

**Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze – Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece*.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. 314. ISBN 978-0691143019. Pb. \$35.00.

In 2008 a group of learned scholars from around the globe gathered at Yale to discuss and debate some of the more contentious issues relating to our understanding of warfare in ancient Greece – in particular the connection between the rise of the massed warfare of the hoplite phalanx and the rise of the city-state (*polis*). *Men of Bronze* is the result of that symposium.

The work is presented as a series of stand-alone chapters – each with its own accompanying notes and bibliography – written by different authors, based upon the presentations that they gave at the Yale conference. The contributors represent a cross-section from both sides of the academic divide in relation to the topics under examination and each chapter provides the views and theories of the author on the subject matter. These often diametrically opposed models have come to be known as the ‘orthodox’ understanding of hoplite warfare and the opposing ‘heretical’ viewpoint. It is this issue that forms the basis of *Men of Bronze*.

Donald Kagan and Gregory Viggiano open the book with a lengthy introductory chapter which outlines the history of the contentious examination of hoplite warfare going back to the nineteenth century. Viggiano and Hans van Wees then provide more background information through an examination of the arms, armour and iconography of combat in ancient Greece in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, Paul Cartledge starts to dig into the debate by looking at the factors which may (or may not) link the rise of the hoplite with the rise of the *polis*, and some of the problems with understanding this concept due to our source material. Anthony Snodgrass then provides a chronology of the evolution of hoplite warfare in Chapter Four, along with an examination of the impact of using the poetic references to combat by Homer on the understanding of the later hoplite. Kurt Raaflaub expands on the rise of the hoplite in Chapter Five by comparing this style of combat to possible Near Eastern influences and, along the way, critiques some of the theories about the ‘openness’ of Homeric warfare. Chapter Six sees Viggiano accept the ‘orthodoxy’ in his examination of the hoplite and the *polis* and a rejection of the archaeology which suggests there was no large landed middle-class in ancient Greece (the members of which would have made up the bulk of a city’s hoplite forces). In Chapter Seven Peter Krentz goes against Victor Davis Hanson on one of the other long-debated issues of hoplite combat: the idea of the mass ‘push’, or *othismos*, and the overall nature of hoplite combat. Adam Schwartz adds to this discussion in Chapter Eight through an analysis of the arms and armour of the Greeks in comparison to what we know of their stature. In Chapter Nine, John Hale wades into the debate by disagreeing with two of the main theories about how and why the hoplite style of fighting emerged, while in Chapter Ten Lin Foxhall provides a study of the archaeological evidence for a landed middle-class in ancient Greece (engaged with by Viggiano in Chapter Six). The book concludes with a chapter by van Wees in which he critiques Hanson’s theories about social and economic changes that may have taken place at the time of the rise of the hoplite, and with a chapter by Hanson who

vigorously defends the 'orthodoxy' despite attempts to revise it.

Despite its somewhat contradictory nature, there are a number of valuable elements to this collected work. Many people are unaware of just how contested many of the aspects of ancient history (and in particular the understanding of ancient Greek warfare) are. If relying solely on one book, most readers will only be given one viewpoint or side of the debate. In *Men of Bronze*, on the other hand, some of the most troublesome issues in this field are presented as a collective whole, and so a reader cannot help but be 'initiated' into a debate which has been ongoing for considerable time. It is this 'eye opening experience' which will be valuable for student, academic and layperson alike. Additionally, and this is the true value of the book, both sides of these arguments are presented in a concise, but detailed, way. This allows the reader to engage with both sides of the debate and, if they choose, use what they have read to form their own opinion or investigation into an area of interest forearmed with a good idea of how both sides of the academic divide are placed.

*Men of Bronze* does, however, also have its drawbacks. In their introduction, Kagan and Viggiano state that the possible outcomes of the Yale conference were that either side of the debate would sway the opposing side into acceptance, or that some form of common ground might be reached. They continue to state that, unfortunately, none of these possible outcomes eventuated. Rather, both sides of the debate merely entrenched themselves deeper into their own theories in order to respond to the counter-claims levelled against them. The resultant opposing viewpoints given in many of the chapters tend to make some of the information provided confusing. Those with only a general interest in this area may be swayed by the hypotheses in a particular chapter, only to have that acceptance turned on its head in the next. Furthermore, as the chapters are written versions of oral presentations, some of which seem to have undergone little editorial alteration prior to publication, sections of certain chapters might seem a little odd in the way that the arguments flow to some readers. Finally, as the chapters are based upon a conference held in 2008, some of the information presented in them fails to engage with any work that has been released in the five years between the conference and the publication in 2013; some of which has added its own contribution to the debate – this is a point acknowledged by Cartledge in the last note of his chapter.

As such, *Men of Bronze* is more of a snap-shot of the academic debate over a number of aspects of ancient Greek warfare as it stood in 2008 rather than the most up to date research in this area. Yet this is not to say that the work as a whole is without merit or value. On the contrary, *Men of Bronze* provides a collective thrust into this ongoing contention that would not be possible from reading most other works on the subject. A reader armed with the foreknowledge that it is the debate itself that is being discussed, and that no 'higher truth' regarding hoplite warfare will be forthcoming from the pages, will find *Men of Bronze* a valuable point of reference which will highlight just a part of the quagmire that is ancient military history and, for some, may form the starting point for their own examinations into this fascinating, and vigorously debated, aspect of the ancient world.

CHRISTOPHER MATTHEW  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY