

HOPLITES AND HERESIES

FUNDAMENTAL questions have recently been raised about the way hoplites fought and about the reason for the survival of this curious form of warfare over a period of some three centuries. The present paper seeks to examine the grounds on which traditional views have been assailed.¹

I. THE MANNER OF HOPLITE WARFARE

The traditional view is that in the fully-developed hoplite line the soldiers were packed closely together, each man relying on his right-hand neighbour for protection because his own shield, on his left arm, could not adequately cover his right side. A famous consequence of this situation was the tendency for the man on the extreme right of the line to edge further to his right in order to outflank the enemy and protect his own vulnerable side. This process is attested in Thucydides and elsewhere.² The main aggressive weapon was the thrusting spear (the sword being used only when the spear was lost or broken) and the main aim was to break through the enemy line by the pressure of massed ranks—the so-called *othismos*. Armies were usually drawn up 8 ranks deep for this purpose although the Thebans stepped them up to 25, 40 and, finally, 50.³ A breakthrough, it is thought, normally led to the collapse and flight of the losing side, though frequently both sides achieved a breakthrough on different flanks (as the best troops were habitually placed on the right wing) and further conflict would then be likely between the two victorious elements in order to decide the issue. It would thus be of prime concern to keep one's line intact. Once it was broken it would become vulnerable not only to the intact line of enemy hoplites but also to attacks by cavalry and light-armed troops. It was sometimes possible for elements of the broken line to re-group away from the main battle and fight bravely on, but this was rare and usually ineffective.

Against this picture G. L. Cawkwell has argued that some hoplite battles are described as lengthy, and that no army could sustain the pressure of the *othismos* for a period which might amount to as much as two hours. He also points out that the front lines could hardly handle their weapons with any degree of skill if they had seven or more ranks pressing hard on their backs as required for the *othismos*. He seeks to solve these problems by pointing out that in the ancient accounts of several battles there is evidence of a phase in which the opposing lines are engaged in tough hand-to-hand fighting but not in *othismos*. This is certainly correct, but he goes on to suggest something that is not in the sources, *viz.* that in this phase the armies, which had approached each other initially in tight formation, opened up their ranks somewhat so as to give room for weapon-play. There would be in effect single combats and they would give an opportunity for soldiers to stand aside for periods of rest.

This interpretation presents considerable difficulties. Whereas Thucydides portrays the hoplites as eager to cling to the protection of their neighbour in the line it is now suggested that they were prepared to deprive themselves of this in order to engage in single combat like the *promachoi* of ancient times.⁴ Yet Cawkwell admits that there is little ground for believing that ordinary hoplites received much training as opposed to the well-known exceptions—the

¹ G. L. Cawkwell, *Philip of Macedon* (London 1978) 150–3; Paul Cartledge, *JHS* xcvi (1977) 11–27. The latter article is only concerned in part with the issue of the survival of hoplite warfare.

² Thuc. v 71.1, *cf.* Xen. *Hell.* iv 2.18–19.

³ For the figures see W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* i (Berkeley 1974) 134–43.

⁴ The mention of a soldier as *promachos* in a funerary inscription is surely eulogistic and hardly to be offset

against the picture in Thucydides' account of normal hoplite behaviour (*cf.* n. 2). But it is clear that on occasions brave, or foolhardy, soldiers ran out and broke the line, as in the Anapus battle (*cf.* n. 11) and he may have been such a one. As for pictures of duels between hoplites on fifth-century vases, these are not clearly related to hoplite fighting of the developed kind and may perhaps be regarded as heroic. I am indebted to Professor J. B. Boardman for this comment.

Spartans and, later, the Theban Sacred Band. A force of 1,000 Argives is specifically mentioned by Thucydides as being trained at public expense, so this is clearly an unusual case.⁵ So, if most hoplites lacked high skill, and their shield and spear seem unsuitable for duels, it hardly seems likely that they would be willing to put themselves at risk. If they had been so willing one would expect that the tight hoplite line and the *othismos* would have given way to a more open formation (like the Roman maniple) for the whole duration of the battle and not merely for a passing phase. In fine, it seems unsafe to base an interpretation of hoplite warfare on an assumption of skill for which, in the case of ordinary hoplites, there is no reliable evidence—and some good counter-evidence.

A further problem is how the transitions between the various phases would be organised, both that from the tight formation in which the armies approached each other to the more open order for single combat, and also that from open order back to a tight line for the *othismos*. Who or what would determine the moment at which the lines opened out and then closed up again? There was no referee with a whistle. For one side to start opening out whilst the other remained in close order would invite an *othismos* and a disaster. It would seem to be possible only if both sides acted simultaneously and it is difficult to see how this could be achieved. As for re-grouping after a phase of single combats, this would seem to be even more difficult with many individuals locked in battle over a wide area. It is not altogether clear if Cawkwell visualizes all the eight ranks of the normal hoplite formation spreading out to fight single combats.⁶ If so, the area involved would be very wide indeed. But if only the front rank is supposed to be involved the effect on the final outcome of the battle could not have been very large. This latter supposition raises particular difficulties with the narrow Theban front at Leuktra (about half the width of the Spartan according to the estimate of Buckler [n. 13] 290 n. 27). Surely the overlapping Spartans would not have remained idle?

