

Some Greek Evidence for Indo-European Youth Contingents of Shape Shifters

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Artistic evidence, legends and anecdotes in Greece seem to reflect very archaic ways of fighting, remnants of IE youth contingents covered in skins, lightly armed, and inspiring terror. Although these troops had largely disappeared from the written sources in archaic and classical times, there are enough indications to suggest that they operated past Iliadic times, even if they were no longer well understood.

Shape shifting warriors are known from several IE cultures. Scholars assume that there were probably two types of shape shifters. On the one hand there was a “consecrated” warrior,¹ and on the other hand there were contingents of young adolescent men, who fought for a period of time as shape shifters before they were integrated into the productive structure of their societies (Kershaw 2000: 63).

In a seminal work, Kim McCone identified the contingents of young marauding men in several IE cultures. He established a distinction between them and the organized troops of property owning citizens (**teutá*) (McCone 1987: 111). These young men gathered in the so-called IE **koryos*. Members of the **koryos* spent their time in the theft of cattle and women, activities which constitute the themes of most IE epics.

Possible traces of these young men and their paraphernalia are found in the *Iliad* in the “long-haired” Achaeans, the

¹The best examples for the two separate groups of shape-changing warriors come probably from Tacitus’ *Germania*. According to Kershaw (2000: 41), Tacitus describes the young adolescent warrior in *Germania* 43. As for consecrated warriors, Tacitus describes in chapter 31 the tribe of the Chatti. Tacitus writes that as soon as the Chatti became men, they let their hair and beard grow and would not cut it until they had killed an enemy. They always fought in the front ranks and did not temper their aspect even during peace. They did not possess land or houses and lived from what others gave them. Cf. Egil’s Saga 3: Harald had sworn a solemn oath never to cut or comb his hair until he made himself sole ruler of Norway. That was why he was called Harald the Shaggy.

Myrmidones, and of course the Lykians, Wolf-People, possibly representing some IE Männerbünde (McCone 1987: 122). The *Iliad* has also preserved a word for them, *koiranoi*.² The evidence of the *Iliad* seems sufficient to claim some youth contingents for Greek prehistory. When it comes to Greek history, however, the evidence seems much harder to find. In this paper I would like to investigate the survival of IE contingents of young warriors in Greek archaic and classical times. I will examine the evidence in literature, myth, history, and art from a comparative perspective.

Through comparison with other IE cultures it has been established that contingents of young warriors often assumed some kind of shape shift. Here are the most important characteristics of the shape shifters, which, I will argue, are also present among Greek youth contingents not only in Homeric times, but in archaic and even classical times.

1. Most important is the use of animal skins, which allowed the warriors to assume the nature of the animal.³
2. Other sources mention their long hair or strange hairdos, which was supposed to give them a horrifying aspect.
3. They also impersonated ghosts or dead ancestors.
4. As a result of the physical change there was a psychological change that made them fight defiantly, naked or semi naked, armed only with light weapons.
5. Also, the change made them fight in a state of fury that increased their performance above natural expectations, but left them worn out for a long period after their frenzy.⁴
6. Their ecstatic performance was accentuated by dances and perhaps the use of drugs.

²*Il.* 2. 207, 2. 487, 2.760, 4. 250, 5. 824, 7. 234... According to Kershaw (2000: 18), Greek *koiranos* is the exact parallel of Old Norse epithet of Odin *herjann* – “he who embodies or leads the *herr*.” In Norse mythology the *herr* is the army of the dead that gathers in Valhalla until the end of times in Ragnarokr.

³The most commonly known “style” of shape-changing warriors among the IE peoples are the Norse berserkers, said to wear a bear-skin or to be naked and to scorn the use of armor. Yet, the most common frenzied warriors were the wolf warriors, who also wore around their shoulders the skins of wolves and/or a cap of the same material. They are called *ulfhedinn* – “wolf coat” in the sagas (Speidel 2004: 15).

