

EPAMEINONDAS AND THE *EMBOLON*

JOHN BUCKLER

IN A RECENT ISSUE of this journal A. M. Devine presented a study of the ἔμβολον (wedge) in Greek military terminology.¹ Although the *embolon* figures more prominently in the writings of Hellenistic and Roman military theorists than among the historians, Devine concluded that Epameinondas, the great Theban general and military innovator, created this formation and first applied it successfully in hoplite warfare. For support he points to the battle of Mantinea (362 B.C.), where Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.5.22, 24) states that Epameinondas made an *embolon* of the troops around him and another of his cavalry and *hamippoi*.² Xenophon's use of *embolon* Devine equates with that of Aelian (*Taktika* 47.3–5) and Arrian (*Taktika* 11.2), who add that Epameinondas had earlier used this formation at the battle of Leuktra (371 B.C.). Hence, he concludes that at both Leuktra and Mantinea the Theban organized his wing in a wedge-shaped, hollow formation as the spearhead of his attack. He thereby argues against the traditional view that Epameinondas' dispositions at both battles were deep columns.³ In his reconstruction of Leuktra, he strangely pays little attention to the testimony of Plutarch, who is a major source. The purpose of this paper is to establish the two points that Xenophon's use of *embolon* in describing Mantinea is figurative, not literal, and that Diodoros' terminology concerning Leuktra has nothing in common with that of later tactical writers. It will also present historical arguments against the hypothesis that Epameinondas' wing at both Leuktra and Mantinea was arranged as a wedge. Thus, this paper has the colorless task of defending orthodoxy and the regrettable duty to deprive Epameinondas of a military invention.

I

Fundamental to the hypothesis of the wedge is the assumption, which is

¹A. M. Devine, "EMBOΛON: A Study in Tactical Terminology," *Phoenix* 37 (1983) 201–217, cited below by author's name, as are J. Buckler, "Plutarch on Leuktra," *SO* 55 (1980) 75–93, and A. J. Holladay, "Hoplites and Heresies," *JHS* 102 (1982) 96.

²For *hamippoi*, cf. also Thuc. 5.57; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 49.1; and for modern accounts cf. A. W. Gomme et al., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* 4 (Oxford 1970) 79–80; P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford 1981) 566.

³Devine (205–210) specifically argues against the standard view as presented by J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970) 327 n. 3; cf. also W. K. Pritchett, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography* 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969) 66. Yet he ignores a great deal of more recent work that also supports the *communis opinio*: in addition to Buckler and Holladay, G. L. Cawkwell, *Philip of Macedon* (London and Boston 1978) 155, "Epaminondas and Thebes," *CQ* NS 22 (1972) 260–261, "The Decline

never proved, that Xenophon's terminology with regard to Mantinea and Diodoros' in connection with Leuktra are identical with the technical military terminology of Asklepiodotos, Aelian, and Arrian. The burden of proof must fall on the affirmative, especially since weighty arguments can be brought to bear against this assumption.⁴ Xenophon's *embolon* is the logical place to start. In his account of Mantinea Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.5.22) describes Epameinondas' formation of his hoplites: ἐπεὶ γε μὴν παραγωγὸν τοὺς ἐπὶ κέρως πορευομένους λόχους εἰς μέτωπον ἰσχυρὸν ἐποίησατο τὸ περὶ ἑαυτὸν ἔμβολον. At 7.5.24 he states that the Theban drew up his cavalry and *hamippoi* in accordance with the disposition of his phalanx: ὁ δ' Ἐπαμεινώνδας αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ ἱππικοῦ ἔμβολον ἰσχυρὸν ἐποίησατο, καὶ ἀμίλλους πεζοὺς συνέταξεν αὐτοῖς.