Another crucial question is how wide a gap between hoplites would be created for the single combats. If it was slight—merely sufficient to enable free manipulation of the spear—this would open the right side to attack but would hardly be sufficient to turn each man into a *promachos* and certainly not to enable them to enjoy respite from battle. If the gap is to be large enough for this purpose how could a hoplite be sure that he would only have to confront a single opponent and not be set upon by several (to cope with whom the spear would be too clumsy) or even by cavalry and light infantry? The hoplite's equipment was ill-suited to meet such threats and an army with inferior numbers would surely be disinclined to dissolve its tight formation in the face of such risks. Respite from battle would surely only be possible by mutual consent (lemons at half time) or by 'opening out' to the point of virtual withdrawal from the battle. Brasidas, speaking to his hoplites in Thrace, enjoined them to maintain their close formation in all circumstances and made it clear that only light-armed troops could enjoy freedom of movement in the battlefield and that they could easily quit the battle precisely because they had no fixed position.⁷ He clearly did not think that hoplites were ever in a position to behave in this way, nor is it easy to see how the description of the alleged open-fighting phase as 'hand-to-hand' in the ancient sources is compatible with such behaviour.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the overall effect on military operations, both defensive and offensive, if such open-order fighting occurred in hoplite battles before the *othismos*. It has already been noted that an army in open order would lose its defensive strength. It is indeed clear that on many occasions a hoplite force was taken by surprise when out of battle order and made great haste to form ranks, as if to be so caught would be disastrous. This is clearly said of the Spartans at Mantinea in 418 when they were shattered beyond anything they could recall by the

⁵ Thuc. v 67. In the Funeral Oration (Thuc. ii 39.1) Pericles is represented as chiding the Spartans for their laborious application to military training. There is no reason to attribute this view to Thucydides himself as his account of the effects of Spartan training at

Mantinea is respectful.

⁶ He suggests that the abnormal Theban depth was to provide reserves (*cf.* n. 13) but this was clearly not the case with the normal depth of 8 ranks.

⁷ Thuc. iv 126.

discovery that the Argives in proper battle order were close in front of them whilst they were in disarray: they hastily formed ranks themselves in order to meet the threat.⁸ Similarly, at the battle of the Anapus near Syracuse in 415 the Syracusans were taken by surprise by the Athenian attack as they had broken their ranks. They made haste to re-form although they did not all have time to take their normal position.⁹ But perhaps the most famous instance is the battle of Mantinea in 362 when Epaminondas pretended to encamp his men and thus encouraged the Spartans and their allies to relax their battle-array. When he launched his surprise attack they rushed to form their line.¹⁰

In all these cases the immediate reaction of the force taken by surprise is to form the battle-line. Why was this so crucial if the armies were about to break up into open order? It seems clear that close formation was essential for the security of the hoplites. In the battle of the Anapus mentioned above (at a later stage) some Athenian hoplites broke formation in the pursuit of the enemy and were effectively attacked by Syracusan cavalry.¹¹ Brasidas, as we have seen, sums the matter up by telling his hoplites in Thrace that they must retain formation at all times, even in retreat.

If it is granted that hoplite armies were most unwilling to loosen their close formation in the face of the enemy, because the latter would be likely to press home with an immediate *othismos* rather than sportingly join in single combats, it follows that the attacker will keep his formation intact if he seems to have a chance of success with an *othismos* at the outset of the battle. This is surely at the heart of the Theban plan to deepen their ranks. When the armies came to grips there would clearly be spear-thrusting from the outset even if arm movements were restricted. But there would be pressure, also, and if the enemy showed signs of giving way this would be intensified by moving to even closer quarters and applying the pressure directly from shield to opposing shield—the *othismos aspidon*.¹² If this succeeded the battle would be won provided the enemy had not done likewise elsewhere. If it failed then the shield-to-shield contact would be eased in order to allow more space and energy for spear-thrusts, but the line would surely not open out widely enough to expose the soldiers' vulnerable right sides.