⁴Egil’s Saga 27: “What people say about shape-shifters or those who go into berserk fits is this: that as long as they are in the frenzy they are so strong that nothing is too much for them, but as soon as they are out of it, they become much weaker than normal. That is how it was with Kveldulf; as soon as the frenzy left him he felt worn out by the battle he had been fighting, and grew so weak as a result of it that he had to take to his bed.”

From the *Iliad*, we know that the ancient Greeks had some kind of appreciation that shape shifters had been part of their past. It is not uncommon to see some of the warriors of the *Iliad* fighting in a state of frenzy.⁵ There are two words to describe this state: *menos* and *lyssa*. Although *menos* is primarily a state of altered mind⁶ (it is etymologically related to the IE root **men-* to think), it is, nevertheless, associated with animalistic traits. For instance, in book five of the *Iliad*, Diomedes is characterized by his receiving the extraordinary force of *menos* that allows him to continue fighting without paying attention to the wounds he has just received. Diomedes' *menos* is so intense that he even attacks gods in his fury, which has a special character, as we read in *Il.* 5. 136: *then a force (menos) three times as great seized him, as if he was a lion.*

In book 10 of the *Iliad*, Diomedes' description as a lion is matched by him actually putting on over his shoulders a large lion skin that reaches to his feet (*Il.* 10. 177). Later on (*Il.* 10. 255-258), he wears a bull helmet. The helmet is described as a *kynēēn taureiēn*, literally a dog-hide cap in shape of a bull.⁷ This is a special type of helmet⁸ for young people –*aizēōn*.⁹ *aizēoi* is a strange term, without known etymology, but that the ancients understood as compound of *aei* + *zēn* – to live eternally. From this short description we can see that Diomedes presents an altered state of mind (*menos*), animal characterization and perhaps invulnerability, all characteristics of shape shifters. In the same book, the Trojan Dolon, opponent of Diomedes, is covered with the skin of a wolf and a dog-hide cap in the shape of a marten (*Il.* 10. 334-335).¹⁰

Homeric warriors were conscious that they could be possessed and transformed by a power similar to that of animals,

⁵Hector (*Il.* 7. 38, 17. 565...), Idomeneus (*Il.* 13. 424) and naturally Achilles (*Il.* 11. 268, 21. 305...)

⁶Dumézil 1983: 185 argues that the warrior inflamed with *menos* does not lose his lucidity, since he can still heed advice. He also argues that dressing up with an animal skin does not turn a warrior into an animal.

⁷However, *Il.* 3. 316 – bronze *kynēe*. Obviously, the noun had become a common way to designate a smaller helmet.

⁸Odysseus boar's tusk helmet is also mounted on a dog-hide (*Il.* 10. 261).

⁹There are 17 instances of this word in the *Iliad*. Most of them refer to young men during the hunt of wild animals with dogs.

¹⁰In the Saga of the Volsungs chapter 8, Sigmund and Sinfjotli put on some wolf skins that transformed them into howling wolves with superhuman powers. Marten warriors are not unknown in other IE groups, see Speidel 2004: 51.

as exemplified by the word *menos*, which primarily describes a mental state, that of madness. Consequently, Diomedes in *Il.* 5. 185 is described as a person who is mad with *menos*: (*mainetai*- he is enraged or possessed).¹¹ *mainetai* is used to describe the possession by an outside force: a god, fury, poetic inspiration ... *mainetai* and its related word *mania* are often associated with frenzy in particular of the Dionysian kind. On the other hand, in the *Iliad* *mainetai* still refers predominantly to war frenzy.¹²