According to Sturtz's *Lexicon*, in all of his writings Xenophon employs the word ἔμβολον only in these two passages.⁵ Consequently, its meaning must be determined from its context. Pertinent, however, is the usage of Herodotos and Thucydides, whose *embolon* means solely the "ram" or "beak" of a trireme.⁶ Xenophon gives abundant evidence that he too meant to portray Epameinondas' formation as a column jutting out from the line like the ram of a trireme. He describes (*Hell.* 7.5.23) Epameinondas' advance against the Spartan line: ὁ δὲ τὸ στράτευμα ἀντίπρωρον ὥσπερ τριήρη προσήγε, νομίζων, ὅποι ἐμβαλὼν διακόψει, διαφθερεῖν ὅλον τὸ τῶν ἐναντίων στράτευμα. The naval terminology is conspicuous. Ἀντίπρωρος means "with the prow forwards," and is so used at *Hellenika* 6.2.28, where Xenophon describes one of Iphikrates' drills for his ships' crews: ἐπιστρέψας ἂν καὶ ἀντιπρόρους καταστήσας τὰς τριήρεις ἀπὸ σημείου ἀφίει ἀνθαμιλλᾶσθαι εἰς τὴν γῆν.⁷ As G. E. Underhill noted long ago, ἐμβαλὼν διακόψει "continues the metaphor" of Epameinondas' Boiotians advancing towards the enemy line like a trireme steering for an enemy ship.⁸ The image reappears with regard to Epameinondas' plans for the attack of the cavalry and *hamippoi* (*Hell.* 7.5.24: νομίζων τὸ ἱππικὸν ἐπεὶ διακόψειεν). The metaphor of the trireme recurs in the picture that Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 11.10) paints of the Spartan army maneuvering to meet an enemy: ἐπὶ κέρως πορευομένων, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πραγματεύονται ἢ τὸν λόχον ἕκαστον ὥσπερ τριήρη ἀντίπρωρον τοῖς ἐναντίοις στρέφουσι.⁹

of Sparta," CQ NS 33 (1983) 399; J. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony, 371-362 B.C.* (Cambridge, Mass. 1980) 63, 217.

⁴Pertinent also is the fact that a technical military vocabulary, as found among Hellenistic tactical writers, is largely absent among the classical authors (cf. Buckler).

⁵F. G. Sturtz, *Lexicon Xenophonticum* 2 (Leipzig 1802) s.v. ἔμβολον, which in the context of *Hellenika* 7.5.23 also brings to mind ἐμβολή, which Xenophon frequently uses: cf. Sturtz, s.v. ἐμβολή.

⁶J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge 1938) s. v. ἔμβολος; E.-A. Betant, *Lexicon Thucydideum* 1 (Geneva 1843) s. v. ἔμβολον.

⁷This usage is also common to Herodotos and Thucydides, as LSJ⁹ (s. v. ἀντίπρωρος) makes abundantly clear.

⁸G. E. Underhill, *A Commentary on the Hellenica of Xenophon* (Oxford 1900) 306-307.

⁹This use of the naval metaphor is significant because it suggests that Xenophon saw nothing

Xenophon thus portrays Epameinondas' *lochoi* drawn up on his own wing into a ram that presented a powerful front (μέτωπον ισχυρόν), jutting ahead of the weaker contingents of his line, which were stationed behind (τὸ δὲ ἀσθενέστατον πόρρω ἀπέστησεν: *Hell.* 7.5.23). This formation he led prow on like a trireme. He intended to destroy the enemy line by piercing a part of it with his strongest element (νομίζων, ὅποι ἐμβαλὼν διακόψειε, διαφθερεῖν ὅλον τὸ τῶν ἐναντίων στράτευμα), just as the ram of a trireme sinks an enemy ship by staving in a section of its hull. Furthermore, the ram or beak of a trireme was not necessarily a triangular-shaped point, as is proved by the one actually recovered from the eastern Mediterranean and by various artistic representations.¹⁰ Hence, Xenophon's use of *embolon* here is figurative, with nothing to do with the Hellenistic tactical meaning. Xenophon is simply drawing a striking picture of Epameinondas' attack. He is ignorant of a wedge-shaped formation.

