

Fighting Unshod: The Question of Footwear in Hoplite Warfare

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1. *Going barefoot*

It is normally assumed that the Greeks of antiquity used footwear to the same extent that we do, likely because we perceive footwear as a cornerstone of civilisation and so necessary that we can hardly imagine willingly forgoing the support and protection of the feet provided by a good pair of shoes.¹ To a certain degree, this is corroborated by the extant literature: leather-workers are attested,² along with a bewildering array of named types of footwear for a wide variety of purposes.³

The prevalence of footwear is perhaps best demonstrated by contrasting with the instances of *anypodēsia*, which are usually treated as an anomaly. Socratics and satirists alike famously portray Sokrates as almost never wearing footwear.⁴ This might

¹ See e.g. A. A. Bryant, “Greek Shoes in the Classical Period,” *HSCP* 10 (1899) 57–102, esp. 57–58.

² Pl. *Resp.* 369D; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1291a13. The word *skytotomos* is frequently translated as “shoemaker” (see LSJ⁹ s.v.), but it seems obvious that a leather-worker (a type of craftsman allowed in the ideal *polis* of the *Republic*) would not necessarily confine himself to making or repairing shoes, and that Sokrates did not exclude the many other useful services such a craftsman would be able to provide.

³ Summed up and catalogued in Bryant, *HSCP* 10 (1899) 57–102.

⁴ Ar. *Nub.* 102–104: “Yuk! That scum. I know them: you mean the charlatans, the pasty-faced, the unshod, like that miserable Sokrates” (αἰβοῖ, πονηροὶ γ’, οἶδα. τοὺς ἀλαζόνας, τοὺς ἀχρῖωντας, τοὺς ἀνυποδήτους λέγεις, ὧν ὁ

be a peculiarity of the philosophically inclined;⁵ at any rate later writers identify the lack of footwear as a distinguishing mark of actual and would-be philosophers.⁶ But others might be similarly inclined, such as the orator Lykourgos, who, “although he was well-to-do [...] wore one and the same cloak winter and summer and put on sandals only on days when they were necessary.”⁷ At the same time, being barefoot was the norm in certain settings: in the religious sphere, for example, a wide range of sanctuaries had prohibitions against footwear that applied during cultic functions.⁸

κακοδαίμων Σωκράτης [transl. Henderson]; Ameipsias fr.9 Storey (= Diog. Laert. 2.27–28): “Your poor condition is an insult to shoemakers everywhere” (τουτὶ τὸ κακὸν τῶν σκυτοτόμων κατ’ ἐπήρειαν γεγένηται [transl. Storey]); Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.2 (ἀνυπόδητός τε καὶ ἀχίτων); *Smp.* 174A, Sokrates wearing sandals to the symposium at Agathon’s.

⁵ Pl. *Phdr.* 229A, *Smp.* 173B. This may include Phokion, a former student of Plato’s noted for his austere lifestyle, always going barefoot (*anypodētos*) and without overgarment in the country or on campaign, except in extreme cold (ἐπεὶ κατὰ γε τὴν χώραν καὶ τὰς στρατείας ἀνυπόδητος ἀεὶ καὶ γυμνὸς ἐβάδιζεν, εἰ μὴ ψυχρὸς ὑπερβάλλον εἶη καὶ δυσκαρτέρητον: Duris *FGrHist* 76 F 50 [= Plut. *Phoc.* 4.3–4]).

⁶ Luc. *Icarom.* 31, *Cynic.* 1; Athen. 163E; Theoc. *Id.* 14.5.

⁷ [Plut.] *Mor.* 842C: εὖπορος δ’ ὂν ἰμάτιον ἐν καὶ ταῦτὸν ἐφόρει τοῦ χειμῶνος καὶ τοῦ θέρους καὶ ὑπεδέδετο ταῖς ἀναγκαίαις ἡμέραις (transl. Fowler).