Besides the mental transformation expressed through *menos*, there is yet another word describing animal possession and the subsequent shape shift of the warriors, namely *lyssa*, fury. *lyssa* is a feminine abstract of the word *lykos*- wolf (Lincoln 1991:131). In the *Iliad*, *menos* and *lyssa* do not appear together, but both terms of fury appear often in combination with *mainetai* or etymologically related words. For instance, Hector in book *Il.* 9. 237-239 is said to be enraged (*mainetai*) and not to respect men or gods in his fury, which is termed *lyssa*. Also *Il.* 21. 542- 543, Achilles' heart is possessed by fury (*lyssa*) as he intends (*meneainei*) to win glory. Furthermore, the scholia define *lyssa* as *mania*.¹³

Whereas shape-changing warriors were not unknown to Homer and times before Homer,¹⁴ in classical times, only one warrior is described using a word derivate from *lyssa*.¹⁵ Herodotus tells the story in the *Histories* 9. 71. The Spartan Aristodemus, who had returned from Thermopylai because of an eye infection, wanted to redeem his reputation. Therefore, he fought very courageously (Herodotus uses the very Homeric word *aristeuein*). Nevertheless, the Spartans did not consider that he deserved the

¹¹The assertion about Diomedes' madness is made by Lykaon's son, Pandaros. It is difficult to say whether this Pandaros is the same one of the *Odyssey*, whose daughters, according to the scholiast to *Od.* 20. 66 suffered from a disease called *kyon* – dog – or probably more lycanthropy.

¹²*Iliad* 6. 132 refers to Dionysos and *Iliad* 22. 460 to a maenad.

¹³Dumézil 1983:188-189 argues that *lyssa* precedes the doom of the warrior, because the warrior cannot control it. This brings him to commit an act of *hybris* for which he will be punished.

¹⁴Mycenaean warriors in a fresco in Pylos are depicted with tails, also in the Tiryns crater Athens National Museum 1511. In the mythical realm, Heracles, a pre-Iliadic hero, wears continuously a lion skin and he is often furious with *lyssa*.

¹⁵The word *lyssa* or its derivates does not appear in Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon or the orators. It appears once in Alcaeus, several times in Euripides', *Heracles* and *Orestes* and many more times in the *Anthologia Graeca*, but here referring exclusively to the madness of love.

recognition as best fighter because he had become mad (*lyssônta*) and abandoned the formation. This example illustrates that the Greeks in later times did not think that out-of-control warriors had a place in the phalanx formation. Individual, berserk-acting warriors do not make good soldiers and are, consequently, obscured in the written sources during classical times.

As with the word *lyssa*, the word *menos* is not a favorite of the classical writers. It appears in Herodotus 7. 220.4. Herodotus transcribes an oracle of Delphi for Leonidas (the Son of the Lion!) and the Spartans given before the battle of the Thermopylai. The oracle said that Leonidas would not be seized by the *menos* of bulls or lions but that he has the *menos* of Zeus. Whatever this means, it does not seem to refer to the irrational fury of animals, but to some royal or intellectual quality perhaps, which he already has. As in the previous example, the passage also stresses that shape shifters, as irrational fighters, are no longer well seen. The qualities of the shape shifters are not well-suited for later historical soldiers. After Homeric times, the practices of the frenzied warrior seem to have largely disappeared from the sources.

In order to find the groups of young shape shifters I will continue examining the evidence of the *Iliad* beyond the contributions of McCone. The evidence gravitates around two interconnected points, the terrifying aspect of the warriors and the use of animal skins. These points find parallels among other IE young warriors. For instance, the Germanic Harii, whose name is etymologically built on the IE root **koryos*, were, according to Kershaw, contingents of young men more than a separate tribe.¹⁶ Tacitus mentions in section 43 of the *Germania* that “their shields are black, their bodies dyed. They choose dark nights for battle and strike terror by the horror and gloomy appearance of their death-like army. No enemy can bear their strange and almost infernal aspect.”