It is easy to see how Aelian and Arrian misinterpreted Xenophon's naval metaphor. Familiar (at least in theory) with wedge-shaped infantry and cavalry formations, they simply took Xenophon literally.¹¹ This conclusion is strengthened by the contradiction involved in the origin of the ἔμβολον *qua* wedge. Despite their testimony about Epameinondas' use of it, both Aelian (*Taktika* 18.4) and Arrian (*Taktika* 16.6–8) credit Philip of Macedonia with the introduction of the wedge to Greek warfare. Perhaps the tactical writers were merely misled by Xenophon's novel use of *embolon* in the context of hoplite warfare. No one else, at least among extant writers, had ever employed it thus before (see above, note 6), so one can readily understand how the mistake originated. Furthermore, since Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.12–15) does not use the word *embolon* in his account of Leuktra, the military writers merely assumed that Epameinondas' wing there, which was at least 50 shields deep, was a wedge. In short, since Xenophon neither means "wedge" at Mantinea nor mentions an *embolon* at Leuktra, and since the theoreticians have obviously misunderstood his imagery, there is absolutely no reason to conclude either that Xenophon can provide evidence for Epameinondas' innovation of a wedge or that the testimony of Aelian and Arrian is anything more than an incorrect assumption.

very novel about Epameinondas' deep formation at Mantinea, which he described in the same way as he had earlier depicted a similar Spartan evolution.

¹⁰E. Linder and Y. Ramon, "A Bronze Ram from the Sea of Athlit, Israel," *Archaeology* 34 no. 6 (1981) 62–64; J. S. Morrison and R. T. Williams, *Greek Oared Ships, 900–322 B.C.* (Cambridge 1968) 280 and plates 13, 15, 19. The recently discovered ram, which has been dated to the fourth century B.C., is of the common three-pronged type familiar from a host of ancient representations.

¹¹Although it is possible that the confusion of ram with wedge, since Aelian and Arrian share it, goes back to a common source, there is currently no reason to date it earlier than Poseidonios, who has been plausibly suggested as their source: P. A. Stadter, "The *Ars Tactica* of Arrian: Tradition and Originality," *CP* 73 (1978) 117–118.

Likewise, neither can Diodoros provide evidence for a wedge at Leuktra nor can a link be established between him and the military writers. The problem is complicated by Diodoros' chaotic account of Leuktra, which is so hopelessly muddled that no coherent reconstruction is possible. Neither Diodoros nor his source, Ephoros, was a master of military affairs.¹² In part, Diodoros' picture of Leuktra is a standard Ephoran battle-piece. Yet since Polybios (12.25f.4) testifies that Ephoros' ignorance of land warfare is not evident in his treatment of Leuktra, the responsibility for the chaos in 15.54.4–56.4 must belong to Diodoros himself.¹³

For what it is worth, then, Diodoros (15.55.2) states that Epameinondas placed the best hoplites, who were to be the deciding factor of the battle, on his own wing: ἐκλεξάμενος γὰρ ἐξ ἀπάσης τῆς δυνάμεως τοὺς ἀρίστους ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον μέρος ἔστησε, μεθ' ὧν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐμελλε διαγωνίζεσθαι. The weakest elements he placed on the other wing, with orders to withdraw during the advance: τοὺς δ' ἀσθενεστάτους ἐπὶ τὸ ἕτερον κέρας τάξας παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς φυγομαχεῖν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἔφοδον τῶν πολεμίων ἐκ τοῦ κατ' ὀλίγον ὑποχωρεῖν. Epameinondas' formation here is essentially that described by Xenophon at Mantinea. This entire alignment, which Diodoros calls an oblique phalanx (λοξὴ φάλαγξ), went forward with Epameinondas' wing moving at a faster rate than that of his other wing (15.55.3). When they engaged the Spartans, Epameinondas' troops carried the day διὰ τε τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὴν πυκνότητα τῆς τάξεως (15.55.4).

Devine claims that the phrases "oblique phalanx" and "compacted formation" indicate that Diodoros' source too knew of a wedge at Leuktra. In his opinion, Diodoros' testimony can be used to prove that Epameinondas employed a ἀμφίστομος διφάλαγγία (lambda-shaped wedge), the oblique sides of which were known as τὰ λοξά, a formation that was "compacted" (cf. Aelian *Taktika* 47.4: πυκνώσας εἰς ἔμβολον τὸ στράτευμα). This information is in turn used to suggest that the account serving as Diodoros' source was in obvious and substantial agreement with that of Aelian and Arrian. First, regarding sources, Aelian and Arrian show no familiarity with either Ephoros or Diodoros, and their testimony cannot be traced further back than Poseidonios (above, note 11). This alone argues against any connection between Diodoros and the tactical writers.

