

ENI PRÔTOISI MACHESTHAI
SOME REMARKS ON THE ILIADIC IMAGE OF
THE BATTLEFIELD

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Military history seems in recent years to enjoy something like a comeback. Ancient Greek warfare in any case has become the subject of intensive research. Certainly one of the most impressive results to date is the scholarly monument on *The Greek State at War* by W.K. Pritchett¹, five volumes of which have now appeared. I would like to single out also the work of J. Latacz, of V.D. Hanson, and of my compatriot H. van Wees, not to mention many other names.² Inevitably, part of the research and of the ensuing debate has been on origins and in particular on the origin of that style of warfare that seems to have dominated so much of Greek history: hoplite tactics. Where origins are debated the *Iliad* comes in, and in this case even more so since the *Iliad* is so clearly an epic on war, if not indeed the greatest war poem in history.

For a long time there had been a fairly broad consensus among historians that hoplite tactics appeared quite suddenly in Greek history, somewhere around 700 B.C. This idea - perhaps most clearly stated by M.P. Nilsson in a classic article published in 1928³ - presupposed a type of warfare in the period before the so-called 'hoplite revolution' in which the phalanx and its characteristic tactics did not yet exist. Indeed, it was largely the supposed absence of such tactics and even of any ordered fighting in the *Iliad* that lead to the idea of a more or less revolutionary change in the early Archaic Age. This view was undermined by H.L. Lorimer and especially A.M. Snodgrass.⁴ More recent literature even tends to present a more radical view. One could say that the pendulum has swung to the opposite direction. In stead of an Homeric

¹ Pritchett 1971-1991. In addition to literature mentioned in the text, the Bibliography contains a selection of other relevant studies on the subject.

² Latacz 1977; Hanson 1983; 1989; [1992=]1991; Van Wees 1986; 1988; 1992; 1994.

³ Nilsson 1928.

⁴ Lorimer 1947; Snodgrass 1965.

battlefield on which aristocratic heroes bear the brunt of the fighting and the anonymous masses behave as more or less passive onlookers, a picture now emerges of warfare in which the decisive role is played by masses of warriors and even by masses ordered in battle formations. According to Latacz hoplite tactics of some sorts - differing in details such as the use of throwing spears, but not differing essentially from classical hoplite warfare - characterize the Iliadic battlefield.⁵ Pritchett too sees massed battle formations in the *Iliad* that differ in little else but name from the classical hoplite *taxis*.⁶ This opinion now seems to have become a new consensus, although Van Wees has recently tried to steer a middle course.⁷ To my mind some middle course is indeed called for. The subject of warfare in Homer is important, both in itself and for the history of war and society in archaic Greece. What I propose to do here is briefly two things. First, I shall try to ascertain, as far as possible, what picture or pictures of the battlefield the *Iliad* presents. Secondly, I shall try to compare this with what is known of archaic and classical land warfare in Greece and try to suggest a possible line of historical development. Needless to say, all this would actually require a whole monograph rather than a short paper. Inevitably, therefore, I shall have to refer to my Dutch Ph. D. dissertation of 1988 and to an earlier paper on Homeric warfare.⁸ Here I must confine myself to the necessary outlines.

THE BATTLEFIELD IN THE *ILIAD*

As I see it the Iliadic picture of the battlefield has five main characteristics, which I shall try to sketch briefly.

1. The opposing armies consist of separate contingents, each of which is lead by one or more commanders. They are enumerated at length in the second book of the *Iliad* and in the scenes of fighting there is occasionally some explicit reference to an *ethnos*, be it Cretans (IV. 251-4), Pylians (IV. 293-300), Salaminians (if these are to be understood here: IV. 273-84), Athenians (IV. 327-8), and Kephallenians (IV. 329-31) - all mentioned before going into battle -, Lokrians (XIII. 712-8) or Myrmidons (XVI. 211-7), Lykians (V. 482 and elsewhere)

⁵ Latacz 1977. For the "*Phalanxtaktik eigener Art*" in Homer, p. 178.

⁶ Pritchett 1985, 1-93.

⁷ Van Wees 1994.

⁸ Singor 1988; 1991 (both with other references to recent literature).