As the appearance of the Harii is infernal in the dark night, all in black, so Hector is described in *Il.* 12. 463 as having a face similar to the night. The context here is the attack on the Greek ships. There is a fierce battle to climb and break the wall that the Greeks have built around the ships. Hector who seems unstoppable and whose eyes are burning with fire (*Il.* 12. 466), is described as

¹⁶Kershaw 2000: 42 does not think that the Harii are the same people as the Charini (Pliny *H.N.* 4.14. 98) although they refer to the same troops of young men.

“equivalent in his face to the fast night”.¹⁷ The comparison with the night implies death and fear, as seen at the beginning of the *Iliad* when Apollo sends the plague and he also is described as being similar to the night (*Il.* 1.47) (Moreux 1967: 237-272).

Besides the sinister appearance of Hector, the Lykians, who are the ones bearing the brunt of the attack, are described as using animal skins as shields – (*laisêia Il.* 12. 426). Furthermore, neither the Greeks nor the Lykians seem to be wearing corselets because the weapons can penetrate their skin when they turn their *naked* back (*Il.* 12. 428). Whereas the Greeks are fighting in a desperate manner, the Lykians seems to be some kind of shock troops, lightly armed so they can climb the wall.

One can safely say that there are in the *Iliad* reflections of the young IE contingents characterized by the wearing of skins, nakedness and a sinister appearance. On the other hand, even after the *Iliad*, it can be observed that the *laisêia* are not just another type of shield, but probably just a shaggy hide characteristic of certain troops. A fragment of the Cretan poet Hybrias exemplifies this:

There is for me much wealth, spear and sword and the beautiful hide (*laisêion*), cover of the body. With this one I carry plunder, with that one I reap, with that one I trample the sweet wine from the vine, with that one I am called lord of the serfs. Those who do not dare to have spear and sword and the beautiful hide (*laisêion*), cover of the body, all of them falling to their knees bow to me, calling me lord and great king.

The fragment shows that the *laisêion* can be used as shield and cover for the body. This perhaps implies that the narrator was naked. The hide is part of the attire of the warrior, together with spear and sword. It can be certainly used as shield, but it was probably just a hide of an animal. This can be seen in Herodotus 7. 91, when he writes that the Cilicians used *laisêia* instead of (*anti*) shields.¹⁸

¹⁷Egil's Saga 1 describes the bad temper that overcame Kveldulf (Evening Wolf) every night. Also in chapter 40, the powers of Skallagrim (Kveldulf's son and Egil's father) are normal during the day, but at night he is able to pick up a person and dash him so hard against the ground as to break his bones and kill him.

¹⁸The assumption is strengthened by images showing warriors or hunters using skins instead of shields. Cf. Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano AST 318 showing a hunter or warrior with goat skin and spear and Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquinies RC191 showing a soldier with skin and round shield on

Herodotus continues describing Xerxes' contingents present at the battle of Salamis. In 7.92 he describes the Lykians, according to Herodotus, historical descendants of those in the *Iliad*, and who were of Cretan origin and received their name from the Athenian Lykos, son of Pandion. This Lykos is a mythical character considered to be the founder not only of the Lykians of Asia Minor when he was exiled from Athens, but also the founder of the sanctuary of Apollo Lykeios – “Apollo, Lord of the Wolves” in Athens. These Lykians wore corselets, but on top of them they also wore around the shoulders the skin of a goat and the *pilos* hat that characterizes young warriors in Greek artistic depictions.

The connection with the Lykians and the goatskins opens yet another connection to another group of shape shifters. The use of the goatskin cannot only be justified through the fact that goatskins are easier to come across than wolves' or bears'. Buck warriors were known from the Germanic and Celtic world (Speidel 2004: 47-50).¹⁹ Wearing skins of goats was probably another means of inducing the shape shift in the warrior.²⁰ Also among the Greeks, Zeus and Athena wear the *aegis* (*Il.* 5. 733, 738 and 742), which even if described as a portent, is still a goatskin. The *aegis* itself has tassels or fringes, more likely to emphasize its wild, shaggy aspect.