At the battles of Leuctra (371) and Mantinea (362) Epaminondas was determined to break through the enemy line from the outset, and he even manufactured a surprise at the latter, as has been seen. There would have been little point in surprise if the tight formations were going to break up into single combats and the depth of the Theban formation would have hindered most of their troops from making much impression in the weapon combats of the front line. The formation like a ship's prow at Mantinea and the mass advance at Leuctra would have been wasted.¹³ Epaminondas on both occasions intended to withhold his weaker units from contact with the enemy until the battle had been won.¹⁴ How would this have been possible if the two armies were going to settle down to a period of single combats before any attempt at *othismos* was made? If it should be argued that Epaminondas, being a military genius, fought in a more sophisticated way than conventional generals and his methods should not be taken as normal,

⁸ Thuc. v 66.1–2.

⁹ Thuc. vi 69.1.

¹⁰ Xen. *Hell.* vii 5.22.

¹¹ Thuc. vi 70.3.

¹² Thuc. iv 96.2.

¹³ Cawkwell's suggestion, (n. 1) 15, that the rear ranks in the deep Theban formations must have been intended as reserves in a second stage of the battle, and not for pressure in an early *othismos*, hardly fits the evidence. If they were reserves why were they not kept out of the fray, as were those at the battle on the Anapus (Thuc. vi 67.1) or at Amphipolis (Thuc. v 9.8)—the cases he cites as parallel? This suggestion also flouts the evidence of the importance of the pressure of the deep ranks and of a breakthrough on a narrow front. Xenophon (*Hell.* vi 4–14) describes the Spartans as

being pressed back by the mass (of Thebans) at Leuctra and adds the revealing detail that Boeotian merchants and baggage-carriers grouped themselves behind the army, thus adding bulk and mass to it. They were not armed as hoplites, so they had nothing to contribute but weight for the *othismos*. John Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony 371–362 BC* (Cambridge, Mass. 1980) 63–4 and 216–18, endorses the traditional view of the deep Theban ranks.

¹⁴ Xen. *Hell.* vii 5.23 mentions this tactic specifically at the battle of Mantinea in 362, and Cawkwell, *CQ* xxii (1972) 262, very reasonably argues that it was also true of Leuctra. Xenophon says that the prime Theban aim was to defeat the Spartan right wing and hence the massed Theban force was placed on their own left wing.

two difficulties still remain for Cawkwell's theory: first, the Thebans had seen the advantage of deep formation at least as early as the battle of Delium in 424 and this advantage could only be fully exploited by an instant attempt at *othismos* when the armies came to grips; and, secondly, the question as to what advantage any general might hope to derive from a phase of single combats if the issue was to be decided in the end by an *othismos*? Only if it was hoped that massive casualties would be caused in this phase, so that the enemy's line would be too weak to stand up to pressure in the *othismos*, would such a phase be comprehensible—but in fact the total casualties in hoplite battles where we have reliable figures are remarkably light,¹⁵ thus lending support to the traditional view that the breakthrough was normally accepted as a decisive verdict.

II. THE SURVIVAL OF HOPLITE WARFARE

The second hoplite question has been recently posed by Paul Cartledge.¹⁶ Innumerable writers ancient and modern, beginning with Herodotus (through the mouth of Mardonius), have commented on the oddity of the Greeks' way of making war, seeking out flat ground to fight on in a country that is largely mountainous and observing conventions which seem as artificial as those of a modern sporting event. The two sides march openly to the battlefield and there are few ambushes and surprises, rarely attempts to outmatch the enemy by unusual formations of troops or by luring them into unsuitable terrain.¹⁷ Even when the Thebans began to experiment successfully with the massing of hoplite ranks their example did not greatly affect the behaviour of other Greek cities.

The question is whether this manner of fighting was adopted in the first place and subsequently preserved for three centuries because of its efficiency or because the aristocracies under whom the style evolved saw political advantage in restricting participation in war to those prosperous enough to own hoplite equipment, and whether the same motives influenced the hoplites to perpetuate this exclusiveness in the post-aristocratic period. On the question of what type of fighting might have been more effective and what class was being excluded from war the answers suggested are, respectively, light-armed troops and the poor who could not afford hoplite equipment. If such people were allowed to realise their military potential they would demand political advancement.

Cartledge admits that '*on its chosen ground* the phalanx could be a superior instrument to most others'¹⁸ (though without specifying which minority of possible alternatives might be better on the chosen ground) and concentrates on the strategy canvassed by many scholars—that the defenders should avoid battles in the open plain and seek rather to hold the difficult passes that led to it.¹⁹

It is possible, and no doubt correct, to draw attention to an element of ritual and competitive display of manhood in the aristocratic origins of the Greek conduct of war and this comes out most clearly in the relations between Chalcis and Eretria or, better still, Sparta and Argos. To win by cheating would no more be a satisfying proof of manhood than a boxing victory won with a loaded fist. But the harsh realities of life tended to squeeze out the more extreme manifestations of this sort even by the time of the Battle of the Champions in 546, let alone by

¹⁵ Cawkwell's view (discussed in n. 13) that the rear ranks of Theban armies were a reserve would mean that the casualties of the single combats could hardly be decisive since a large part of the army would not be involved. Even when hoplite armies were deployed on a broader front, in the normal manner, the casualty figures in all reliable cases are small: Marathon—192; Plataea—91 Spartans, 16 Tegeates, 52 Athenians; Delium—500 Boeotians, nearly 1,000 Athenians; Mantinea (418)—1,100 Argives and allies, 300 Spartans.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* (n. 1).

