

DIODOROS ON DELION AND EURIPIDES' SUPPLICES

Diodoros (12.70.1–3) gives the following account of the battle at Delion in 424 B.C.:

ἀμφοτέρων δὲ προθύμως ὥρμημένων παρετάχθησαν αἱ δυνάμεις τόνδε τὸν τρόπον. παρὰ τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς ἐτάχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ δεξιὸν κέρας Θηβαῖοι, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ εὐώνυμον Ὀρχομένιοι, τὴν δὲ μέσσην ἀνεπλήρουν φάλαγγα Βοιωτοί· προεμάχοντο δὲ πάντων οἱ παρ' ἐκείνοις ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται καλούμενοι, ἄνδρες ἐπίλεκτοι τριακόσιοι. Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ διατάττοντες ἔτι τὴν δύναμιν ἠναγκάσθησαν συνάψαι μάχην. γενομένης δὲ τῆς παρατάξεως ἰσχυρᾶς, τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οἱ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἵππεις ἀγωνιζόμενοι λαμπρῶς ἠνάγκασαν φυγεῖν τοὺς ἀντιστάντας ἵππεις· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τῶν πεζῶν διαγωνισαμένων οἱ ταχθέντες κατὰ τοὺς Θηβαίους Ἀθηναῖοι βιασθέντες ἐτράπησαν, οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Βοιωτοὺς τρεψάμενοι καὶ συχνοὺς ἀνελόντες ἐφ' ἱκανὸν τόπον ἐδίωξαν. οἱ δὲ Θηβαῖοι, διαφέροντες ταῖς τῶν σωμάτων ῥώμας, ἐπέστρεψαν ἀπὸ τοῦ διωγμοῦ, καὶ τοῖς διώκουσι τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐπιπεσόντες φυγεῖν ἠνάγκασαν· ἐπιφανεῖ δὲ μάχῃ νικήσαντες μεγάλην ἀπηνέγκαντο δόξαν πρὸς ἀνδρείαν.

His description differs from that of Thucydides (4.91–101) in two significant ways: there are charioteers and their riders (ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται) fighting as *promachoi* before the Boiotian hoplites, and the Athenians are victorious in a cavalry clash before the main encounter of the infantry.¹

These differences in Diodoros' account, specifically his assertion that chariots were present in the fighting at Delion, have elicited a variety of reactions from scholars. Jeffery in the *CAH* accepted Diodoros' statement at face value and included charioteers and their *parabatai* as part of the Theban military of the late fifth century B.C.² Wilamowitz suggested that Diodoros' reference to chariots here was simply an archaism of language which preserved the title of 'charioteers and their riders' for an élite group of the Theban army long after this group had ceased to use chariots in battle. He cited as a parallel for such an anachronistic title the *ἵππεις* of the classical Spartan army, a group of hoplites which acted as a guard for the king when the Spartans entered battle.³ Gomme and Pritchett simply rejected Diodoros as wrong on all counts but neither provided an analysis of the issue.⁴

Despite the authority of the *CAH*, it is incredible that chariots would have been present at Delion. There is no evidence for their use by any Greek hoplite army,⁵ and it is not possible to construct a scenario in which they would have made tactical sense in such an army on the Greek mainland. The explanation of Wilamowitz, which on first

¹ In addition, Diodoros fails to mention the sudden appearance of the Boiotian cavalry on the Athenian right which turned the tide of the battle; cf. Thuc. 4.96.5.

² *CAH* 4² (1988), 360.

³ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Euripides Herakles* (Berlin, 1895), 3.113–14. The term *hippeis* would seem to suggest that originally it had been a cavalry corps, but Lazenby in *OCD*³ (s.v. 'hippeis', 709) plausibly suggests that these Spartan Hippeis could well have been originally a squadron of chariots.

⁴ A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford, 1956), 3.568 and W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1974), 2.221–2.