⁸ A.-M.-S. Karatas, “Greek Cults and their Sacred Laws on Dress-code: The Laws of Greek Sanctuaries for Hairstyles, Jewelry, Make-up, Belts, and Shoes,” *CW* 113 (2020) 147–170, lists evidence for the cults of Alektrona at Ialysos (*IG* XII.1 677), Zeus Kynthios and Athena Kynthia on Delos (*I.Delos* 2529); Demeter and Kore at Andania (*IG* V.1 1390) and Lykosoura (*IG* V.2 514.6–7); Demeter at Kios (*I.Kios* 19.3–4); Asklepios at Pergamon (*I.Perg.* II 264); and Athena at Lindos (*Lindos* II 487). Karatas seems to suggest that the term *hypodēmata*, since it properly applies to footwear of the sandal type, does not necessarily imply *all* footwear, but then adds (164), “The *hypodemata* were presumably used as a general term for shoes in sacred laws on dress-code mentioned above.” The term ὑποδήματα undoubtedly serves as a κύριον ὄνομα or catch-all, and a prohibition against sandals but none against, e.g., boots on religious grounds seems implausible (though *IG* XII.1 677 expressly

Nor should the fact that almost all our sources were written by wealthy Athenian city-dwellers be overlooked: the streets of Greek cities were, at least until Roman times, at most metalled with rubble or potsherds and undrained, to which we may add a large population and, normally, the absence of sanitary infrastructure.⁹ It would not be surprising if urban populations opted to use footwear outside as a rule, as demonstrated by Phokion, who did not necessarily keep up his habitual *anypodēsia* in the city, “since in the country, *at least*, and on his campaigns, he always walked without shoes.”¹⁰

This aspect intersects with a possible socio-economic bias in that footwear, made of leather, may have been outside the economic reach of the poorest subset of any population. Its frequency in the extant literature therefore may have to do with the urban social circles our sources moved in, whereas the lower strata either had to do without or had more pressing needs.¹¹

But equally, for many it may not have been a priority: for the rural population living in the country well outside of Athens,¹²

forbids “shoes or anything else made from pigs” (μηδὲ ὑποδήματα ἐσφερέτω μηδὲ ὕειον μηθέν).

⁹ A. Toynbee, “Town-Planning in the Ancient Greek World,” *Ekistics* 24 (1967) 445–448, at 447; S. Müth, “Chapter 5.2.2: The Plain of Sikyon in the Archaic and Classical periods,” in K. Kissas et al. (eds.), *Finding Old Sikyon: The Surveys* (Monographs of the Danish Institute of Archaeology, forthcoming; I am grateful to Silke Müth for calling my attention to this work).

¹⁰ Duris (n.5 above): ἐπεὶ κατὰ γε τὴν χώραν καὶ τὰς στρατείας ἀνυπόδητος ἀεὶ [...] ἐβῶδιζεν (transl. Perrin, emphasis added).

¹¹ Barefootedness is treated as an indicator of poverty in the case of Eros by both Plato and Xenophon: Pl. *Smp.* 203D, Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.2 (Antiphon speaking). This is borne out by Ps.-Plutarch’s puzzled comment regarding Lykourgos, who went barefoot “although he was rich” (n.7 above).

¹² The vast majority of the population was occupied with agricultural work, one estimate putting it at “probably at least 80 percent”; see L. Migéotte, *The Economy of the Greek Cities. From the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire* (Berkeley 2009) 67. Many of these were smaller farmers or homesteaders who lived the greater part of their lives on land far from the city, and may not often have ventured into town.