¹⁷ Hdt. vii 9 β and reference by Cartledge (n. 1) 18. Cf. also W. K. Pritchett (n. 3) ii (1979) 180 ff. Adventurous generals like Brasidas and Demosthenes did go in for ambushes.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.* (n. 1) n. 83. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁹ Recent writers who have discussed this idea are: A. W. Gomme, *HCT* i (1945) 10–15, J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley 1970) 5, and G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 190–6.

420 when the Spartans were taken aback by the Argive proposal to settle disputes on challenge, with both sides agreeing not to issue one if their enemy was already at war or suffering from disease.²⁰ So it is difficult to believe that cities would have agreed purely on the grounds of agonal rules to fight on level ground if they could have had better prospects by defending passes. It is therefore necessary to examine more closely what such a policy might offer.

The first question is whether a state would be able to defend itself adequately by means of light-armed troops posted at passes. Gomme claimed that 'almost every state had a mountain barrier . . . defensible against hoplites' and only mentions Tegea as an exception.²¹ But there are no great physical barriers between most of the cities on the Arcadian plateau and even less so between the cities of Boeotia and Thessaly, or those on the coastal strip of the northern Peloponnese—Corinth, Sicyon, the cities of Achaia and Elis. Moreover, as Gomme himself goes on to acknowledge, many of the most important passes like Thermopylae and Parapotamion (between Phocis and Boeotia) had room enough for hoplites to operate and therefore had to be defended by hoplites. Gomme suggests that these were exceptions, but Tempe must clearly be added and one suspects that there were many more. Even the Athenian garrison on Mt Geraneia in the Archidamian war is likely to have been hoplite since Thucydides tells us that at that time Athens had no light-armed troops.²² Moreover, of those passes which seemed to favour light-armed troops most could still be forced by hoplites under skilful and determined leadership, as by Agesilaus in Akarnania in 389.²³ So the question of guarding passes must be distinguished from that of using light-armed troops: they are not identical.

Gomme admits that all the passes in Greece (except in the politically unimportant Pindus region) could be easily turned. This is why the Greeks decided not to hold Tempe and the Spartans would clearly have preferred to fight at the isthmus of Corinth. His suggestion in reply is that light-armed troops could change direction faster than hoplites. But this assumes that news of enemy movements would be rapidly available. Obviously, if there were many possible passes, garrisons could not be maintained on all of them continuously and everything would depend on speed of information. Was such information available?

In the case of Sparta, at least, it has been maintained that it was, since she would issue a summons to her allies in the Peloponnesian League and thereby give notice to her enemies of impending action. It has also been suggested that this was demonstrated by the successful Theban blockade of the pass over Cithaeron which prevented Cleombrotus from invading Boeotia in two successive years.²⁴ But this is a rather one-sided statement of the evidence. In 379 Cleombrotus found the road through Eleutherae into Boeotia guarded by Athenian light-armed troops, so he switched to a different route and found only a small guard of 150 men whom he destroyed.²⁵ In 378 Agesilaus put a friendly force into the Cithaeron pass before the Thebans could act, thus ensuring himself entry into Boeotia,²⁶ and in the next year he did the same with a force from Thespieae.²⁷ On none of these occasions did the Spartans signal their intentions so clearly that an adequate force of defenders could manage to prevent entry in the end. It is true that in 376 Cleombrotus turned back because Thebans and Athenians had already occupied the pass²⁸ and in 375 he made no attempt.²⁹ Thereafter, however, he crossed to Phocis by sea³⁰ and thus posed a new threat to Boeotia from the west. Finally in 371 he successfully entered Boeotia

²⁰ Hdt. i 82–3, Thuc. v 41. Note also Mardonius' challenge to the Spartans before the battle of Plataea (Hdt. ix 48).

²¹ *Op. cit.* (n. 4) 12–13. All allusions to Gomme's discussion of passes come from these pages.

²² Thuc. iv 94.1.

²³ Xen. *Hell.* iv 6.10–11. He was allowed to pass freely through Aetolia but he had to fight through a narrow pass in Akarnania.

²⁴ Cf. de Ste Croix (n. 19) 193–4.

²⁵ Xen. *Hell.* v 4.14.

²⁶ *Ibid.* v 4.36.

²⁷ *Ibid.* v 4.47. In this year Agesilaus made moves within Boeotia as if he were going to approach Thebes by way of Thespieae. The Thebans guarded the pass from Thespieae and Agesilaus then went by the direct road. It was not difficult to find a way if there was a will.