⁵ Herodotus (5.113.1) refers to *πολεμστήρια ἄρματα* among the forces of the Kouries on Cyprus in the 490s, but clearly this is due to the proximity of the island to Asia, where chariots were used in warfare throughout the classical period by the native populations. Cf. J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938) s.v. ἄρμα. and W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford, 1912), 2.62.

consideration seems plausible, also has problems, not the least of which is that, even if it is right, it does not solve the problem of a victorious Athenian cavalry charge in Diodoros' account. This paper will argue that Gomme and Pritchett are correct in rejecting the historicity of Diodoros' account, and, through an investigation of the whole issue, will offer an explanation of Diodoros' error and free us from charioteers or their misnamed descendants on the battlefield at Delion.

The attraction of Wilamowitz's explanation can be estimated from the fact that three other scholars in the century since have arrived at essentially the same conclusion, all without knowledge of Wilamowitz, and, apparently, of each other.⁶ But when the implications of his explanation are followed up, it becomes much less convincing. Diodoros' description seems to support Wilamowitz in so far as he says these men were the ones 'called' the charioteers and their riders and he describes them as an 'élite' (ἐπίλεκτοι) of three hundred. We must conclude, then, that there was an anachronistically named cavalry counterpart to the ἱερὸς λόχος which existed in the Theban army fifty years before the formation of its better-known infantry complement. Or, alternatively, since there is nothing in Diodoros which excludes it, we might conclude that it was an élite hoplite group, but then that necessarily assumes a precursor to the Sacred Band which disappeared (annihilated like the Band itself in one battle?) or was reformed under a new title in the fourth century. Although the term *epilektoi* is often used to describe a group which performed special duties within an army (light-armed troops for ambushes or bodyguards of magistrates), we must conclude from Diodoros' description of their position as a *promachic* group that the ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται would have been a select group of 'professional' cavalry or hoplites who trained all year round at their own expense or that of the state.⁷ The evidence for such *epilektoi* within hoplite armies has been collected by Pritchett, and except for the ephemeral Argive One Thousand and a shadowy group, the Six Hundred, in the Syracusan army, these élite bands were a fourth-century phenomenon. Their development, then, is testimony to the experience of constant warfare in the Peloponnesian War and to the advantage to a citizen army of a sub-group always trained and in fighting trim.⁸ It is not impossible that there was an élite band in the Theban army of the fifth century called the ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται, but circumstantial evidence does not support the probability and the complete silence about such a group in all the rest of our evidence for the Theban military argues against its plausibility.

But as mentioned above, the problem with Diodoros' account is twofold, and an explanation, even if plausible, of the ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται does not solve the problem of Diodoros' account of the cavalry in the battle. In Thucydides, the Athenian cavalry do not figure at all in the battle, and the Boiotian cavalry only as a flying squadron against the Athenian right wing whose sudden appearance turns the tide of the battle in favour of the Boiotians. The cavalry of both armies had been aligned on

⁶ J. Kromayer and G. Veith, *Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen und Römer* (Munich, 1928), 2.64 (followed by Lambertz in *RE* s.v. 'Παραβάται', XVIII 3, 1126–7); P. Salmon, *Étude sur la confédération béotienne* (Brussels, 1978 = *Mém. classe des lettres, Acad. Royale de Belgique*, vol. 63, fasc. 3), 181; and G. L. Huxley, 'Boiotian charioteers in Diodoros', *Philologus* 135 (1991), 320–1. And so these *parabatai* have now become accepted as 'a type of warrior found in central Greece in the fifth century' (A. M. Bowie, 'Tragic filters for history: Euripides' *Supplikes* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* [Oxford, 1997], 46, n. 63).

⁷ Salmon (n. 6), 181 and *RE* XVIII 3, 1127.

