5.

⁹ The suggestion has been put to us that Diodorus (or his source?) might have decided to write ἀπὸ τῶν ἀσπίδων rather than ἀπὸ τῶν ὅπλων because ἀπὸ τῶν ὅπλων would not naturally have conveyed to readers the specific meaning 'shields' as opposed to the generic one 'gear'; in that regard the singular ἀπὸ τοῦ ὅπλου would have served better but could not be used, since the thought was being expressed about hoplites in the plural. However, Diodorus was happy enough to say that peltasts in the plural were named ἀπὸ τῆς πέλτης, not ἀπὸ τῶν πέλτων; so the enigma remains.

¹⁰ It may be noted here that [Epich.] fr. 275, ποτὶ πονηρὸν οὐκ ἄχρηστον ὅπλον ἃ πονηρία is classified by *LS-J* as a general 'arms' usage, not a specific 'shield' one; that is to say, presumably, πονηρία is a weapon, not a defence, against the πονηρός.

Dürnbach's comment *ad loc.* on ὄπλον στύππινον. One would be bound to concur, were it obligatory to see anything military here.¹¹ However, surely a ὄπλον of στυππείον listed, as this one is, straight after a ἱμάτιον and (especially) a παραπέτασμα should be visualized as a rope or cord of some kind.

(vii) IG II²1012, lines 17–18 (Athenian honorific decree, late second century): ἀναθεῖναι εἰκόνα γραπτὴν ἐν ὄπλῳ. (Cf. lines 26–27, τῇ[ν] ἀνάθεσιν τῇ[s] γραπτῆς εἰκόνης ἐν ὄπλῳ.) 'De imagine picta in clipeo ponenda haec intellegit Boeckh' (Kirchner *ad loc.*). And probably rightly, given the long history of such things stretching back to Hephaistos' great shield for Achilles (*Iliad* 18.478ff.). On the other hand, decorated body-armour could lay claim to epic precedent too (e.g. Agamemnon's θώρηξ in *Iliad* 11.19–28).

(viii) IGR 4.1302 (SGDI 311), lines 34–5 (honorific decree from Kyme, turn of first century B.C./A.D.): ὀντέθην δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ εἰκόνας, γράπταν τε ἐν ὄπλῳ ἐνχρύσω καὶ χαλκίαν. This bears obvious comparison with the preceding item; the same comments thus apply.

4. A meagre haul, then: Diodorus, New Comedy, and a couple of late-Hellenistic and Roman-era inscriptions. Admittedly, *LS-J* is a lexicon, not an index. No claim to completeness of citations is made, for any word or meaning thereof; and there are in point of fact several further cases of *hoplon* as shield to be had.¹² Above all, the practice of inscribing words and/or pictures¹³ on a (metal) *hoplon* for honorific purposes is exemplified not only by the two inscriptions just cited (§3 items vii–viii) but also by numerous others, from Athens and elsewhere.¹⁴ Agamemnon's θώρηξ and its ilk notwithstanding, we are prepared to concede that in such cases the singular, unspecified ὄπλον upon which the craftsman would set to work was normally a shield. (Plurals are another matter. When, for example, Polybius at 2.2.9–11 and 2.4.1–2 uses the phrase τῶν ὄπλων ἐπιγραφὴ about the city of Medion during the First Illyrian War, there is no justification for a translation like that of W. R. Paton in the Loeb edition which restricts it to 'shields'. What is involved here is booty, arms and armour taken as spoils, any and every item of which could and did bear dedicatory inscriptions.¹⁵)

It thus seems beyond dispute that 'shield' became one commonly understood meaning of *hoplon* in post-classical usage. The generic meaning was not, however, lost sight of even then. As well as Polybius, witness for instance the sacred law (late-third or early-second century) from Xanthos with its prohibition upon taking ὄπλον μὴθὲν into the Letôon.¹⁶ In any case, our contention here is that what Hellenistic or later evidence illuminates, unless there are good indications to the contrary, is Hellenistic or later usage. And what happens if it is screened out, in favour of concentration on

¹¹ In a military context, tow (στυππείον) is generally encountered as a substance readily combustible; that does not lend it much plausibility as a protective material.

