Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano eds.


This collection of essays presents contrasting views in the ongoing debate about the nature and chronology of specific changes in the weaponry and tactics of heavy-infantry (hoplite) warfare in the Greek Archaic Age (eighth to late sixth/early fifth centuries BC), and, on a broader level, about the significance (or not) of these changes for the political development of the Greek city-state. The latter point concerns the vexed question of how – or, indeed, whether – the emergence of metal-armoured hoplites fighting in formation as the main strike force in Greek warfare (before the creation of large navies in the late sixth and then fifth centuries) was related to the general, if gradual, movement in archaic Greece away from more restricted governing regimes to those in which a larger number of citizens had significant roles. Aristotle (*Politics* IV.1297b16-24) famously makes this development – traditionally called the ‘Hoplite Revolution’ in modern scholarship – fundamental to the epochal shift in political power that removed many city-states from the control of, as he saw it, kings and oligarchs. Some scholars today accept this ‘orthodoxy’, in which hoplites’ contribution to national defence entitles them to acquire political status as recompense, not unlike the way in which the Roman *plebs* is portrayed by Livy as securing political power in the early Republic. Other ‘revisionists’ argue against this model of Greek political changes, though they have not achieved consensus on a new narrative.

The contributors to this volume represent both sides in the debate with bracing directness. The following list of the contributions, whose richness cannot be adequately described here given constraints of space, can provide an idea of the scope of the arguments: Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, ‘Preface’ (pp. ix-x) and ‘Introduction’ (pp. xi-xxi); Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, ‘The Hoplite Debate’ (pp. 1-56); Gregory F. Viggiano and Hans Van Wees, ‘The Arms, Armor, and Iconography of Early Greek Hoplite Warfare’ (pp. 57-73); Paul Cartledge, ‘Hoplitai/Politai: Refighting Ancient Battles’ (pp. 74-84); Anthony Snodgrass, ‘Setting the Frame Chronologically’ (pp. 85-94); Kurt A. Raaflaub, ‘Early Greek Infantry Fighting in a Mediterranean Context’ (pp. 95-111); Gregory F. Viggiano, ‘The Hoplite Revolution and the Rise of the Polis’ (pp. 112-33); Peter Krentz, ‘Hoplite Hell: How Hoplites Fought’ (pp. 134-56); Adam Schwartz, ‘Large Weapons, Small Greeks: The Practical Limitations of Hoplite Weapons and Equipment’ (pp. 157-75); John R. Hale, ‘Not Patriots, Not Farmers, Not Amateurs: Greek Soldiers of Fortune and the Origins of Hoplite Warfare’ (pp. 176-93); Lin Foxhall, ‘Can We See the ‘Hoplite
Revolution’ on the Ground? Archaeological Landscapes, Material Culture, and Social Status in Early Greece’ (pp. 194-221); Hans Van Wees, ‘Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development,’ (pp. 222-55); and Victor Davis Hanson, ‘The Hoplite Narrative’ (pp. 256-75).

As the authors expertly demonstrate, substantial disagreements remain on crucial issues, including (but not limited to) what to make of the depictions of infantry battle in Homer’s *Iliad*, how to understand the evidence of art and archaeology, how to determine the size and weight of the weapons and armour of hoplites, whether hoplites fought in a close-packed or more flexible formation, from precisely what social and economic class(es) hoplites came, and how and when changes in warfare may have affected a move from governments in which rich landowners exercised an overwhelmingly predominant influence to institutions of government in which ‘the people’ (*demos*) obtained significant political power.

The introduction and following chapter by Kagan and Viggiano (themselves proponents of ‘orthodoxy’) clearly describe how the current disagreements developed, making it easy for anyone new to the debate to get up to speed. Cartledge’s chapter is similarly helpful in outlining the terminology of the current debate and encouraging wide-ranging approaches to Greek warfare. In their joint chapter, Viggiano and Van Wees, who are on opposing sides in the debate, collaborate to reveal how the ambiguity of evidence central to the debate fuels diverse interpretations. Viggiano’s chapter as a solo author emphatically supports the ‘orthodoxy’ of seeing a revolutionary effect on politics from the emergence of hoplites fighting in a phalanx from relatively early in the Archaic Age. Snodgrass (justly renowned for having decades ago staked out important ground in the ‘revisionist’ position), Krentz, Foxhall, and Van Wees present objections to various components of the traditional interpretation. Schwartz’s chapter opposes Krentz’s case that hoplite armour and weapons were lighter in weight than traditionally calculated, adding the point that such a weight would have been especially unwieldy for infantrymen with the average stature of ancient Greeks, which was slighter than that of contemporary Westerners. Raaflaub and Hale extend the geographical range of the debate beyond Greece proper; the former concludes that the appearance of characteristic hoplite equipment, except perhaps for shields gripped with one hand, were Greek developments rather than imports from the martial empires of the eastern Mediterranean, while the latter introduces a new argument by proposing that hoplites derived their armour and tactics from the experience of Greek mercenaries in that same part of the world and that their entrepreneurial drive as soldiers of fortune carried over to promote the sharing of political power in the city-states back home. The final chapter by Hanson, the