Furthermore, the historical and mythical connections of the goatskin produce perhaps yet another piece of linguistic evidence towards the identification of contingents of young men in the *Iliad*. In book 8, Teucros shoots his arrows behind the protection of his half-brother Ajax. He manages to kill several Trojans, but cannot hit Hector, who is described as a furious dog (*kyna lyssêtêra Il.* 8. 299), obviously the epithet of a shape shifter. The rest of the Trojans are described with the word for young men *aizêôn* (*Il.* 8. 298), which we saw already applied to Diomedes and often describes the young men in a hunt of wild animals.²¹ Perhaps this description of the Trojans alludes to Hector's contingent being formed by a group of young men not only enraged like animals, but also dressed in animal hides, most likely goats.²² Certainly

the same hand and spear in the right.

¹⁹The British Gabratovices are literally the Goat People.

²⁰Herodotus 1. 173 explains how Lykos, founder of the Lykians, was driven out from Athens by his brother Aigeus, “the Goat.” The legend may reflect some prehistoric enmity between the “Wolf People” and the “Goat People”.

²¹*Il.* 3.26, 11.414, 18, 581, 17, 282.

²²cf. Tiryns frescoes depicting armed men fighting against men covered in skins.

they seem to have no armor. So Teucros can claim that his arrows pierce the skin of the young men (*Il.* 8. 298).

The word could be related to the word for goat. Mycenaean *aiza* (PY Un 1318) for goatskin (*aigia*) proves that there is an early affrication of the consonant. Although the etymology needs to be worked out in detail, maybe the *aizēoi* were originally men wearing a goatskin over the shoulders. They were hunters (and there are many depictions of hunters with this attire) and also light armed troops, whose name and function the *Iliad* vaguely remembers. As seen from Zeus and Athena, the goatskin could also have a terrifying aspect, which is also a common trait of youth troops. Furthermore, the terrifying aspect of the young men could also be emphasized by the dark color of their garments. In the *Iliad* 4. 280, the phalanxes of *aizēoi* are described as dark blue (*kuaneai*). This color is also used to describe Thetis' mourning veil in *Il.* 24. 93. Apparently, there was no other veil blacker.

In order to develop the discussion of the sinister aspect of the young troops, we have to refer to Angelo Brelich's contribution (Brelich 1961). He argued for the ritual initiatory character of many conflicts in archaic Greece. The soldiers in these conflicts would be largely young men, who used war as initiation into society. Conflicts, therefore, were fought by a reduced number of combatants and were recurring (Brelich 1961: 48-49). He explains the conflict of the Thessalians and Phocians (Herodotus 8. 27) as ritualistic fights. The seer²³ of the Phocians advises them to cover their bodies in chalk and attack the Thessalians in the dark night. The Thessalians fell into a state of panic thinking that they were some kind of apparition.²⁴ Herodotus mentions that the Phocians took not only the shields, which they customarily dedicated to the gods, but also the bodies. Herodotus, however, does not explain what the Phocians did with the bodies of the four thousand dead Thessalians.

The themes of fighting by night, using deceit and the fight being instigated by a seer are also present in other sources, although it is not clear whether the fighters belong or not to a youth contingent. In Thucydides 3.20.1-3.23.3 we read that the Plataeans escaped the besieging Peloponnesians by climbing

²³The word *mantis* is related to *mainomai* and *menos*.

²⁴Kershaw 2000: 63: The Germanic Harii were also conceived as an army of the dead. The fact that they considered themselves to be dead made them invulnerable, since they could no longer die.

through the wall in the middle of a dark, stormy night. Only about two hundred dared to break the siege, the majority considered it too dangerous. Through the description one can see that deceit was part of the plan from the beginning. In this regard, the Plataeans remaining in the city started an outcry at the wall far away from where the men were crossing and also had beacons ready to counteract the signals of the Peloponnesians. There does not seem to be much point to the whole expedition other than a proof of courage, since the Plataeans that escaped to Athens could not bring back the needed food supplies, which, according to Thucydides, had motivated the escape in the first place. It is interesting to note that the troops were lightly armed, as to be more mobile and make less noise, but also they wore only the left sandal. Thucydides mentions that this was with the intention of not slipping in the mud, but most probably this is as well some kind of reflection of an old contingent.