or Paphlagonians (XIII. 648-59). In itself this is nothing to be wondered at, since both armies are depicted as coalition armies and the various contingents can be expected to be lead into battle by their own commanders. Things become a little more problematic, however, when one tries to visualize these various groups in battle array. In the scene of the *Epipolêsis* they are styled *pyrgoi* at the moment they start off to the battlefield (IV. 334, 347). Normally *pyrgos* in the epics means “tower” or “towered wall”; it can be used as the point of comparison in a simile (“he fell down like a tower”: IV. 462) or in Great Aias’ famous “shield like a tower” (VII. 219; XI. 485; XVII. 128). Metaphorically Aias himself can be called a *pyrgos* for the Greeks (*Od.* XI. 556), and the idea is that Aias protects his fellow warriors like a wall or bulwark. The same idea lies behind the adverb *pyrgêdon*. When the hunters in front of a wild boar or lioness stand close together (*artynantes*), it is again a ‘wall’ that is evoked by *pyrgêdon* (*Il.* XII. 43). Likewise, the Greeks “wall together” (*pyrgêdon*) to stop the Trojan onslaught, at first in vain (XIII. 152), later, near the ships, with more success (XV. 618). So what are these *pyrgoi* of the Greeks marching into battle? Already Eustathios (*ad Il.* IV. 250ff.) saw here ‘battalions’ made up of several ranks and numbering each 360 men, i.e. three phalanxes of 120 men. This is, of course, rather pedantic schematizing which should not be taken seriously. Yet in modern scholarship the same idea, this time without exact numbers, recurs. For Latacz the *pyrgos* is the epic term for the ethnic contingent in battle, itself consisting of several *phalanges* or ‘ranks’.⁹ Now the only support in the *Iliad* for the equation *pyrgos* = *ethnos*-in-battle-formation is in the scene referred to in IV. 334, 347. But even here the meaning ‘walls’, hence ‘lines’ or ‘rows’, cannot be ruled out. The whole episode frequently refers to *phalanges* and *stiches*, both terms meaning rows or lines.¹⁰ A little later the whole Greek army is said to march into battle in *phalanges*, the various groups being lead each by its own commander (IV. 427-9). Basically the *pyrgoi Achaiôn* should mean the ‘battlelines’ of the Greeks, consisting, according to circumstances, of one or several ‘ranks’. To assume that the *pyrgos* was a technical term for a close battle formation comparable to the classical *taxis* is in my opinion unwarranted.

As to the question of leadership, many *ethnê* have two or more commanders. The Cretans are lead by Idomeneus and Meriones (IV.

⁹ Latacz 1977, 54; followed by Ulf 1990, 141.

¹⁰ Cf. Singor 1991, 20-6.

251-4), while the Pylians are even said to be under five leading officers (IV. 293-309). Strange as it may seem at first sight, the *phalanges* marching, we may assume, one behind another to the battlefield in IV. 427-9, might very well be understood to have their own separate commanders. Likewise, the Trojans march in five groups (no technical term is mentioned) one behind another, each under its own commander, with Hector in front as commander-in-chief (XI. 56-65). Of course, this can be matched by the marching order of a classical hoplite army before the various regiments are stationed in line on a battlefield. But on the Homeric battlefield also the fighting itself is done in these separate 'battalions', as in XII. 86-7, where the Trojans attack in five distinct units (*pentacha kosmêthentes*) with some space in between (*diastantes*) and all under their own *hêgemones*. One wonders how the five commanders of the attacking Myrmidons were supposed to act, each leading one of the five *stiches* (XVI. 171-97). At least the ethnic contingents are not invariably supposed to form solid 'blocks' (whether or not called *pyrgoi*) on the battlefield. This could also perhaps explain the fact that we hear more of the *ethnos*-formations when they are marshalled before battle than in the course of the fighting itself. We come across some peculiar trait here of the Homeric picture of war. Whereas in classical hoplite battles, when armies consist of contingents from various states, the battle lines may fall apart and the respective contingents may fight more or less separate battles, the fragmentation of the Iliadic battle scenes can go much further. Not only the ethnic contingents, but even the lines that march behind each other into battle can sometimes be presented as acting separately as soon as the fighting starts. This, in its turn, is obviously connected with the overall picture that the epic so frequently presents and to which I shall return under 5., viz. of a battle being broken up into many separate and often even unrelated actions.

2. Often a clear distinction is made between the fighters-in-front or *promachoi* and the rest of the army. While the *prôtoi* (the term is practically interchangeable with *promachoi*) are fighting, the *laos* behind remains uninvolved in the scene (see V. 573-5). Elsewhere, Greek *aristoi* or *hêgêtores* fight on, while the *plêthys* or *laos* flees (XV. 295-305; cf. 491-501). Frequently, the fighters in the frontline are called *hêgemones*, *hêgêtores*, or *basileis*, the others being referred to as the *laos* or *plêthys* (IX. 708-9; XI. 301-9; XII. 310-28; XIII. 489-95, 833-6; XVI. 491-533). Or it is simply "the others" who flee when a group of named *promachoi* are killed by some hero (Hector: XI. 299-

305; Patroclus: XVI. 692-6). The difference can also be clearly spatial: *promachoi* can be imagined “to go back” to the *plêthys* (XVII. 31; XX 197, even on a chariot: XI. 359-60).

The question is: are these *promachoi* simply fighters-in-front, not differing essentially - either militarily or socially - from the rest of the troops, or is there some other criterion at work? When we look at arms and armour, the matter is not clear-cut. Almost invariably the warriors in the frontline wear bronze armour and only rarely does Homer tell us that the *laos* behind the *promachoi* does not. On the contrary, the whole (!) Greek army can be pictured in shining bronze (e.g. IV. 431-2). While this could conceivably be attributed to the poetic imagination, the hints of a difference in equipment between the two categories are more revealing. We hear of stones, arrows and javelins filling the air over the battlefield, but the fighters-in-front use mostly spears which they either throw or thrust. The impression one gets is of a mass of soldiers using primarily *belea* or long-distance weapons, while terms like *anchi-machêtai* or *angemachoi* seem to refer to the named heroes appearing in the frontline. Around the corpse of Patroclus, the Greek *aristoi* fight at close hand while elsewhere *belea* are used (XVII. 359-65). Of the Lokrians, it is explicitly said that they do not have bronze helmets, shields and spears and consequently fight with bows and slings from behind the heavy armed (XIII. 712-21). The contrast in this scene is between the followers of Aias Telamonios, described as *esthloi laoi hetaroi* (“noble - or brave - comrades-in-arms”), who do have heavy equipment and so can assist their leader in the “standing combat” (*stadiê hysminê*; XIII. 709-13), and the contingent from Lokris lead by the Lesser Aias, that is so much more poorly equipped. In my opinion there is no reason to treat this scene as an exception, since we can assume that it was primarily the cooperation of the two Aiantes that lead the poet to the juxtaposition of well-armed *esthloi hetairoi* on the one hand and long-distance fighters on the other. In other scenes such differentiation can be easily imagined, if not taken for granted.

In the view of J. Latacz, there is no real difference between the *promachoi* and the *laos* behind.¹¹ I find this very hard to believe. Naturally, all the heroes belong to the category of the heavy armed; this holds true even of the archers Teukros and Pandaros, who sometimes are depicted in heavy armour (III. 17-9; VIII. 266-72; XV. 442-83), which is to my mind some form of contamination of the ‘normal’ *pro-*

¹¹ Latacz 1977, 141-163; followed, among others, by Ulf 1990, 139-43.

machos and the ‘true’ archer exemplified by the Lokrian contingent. More important, in my view, are some indications of a *permanent* differentiation between fore-front fighters and the others behind them. When Nestor orders his Pylian troops, we hear of *hippêes* in the front line, followed by *kakoi* and finally by *esthloi pezoi* (IV. 293-309). Whatever equipment these latter two categories are supposed to have, a term like *kakoi*, used collectively of a group stationed in between higher valued warriors, implies some standing inferiority. Moreover, it is clearly expressed by Odysseus that “the man of the people” (*dêmou anêr*) is *aptolemos kai analkis*, i.e. of no value in war, although he also belongs to the *stratos* (II. 198-201, 207). Such a characterization is in my opinion unthinkable, if the *dêmou andres* were really of the same class of warriors as the *promachoi* or *aristoi* to whom, of course, Odysseus himself belongs. Then there is the famous scene in which Sarpedon exhorts Glaukos to fight *eni prôtoisi*: it is the duty of kings to be in the front line, for they are honoured for that with a grant of land (*temenos*) by the people (XII. 310-28). This does not prove that the *prôtoi* or *promachoi* are exclusively kings and leaders, but it does suggest at least that other factors than purely the bravery or ability of individual warriors, who might for their personal qualities be selected to be in the first line, play a role here. It has been debated whether or not terms like *aristoi* in Homer denote a class distinction. This is partly a non-problem. For in the epics the leaders of contingents, the *basileis*, *hêgemones*, and the like, are by definition also ‘the best’ and ‘bravest’. Of course, among the *aristoi* some might be ‘better’ and ‘braver’ than others, just like there are ‘better’ or ‘best’ men in practically all walks of life. But this is not to say that all men have equal chances of being selected to fight in front of their compatriots. Surely, these ‘best men’ in the frontline are the ones who by training and equipment have all the opportunity to prove themselves - which in the last analysis must come down to some social differentiation. The scene in XIV. 376-82, where the better warrior gets a better shield from the lesser man behind him, does not prove a form of selection according to merit made on the spot, but is an *ad hoc* arrangement brought about by the *basileis* themselves on the advice of Poseidon in a clear emergency; it does not tell us much of normal practices, unless one would suppose that such exchange of equipment were a regular feature of the heroic battlefield. Latacz’ reconstruction, which is based on the conception of massed formations (*pyrgoi*), made up of various ranks (*phalanges*), the front ranks consisting of the *promachoi*, must to

my mind remain a reconstruction for which the epic itself does not lend decisive support. The masses of *laos* or *plêthys* are surely there, but Homer prefers to concentrate his battle narratives on the fighters-in-front. The impression may be dim and is often obscured by glamourizing images of the armies at large, advancing like waves or clouds, but the impression is there nevertheless, that we have to do with at least two basic categories of warriors: well-armed fighters in the front line, to whom all the named heroes belong and who fight very often at close hand, and others behind them or apart from them, of lesser military and almost certainly also social standing.

3. Individual warriors play a large role in the epic's battles. I hardly need to digress on this point. All readers of the *Iliad* are familiar with the heroes rushing forward from among their fellow warriors (the *ethnos hetairôn* or a group of *promachoi*) to accomplish some act of bravery or merely to challenge an opponent to a duel. Individual heroes slay 'catalogues' of named opponents. They can even on their own put to flight or destroy the *phalanges* or *stiches* of the enemy (V. 93, 96; VI. 6; VII. 141; VIII. 279; XI. 503, 567; XVI. 394; XVII. 285; XIX. 152). Or, alternatively, they hold on alone or with two or four against a mass of opponents (e.g. in book XI the scenes 314-327, 404-410, 485-7, 575-6). Moreover, they move freely over the battlefield, jumping on and off chariots, or may even temporarily withdraw from the battle altogether. When one of them is killed, his death regularly provokes a concentration of fighting around his corpse by other heroes and *hetairoi*. I am not concerned at this point with the question of historical reality or plausibility. What I want to stress is that in the image of battle in the *Iliad* individual heroism is of the utmost importance: the ebb and flow of the battle seems in large part to be caused by the prowess of individual warriors such as Hector, Diomedes, Aias, Patroclus, and, ultimately, Achilles.

This picture is hard to reconcile with an interpretation, such as offered by Latacz or Pritchett, in which it is massed formations, not individual heroes, that are decisive. One could argue, as Latacz does, that the depictions of individual heroism are merely a poet's technique to evoke mass fighting.¹² The poet focuses his attention on individual warriors to illustrate or to exemplify what is going on in the battle at large. No doubt, this could be an explanation for many such scenes.

¹² "Exemplifizierung der komplexiven Massenkampfschilderung": Latacz 1977, 68-95, esp. 77.

But I am not convinced that all or even most scenes of individual heroism could thus be explained away. One reason to doubt this is the fact that so often individual warriors are shown acting in a way that could not possibly be interpreted as exemplifying mass actions, for instance when they rush forward from the line of *promachoi* for a challenge or a duel. Neither do I believe that, where individual heroes or leaders are mentioned on the battlefield, we should as a rule assume that the poet has leaders *and their men* in mind, as Van Wees has argued.¹³ Admittedly, this could be so in some instances, but very often, if not normally, individual heroes clearly are what they are said to be: individuals fighting alone or accompanied by a small group of other named individuals. For example, Odysseus in book XI calls on Diomedes to “come and stand next to me”, for Odysseus is clearly facing the enemy alone: we are told that he is afraid and tosses the idea in his mind whether to stay or to flee. It is then, when he has made up his mind to stay, that all the Trojans come to attack him; he thereupon calls for help from his *hetairoi*, and indeed, we are told, Menelaos and Aias come to his aid (XI. 314-88). Later, it is again Aias alone who holds the Trojan *phalanges* at bay (544-67). Likewise two Lapiths are said to shield off the gate of the Greek camp against the Trojan attacks (XII. 127-36). More examples could be cited, but I think we may conclude that the poet at least very often means what he says when he tells of individual warriors fighting against all odds. It is precisely this that makes them heroes.

4. On the battlefield also chariots make their appearance. They are always used by warriors who may be reckoned among the heroes acting as *promachoi* and often called the *aristoi*.¹⁴ Scenes of combat between chariots are rare, more often charioteers fight against opponents on foot. Usually, however, the charioteers dismount for battle (the formula “*syn teuchesin alto chamaze*” appears about 30 times), thus using their chariots effectively as a means of transport. There has been some debate on the plausibility and historicity, or the lack of it, of Homer’s handling of these chariots. I will not enter into that here, but confine myself to the conclusion that the overall picture seems to me perfectly plausible.¹⁵ A corollary must be then that the part played by chariots on the battlefield is difficult to reconcile with the notion of a

¹³ Van Wees 1986.

¹⁴ Singor 1991, 55-6.

¹⁵ Singor 1988, 112-9.

battle fought in ordered mass formations of infantry. For frequently we hear that the leaders who act as *promachoi* leave their chariots behind when they go into battle (V. 249-55; XI. 47-52; XII. 76-85; XV. 3, 454-7; XVI. 342-4; XVII. 694-9). It is implied that these chariots are close by the dismounted charioteers (who can be whitened by the dust thrown up by the horses when the chariots are turned round: see, V 499-505). In such cases, obviously the chariots standing in readiness for the dismounted *hippêes* take the place that could otherwise be occupied by ranks of other infantrymen.

5. Finally, one can say that in the Iliadic picture the battle and the battlefield are broken up in separate actions and scenes. As long as the armies march against each other and still at the moment they crash into each other, the epic evokes some unity of formation, usually with the help of nature similes, such as clouds, waves, swarms of birds and the like. But even in this phase the poet sometimes reveals that the armies really consist of separate contingents, separate 'waves' or separate *stiches* and *phalanges*, lead by their own commanders. And when the actual fighting starts, the image splinters into various pictures. I do not believe that this is just a matter of literary technique or convention or even of some inability on the part of the poet to depict an overall view of the battle. Rather, the epic descriptions quite often present what seems to be an awareness of separate fighting in separate actions, spread out in time and place. Thus, the *stiches*, *phalanges*, or unspecified groups are sometimes shown attacking in successive order or in separate places (so, for example, the Trojans in XII. 86-7, already referred to above, attacking *pentacha* and *diastantes*). Often a contingent, or an indefinite number of *phalanges* or *stiches* flee but are able after some time to confront the enemy again and to resume battle. During the battle, moreover, individual heroes move around freely, alone or followed by *hetairoi*, from one part of the battlefield to another, on foot or mounted on their chariots. They come to assist each other, or they flee, they are attracted by the fighting around some fallen warrior, or they are on their way back to the camp or the city of Troy. Heroes can deliberate among themselves where exactly to enter the battlefield (as Idomeneus and Meriones do in XIII. 307-27). Nor is it only the *aristoi* that show so much mobility. When Aineias calls for help from his *hetairoi*, we see Deïphobos, Paris and Agenor coming to his assistance, followed by *laoi* (XIII. 489-92). Or Hector, perceiving through the *stiches* that two Trojans are killed, comes to the rescue of their bodies followed by "the *phalanges* of the Trojans" (V 590-2 = XI 343-4). The

expression *bê de dia promachôn* points to the same phenomenon of individual warriors moving freely from one place to another, in this case in the area where the *promachoi* operate, spatially apart from the rest of the troops (IV. 495; V. 562, 566; XVII. 86, 124, 592; XX. 111). This mobility of individual warriors and of groups of warriors during the battle is indeed striking. It should be noted too that flying before the enemy is not unequivocally condemned. Often great heroes are shown fleeing (Hector: XI. 358-9; XVI. 656-8; Odysseus: VIII. 94; all Greek heroes except Diomedes and Nestor: VIII. 78-9) or considering the idea of flight (XI. 404-10; XXI. 553-70; XXII. 99-130). On the other hand, we hear exhortations to stay, to “stand firm” (XI. 410; XIII. 56), particularly addressed to the *promachoi*. There is no overt contradiction here, since it is rightly observed that fleeing individually is far more dangerous than standing together (cf. XVII. 363-5). What is absent, though, is the Spartan morale of Thermopylae, of fighting to the finish instead of retreating.

Such are, in my opinion, the main characteristics of the battlefield in Homer. Do they form a consistent picture? Consistency is a quality that has perhaps been most commonly denied to the epic pictures of society in general and of warfare in particular. Since we know that a tradition of oral poetry of as yet unknown length in time, but certainly at least of some generations, preceded the final composition of our *Iliad*, inconsistencies are more or less to be *a priori* expected. But one has to be careful. Oral poetry in its handling of the social context of the stories it relates, tends to adjust itself to the assumptions of its public. In other words, descriptions of social institutions, warfare and the like cannot deviate very much from common knowledge, although precisely the ‘heroic’ character of this poetry leaves some room for phantasy and thus for departure from what is possible in normal life. Moreover, the oral-formulaic character of the epic tradition can also be responsible for the preservation of some elements that do not really fit in with the poet’s contemporary world. Such traditional elements and the poet’s imagination could account for the more awkward incongruities one meets in the epic picture of, among other things, warfare. In the view of Van Wees, the different elements or ‘sources’ of the epic material nevertheless yield a perfectly consistent picture, be it a phantasy.¹⁶ There is lot to say for this, and in the field of warfare there is certainly much consistency among the main characteristics that I have briefly

¹⁶ Van Wees 1992.

mentioned above. Yet I do not think that all incongruities could be explained away. Partly they concern minor items, such as ambushes which are referred to but never laid in the warfare of the *Iliad*'s ten days, perhaps also the threats or fears of horrible cruelties to be committed to the defeated, which are usually not realized, and also some awkward pieces of armour, like the 'body-shield' or the helmet covered with boar tusks, which in my opinion can still best be explained as relics of a rather distant past. But these items are of small importance. In the general image of the battlefield perhaps the main inconsistency - apart from the related one of the appearance of chariots in the mêlée of fighters - is that between the role played by individual heroes or small groups of *promachoi* on the one hand, and the poet's evocations of huge numbers of fighters rolling like waves across the plain of the Skamandros on the other. Even here one could argue that this apparent discrepancy is still consistent with the poet's view of heroic warfare in which the heroes are simply superhuman in strength. To some extent that is obvious, but I prefer to see here some mixture of basically two different elements: one of war and combat in relatively small bands of fighters - a type of warfare that I suspect to have been the subject of this heroic poetry at some time before Homer¹⁷ -, the other of war as primarily a matter of the community at large, if not an enterprise requiring the cooperation of a whole range of states: an element that could well reflect some realities of Homer's contemporary world, however much inflated by poetic phantasy. With this we touch upon the question of the relation or relations between the epic image of warfare and the possible historical realities of 8th or 7th century Greece.

HOMERIC WAR AND HISTORY

One observation must be made at the outset: warfare in the *Iliad* is clearly incompatible with the hoplite tactics of classical Greece. When we hear of *stiches* or *phalanges* or successive 'waves' of warriors, lead separately by different commanders (cf. IV. 422-8; XI. 56-65; XII. 85-107; XIII. 790-802; XVI. 171-217), these cannot have been the 'ranks' of an army in formation like the classical hoplite *phalanx* or *taxis*. Such *phalanges* or *stiches* in the *Iliad* could still be lines or

¹⁷ Singor 1991.

rows of fighters, and especially when marching from the camp or the city to the battlefield they could be imagined as one behind the other forming huge concentrations of warriors in deep formations. But on the battlefield itself there is hardly any mention of such formations of heavy-armed fighters: instead, the heavy-armed spread out, fighting is done in small groups or even individually in duels, and where mass operations are referred to we mostly hear of *belea*, long-distance weapons, used from behind or at some distance from the *promachoi* fighting as a rule at close hand. In classical hoplite armies, on the other hand, there is no such apparent distinction in arms and armour among the fighters, for they are all heavy-armed, equipped with thrusting spears and round, bronze shields, although by the 5th century B.C. such items as bronze greaves and breast cuirasses seem to have been no longer in general use. In any case, there is no question of heavy-armed in front followed by lesser or light-armed soldiers. Further, classical hoplite warfare forces the men to keep their place in the line: there is no rushing forward and back again of individual warriors. In Homer, occasionally the *promachoi* are exhorted to stand firm and to keep in line (cf. XVII. 354-60), but far more often they move around at will, jumping forward from the lines of their *hetairoi*, wishing to be far ahead of the others as a true *pro-machos* (XI. 217; XVII. 342), going or even storming through' the *promachoi*. Between them and the rest of the army (the *plêthys* or *laos*) there can even be some distance to be crossed on a chariot (e.g. V. 224, 249-55, 328-30; XI. 359-60, 521-34; XVI. 656-7). All this suggests a battlefield where the *promachoi* fight in their own way, differently and even spatially apart from the mass of the army, and certainly not, at least not invariably so, as the front rank of a mass formation. Perhaps it is not fortuitous that the term *promachos/oi* lived on in historical times only in the meaning of 'champion', not as an equivalent of the *prôton zygon* or 'front rank' of the taxis. In the classical hoplite battle the element of mobility is almost completely absent as soon as the armies have engaged in combat. Neither individual fighters nor groups of warriors can in classical battles move about from one spot to another. And the moment one side loses its battle formation and turns to flight the battle is over: there is no restoring of the formation and no renewal of the fighting as Homer so frequently describes.

Two points may further serve as illustration of this fundamental difference between the battlefields of the *Iliad* and those of historical Greece of, say, the 5th century B.C. In the *Iliad*, a large part of the fighting among the *promachoi* is around the corpses of fallen warriors.

These *Leichenkämpfe*, as they are called by German scholars, belong to the 'typical battle scenes' of the epic. From both sides heroes and their *hetairoi* are frequently drawn into a fight in order either to partake in the despoiling of a slain foe or to help protect a fallen friend. Such scenes are so common that they are one of the means of the poet to string his battle narratives together. In a classical hoplite battle, on the other hand, such scenes are simply impossible. There, close and deep formations push and struggle over a bloody field where the fallen must be left to their fate, for only after the battle can the dead or wounded be taken care of.¹⁸ It is then that the defeated party formally asks for a truce in order to bury its dead. The contrast with Homeric practices is all too clear. There is no way of taking up the dead and bringing them to safety behind the line of the *promachoi* as in the Homeric picture of battle, nor of heroes coming 'through the *promachoi*' to the aid of the fallen. Indeed, there are no *promachoi* in the epic sense in classical hoplite battles, only ranks upon ranks of soldiers, whose clashing simply leaves no space for *Leichenkämpfe* in the Homeric way.

Another point may be added. When the defeated party in a hoplite battle asks for a truce to bury its dead, that is at the same time a formal acknowledgement of the defeat. The victor on his part, while granting the truce raises a trophy as a solemn and sacred sign post of his victory. The *tropaion* is erected at the spot where the defeated army had started its flight: the point where the decisive *tropê* had begun. As we have seen, in the Iliadic image of the battlefield there is hardly any decisive flight or any final *tropê* (turning around) of the enemy. For in their flight the roaming groups of heroes and *hetairoi* can always turn and make a new stand, as they do often enough. It is hardly by chance, therefore, that in the *Iliad* there is no reference at all to the *tropaion*.¹⁹

We may conclude, I believe, that the Homeric image of land warfare was not that of later hoplite battles. In so far as the new consensus to which I referred above assumes that there was in all essentials no difference between the two, that consensus must be wrong. But clearly this is not the whole story. We need not go back to the old view which denied any form of ordered battle to the *Iliad*. On the contrary, the epic unmistakably shows some foreshadowing of what we would later call hoplite tactics. These are not to be found, however, in the images of the

¹⁸ Hanson 1989, 171-218.

¹⁹ Pace Pritchett 1974, 249.

armies at large, compared with clouds or waves or the like, but in the smaller groups of *promachoi*. These latter are presented, certainly not always, not even regularly, but often enough, as lines of warriors fighting close together. A clear case is in book XVII where the leaders of the Greeks (the *hêgêtores êde medontes*) form a line of shields to protect the fallen Patroclus, while Aias exhorts them to hold the line: nobody is to go back or to go forward in front of the others (XVII. 248-68, 354-9). There are more scenes like this one, often connected with the fighting around the body of a fallen hero. But they occur also in other contexts. In V. 498ff., nine Greek heroes mentioned by name make a stand together (*hypemeinan aolles*) against the attacking Trojans. We are told that they are whitened by the dust their horses throw up when the drivers make the chariots turn round and thus ready for use in case of emergency. This detail reveals that between the chariots and these dismounted *promachoi* there is only a very short distance, as I already pointed out above. And it shows that there are no other fighters here except for the heroes mentioned. The suggestion is clearly that these form one line with their backs to the chariots, a situation that seems also to be implied in other passages, where the *basileis* dismount and leave their chariots 'in good order' (*eu kata kosmon*) behind (IX. 708-9; XI. 47-52).

There has been some discussion about these and other 'hoplite passages', especially the scene in XIII. 130-3 (= XVI. 215-7), where the Greek *aristoi* are described shield against shield, shoulder to shoulder, with spears and even helmet crests touching each other. Possibly the picture that the poet wants to evoke is that of several lines of heavily-armed warriors standing behind each other, but to my mind that is not an unescapable solution, since the description could also, perhaps less plausibly, be interpreted as pointing to only one line of heroes.²⁰ Be that as it may, these passages should certainly not be isolated as anachronistic pictures of hoplite tactics and therefore rejected as so many interpolations. They are full and graphic descriptions of what is elsewhere often only hinted at or merely implied. To repeat, the *promachoi* are surely not always, when acting in groups, represented in such a formation which in classical times would be called *synaspismos*. But it happens often enough to warrant the conclusion that this formation was not unknown to the epic. As we have seen, the *promachoi* can form such a formation in a single line (only in XIII. 130-3 = XVI.

²⁰ Singor 1988, 181-2 n. 88.

215-7 possibly several ranks of *promachoi* are implied). When they are followed by others, however, it is not clear whether these too are supposed to be in lines or ranks. Here one can only argue from plausibility. Where terms like *phalanges* or *stiches* occur, the suggestion is that of lines or rows - at least I can find no passage in the *Iliad* where the meaning 'line' for *phalanges* is definitely excluded. This term, as well as *stiches*, can be applied both to the *promachoi* and to the rest of the army. Considering the distinction between these fighters-in-front and the *laos* or *plêthys* behind them as discussed above, I find it not plausible that the *phalanges* or *stiches* following upon the *promachoi* on the battlefield should also be heavy-armed warriors; instead, we have seen some indications that the fighters-in-front are followed by light-armed troops. Perhaps we should imagine these latter behind a closed line of *promachoi* to draw together or to spread out as circumstances require. But here our reconstruction becomes inevitably weak, since detailed evidence in the epic is lacking. What one could fairly say, however, is that the Homeric descriptions of incipient hoplite tactics concern named heroes whose role is to act as the *promachoi*. Whether or not they already used the typical hoplite shield with double grip is to my mind not of great importance; probably Diomedes, who could be recognized by his shield can be supposed to carry a blazoned *aspis* like the ones archaic hoplites have on 7th and 6th century vases (V. 182), but the beginning of these tactics must surely antedate the appearance of the double-gripped shield. In any case they did at first not concern the army at large but only the relatively small groups of the *promachoi*. Very often the latter number exactly nine warriors and I have argued elsewhere that this number might well have been an old element in the pre-Homeric oral tradition.²¹ Small numbers of *promachoi* fit in well with the overall picture of the battlefield characterized by so much mobility of heroes and their *hetairoi* moving from one spot to another, retreating or advancing during the course of the battle.

