After the battle of Cunaxa, Artaxerxes’ cavalry withdraws to a hill. The Greeks pursuing them realise that the standard of the Great King (and thus Artaxerxes himself) is in the midst of these troops. In modern editions, the description of the standard is given as follows (An. 1.10.12):

καὶ τὸ βασίλειον σημεῖον ὁρᾶν ἔφασαν, ἀετὸν τινα χρυσοῦν ἐπὶ πέλτης [ἐπὶ ξύλου] ἀνατεταμένον.

ἐπὶ ξύλου F ἐπὶ ξυγοῦ Vollbrecht, del. D’Orville 1) was followed in athetising ἐπὶ ξύλου by Masqueray and Hude in their more recent editions. Marchant in his OCT preferred daggers. One reason why scholars were dissatisfied with the text is a scholion on the passage that mentions that doubts about the genuineness were raised already in antiquity: ἐν ἐν καὶ ταῦτα ἐν τινι παλαιῷ ἐξωθέν μετὰ ἀστερίσκου. 2) These doubts seem to be confirmed by the explanation (in another scholion and in Hesychius) 3) that the word πέλτη means ‘lance’. Finally, in a passage of the Cyropaedia (7.1.4) the σημεῖον of Cyrus is described as a golden eagle ἐπὶ δόρατος μακροῦ ἀνατεταμένος. 4) For these reasons the modern editors assumed that ἐπὶ ξύλου was a gloss that was supposed to make clear that in this case πέλτη did not have the usual meaning of ‘light shield’.

In contrast to this explanation, Robert Dunbabin argued in a review of LSJ that the meaning ‘lance’ is not applicable here, as it would be the only instance of

1) D’Orville 1783, 690.
2) An asterisk is not normally a sign of athetesis. However, the scholiast goes on, anticipating an explanation to the one I support in this paper: δῆλον ὅτι ὁ μὲν ἀετὸς ἐπὶ πέλτη (πέλτους Μ.) ἐπὶ (sic, perhaps ἐπέστι) ἐπὶ ταῦτα τινα πελτη ἔπεστι (ξυλωτῆς Μ.) ἐπέκειτα (mss M.O.; the text is taken from Dindorf 1855). So he interpreted the asterisk as doubt of authenticity. A similar meaning of the asterisk may also be found in Schol. Nic. Ther. 564bis. For the awareness of the possibility of glosses entering the main body of the text cf. Galen 17/1.634, Hieron. Ἐπ. 106.46.3-5.
3) Schol. X. An. 6.1.9, Suda s.v. πέλται, Hesych. s.v. πέλτη and πέλτη.
4) Schneider 1828, 71: “Est igitur πέλτη h.l. quod dōro in Cyropaedia; et Suidae cum Hesychio πέλτη interpretetur etiam λόγχην et ἀκόντιον. Quare verba ἐπὶ ξύλου tanquam scholion delenda esse recte censuerunt Dorville […]”
that meaning in Xenophon and not identifiable as something different from πέλτη in the regular use.⁵ I agree with this view and would like to affirm it with reference to some archaeological evidence and the later reception of Xenophon’s text. Furthermore, I would suggest that the meaning ‘lance’ does not actually exist in classical Greek. Instead, it came up later, triggered by the misinterpretation of exactly this passage in the *Anabasis*. The juxtaposition of ἐπὶ πέλτης and ἐπὶ ξύλου led to the assumption that the two nouns must be identical in meaning, the latter having been added to clarify the meaning of the former.

On the Alexander sarcophagus from the fourth century BC one of the Persian Immortals is holding his shield so that the beholder can see the outside. The blazon shows traces of a falcon,⁶ the heraldic animal of the Great King, which was possibly depicted on the shields of all Immortals. Xenophon’s eagle, which may thus have actually been a falcon,⁷ is therefore probably painted on a πέλτη, a shield. The preposition ἐπὶ is regularly used in this sense. A suitable parallel can be found in Euripides: Τελαμών δὲ χρυσοῦν αἰετὸν πέλτης ἔπι πρόβλημα θηρός.⁸ Persian military standards are equally well attested. Consequently, archaeologists do not seem to find a problem in Xenophon’s text as transmitted.⁹ The phrase ἐπὶ ξύλου does not pose any problems either: the shield was fixed on top of an upright pole (or a lance). Moreover, Xenophon’s narrative makes it very clear that the standard has to stick out so that his own men can actually recognise it.¹⁰ If πέλτη denotes a shield, it is only sensible that another expression referring to the pole follows. By contrast, there is no clear evidence for πέλτη with the meaning ‘lance’ anywhere in Xenophon nor in earlier texts.¹¹

---

⁵ Dunbabin 1946, 10.
⁶ See the photograph in Sekunda & Chew 1992, 45 and comparable pictures on the following pages.
⁷ Cf. e.g. Istituto italiano 1956, nr. 213 table 28 (= Teheran, Archaeological Museum inv. 2436) and Dalton 1964, nr. 25 table 11; however, the eagle too can be used as a symbol of the Persian king: Shahbazi 1980, 137-9. Other interpretations in Nylander 1983, 23-4 n. 25.
⁸ Fr. 530 Nauck; cf. Theopompus *FGH* 115 F 247. Philostr. *Im*. 2.31.1 mentions a χρυσοῦς ἐπὶ τῆς πέλτης ἀετός. The meaning of πέλτη, however, cannot be determined in this case.
⁹ On the Alexander mosaic in Naples a standard with a bird on it is preserved fragmentarily, cf. Nylander 1983, 32. On a cup from the Louvre (G 117) there is a standard (without bird) the upper part of which seems to be made not of cloth but a solid material. For a shield, however, it may be too small. Nylander (1983) as well as Sekunda & Chew (1992) accept the text as transmitted.
¹⁰ Cf. Dunbabin’s (1946, 10-1) explanation of the word ἀνατεταμένον.
¹¹ Schol. X. *Ant*. 6.1.9 glosses πέλτη as λόγχη: a dancer makes a performance with two