²⁸ *Ibid.* v 4.49.

²⁹ *Ibid.* v 4.63.

³⁰ *Ibid.* vi 1.1.

from Phocis by a mountainous and unexpected route held by a tiny force whilst the mass of Thebans was guarding a more obvious pass.³¹

From this account it can be seen that the Spartans usually succeeded in getting into Boeotia by occupying the passes or switching routes. Cleombrotus' failure to do either in 376 or 375 seems to be due to his lack of enthusiasm for the war rather than military impossibility. If through apathy he had failed to occupy Cithaeron there were other routes. Xenophon discloses that in 379, when he did succeed in getting into Boeotia, he caused little damage and led his army home by an unusual and difficult route (presumably to avoid an encounter with the enemy) so that his troops did not know if a war was really in progress.³² Xenophon also makes Cleombrotus' friends advise him on the eve of Leuctra that he must act vigorously to eradicate the impression of feebleness in 379 and of incompetence in 376 and 375, since Agesilaus had always succeeded in entering Boeotia when he wished.³³

It does not seem, therefore, that the evidence concerning Sparta and Boeotia in this period supports the theory of the invulnerability of passes or the view that states could rely on getting advance information about impending attacks and their routes. It may suffice to mention two more famous instances of successful penetration or circumvention of defences at passes—that of the Athenian garrisons on Mt Geraneia by the Corinthians and their allies in the First Peloponnesian War,³⁴ and that of the anti-Macedonian coalition's position by Philip in 338.³⁵ Intelligence was usually poor and in most cases the enemy was already in the defenders' territory before they could react.

A final, and weighty, objection to reliance on the defence of passes by light-armed troops, which seems to have been largely overlooked, is that almost all Greek states were open to invasion by hoplites from the sea so that hoplites would need to be met on ground of their own choice. Athens made great use of this possibility, and over the years landed forces on the coasts of Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Corinth, the Argolid, Boeotia and innumerable other states of less importance. The Arcadian cities were almost alone in possessing immunity from this threat. So the effectiveness of light-armed troops in very difficult mountain areas could not normally serve to protect the urban centres and good agricultural land of the plains.

If it is conceded that the importance of light-armed troops for the defence of frontiers has been exaggerated it still remains to ask if the belief that hoplites were the most effective troops for general purposes was justified. This will also enable us to consider what exceptions might justify the note of reservation in Cartledge's endorsement of this belief, even in respect of level ground.

The early Greek aristocracies dominated their cities in a military scene which is of considerable obscurity but clearly depended on individual combats and in some way on horses. Why did they permit this situation to change to the hoplite dominance where well-to-do non-aristocrats had to be admitted to share the battle-line and consequently political power? Surely this can only be explained by the technical development of the new arms and armour which could not be arrested or ignored. In theory, if the international connexions of aristocrats had been sufficiently tight they might have agreed to suppress new military techniques which involved such serious political hazards, but in fact throughout history the desire by one group to defeat another and gain specific short-term advantages has always prevailed in the end and led to the dreaded innovation. Cartledge himself concedes that the highly aristocratic Spartans may have been late developers in 'going hoplite' but were forced into it by their defeat at Hysiae.³⁶ The Argive régime had probably adopted hoplite methods and thereby sold the pass as decisively as those mediaeval dynasts who spelled out the doom of castles and armoured knights by adopting guns and gunpowder.

If it is conceded that the initial introduction of hoplite warfare must have been due to its

³¹ *Ibid.* vi 4.4.

³² *Ibid.* v 4.16.

³³ *Ibid.* vi 4.5.

³⁴ Thuc. i 105.3.

³⁵ Cawkwell (n. 1) 142.

³⁶ Cartledge (n. 1) 25.

effectiveness can it nevertheless still be argued that its preservation for three centuries greatly outlived its usefulness and can only be explained by the determination of the hoplite class to retain its political dominance?

Here must be considered above all the effectiveness of Greek or Carian hoplites serving in the Middle East, in Babylon and Egypt. Clearly the Eastern dynasts who hired them from early times were impressed by their effectiveness and there is much evidence to prove this justified.³⁷ The Eastern forces opposed to these mercenaries were in no way conforming to the rules of the Greek hoplite agonal game nor would the wily Orientals have eschewed ambushes and tricks. The variety of forces which the hoplites encountered was very great—cavalry, mounted archers, archers on foot and, no doubt, chariots and elephants. Nor were these battles fought on ground chosen by mutual consent of the opposing commanders, a condition regarded by some as essential if hoplites were to prevail.