All that remains is the testimony of Diodoros himself, and an examination of his terminology proves that he knows nothing, even imperfectly, about a wedge at Leuktra. In the first place, *embolon* does not appear in Diodoros' narrative. Secondly, in every instance where Diodoros writes ἔμβολος, he

¹²Cf. G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus* (Cambridge 1935) 140–144; B. Farrington, *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece* (London 1947) 58.

¹³Cf. F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybios* 2 (Oxford 1967) 394–395; K. Meister, *Historische Kritik bei Polybios* (Wiesbaden 1975) 72–77.

means "ram." Diodoros is also ignorant of an ἀμφίστομος διφάλαγγια. He uses ἀμφίστομος only once, to describe a sword.¹⁴ The phrase λοξή φάλαγξ at 15.55.2 is best understood in the light of a similar phrase, λοξή τάξις. According to Diodoros (17.57.6), at Gaugamela Alexander advanced in oblique formation, which Arrian describes simply as a movement to the right (*Anab.* 3.13.1: ἐπὶ τὸ δέξιον; 3.13.2: ἐπὶ δόρυ).¹⁵ At 19.29.7 Diodoros describes an attack very similar to Epameinondas' at Leuktra. In 316 B.C. Antigonos launched a downhill attack in oblique formation, only towards the right. Like Epameinondas, he thrust one wing forward, while holding back the other. At Leuktra, too, Diodoros applies the phrase λοξή φάλαγξ to Epameinondas' entire line, just as he uses λοξή τάξις of Antigonos', and not just to one wing of it. In all three cases Diodoros indicates by λοξή φάλαγξ nothing more than a "slanting phalanx" in which one wing is advanced and the other refused. He does not in any case refer to a wedge, and he never uses τὸ λοξόν substantively in the sense of τὰ λοξά.

Diodoros employs πυκνός, πυκνότης, and πυκνοῦσθαι in a variety of contexts, but all that any of them ever implies is "density."¹⁶ He never applies any of these terms to *embolon*, even in military contexts. Thus at the siege of Tyre he refers to men packed together (17.42.2, 44.4). More to the point, at 17.58.2 Diodoros describes the Persian officer Mazaios in action at the battle of Gaugamela. There Mazaios, ὁ τῶν ἱππέων ἡγούμενος πυκναῖς ταῖς εἵλαις, supported the attack of the Persian chariots.¹⁷ There is nothing in Diodoros' account to suggest that the πυκναὶ εἵλαι were organized in a wedge-shaped formation. Nor is there any reason to think that such a formation is meant at 15.55.4. The phrase διὰ τὴν πυκνότητα τῆς τάξεως applies perfectly well to a deep, solid column of troops that could be likened to the ram of a trireme. Such a formation would necessarily be "dense." Diodoros (15.55.4) signifies something of the sort when he states that the Spartans failed to resist successfully the weight of Epameinondas' attack. Nothing in Diodoros' imperfect account can support the weight of a wedge at Leuktra.

There remains the relative disregard of Plutarch's testimony (*Pel.* 23) even though his principal source for the battle of Leuktra is the fourth-century historian Kallisthenes (Buckler 75–76). Plutarch states (*Pel.* 23.1) that in the battle Epameinondas led the phalanx obliquely towards the left (τὴν φάλαγγα λοξὴν ἐπὶ τὸ εὐώνυμον ἔλκοντος) with the intention of separating the Spartan right wing from the allied left wing. He planned to overpower Kleombrotos

¹⁴Cf. J. I. McDougall, *Lexicon in Diodorum Siculum* 1 (Zürich and New York 1983) s. vv. ἔμβολος, ἀμφίστομος.

¹⁵Cf. A. B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander* 1 (Oxford 1980) 305.