¹² One, drawn to our attention by Victor Hanson, is Polyaeus' summary account (3.8.1) of how Archinos became tyrant of Argos. This has *hoplon* in the singular as, surely, shield (καὶ τὸν ὄπλον ἐκάστω τῶν πολιτῶν διδοὺς τὸ παλαιὸν ἐλάμβανεν ὡς ἀναθήσων τοῖς θεοῖς) sandwiched between what look like two allusions to *hopla* as generic plurals.

¹³ Note W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War III* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1979), 261 n. 90 on the ambiguity of ἐπίσημος (e.g. IG II²1425.272, ἀσπίδες ἐπίσημοι) in this regard.

¹⁴ For Athens see (e.g.) IG II²1039.35–6 (and 39), 1043.35, 1048.12–13, 1049.6–7, 1050.6–7, 1070.7–8; SEG 22.111.12–13, 25.134.10–11, 28.95.9–10, 38.1889.7. Elsewhere (e.g.): *Caria Iasos* 24.35–7; *FD III.4* 69.14ff.; *IG V.2* 269.14–16; *IG VII* 2711.71–3 and 116–17.

¹⁵ See (e.g.) Pritchett (n. 13 above), 240–95; A. H. Jackson in Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites* (n. 4 above), 228–49.

¹⁶ SEG 36.1221 = C. Le Roy, *RA* 1986, 279–300, with epigraphic parallels at 289 n. 53.

nothing later than the fourth century? The short answer is that nobody examining the vocabulary of the late-archaic and classical periods would emerge with the view that 'hoplites' derived their name from their shields.

5. When, in particular, does the 'shield' meaning of *hoplon* first occur? Given the manifold problems surrounding Thuc. 7.75.5 (§3 item i),¹⁷ the earliest clearcut specimen we can find appears in Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.25. In this account of an event of the late-fifth century probably written in the mid-fourth, the Peiraeus men of 403 *ὅπλα ἐποιούντο, οἱ μὲν ξύλινα, οἱ δὲ οἰσύνια, καὶ ταῦτα ἐλευκούντο.*

Here is a significant finding as far as it goes. By this time if not earlier, a writer could use the word *ὅπλα* and expect the context to make his readers visualize shields—somewhat as if the image of a cat were conjured up by mention of a 'pet' being given a saucer of milk and purring in appreciation. (It is worth remarking that the reason why *Hell.* 2.4.25 succeeds in its aim of producing a mental picture of shields is because of the materials of which the *ὅπλα* are said to be made. Quite possibly, therefore, Xenophon felt unable to write of *ἀσπίδες* here precisely because of that word's close association with hoplite shields, which, although constructed upon a wooden core, had bronze facings, and were never made of osiers.)