We can find parallels in Vergil, *Aeneid* 7. 682-691, when the troops of king Caeculus are described as lightly armed, wearing wolf-skins, and having only one sandal (Speidel 2004: 41).

King Caeculus is followed by a wild legion (*legio agrestis*) from afar. ... Not all have armor (*arma*), and the chariot and shield do not sound; but the majority hurls balls of blue lead, some others in one hand bear a brace of javelins; they have hoods of tawny wolf-skin as cover for their head; the left foot leaves a barefoot track behind, a rawhide sandal covers the other one.

Barefooted warriors appear in Trajan's column, as well, as part of the Germanic auxiliaries (Speidel 2004:60). Soldiers wearing only one sandal are an obvious variation of the theme. It does not seem that there is any specific importance attached to which foot is left bare, as long as one of them is, so as to prove the manliness and courage of the soldier. Although Thucydides does not mention that the Plataeans were ephebes, Hornblower (Hornblower 2004: 29) has noticed that the description echoes Pindar's 4th Pythian Ode (75-85), where Jason appears covered in a leopard skin, with long hair,²⁵ and also wearing only one sandal. According to Pindar, Jason is the one who is a stranger and a citizen at the same

²⁵Herodotus 1. 82 mentions how the Argives cut their hair short after losing Thyreae to the Spartans, while these let theirs grow from then on. This is, according to Brelich 1961, another ritualistic battle in which only 300 men in each group fight.

time, which has been explained as a symbol for the ephebe (Vidal Naquet 1986: 108). His description reflects the young marginal warrior, common from other IE peoples.

As the figure of Jason indicates, another reflection of IE contingents of youth can be found more generally in the groups of ephebes. Ephebes were not a regular part of the Greek army, only going into battle under special circumstances. They were also set apart in many other ways. Ephebes lived at the edge of society during the two years of their ephebeia. They were posted in the territorial limits of their cities and they were also marginal in social status, having the duty of guarding the territory, but not yet having full-citizen rights. They wore black tunics and were lightly armed, so they were distinct in their appearance. The fighting of the ephebe was not the hoplite phalanx, but more the skirmish at the border of the territories, similar to what we find in IE warfare, which has been characterized as series of raids.

Vidal-Naquet and Brelich studied the myths involving the ephebes that related them to the festival of the Apaturia – Deceit (?) – that celebrated the fight of Melanthos (the Black One) against Xanthos (the White One). Vidal-Naquet (1986:110-112) explains this as a rite of passage of the ephebes into the community. Besides being a characteristic way of fighting of the young warrior, deceit in this myth is explained in part as the presence of Dionysos Melanaigis or “Dionysos of the Black Goatskin”.²⁶ Dionysos, god of intoxication and ecstatic dances, covers his back with a goatskin, which we have seen as well as a characteristic of certain fighters, including Zeus.²⁷

Ephebes were by and large under the patronage of Apollo, who was an ephebe himself. Just as the IE contingents of young warriors are represented by the image of the wolf, Apollo is also associated in many myths with wolves as the epithet Lykeios expresses. Other wild beasts fall into the realm of his twin sister Artemis. As much as she is the mistress of the wild beasts in general, Apollo is the master of the wolves (Gersheson 1991: 7). The initiation of the ephebes also included rites to Artemis, as in Sparta to Artemis Orthia, who is, of course, patroness of hunting

²⁶There is another association with deceivers and goats. In the *Odyssey*, Dolios, Odysseus' faithful goatherd, is the father of Melanthios (the Black One), who fights on the side of the suitors. The fight against the suitors reenacts then the myth of the ephebes.