⁸ On *epilektoi* in Greek armies, cf. Pritchett (n. 4), 2.221–4, who correctly excludes the Spartan Hippeis as being of a different order.

the wings of each line (4.93.4–94.1), and Thucydides says that the extreme wings of both lines did not figure in the main battle because they were hindered by water-courses (4.96.2)

Huxley thought that the differences in Diodoros' account of Delion were due to Ephorus, but there is no evidence for this and, even if true, such a suggestion only moves the problem back to Ephorus. It does not explain the mysterious charioteers and the Athenian success with their cavalry at Delion.⁹

A solution to the problems in Diodoros, 12.70, may be found in Euripides' account of the battle for the return of the dead Argives in his *Supplikes* (650–725). A Messenger gives the following description of the first part of the battle (674–83 and 694–6):

ποιμένες δ' ὄχων
 τετραόρων κατήρχον ἐντεύθεν μάχης·
 πέραν δὲ διελάσαντες ἀλλήλων ὄχους,
 παραιβάτας ἔστησαν ἐς τάξιν δορός.
 χοῖ μὲν σιδήρῳ διεμάχονθ', οἱ δ' ἔστρεφον
 πώλους ἐς ἀλκὴν αὐθις ἐς παραιβάτας.
 ἰδὼν δὲ Φόρβας, ὃς μοναμπύκων ἄναξ
 ἦν τοῖς Ἐρεχθεΐδαισιν, ἀρμάτων ὄχλον,
 οἷ τ' αὖ τὸ Κάδμου διεφύλασσον ἵππικόν,
 συνήψαν ἀλκὴν κάκράτουν ἡσσώντο τε . . .
 νικῶντα δ' ἵπποις ὥς ὑπείδετο στρατὸν
 Κρέων τὸν ἐνθένδ', ἰτέαν λαβὼν χερί
 χωρεῖ, πρὶν ἔλθεῖν ξυμμάχοις δυσθυμίαν.

As in Diodoros, there are charioteers and their *parabatai* fighting in Homeric fashion as *promachoi*, and the Athenians are successful in a preliminary cavalry charge, which moves Kreon to engage with his hoplites. Euripides' Messenger then provides a description of a standard hoplite battle that parallels remarkably the course of the battle at Delion as described by Thucydides. In both accounts the battle is even for some time marked by persistent pushing and fighting (cp. *Supp.* [699–700 and 706]: καὶ συμπατάξαντες μέσον πάντα στρατὸν / ἔκτεινον ἐκτείνοντο . . . ἦν δ' ἀγὼν ἰσορροπος and Thuc. 4.96.2: τὸ δὲ ἄλλο καρτερᾷ μάχῃ καὶ ὠθισμῷ ἀσπίδων ξυνειστήκει); the Thebans and the Athenians are both successful on their right wings (*Supp.* [704–6]: ἔκλινε γὰρ κέρας / τὸ λαῖον ἡμῶν· δεξιῷ δ' ἡσσώμενον / φεύγει τὸ κείνων . . . and Thuc. 4.96.3–4: καὶ τὸ μὲν εὐώνυμον τῶν Βοιωτῶν καὶ μέχρι μέσου ἡσσᾶτο ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων . . . τὸ μὲν οὖν ταύτῃ ἡσσᾶτο τῶν Βοιωτῶν καὶ πρὸς τὸ μαχόμενον κατέφυγε, τὸ δὲ δεξιόν, ἧ οἱ Θηβαῖοι ἦσαν, ἐκράτει τῶν Ἀθηναίων); but in each account defeat on the left wing is only avoided by the quick action of the commander of the successful army, Theseus for the Athenians and Pagondas for the Boiotians (*Supp.* 709–718 and Thuc. 4.96.5–6).

The similarity between Euripides' mythic battle and Thucydides' description of Delion has long been noted.¹⁰ It seems clear that the *Supplikes* must have been staged not long after 424 and the defeat at Delion, when the historical abrogation of the 'pan-Hellenic *nomos*' by the Thebans concerning the return of the dead would have been fresh in the minds of the Athenian audience, and the Messenger's description of Theseus' victory would have assuaged historical reality with presentation of mythic

⁹ Huxley (n. 6), 320.