When the Persians came to Greece the lessons of hoplite superiority seemed to be confirmed by Marathon and Plataea. It is true that on both occasions the Persian commander may have failed to exploit his best asset, the mounted archers, to full extent and thus let the hoplites off the hook. If Mardonius at Plataea had continued his harrying of the communications and battle-line of the Greeks and resisted the temptation to engage with his infantry, the result might have been different.³⁸ But that was, and is, mere conjecture: hard-headed men in the East were more concerned with what actually happened. Even the Persian kings seem to have ultimately accepted the lesson and continued eagerly to seek to hire Greek hoplite mercenaries for service in their armies. They became largely dependent on them to maintain their power, as also did their revolting subjects, so that battles in Egypt and elsewhere came to be fought largely between rival Greek mercenaries in the pay of different dynasts. In 375/4 we are told that the Great King encouraged a Common Peace among the Greeks because he was in desperate need of Greek mercenaries.³⁹ It is perhaps best not to stress the achievements of the 10,000 as evidence of hoplite efficacy, since our chief witness is biased and it is disputed whether a serious attempt was made to destroy them, but the Greek mercenary hoplites put up very stout resistance even to Alexander's highly developed army with its specialized phalanx, cavalry and light-armed troops.⁴⁰

It would, surely, be going a little far to see in all this merely further evidence of a deliberate conspiracy to maintain the political supremacy of the hoplite classes in the Greek cities—a matter of little concern for the Great King or his revolting subjects. And if it proved impossible for these men to force the hoplites to fight on unfavourable ground, this must be because it really was extremely difficult or even impossible. The tanks control the rich plains and roads, the light-armed guerillas only prosper in the recesses of mountains. Governments are primarily concerned with plains and roads.

There is a line of defence to which Cartledge makes passing allusion and on to which he might choose to retreat. 'The acceptance and apotheosis of hand-to-hand fighting presupposes the refusal (whether conscious *or not*) to countenance and develop the mobile and light-armed infantrymen for whose style of combat Greece, one would have thought, had been made.'⁴¹ Here the suggestion is that political prejudice may have caused the hoplite class involuntarily to overlook military advantages which they might have gained over their enemies by developing light-armed forces.⁴² This line of argument avoids the need to postulate a deliberate rejection by all Greek states of obvious military improvements which might bring survival against a deadly foe, e.g. for Thebes against Athens, and, later, Sparta.

The urgent need for survival certainly did cause Thebes to carry out military

³⁷ Cf. H. W. Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers* (Oxford 1933) 3–6. It is noteworthy that the Eastern dynasts were not content with the mere purchase, or manufacture, of hoplite equipment.

³⁸ Hdt. ix 49.2–3.

³⁹ Diod. Sic. xv 38.

⁴⁰ Arrian *Anab.* ii 10.4–6.

⁴¹ Cartledge (n. 1) 24. The emphasis is mine.

⁴² Contempt for light-armed troops appears clearly in Thuc. vi 69, but in a matter of this kind we cannot regard his judgment as final since he could well have been the victim of a general upper-class prejudice.

improvements—the thickening of ranks to 25 at Delium and even more in subsequent battles, and later the formation of the Sacred Band and the high degree of training given to it. But these were ways of improving the application of hoplite weapons and not of supplementing or superseding them.⁴³ It is a remarkable fact that no other Greek city seems to have learned much from the Theban example,⁴⁴ and it seems to have taken the Spartans by surprise in 371 as much as it had in the Corinthian War (and the Athenians at Delium).

Yet this instance of blindness cannot be ascribed to political prejudice since a re-grouping of hoplite ranks would not have involved any extension of a military role to people of lower social class; and the Thebans who introduced it were totally committed to hoplite domination of their city. It seems to be simply a case of extreme conservatism which, as has often been remarked, is a perennial feature of the military establishment in all ages and nations. This is not purely due to the stupidity of the sort of men who run armies (gratifying as that assumption would no doubt be to some) but also to the extreme delicacy of the task of holding men's lives in one's hands, particularly when they are one's fellow citizens and political equals. It seems to commanders best to stick to tried formulae and not to risk lives in possibly dangerous innovations: it takes a man of fantastic nerve and self-confidence to do otherwise. The Spartan refusal to engage in sieges except under extreme pressure is part of their determination to stick to a safe formula.⁴⁵ If Brasidas had been in full command of the Peloponnesian forces in the Archidamian War one suspects that assaults by night at many points simultaneously might have forced entry into the Long Walls, but, as it was, the attempt was never made.

But can blindness to allegedly sovereign light-armed virtues be ascribed to fear of the lower classes in Greece? Hardly so, since the most remarkable feature in Spartan military development of the fifth and fourth centuries is the growing reliance of her army on perioeci and even liberated helots. It would seem a very dangerous thing for the Spartiate hoplites to extend the military role of men who in the one case had no political rights and in the other case came from a totally subordinate and oppressed class. It seems clear that the need for survival caused the Spartans to take these great risks.⁴⁶ But if they had come to regard light-armed troops as of high military value surely they would have preferred to equip their liberated helots as light-armed rather than as hoplites, thus maintaining a prestige gap as well as saving money. Or, indeed, if it was thought that the hoplite was obsolescent and the light-armed soldier was to dominate the battlefield in the future perhaps they should have handed over all hoplite armour to the helots and re-trained the Spartiates as light-armed!