forgoing footwear may have come naturally under most circumstances.¹³

2. *Practical considerations*

Whatever role economic factors played in the use of footwear, it may have been preferable to go unshod for physical labour. Plato seems to indicate as much when he has Sokrates lay out the work life for the inhabitants of the ideal *polis*: they will “build houses, work naked and barefoot in the summer, and wear adequate clothing and footwear in the winter.”¹⁴ Similarly, Hesiod, who dispenses advice on nearly all aspects of a farmer’s life, has curiously little to say on the subject of footwear—except that in the harshest winter, protection against the cold is in order: “Bind around your feet well-fitting boots from the leather of a slaughtered ox, padded inside with felt.”¹⁵ Winter cold, then, might induce all but a few to wear some form of footwear—as

¹³ S. Blundell, “One shoe off and one shoe on: The Motif of *monosandalism* in Ancient Greece,” in S. Pickup et al. (eds.), *Shoes, Slippers and Sandals. Feet and Footwear in Classical Antiquity* (Abingdon 2018) 216–228, at 225 n.17: “[An interlocutor] passed on information that on the island of Lewis in her grandfather’s time, people used to put on shoes only when they went into the town of Stornoway (even though the streets in the town were probably easier to walk on than the stony roads in the rest of the island, or so we imagine). Similarly, we are perhaps more likely to see children running around without shoes in the country rather than in a town. A friend who grew up in India told me that when he was a child going without shoes was a joy, but he would not have done it when visiting Delhi.”

¹⁴ Pl. *Resp.* 372A–B: καὶ οἰκοδομησάμενοι οἰκίας, θέρους μὲν τὰ πολλὰ γυμνοί τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητοι ἐργάζονται, τοῦ δὲ χειμῶνος ἡμφιεσμένοι τε καὶ ὑποδεδεμένοι ἰκανῶς (transl. Grube).

¹⁵ Hes. *Op.* 541–542: ἀμφὶ δὲ ποσὶ πέδιλα βοῶς ἴφι κταμένοιο / ἄρμενα δῆσασθαι, πῖλοις ἔντοσθε πυκάσσας (transl. Most). Lenaion is described with vivid imagery at 504–518 and said to be the worst month of winter (557–558). The *pedila* described are open and tied under the foot with straps, and thus structurally similar to *hypodēmata*; see *LfggrE* s.v. πέδιλον (M. J. Cuypers): “Die für den Winter bestimmten π. [...] sind m. Filz gefüttert; kein Grund zur Annahme, daß dort andere π. beschr. als sonst.”

we saw above, even the austere Phokion did so—but to keep the feet from freezing, rather than to cushion the foot soles.

Anypodēsia was also a matter of course in sports of any kind.¹⁶ While there may have been ritualistic or aesthetic reasons for this practice,¹⁷ most ancient sources connect it with enhanced performance.¹⁸ And on the race track, and especially in the palaestra, bare feet would have a surer foothold and be more tactilely responsive to the shifting of the sand beneath.¹⁹

A striking illustration of the preference for going barefoot during physical exertion is furnished by the *hēmerodromoi*, dispatch-runners routinely covering several hundred kilometers at a time, who certainly ran barefoot later—and did so on the notoriously poor Greek road network.²⁰

¹⁶ See e.g. Thuc. 1.6.5 for a statement that, by implication, can only mean that Greeks invariably did sports naked (along with the somewhat startling claim that they actually did it clothed “until not many years ago,” οὐ πολλὰ ἔτη ἐπειδὴ πέπανται; cf. Pl. *Resp.* 452C), and cf. Hdt. 1.10, Eur. *Andr.* 595–600.

¹⁷ Lucian *Anach.* 36: nakedness is essential for showing off the well-trained body.

¹⁸ Paus. 1.44.1–2 (though see also 5.6.7–8); Dion. Hal. *Ant.Rom.* 7.72.3–4. See J. A. Arieti, “Nudity in Greek Athletics,” *CW* 68 (1975) 431–436, esp. 435–436 for an attempt at a rationalising explanation.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note the wealth of perfume flasks, aryballoi, shaped like sandal-clad feet with ankles: A. Smith, “The Left Foot Aryballos Wearing a Network Sandal,” in *Shoes, Slippers and Sandals* 195–215, at 195 notes that “foot vases are best suited to their erstwhile contents, namely perfumed oils. Such oils could have been used on removal of sandals or slippers, for example, in bathing, sympotic, erotic and funerary settings.” I would add that they were at least as likely to be used in a sports context, as part of the after-exercise toilette.