¹⁰ Cf. Bowie (n. 6), 46, with references. In general on Euripides and hoplite battles, cf. J. F. Lazenby, 'The killing zone', in V. D. Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London/New York, 1991), 87–109.

success. There is reason to think, based on a statement in Plutarch's *Theseus*, that Euripides was the first to introduce into the tradition an actual fight over the bodies,¹¹ and the defeat at Delion would have been the motivation for this innovation.

Although Diodoros' description of Delion is puzzling, the anachronistic account of Homeric chariot battle and hoplite fighting in the *Supplices* can be explained as part of a motif of anachronistic juxtaposition that runs throughout the play. The most obvious anachronism is the character of Theseus himself, a king who rules over and lauds a democratic Athens (e.g. *Supp.* 429–55).¹² In the *Supplices*, the burial of the Argive dead is a combination of a hoplite burial of most of the dead (ὄχλος) at Eleutherai (just over the border into friendly territory, as defeated hoplite armies tended to do),¹³ and a heroic cremation of the Argive heroes at Eleusis and the return of their remains (except those of Capaneus) to Argos. This treatment of the heroes recalls the fate of Sarpedon, the Homeric hero and son of Zeus whose remains were transported by divine agency from Troy for burial in his homeland of Lycia (*Il.* 16.676–83), and, of course, the fate of the contemporary Athenian 'heroes' in their annual public funeral. Another anachronism occurs with Adrastus' funeral oration, which presents a eulogy of the individual dead heroes, a practice avoided in real *epitaphioi* until the very end of the genre;¹⁴ but it is praise that depicts the Argive heroes as *exempla* of fifth-century polis values.¹⁵ Euripides uses anachronistic juxtaposition throughout the *Supplices* to define the heroic action of the play by reference to contemporary circumstances, and so it is in relation to this motif of anachronism that the Messenger's description of the battle makes dramatic sense.

Euripides' battle description in the *Supplices* and Diodoros' account of Delion have the same character, and this leads to the conclusion that Diodoros incorporated the ahistorical reflection of Delion found in that play into his 'historical' account of the battle.¹⁶ In Euripides, the fighting progresses unhistorically but sequentially from the charge of the chariots and their *parabatai* (674–9) which in turn causes the Athenian cavalry commander to lead his force into the battle (680–3), and the success of the Athenian cavalry causes Kreon to enter the fray with his hoplites (694–6).

¹¹ Plut. *Thes.* 29.4: συνέπραξε δὲ καὶ Ἀδράστῳ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν τῶν ὑπὸ τῇ Καδμείᾳ πεσόντων, οὐχ ὡς Εὐριπίδης ἐποίησεν ἐν τραγωδίᾳ, μάχῃ τῶν Θηβαίων κρατήσας, ἀλλὰ πείσας καὶ σπεισάμενος· οὕτω γὰρ οἱ πλείστοι λέγουσι. After the production of the *Supplices*, the version of the myth in which the Athenians fight a battle to retrieve the dead became a staple theme of the Athenian *epitaphios logos* and other patriotic oratory (cf. Lysias, *Epitaph.* 7–10; Plato, *Menex.* 239b; Isocrates, *Paneg.* 54–59), and it is significant that both Plato and Isocrates credit the version of the myth that they give to the poets, Isocrates (*Panath.* 168) specifically to the tragic poets. Cf. C. Collard, *Euripides Supplices I* (Groningen, 1975), 6 and E. McDermott, 'Double meaning and mythic novelty in Euripides' plays', *TAPA* 121 (1991), 125–6.

¹² Cf. P. E. Easterling, 'Anachronism in Greek tragedy', *JHS* 105 (1985), 9, and N. T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic. Trojan Women and the Function of Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1994), 207–15.