But the truth seems to be that none of the Greek cities came to believe that the light-armed soldier was the all-purpose weapon of the future. It has been held that Sparta was probably first to use organised light-armed troops as a tactical force⁴⁷ but, if so, it was supplementary and not of central importance since it does not figure significantly in the accounts of Sparta's battles, and if Sparta had wanted to expand it, it would have been easy to do so, as we have seen, by making use of liberated helots.

As for Athens, she could certainly have afforded to hire light-armed troops if she had wished. She did in fact begin to do so in the last quarter of the fifth century as a useful supplementary force in all cases and even as a central force in minor actions under special conditions. The Athenian general Demosthenes had learned rather expensively in Aetolia the effectiveness of such troops if war was taken into their kind of country. In the next year at Pylos he was able to

⁴³ It is true that Epaminondas seems to have made use of cavalry in the main battles at Leuctra and Mantinea and this was an innovative supplement, but the depth of the hoplite ranks seems to have been the crucial factor.

⁴⁴ On occasions other Greek lines are drawn up 12 or 16 deep, but not more.

⁴⁵ Cf. Cartledge (n. 1) 17. He fails to comment on the willingness of Athenian commanders to undertake

sieges.

⁴⁶ They must have relied on the force of social discipline, as have many authoritarian regimes which have dared to allow weapons to the deprived. Cf. Holladay, *CQ* xxvii (1977) 124 for references to the ancient evidence.

⁴⁷ A. M. Snodgrass, *JHS* lxxxvii (1967) 19 and other references in Cartledge (n. 1) 25.

use such troops against the Laconian hoplite force on Sphacteria. Light-armed troops were also summoned to sail for Sicily, but they failed to arrive in time.⁴⁸ By a curious chance the other aggressive general in the Archidamian War, Brasidas, also discovered in Thrace how difficult light-armed troops could be for hoplites to cope with, but he evolved a method which enabled his men to do so, thus rebutting, so far as his men were concerned, the light-armed challenge to hoplite superiority.⁴⁹ In all this there is evidence that light-armed soldiers had shown their value for certain purposes but were not regarded as a replacement for the hoplite. Thucydides, in his account of the forces at Delium, as we have seen, stresses the fact that Athens had not then developed a light-armed force of its own. This is hardly surprising as no importance is ascribed to the 69,500 light-armed Greeks at Plataea and there is no mention of light-armed troops at Mantinea in 418.⁵⁰

The case of Thebes proves even more clearly the subordinate role of light-armed troops and the absence of political motives for this. At the battle of Delium the Boeotians had a force of more than 10,000 light-armed troops, outnumbering the hoplites,⁵¹ but they are not recorded as playing any important part in the main battle. So the Boeotians were not frightened to allow the poor arms, any more than were the Spartans, and no revolution followed.

There were some changes in the fourth century, but not such as to reverse the situation totally. After the early battles in the Corinthian War there was a growing disinclination by the citizen armies of the anti-Spartan alliance to participate actively and the Athenians solved this problem by hiring light-armed troops (which they could somehow still afford, even after the loss of empire and tribute). This force achieved under Iphicrates a notable success against Spartan hoplites in 390⁵² (showing that Brasidas' techniques had not been incorporated into Spartan military handbooks), but this was not taken as proof of hoplite obsolescence, since no state switched their citizens to the new style. That the Athenians continued to fight vicariously with such troops for the most part is due to disinclination of citizens to fight in wars whose duration was protracted and objectives disputed. When really serious threats arose Athens produced hoplites again (as at Chaeroneia) and the great battles like Leuctra were essentially won by the hoplite phalanx.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss the political implications of Cartledge's theory for Athens. Is it not grotesquely implausible to think that it was the prejudice and political self-interest of the hoplite classes at Athens which alone prevented the training of a light-armed force from the thetic class?

It may well be correct to believe that in the sixth century the top three classes in Athens held political predominance and that the thetes carried little weight except in special circumstances such as the vote in favour of a bodyguard for Peisistratus.⁵³ At the time of Marathon Athens was still largely a hoplite-centred state and she had to acquire ships from Corinth to enable her to fight Aegina at sea (probably shortly after Marathon). But Themistocles seems to have started to 'turn the eyes of Athens towards the sea' by his activity at the Piraeus whilst archon in 493 and by his use of the rich Laurium silver-strike to build a big fleet. There may have been many grounds for opposing this—greed for a share of the wealth, farmers' hostility to the diversion of money to maritime interests and, no doubt, hoplites who thought that Athens could best defend herself on land as in 490 and in her brilliant double victory against Thebes and Chalcis. Some may even have foreseen that the construction of a great fleet might bring military importance for the first time to the thetes and thereby lead to the political rise of the 'maritime mob'. But, if so, such opposition was defeated, and the glory of Salamis—shared by all classes, as Athenian manpower must have been stretched to the limit in order to man so large a fleet—ensured that henceforth the prestige of the fleet matched that of the hoplites. Historical circumstances led men like Aristides and Cimon to become deeply involved in naval developments, and the great victories

⁴⁸ Thuc. vii 27.1.