²⁰ Musonius 19.22–28 [ed. Lutz] (= Stob. *Flor.* 3.1.209): “Dispensing with shoes provides the feet with plenty of ease and lightness in movement, if they have been trained. Accordingly, one does not see *hēmerodromoi* wearing shoes when on the road, and of the athletes the runners would not be capable of maintaining speed, if they were to run wearing shoes” (ἢ δ’ ἀνυποδησία πολλὴν εὐλυσίαν τινὰ καὶ εὐκολίαν παρέχει τοῖς ποσίν, ὅταν ἡσκημένοι ὦσιν. ὅθεν καὶ τοὺς ἡμεροδρόμους ὄραν ἔστιν οὐ χρωμένους ὑποδήμασιν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς

All this indicates that there were practical reasons for opting to go barefoot for any kind of serious physical exertion. And in fact the naked, human foot is by nature supremely well adapted to walking and running.²¹ Humans accustomed to walking without shoes inevitably develop calluses and hardened foot soles, without losing tactile sensitivity.²² Thus, protection from puncture wounds, and the general discomfort of walking on rugged terrain, is much less likely to be perceived as a necessity, or even advantageous, by humans accustomed to walking barefoot and hence with better-protected foot soles. Since footwear is a late development in human history, going barefoot has been the norm for the vast majority of our existence as a species and until comparatively recently—except perhaps in very cold conditions, since tough skin alone does not provide protection against cold and frostbite (as is indeed reflected in the sources).

καὶ τῶν ἀθλούντων τοὺς δρομεῖς οὐκ ἂν δυναμένους σφάζειν τὸ τάχος, εἰ δεοὶ τρέχειν αὐτοὺς ἐν ὑποδήμασιν). On the Greek road network see Y. A. Pikoulas, “Travelling by Land in Ancient Greece,” in C. Adams et al. (eds.), *Travel Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt and the Near East* (Oxford 2007) 78–87, at 80. That such a feat is by no means physically impossible is amply demonstrated by similar or greater feats of endurance on display among certain African and Mesoamerican cultures practicing extreme long-distance running to this day with minimal or no footwear: D. L. Christensen, D. H. Nielsen, and A. Schwartz, “Herodotos and *Hemerodromoi*: Pheidippides’ Run from Athens to Sparta in 490 BC from Historical and Physiological Perspectives,” *Hermes* 137 (2009) 148–169, at 160–161 and 164–165.

²¹ A comparative study of the metatarsal bones in modern groups and one pre-pastoral group (dated to between 9720 and 2000 B.C.) found that all sets of modern feet showed considerably more pathological lesions of the bones than those of the pre-pastoral group, and concluded that “[t]he influence of modern lifestyle, including the use of footwear, appears to have some significant negative effect on foot function, potentially resulting in an increase in pathological changes”: B. Zipfel and L. R. Berger, “Shod Versus Unshod: The Emergence of Forefoot Pathology in Modern Humans?” *The Foot* 17 (2007) 205–213, at 206, 209–212.

²² N. B. Holowka et al., “Foot Callus Thickness Does Not Trade Off Protection for Tactile Sensitivity during Walking,” *Nature* 571 (2019) 261–264.

Certainly sandals, the most basic and common type of ancient footwear, do not grip the foot tightly enough or provide adequate ankle support, and may, in terms of traction, actually be worse than going barefoot. Wearing sandals therefore might be an impediment rather than an aid where strenuous physical labour requiring a firm foothold, such as fieldwork,²³ is required.