We stress again, however, that there was no question of the generic meaning of *ὅπλα*, common from the *Iliad* onwards, as 'implements of war, arms and armour' (*LS-J*) losing its vigour. Xenophon himself, to look no further, employs it constantly. An example occurs just a few chapters earlier in the *Hellenica*: *Θρασύβουλος τοὺς μεθ' αὐτοῦ θέσθαι κελεύσας τὰς ἀσπίδας καὶ αὐτος θέμενος, τὰ δ' ἄλλα ὅπλα ἔχων* (2.4.12). A piquant case in that the *hopla* concerned expressly exclude shields! Later in the same work there are passages where the meaning of *hopla*, though still generic, seems defined by the context as offensive weapons rather than armour: *Hell.* 5.4.3 (*ξίφιδια ἔχοντας καὶ ἄλλο ὅπλον οὐδέν*) and, especially, 7.5.17 (*οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτω βραχὺ ὅπλον ἐκάτεροι εἶχον ὥστε οὐκ ἐξικινούντο ἀλλήλων*). Another phenomenon is illustrated by *Hell.* 5.4.18: troops unable to manage all their *hopla* (generic) solve the problem by discarding one major item, their *aspides* (*τέλος δὲ πολλοὶ οὐ δυνάμενοι σὺν τοῖς ὅπλοις πορεύεσθαι, ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν τοῦ ἄκρου κατέλιπον λίθων ἐμπλήσαντες ὑπτίας τὰς ἀσπίδας*). And elsewhere Xenophon sometimes calls *hoplon* one piece of either offensive or defensive equipment which he has already specified by a more exact name: thus for instance of a sling in *Cyrop.* 7.4.15 (*πάντας δὲ τοὺς ἀόπλους τῶν ὑποχειρίων γενομένων σφενδονᾶν ἡνάγκαζε μελετᾶν, νομίζων τοῦτο τὸ ὅπλον δουλικώτατον εἶναι*) and of a breastplate in *Eq.* 12.2 (*χρῆναι τὸν θώρακα πρὸς τὸ σῶμα πεποιήσθαι... ὅ γε μὴν λίαν στενὸς δεσμός, οὐχ ὅπλον ἐστίν*).¹⁸

6. So much for the fourth century, the period in which—to give him the maximum benefit of the doubt—Diodorus' claim that hoplites were named after their shields

¹⁷ Another Thucydidean passage seemingly relevant but disqualified by textual corruption is 7.45.2: *ἀπέθανον δὲ οὐκ ὀλίγοι αὐτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων, ὅπλα μέντοι ἐτι πλείω ἢ κατὰ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἐλήφθη· οἱ γὰρ κατὰ τῶν κρημνῶν βιασθέντες ἄλλεσθαι ψιλοὶ [ἀνὲρ τῶν ἀσπίδων] οἱ μὲν ἀπώλλοντο, οἱ δ' ἐσώθησαν*; editors for the last 150 years and more have been unanimous in expunging an (incompetent) explanatory interpolation.

¹⁸ Compare the tantalizing *fr.* 532 Rose (cf. n. 5 above), referring to a bronze *thorax* carried in procession at the Amyklaian Hyakinthia: *τοῦτον δὲ Θηβαῖοι ὅπλον ἐκάλουν*. This is interesting if, as it seems, it indicates an early departure from generic usage. However, much more would be needed to justify any hypothesis that the hoplite's characteristic *hoplon* was his *thorax*, especially since Aristotle thought that Theban terminology in this regard called for comment. (What, precisely, Aristotle found comment-worthy is unclear, however. *CQ*'s referee opined that it was the use of *hoplon* for a *thorax* rather than for a shield. Perhaps so, given the period.)

may have originated. Let us now go back further still. If the word *ὀπλίτης* was first coined in the (late) eighth century, the seventh, or even the sixth, it has left no trace. Rather, surviving sources focus attention on the second quarter of the fifth century. This provides the three earliest examples of *ὀπλίτης*, all of them adjectival. In his *First Isthmian*, written c. 470, Pindar writes of excellence in the naked foot-races *ἐν τ' ἀσπιδοδούποισιν ὀπλίταις δρόμοις* (line 23). And shortly afterwards, in 467, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* has two of its characters using the phrase *ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης*: first (line 466) a shield, *aspis*, is said to depict an *ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης* climbing a scaling-ladder; later (line 717) Eteokles declares that *οὐκ ἀνδρ' ὀπλίτην τοῦτο χρὴ στέργειν ἔπος* (sc. that the gods reward even a *κακὴ νίκη*).