¹⁶Cf. McDougall (above, n. 14) s. vv. πυκνός, πυκνότης, πυκνοῦσθαι.

¹⁷Cf. Curtius 4.15.5; Bosworth (above, n. 15) 1.304.

by a charge of his massed wing (προσπεσὼν ἄθρόως κατὰ κέρασ καὶ βιασάμενος).¹⁸ Kleombrotos tried to counter this move by extending his wing to the right (*Pel.* 23.2); but before he could do so Pelopidas, who with the Sacred Band was stationed in the front ranks of Epameinondas' wing, ran forward from his position, and was the first to engage Kleombrotos (*Pel.* 23.3).¹⁹ Pelopidas thereby pinned the Spartan line long enough to allow Epameinondas' wing to deliver the decisive blow (*Pel.* 23.5). A charge ἄθρόως κατὰ κέρασ more accurately describes a ram than a hollow wedge.

Several factors indicate ample agreement between Diodoros, despite his confusion, and Plutarch, which is not surprising inasmuch as Diodoros' source was Ephoros. Ephoros himself relied heavily on Kallisthenes' *Hel-lenika* for fourth-century history, so Diodoros and Plutarch go back ultimately to a common source.²⁰ Significantly, Plutarch also knows of Epameinondas' massed wing. Like Diodoros, he knows that Epameinondas settled the battle by destroying the Spartan contingent with his wing. The term λοξὴ φάλαγξ also occurs in Plutarch, uniquely among his writings. Although Plutarch fails to describe the arrangement of this formation, his other uses of λοξός indicate that he too meant a "slanting phalanx."²¹ Plutarch adds that Epameinondas intentionally led this "slanting phalanx" to the left, and that he did so to isolate Kleombrotos' wing. Plutarch's statement of Epameinondas' plan coincides perfectly with that of Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.12). Furthermore, Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.13–14, *Ages.* 2.24) provides evidence that the Theban succeeded so well that some 400 of the 700 Spartiatai engaged were left on the field of battle.

II

Numerous historical arguments can be ranged against a reconstruction of Leuktra that posits a simple Theban frontal attack by a lambda-shaped phalanx. All the same, three main points have been advanced in favor of this reconstruction: (1) an oblique advance of the entire line is unnecessary, (2) the wedge offers certain tactical advantages over a deep column, and (3) a ram-like phalanx has only a limited ability to push against the enemy.

Rejection of the oblique advance of the Boiotian army contradicts the testimony of Diodoros and Plutarch, both of whose sources were fourth-century historians. Both are in substantial agreement over Epameinondas' attack.²² The reasons behind Epameinondas' oblique advance are provided by

¹⁸This is Plutarch's only attested use of ἄθρόως in a military context: cf. D. Wyttenbach, *Lexicon Plutarcheum* 1 (Oxford 1830) s. v. ἄθρόως.

¹⁹Diodoros (15.81.2) and Nepos (*Pel.* 4.2) agree with Plutarch, and Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.13) indicates that Kleombrotos fell mortally wounded at the outset of battle.

²⁰Cf. Barber (above, n. 12) 131–133.

²¹Cf. Wyttenbach (above, n. 18) s. v. λοξός.

²²Devine (207 n. 23) denies that Kleombrotos was the first to place his cavalry in front of his

Thucydides and the battle of the Nemea River. Thucydides (5.71.1) observes that Greek armies normally thrust towards the right during their advance, and Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.2.19–20) testifies that the Spartan army intentionally exaggerated this tendency at the Nemea River with huge success.²³ The Thebans, who held the right of the allied line, likewise marched to the right in order to extend their line beyond the Spartan left wing (*Xen. Hell.* 4.2.18). Epameinondas' oblique advance to the left, which countered any rightward drift of the Spartan army, ensured that the Theban striking-wing would hit Kleombrotos head to head (Buckler 88). Polyainos (2.3.15) indicates that Epameinondas intended as much when the Theban compared the destruction of the Spartan contingent with crushing the head of a snake. Moreover, Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.14), Diodoros (15.55.4–56.2), and Plutarch (*Pel.* 23.3–5) all show that the Spartan wing was hit at the outset of the fighting, even though Kleombrotos had tried to outflank the Thebans (*Plut. Pel.* 23.2). All of the evidence points to a leftward oblique march of the entire Boiotian line at Leuktra. However, such an oblique move would have exposed the right leg of a lambda-shaped wedge, and would even have diminished the impact of its point.