Turning again from the epic image to what might have been the realities of land warfare in Greece, the obvious comparison to be made is with the descriptions of combat in the early Lyric poets Callinus and Tyrtaeus. Can the Homeric picture of heavy-armed *promachoi* fighting in front of lesser armed troops and fighting at least at times in formations which look like the earliest hoplite tactics, be harmonized with the information presented in the fragments of these poets? There

²¹ Singor 1991.

too hoplite tactics as known in the classical period are lacking, but again, as in the *Iliad*, some foreshadowings of such tactics are clearly there. In the famous fragment of Callinus (F 1 W)²², the *kraterophrôn anêr* is exhorted to go forward against the enemy with shield and spears and not to fear death. If he dies he will be lamented and missed by the *dêmos*, if he survives he will be honoured as one of the *hêmitheoi*, that is like one of the half-gods or heroes of the epic. Fighting in front he is said to be as a bulwark (*pyrgos*) for the *laos*. These terms remind us of what can be seen in the *Iliad*: the heavy-armed *promachoi* bear the brunt of the battle, they go ahead of the rest of the army and can also be called a 'wall' or 'bulwark' of the Greeks, like Achilles (*herkos polemoio*, I. 284) or Aias Telamonios (*herkos Achaiôn*, III. 229 and elsewhere; or *pyrgos*, *Od.* XI. 556), or Sarpedon (*herma polêos*, II. XVI. 549). Of Callinus' *anêr* the poet says that "he does alone the work of many". This points to the same distinction between the *promachoi* and the, in some way inferior but more numerous troops behind them, which, as I suggested, can be found in the *Iliad*. Moreover, to be honoured as one of the *hêmitheoi* not after death but alive and well (on condition of being victorious, one supposes) smacks of a social elite, as opposed to the *dêmos* or *laos* mentioned in the poem to which this *anêr* clearly does not belong.

More information is offered by Tyrtaeus' fragments.²³ Here a clear distinction is drawn between *promachoi* and *gymnêtes* (F 11 W 35). The latter have to take shelter behind the shields of the heavy-armed. These *promachoi* are said to "save the *laos opissô*", the others behind them (F 11 W 13). Again, one is reminded of Callinus' *kraterophrôn anêr* and of the heroes of the *Iliad* who are like bulwarks. Tyrtaeus' *promachoi* (the term is used several times) appear in closed, hoplite-like formations (FF 7-11 W *passim*), but here again there is mention of flights and pursuits and apparent movements in battle which do not yet suit classical hoplite tactics while being in accordance with the Homeric image (FF 10 W 16-20; 11 W 7-14; also the fragment in *Pap. Oxy.* 3316, ll. 14 and 22). Between Homer's pictures and those presented by the lyric poets there is no essential difference in this respect that, basically, the light-armed warriors are drawn up behind a screen of heavy-armed fighters-in-front. The actual battles might have been also in the 'real' world of the lyric poets drawn-out affairs,

²² Cf. Singor 1988, 93-6.

²³ See Singor 1988, 96-104.

fought in more or less separate actions by separate groups, allowing for much movement to and fro and for a combination of hand-to-hand fighting by the hoplite-like *promachoi* and the use of *belea* by the lesser-armed.

Such were the tactics, then, of the early Archaic Age. For such tactics to develop into the hoplite warfare of later times it was necessary that the light-armed, so to speak, disappeared. This occurred indeed regularly during the 7th and 6th centuries when war was very often an aristocratic and more or less ritualized affair.²⁴ We hear then of *logades* or selected troops acting like champions. But precisely that had also been largely the function of the epic *promachoi*. Sarpedon reminded Glaukos of their duty to be *eni prôtoisi* on behalf of the people who honoured them with *timê* and *temenê* (XII. 315-21), just like Callinus' man was honoured by the people. Thus it may not be too far-fetched to draw a line of development from the champions of the heroic tradition, through the *promachoi* of both the *Iliad* and the lyric poets, to the *logades* of the Archaic Age. In their turn these elitist warriors could become the kernel of the citizen-hoplites of the classical period when the recruiting base of the heavy-armed had been broadened considerably. That occurred, I believe, in the later 6th century B.C. The main transition in the development towards the classical hoplites is in my view not between Homer and the Archaic Age, but at the latter point in time when the armies were widened to include up to half of the free adult population and at the same time practically exclude the light-armed altogether. That exclusiveness on the part of the classical hoplites, especially in a state like Sparta, might well have been fed, I suspect, on the images of the heroic *promachoi* such as conveyed by the *Iliad* and to some extent even strengthened by Tyrtæus.

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²⁴ Cf. Connor 1988.

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