⁴⁹ Thuc. iv 127–8.

⁵⁰ Hdt. ix 29, Thuc. v 67–75.

⁵¹ Thuc. iv 93.3.

⁵² Xen. *Hell.* iv 5.11–17.

⁵³ Cf. Holladay, *G&R* xxiv (1977) 44–5 and n. 34.

of Eurymedon and Cypriot Salamis, and those of Phormio, ensured continuance of the naval tradition and pride.

As against this the hoplites after Plataea had only Oenophyta and the battle of the Young and the Old to show as their exclusive triumphs. Marathon remained their most glamorous achievement, as the recurrence of the phrase 'Men of Marathon' in Aristophanes shows.⁵⁴ The limited role for them in the strategy of the Archidamian war and their defeat by the Thebans at Delium increased the feeling that Athens now depended almost entirely on her navy for her prosperity and safety. This was a recurrent and insistent theme of Pericles and was clearly set out by the 'Old Oligarch' who candidly admitted that at Athens hoplites were held in less regard than in other cities, and that Athens' radical democracy was tailor-made to suit the interests of the oarsmen and the shipwrights on whom Athens depended and therefore could not be overthrown.⁵⁵

There is no need to rehearse here the mass of ancient evidence which confirms the reality of the power of the popular vote in Athens in the second half of the fifth century and the inability of the wealthier classes to put anything across against the will of the thetes. Even the rigged assembly at Colonus, followed by the use of organised intimidation, failed to secure an oligarchy for more than a few months, and at the end of the war even the loss of the fleet and empire, together with the presence of a Spartan garrison on the Acropolis, failed to prevent the restoration of radical democracy. Clearly the majority even of the hoplite class must have been wedded to it since it was they who had to fight for it in 404/3 when the oarsmen were militarily impotent. Class war between hoplites and thetes was not a reality in this period of Athenian history in spite of attempts by oligarchs to make it so.

It might conceivably be argued that the demands of the fleet on thetic manpower were too great to permit the build-up of a thetic light-armed force, but it is difficult to believe that the use of mercenary oarsmen would not have made this possible even before Athens lost her fleet (after which there would be no problem) and it would easily have been supplemented by mercenaries from the areas which specialized in such fighting.

It seems impossible therefore to credit that Athens' failure to set up such a force on a permanent footing was due to anything but a belief that it would not be of crucial value except in marginal circumstances—a belief that was not created by hoplite brainwashing but by an assessment of the hard facts, and one that was shared by the Spartans, the Thebans and the Persians.

If any of these cities or dynasts had really come to believe in the overall superiority of light-armed troops they would surely have hired or created the necessary forces and, where they possessed them, made more decisive use of them. Even those states where hoplites dominated would have yielded to the needs of survival and the lust for aggrandisement. An Old Oligarch came to regret the growth of Athenian sea-power but Cimon and Aristeides had helped build it up, and to abandon it would have been unthinkable to all but a few fanatical extremists. The realisation by a ruling group of possible dangers for itself will not shake its belief that it, uniquely, will be able to control them and survive.⁵⁶

A. J. HOLLADAY

Trinity College, Oxford

⁵⁴ The choruses in both *Acharnians* and *Wasps* and Demos in *Knights* are all so described. It is possible that attempts were made to heighten hoplite claims to distinctive credit for Salamis. Cf. C. W. Fornara, *JHS* lxxxvi (1966) 51–4.

⁵⁵ [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* i 2, ii 1.

⁵⁶ Cartledge (n. 1) n. 97, cites a work on the thought of Mao (with which I cannot claim familiarity) as evidence for Mao's very just view that 'the acceptance of technological progress rapidly undermines both the ideas on which their rule is based and the ideas serving as its justification'. This was apparently a judgement on

the Mandarins of China, but it might be thought to throw some light on the Cultural Revolution, which was apparently designed to devalue and obstruct the acquisition of technical and cultural skills. But threats and challenges from without seem to have achieved their usual effect. Technological progress, with all its dangers, is now to be resumed. Mao's apparent successor, Den Xiao Ping, is reported to have said recently: 'Of course some decadent capitalist influences will be brought into China. We are aware of this but . . . we are not afraid of it.' *Mutatis mutandis*, so said they all.