Pindar, of course, refers here not to hoplite warfare as such but to its agonistic facsimile, the races in hoplite gear which had been added to the programme of the Olympic and other Games in, it seems, the last third of the sixth century.¹⁹ What is known of the events and of the terminology applied to them unfortunately sheds no light on the root-meaning of *ὀπλίτης*.²⁰ As for Aeschylus, he did, though, have true warfare in mind. It was Bronze Age warfare here in the *Seven*, to be sure, but a contemporary conflict five years earlier, in the *Persai*, with (at lines 378–9) its stately circumlocutions for both the sailors (*πᾶς ἀνὴρ κώπης ἄναξ*) and the soldiers (*πᾶς θ' ὀπλων ἐπιστάτης*) defeated at Salamis.

Moving into the second half of the fifth century we find *ὀπλίτης* establishing itself in common parlance. Herodotus has just one 'Aeschylean' *ἄνδρα ὀπλίτην* (6.117.3)²¹ as against sixteen instances of hoplite as noun; Thucydides' military vocabulary depends heavily on the noun *ὀπλίτης* and its cognates and periphrases; Athenian theatre-audiences grew accustomed to both Aristophanes and Euripides using the word, whether as adjective or noun; Athenian decrees on stone refer to the city's hoplites as a matter of course (IG I³60, line 16, tribute-collection c. 430; 118, line 29, treaty with Selymbria 407). And as the background to all this, never so much as a hint—Thuc. 7.75.5 aside—of *hoplon* as 'shield'.

7. The absence of cases (earlier than Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.25) of *hoplon/hopla* with the meaning 'shield' will be a matter of surprise—or disappointment—only to those still in thrall to the myth of the hoplite's *hoplon*. Besides, another word for shield was readily available: *aspis*; and any objection that *aspis* was not sufficiently precise to be used of an artefact so specific as the hoplite's shield (with its characteristic *porpax* and

¹⁹ See in general (e.g.) E. N. Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals* (London, 1910), 285–9 (and *Athletics of the Ancient World* [Oxford, 1930], 140–1); J. Jüthner in *RE* 8.2 (1913), 2297–8; H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics* (London, 1964), 74–5 (and *Sport in Greece and Rome* [London, 1972], 33); M. I. Finley/H. W. Pleket, *The Olympic Games: the first thousand years* (London, 1976), 41–2.

²⁰ (1) *Terminology*. Pindar's phraseology (above) turns out to involve no poetic licence, as by far its commonest official, epigraphic counterpart is *ὀπλίτην/ὀπλίταν/ὀπλείτην* (sc. *δρόμον*); IG V.1 1120.9–10 is a fifth-century example (from Lakonia). Literary usage is more varied, with Pausanias a prime case in point: *τῶν ὀπλίτων ὁ δρόμος* in 5.8.10, *ὁ τοῦ ὀπλίτου δρόμος* in 6.10.4, *τοῦ ὀπλου τὸν δρόμον* in 6.13.2. In 3.14.3 he rings the changes with *τὸν σὺν τῇ ἀσπίδι δρόμον*, but that is no more revelatory of the meaning of *ὀπλον* or *ὀπλίτης* than is Pindar's *ἡραx ἀσπιδοδούποισιν*; both describe the simple fact of the matter, i.e. (2) *Substance*. The actual equipment which the competitors wore and/or carried varied between one venue and another but, in some cases at least, was steadily reduced over the course of time; see the discussions cited in the preceding note. In the post-classical era the end-product of this trend seems to have been shields only at the Olympics (Paus. 5.12.8, 6.10.4) and the Pythians (*Syll.*³ 419.6ff.) at any rate; but again one should not read back anything from that into the sixth or early fifth centuries.

²¹ See also Aristoph. *Wasps* 360; Eur. *Suppl.* 585, *Herakles* 190.

antilabe) falls away in the face of ancient usage itself. If modern scholars feel the need for a technical vocabulary of their own to apply to ancient military matters, it can do no harm provided it does not masquerade as ancient terminology.