The argument that the wedge offers certain advantages over the deep column is dubious at best. Nevertheless, two virtues are claimed for it:

(1) its flanks are less vulnerable than those of a deep column, and (2) the apex of a wedge is a better cutting edge than the front of a deep column. First, the flanks of a deep wedge provide no greater ability to maneuver than do those of a column, and thus both are equally vulnerable. The outermost files of neither could easily have made a half-turn to confront an attack from the side, and neither could have done so while maintaining forward movement. In the event of a flank-attack, the wedge would be in danger of collapsing, which would not be true of a solid column. To that extent, the column would be better able to resist and perhaps even recover from attack. At Leuktra Epameinondas took two measures to reduce the vulnerability of his striking-column. His oblique march withdrew the left flank of the ram from the enemy. Its right flank was protected by the refused right wing of the Boiotian contingent (Buckler 80, 88). Pelopidas' actions at Leuktra also argue against a wedge (*Plut. Pel.* 23.3). Pelopidas' daring charge onto Kleombrotos' position would have left a hollow wedge with all four forward sides of its supporting arms exposed (that is, the outermost file and the front rank of each arm of the wedge are exposed; cf. Devine Fig. 1), and in the tumult of battle it would have been difficult for all of the components to have re-established contact handily.

phalanx, thus rejecting Xenophon's testimony (*Hell.* 6.4.10) on a detail that he had no reason to invent. J. Wolter, *Antike Schlachtfelder* 4 (Berlin 1926) 311–312, has given a satisfactory explanation of the king's actions.

²³Cf. Anderson (above, n. 3) 144–149.

The second factor proposed in favor of a wedge is its concentration of force at its apex. Yet actually this formation brings the fewest troops to bear on the point of impact (cf. Devine Fig. 1). The three attacking hoplites of the wedge had in fact to grapple with at least five opponents. The attacker on the extreme right was particularly vulnerable to blows from the unengaged defender to his right, who had an unimpeded stroke at his exposed side. Thus, the point of the wedge would have been faced with the danger of envelopment. Staunch defense could thereby blunt the point of the wedge before the rearward ranks could step to the fore. Nor is it easy to see how Pelopidas' Sacred Band, 300 in number, 16 deep, and unsupported by the main Theban formation, could have enjoyed any considerable advantage over a Spartan phalanx twelve files in depth. A deep column, on the other hand, offers the advantage of allowing an attack in force on a narrow front, but one broad enough to destroy a significant length of the enemy's frontage on initial impact.

An argument offered against the traditional view of a deep, solid column is the limited ability of its rear ranks to push forward. This observation is obviously true, not only of the column but also of the deep wedge and of any other deep formation, where large numbers of men would never have come to grips with the enemy.²⁴ One can easily over-emphasize the significance of the push at Leuktra, as A. J. Holladay does, when he suggests that even non-combatants stood at the rear of Epameinondas' phalanx.²⁵ Nonetheless, he has clearly demonstrated the importance of close formation and the *othismos* to the success of hoplite armies. Holladay's emphasis on the significance of the push is supported by a great deal of evidence.²⁶ Furthermore, those wishing substantially to dismiss the effectiveness of the push must account for the Theban preference for deep formations and for

²⁴Thus, Devine's argument (207) from "inherent military probability" weighs against any deep formation. So too with his concept (208) that the rear ranks of a wedge could serve as a "reserve." The same can be said of a deep column, the rear ranks of which were ready and available to grapple with enemy spearmen. Indeed, Cawkwell, *CQ* NS 22 (1972) 260–261, has already made this suggestion. Yet the very concept of the rear ranks constituting a reserve is certainly incorrect. Holladay (96 n. 13) has provided an excellent argument against this view. Perhaps a final word can be added for clarity. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary*⁶, s.v. reserve, defines the term as "troops withheld from action to reinforce others or to cover retreat." The troops in the rear ranks of Epameinondas' column participated in the battle from the outset and were thus not by definition reserves.