¹³ Cf. Pritchett (n. 4), 4.99–100.

¹⁴ N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens. The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harvard, 1986), 52–3.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Foley, 'The politics of tragic lamentation', in A. Sommerstein et al. (edd.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari, 1993), 119–20; Bowie (n. 6), 51–2; and C. Pelling, 'Conclusion', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), 230–1.

¹⁶ This is not the place to enter into the *aporia* of Diodoros and his sources. Cf. the recent discussions in K. Sacks, *Diodoros Siculus and the First Century* (Princeton, 1990) and P. Stylianou, *A Historical Commentary on Diodoros Siculus Book 15* (Oxford, 1998), 25–131. I assume, based on Diodoros' affinity for Euripides (cf. the next note), that he is responsible for the Euripidean elements in his description. But my point remains valid even if one could present a plausible case that it was his 'source' (Ephorus?) who placed the ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται on the field at Delion.

Diodoros does his best to incorporate the Euripidean elements into his account, but without much success. He has the elements but his sequence is disjointed. He simply places the three hundred *ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται* before the main hoplite force and we hear no more about them. Possibly Diodoros knew that at Delion there could not have been a chariot charge as described in Euripides, and he may have rationalized the three hundred *ἡνίοχοι καὶ παραβάται* into just the anachronistic corps that Wilamowitz proposed (arriving at the number three hundred by reference to the Sacred Band?). Diodoros incorporates Thucydides' description of how the battle was forced on the Athenians, but then he introduces Euripides' Athenian cavalry success as preliminary to the main hoplite encounter, his account of which subsequently follows Thucydides again. In addition to the clear correspondences between the battle descriptions in Euripides and Diodoros, there is circumstantial evidence to support the hypothesis that Diodoros was using Euripides in his account of Delion.

Diodoros mentions Euripides nine times in the extant remains of his history, and six times he cites verbatim passages from his plays.¹⁷ He cites the work of no other playwright and only mentions in passing Aeschylus (11.27.2) and Sophocles (12.54.6, 13.103.4). It is clear that Diodoros knew Euripides' plays well and respected them, and knew in particular his *Supplices*, since he mentions its plot in contrast with that of his *Phoenissae* (13.97.6). Furthermore, Diodoros was particularly inaccurate and careless when it came to battle descriptions and tactics.¹⁸ That he might have deliberately or inadvertently introduced into his account of Delion an episode that derived from a Euripidean tragedy is not improbable.

The proposition that an ancient historian might have used a dramatic or poetic account to elaborate his description of an historical event may be disturbing to his modern counterpart, but there is evidence that Diodoros would not have been alone in this.¹⁹ While such a conclusion will not enhance our estimation of Diodoros' historical accuracy, it does account for the startling similarities between his account of Delion and Euripides' battle description in the *Supplices*, and it removes the conundrums of historically impossible Theban charioteers in battle at Delion or a ghostly body of three hundred *epilektoi* for which there is otherwise no evidence.²⁰

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¹⁷ Cf. 1.7.7, 1.38.4, 1.39.1, 9.10.4, 10.9.8, 13.97.6, 13.103.5, 20.14.6, and 20.41.6.

¹⁸ Cf. J. Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford, 1981), 37–8. For example, Diodoros seems to have introduced siege tactics into fifth- and fourth-century conflicts that were only practised in the Hellenistic era; cf. R. K. Sinclair, 'Diodoros Siculus and fighting in relays', *CQ* 16 (1966), 249–55.

¹⁹ So, for example, on Simonides as a source for 'historical' accounts of famous battles, cf. D. Boedeker, 'Simonides on Plataea: narrative elegy, mythotic history', *ZPE* 107 (1995), 217–29, and M. A. Flower, 'Simonides, Ephorus, and Herodotus on the battle of Thermopylae', *CQ* 48 (1998), 365–79.

²⁰ I am grateful to Michael Flower for his comments on an early draft of this piece.