²⁷Dionysos Melanaigis is associated with the festivals of the tragedy. Winkler 1990: 35-36 argues that the tragedy is the “ephebes' song.”

as much as protector of animals.

Associated with the ephebes' warfare style and considered essential part of the ephebes' training is the hunt. In case of the Spartan youth, the hunt was even a human hunt, as seen in the famous *krypteia*. The hunt of the ephebe was conducted by night using snares and traps. Deceit, then, was characteristic of their hunt, but also of their way of fighting. There seems not to be a clear distinction between both. In the *Iliad*, we saw how Dolon - Deceiver - tried to steal the horses of Achilles by night.²⁸ He was covered by a skin of a wolf and his hunt turned into a manhunt. Pictorial representations of the scene make the double layer of meaning clear. In the vase in St Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum 653 Odysseus and Diomedes kill Dolon, who is covered with a wolf skin. Odysseus and Diomedes wear the *pilos* and *chlamys* typical of the ephebes, they are also very lightly armed, one with a spear and the other with a sword. Since these are also the garments of the hunters, the wolf hunt becomes a man hunt and vice versa.

Hunters and ephebes are sometimes mixed in the visual representations, especially when they are both wearing skins. Although written sources are silent about this, images consistently show a young warrior, dressed with skins, who is opposed or complementary to a hoplite. Several vases show young men in what has been described as hunter's and shepherd's outfits, but they are put in contrast to the hoplite. The Athenian red-figure crater in Rome Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 50431 has three men in the front. The one on the right is a bearded man draped, holding a staff. The figure in the centre is a beardless youth, with helmet, spear, shield and a *chlamys*. He does not seem to be wearing a corselet, but looks more like an ephebe than perhaps a hoplite. On the left there is another young man clothed with what seems to be a leopard skin and hat. He has a spear over his shoulder. Although the outfit may correspond to the shepherd, nothing in the vase indicates his activity. His appearance looks foreign and perhaps represents a character in opposition to the hoplite.

Also the Athenian red-figure cup in Havana Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes 212 shows a young man arming. On the left there is a woman holding his spear, while the man closes his corselet.

²⁸Dolon in the *Iliad* was a wolf-warrior whose name means "deceit." This might have been a traditional name for youth warriors in the same manner as Irish and Germanic warriors use the word "thief" in their names.

On the right another of these “shepherd figures” is standing with shield and spear and dressed with skins. The fact that he is holding a shield makes him more a warrior than a hunter and certainly not a shepherd, although the foreign aspect remains. A better example comes perhaps from the red-figure lekythos in Athens National Museum CC1196. Here a young man with a sword and with a skin hat and skin cloak has fallen on the attack of a hoplite and desperately fights for his life. The opposition between the Greek hoplite and the foreign other is demonstrated very clearly.

Who are these young men in skins that the vases show? Are they ephebes or foreign troops? Are they part of a residual system of fighting not well incorporated into the phalanx? They seem to be unimportant enough to have vanished from most sources and only represented in a few vases.²⁹ Written sources are elusive, but perhaps we could find some allusions. Tyrtaios frg. 10, vv. 15-25 mentions the young warrior as opposed to the married soldier. This combination has always been understood as part of the phalanx, but this would imply perhaps a phalanx that was more varied and not as tight as during the Macedonian times (Krentz 2007: 72-73).

If the archaic and classical phalanx offer room for light armed troops to fight within their lines, perhaps these young men of the vases can be seen as contingents within the phalanx. In this case, it might also be significant that they retained the wearing of skins, not just as a way to get cheaper armor, but also as a way to differentiate themselves consciously from the hoplites through an association with animals. On the other hand, the written sources are largely silent about this point and Tyrtaios’ poetry might not be enough evidence.