As for Diodorus, the principal ancient villain of our piece, he believed—possibly because he had read—that *ὀπλίται* were named *ἀπὸ τῶν ἀσπίδων*. The words he used (as opposed to the facts he imagined they conveyed) prompt the question why the designation generated *ἀπὸ τῶν ἀσπίδων* was not *ἀσπισταί*. To this our reply would be that Homer had already claimed *ἀσπισταί* for the poetic high ground. Something similar, indeed, might be said of (e.g.) *αἰχμηταί*, *θωρηκταί* and *κορυσταί*. Perfectly good words in their way, all four of them, but with two drawbacks: one of tone, in their epic associations, and one of substance, in their focus upon a single element in (what became) the hoplite's *panoplia* at the expense of all the other components. Tonally speaking, *ὀπλίτης*, whether as adjective or noun, was better because more down-to-earth. The hoplite was the man comprehensively tooled up, geared up, to fight; the man equipped with the full tackle of war.²² Like *ὀπλίτης*, the word *πανοπλία* itself does not appear in surviving sources before the fifth century. A cognate, on the other hand, does. In the mid-seventh century Tyrtaeus (fragment 11.38 West) described light-armed troops, *γυμνήτες*, as *τοῖσι πανόπλοισι* (Dindorf: *πανοπλοῖσι*(ν) vett.: *πανοπλίταις* recc.) *πλησίον ἰστάμενοι*; and this after several times mentioning *aspides* amongst the equipment such 'fully-armed' carried.²³

We rest our case. Latter-day students of hoplite warfare have spoiled a valuable understanding that the *porpax-antilabe* shield became a, perhaps even the, crucial *hoplon* in fact²⁴ with a notion that the very word *hoplites* encapsulated that fact. It did not: the notion is ill-founded and anachronistic. From a terminological point of view the obsession with the hoplite's shield is almost entirely a modern one.²⁵ Those who first gave him his name took a more balanced view.

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²² Anyone hankering after a more speculative alternative than this might wish, in the light of the 'ropes' meaning of *hopla* (e.g. Hdt. 7.25.1, 9.115; and cf. §3 item vi, above), to consider understanding *ὀπλίται* as roped-men, on the general analogy of yoked-men, the likeliest meaning for *ζευγίται* (D. Whitehead, 'The archaic Athenian *ζευγίται*', *CQ* 31 [1981], 282–6). We ourselves, however, are disinclined to challenge one dubious hypothesis only to advocate another.

²³ See lines 4, 24, 28, 31 and 35 (where however some would understand *ὑπ' ἀσπίδος ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος* as referring to light shields carried by the *γυμνήτες* themselves: W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* IV [Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1985], 40 with n. 131). After Tyrtaeus, the next extant appearance of *panoplos* is again in Aeschylus (*Septem* 59, *πάνοπλος Ἀργείων στρατός*).

²⁴ We emphasize 'became' in view of the cogent demonstration, by Hanson in Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites* (n. 4 above), 63–84, that 'hoplite'-warfare, phalanx-fighting, preceded rather than followed the appearance of the weaponry, the *hopla*, appropriate to it.

²⁵ No justification for it should be sought in the fact that poetic language occasionally picked out the shield for emphasis: Aesch. *Septem* 19, *ἐθρέψατ' οἰκητήρας ἀσπιδηφόρους*; Eur. *Suppl.* 1095–6, *ἐφέδρους <δ> ἰππότας μὲν ἰππότηαις | ἔταξ', ὀπλίτας δ' ἀσπιδηφόροις ἔπι*. (This latter passage should be regarded in the same light as the Pindaric one (n. 20 above): it stems from a simple fact—that hoplites carried *aspides*—without implying a definition.) And note in general Hanson, *Western Way* (n. 4 above), 65: 'what accounts for the particular emphasis on the shield in [ancient] literature is the natural Greek notion that its loss alone affected everyone in the formation who were similarly equipped...'; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 220A.