²⁵*Contra* "The Thespians at Leuktra," *WS* 90 (1977) 79 n. 13.

²⁶In addition to Holladay's references, cf. also Thuc. 4.96.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18–19; *Ages.* 2.12; and especially Tyrtaios fr. 11 (ed. Edmonds). So also P. Cartledge, "Hoplites and Heroes," *JHS* 97 (1977) 17. J. Salmon, "Political Hoplites?," *JHS* 97 (1977) 85–92, has provided an excellent discussion of Greek vase paintings of phalanxes and of the difficulties that artists confronted in depicting massed formations. Also J. K. Anderson, "Hoplites and Heresies: A Note," *JHS* 104 (1984) 152.

the success of their dispositions.²⁷ At Delion (424 B.C.) the Thebans were ranked 25 shields deep (Thuc. 4.93.4), an arrangement in which many men never directly engaged their opponents. Yet their weight was an important factor in the battle, and Thucydides (4.96.4) emphasizes the effect of the Theban push in the conflict. At Nemea River (394 B.C.) the Thebans were "quite deep," which here means more than 16 deep (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18). Xenophon describes this formation as a deep phalanx. During the second stage of the fighting at Koroneia (394 B.C.), the Thebans gathered themselves into a tough knot and cut their way through Agesilaos' line.²⁸ So too at Leuktra, where Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.14), Plutarch (*Pel.* 23.1), and Diodoros (15.55.4, if one wishes to accept his testimony) all note the importance of the weight of Epameinondas' formation.²⁹ Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.14) says specifically that the Spartans were pushed back by the weight of the Theban formation (ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου ὠθεύμενοι). The weight of the push is the essence of Polyainos' anecdote (2.3.2) about Epameinondas calling upon his men to give him one more step to victory over Kleombrotos' phalanx. A hollow wedge is incapable of providing the weight and numbers necessary for such a push against a line 12 men deep. For that a solid, thick, and deep column is needed. The great advantages of Epameinondas' beak-like column are that this battering ram was too heavy to be thrown back and too thick to be cut through. This formation was designed to grind down even a formidable opponent.

In conclusion, when Xenophon describes Epameinondas' wing at Mantinea as an *embolon*, he means the ram of a trireme not a hollow wedge. His naval metaphor, paralleled elsewhere in his writings, which involves far more than the use of a single word, is used to suggest an attack comparable to the rush of a trireme. Diodoros and Plutarch, both of whose accounts ultimately rely on Kallisthenes, neither use the word *embolon* nor can reasonably be interpreted to provide evidence for a wedge-shaped formation. Aelian and Arrian, or their source, are guilty of anachronism, for their wedge is the mistaken equation of Xenophon's ram with a Hellenistic military formation known as a wedge. Far from being the creator of a new military form, Epameinondas brought to fruition a formation long and successfully used by his countrymen. His innovations, which are undeniable, took other shapes. They consisted of a very deep column posted on the left, of the

²⁷In all instances when the Thebans used a deep column, they penetrated the enemy line. Therefore, I cannot understand why Devine (207) claims that "their efforts had met with only limited success."

²⁸Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18–19; Ages. 2.12. The success of the Arkadians in 365 B.C. (Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.23–24) also indicates that weight and tight formation were significant factors in hoplite warfare.

²⁹For other examples of the effectiveness of weight and numbers, cf. Diod. 15.86.5; 16.19.3; 18.17.4.

combination of protruding and refused wings in the same phalanx, of the oblique advance, and finally of novel use of cavalry. These carried the day both at Leuktra and at Mantinea.³⁰

INSTITUT FÜR ALTE GESCHICHTE,
UNIVERSITÄT MÜNCHEN

³⁰I should like to thank warmly the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung for a fellowship that supported in part research for this study. Sincerest thanks are also due to Professor Hatto H. Schmitt and Dr. Hartmut Beister, who made my work at the Institut für Alte Geschichte both possible and pleasant.