Nevertheless, the youth in Sparta was associated with animals. The groups of the young men were called *agelai*— herds and were led by a *boagos* — leader of cattle (Chrimes 1999: 84). Twenty year old young men were called *eirenes*— rams. As Chrimes (1999: 119) states, the theory underlying the education of the boys in Sparta was that they were wild or half-wild animals and treated as such until tamed.

²⁹We cannot assume that every hoplite was armed in an equal manner, especially during the archaic period. Some would have worn bronze corselets, some others only leather or skin corselets. Krentz (2007: 80) assumes that during the archaic period light armed troops fought within the phalanx and only during the Persian Wars was there a separation of heavy and light armed troops into different contingents.

The *eirenes* were in charge of a fierce mock battle over the bridge at the Platanistes. As part of preparation for this battle, a puppy was sacrificed at night (Plutarch, Lycurgus 17). Sacrifices of dogs are common among certain IE youth. Dogs and wolves are connected with demons of the underworld, like Hecate, the Erinyes and the Keres (Kershaw 2000: 257, 262). Also, dogs and wolves are considered to have the same function among the warriors. For instance, while Germanic and Greek warriors built their names with the word for wolf, Irish warriors did it with the word for dog, like the famous Cú Chulainn. That the *eirenes* would sacrifice a puppy instead of a more common victim suggests IE warrior practices.

On the other hand, it seems that there was a division according to age in the usual Spartan formation. Age division in military formations occurs in other IE cultures, as already mentioned (McCone 1987:145). Apparently, the young *eirenes* were only exceptionally put in the military formation and they occupied themselves in other important duties, like overseeing the helots, riding the horses provided by richer citizens (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6. 4.11) and, according to Chrimes, assisting in the *krypteia* (Chrimes 1999: 390), which she considers more than the ritual initiation of the young men and believes it had to do with teaching the young men how to perform scouting missions (Chrimes 1999:375).

Herodotus (9. 85) mentions that different contingents at the battle of Plataea were buried separately. One of the Lacedaemonian contingents was that of the *eirenes*, which implies that they fought separately from the hoplites. Another contingent that might have fought separately from the phalanx is that of the Skirites, which occupied the left wing of the army (Thuc. 5. 67.1), usually the place of most danger. It is still debated whether or not the Skirites were full citizens or *perioikoi* from Skiritis. Chrimes (1999: 378-379) proposes two etymologies for the name – Skirites can be related either to a hard covering as a coat of gypsum or an animal skin used as armor. Either one of these would go with the tradition of IE shape shifters. We saw how the army of the Phocians (Hdt. 8. 27) covered themselves in gypsum to frighten their enemies. Also, we have established that using animal skins as body armor in conjunction with fighting in the most dangerous position and apart from the citizen army were traits of special light-armed contingents. A Spartan *pithos* of the sixth century shows a warrior with helmet and sword and perhaps

a stone in his hand and covered with an animal skin fighting side by side the hoplites. Perhaps this is a representation of a Skirites,³⁰ which could find an echo in Tyrtaios 11, a poem in which he contrasts the heavy armed hoplite with shield and spear (vv. 21-34) with the light armed (*gymnêtes*– naked) throwers of stones and javelins under the protection of those in full armor (vv. 35-38).

To summarize, artistic evidence, legends and anecdotes in several cities of Greece seem to reflect very archaic ways of fighting, perhaps going all the way to a common IE past when youth contingents covered in skins and lightly armed were put in the most dangerous places of the battle, besides the better protected army of citizens. In the Greek world, these troops may have lost some of the element of frenzy that characterizes shape shifters in other cultures, but they still maintained the terror inspiring appearance and the tactics of shock troops. Although these troops had largely disappeared from the written sources in archaic and classical times, there are enough indications to suggest that they operated past Iliadic times, even if they were no longer well understood

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³⁰Plate XV and XVI in Dawkins (ed.) 1929, *The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta*, Council of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies: Suppl. 5.

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