3. *Military footwear? The textual evidence*

The more or less tacit assumption that because footwear existed, it must have been universally used in everyday life, extends to the military sphere: the question of military footwear is generally not brought up, and then usually only in passing, and to note that footwear must have been used as a matter of course. Bryant, in 1899, made the observation that mentions of *anypodēsia* in the sources all point to “exceptions to a rule almost universal,” a viewpoint echoed by Combellack, who cites Bryant but broadens the scope somewhat to “a number of references in Xenophon, Plato, Plutarch, and others to barefoot Spartans, philosophers, and other odd characters.”²⁴ Jarva’s very comprehensive examination of Archaic Greek body armour finds comparatively few representations, yet still concludes that “[d]espite relatively scarce positive evidence from archaeological and artistic sources, or written ones, it is probably reasonable to conclude that Archaic Greek soldiers used footwear, but that the military footwear may not yet have been particularly specialized.”²⁵ Throughout his interesting reading of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, Lee appears to take it for granted that Kyros’ mercenaries wore footgear.²⁶ Similarly, Krentz seems to presuppose a pair of sandals as standard when assessing the total weight of

²³ See e.g. Pl. *Resp.* 372A; N. Sekunda, *The Spartan Army* (Oxford 1998) 23.

²⁴ Bryant, *HSCP* 10 (1899) 58–59; picked up by F. M. Combellack, “Achilles – Bare of Foot?” *CJ* 41 (1946) 193–198, at 197.

²⁵ E. Jarva, *Archaiologia on Greek Body Armour* (Jyväskylä 1995) 106–109, at 109. Jarva’s archaeological findings are discussed below (380–381).

²⁶ J. W. I. Lee, *A Greek Army on the March. Soldiers and Survival in Xenophon’s Anabasis* (Cambridge 2007) 119–120 and *passim*.

hoplite equipment.²⁷ Finally, Matthew draws attention to the fact that footwear is mentioned nineteen times in Homer alone and is prevalent in other Greek literary texts, and on that basis concludes that

All of these passages indicate that during the eighth to fourth centuries BC, tunics, cloaks, armour and footwear were commonly worn, and that the naked hoplite depicted in vase paintings, and of some modern theories, was not the standard of the time despite artistic suggestions to the contrary.²⁸

There seems to be a certain tendency to assume that going barefoot, when footwear demonstrably existed, cannot have been done in earnest, on any large scale or systematically, in some cases even to the point of dismissing evidence that does not fit this notion or arguing *e silentio*. But while it remains true that *a necesse ad esse valet consequentia*, the causality does not work the other way around.

The only apparent exception to this tendency is Nicholas Sekunda, who focuses on the literary sources and pithily concludes, “Consequently, in our reconstructions we should no more give shoes to Greek soldiers than fig-leaves to Greek athletes.”²⁹

The majority of Greek land warfare in the Archaic and Classical period was fought between infantry armies consisting primarily of hoplites. The question of the degree of congruity between the agrarian population and the hoplite segment is better left for discussion in another context; suffice it to say that the mechanics of hoplite fighting at the very least required stamina and included gruelling physical exertion of a kind that

²⁷ P. Krentz, “A Cup by Douris and the Battle of Marathon,” in G. G. Fagan et al. (eds.), *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare* (Leiden 2010) 183–204, at 189 n.28, 196; *The Battle of Marathon* (New Haven 2010) 1, 49 (though see also 54).

²⁸ C. Matthew, *A Storm of Spears. Understanding the Greek Hoplite at War* (Barnsley 2012) 36.

²⁹ Sekunda, *Spartan Army* 22; see also *Greek Hoplite 480–323 BC* (Oxford 2000) 61.

made up a large part of agricultural day-to-day work in a pre-industrial society.³⁰ In this respect, then, there was a certain degree of overlap between hoplite fighting and hard manual labour.

A recurring theme in the sources is the need for ‘digging in’ and standing fast, for not giving ground under any circumstances. A very early instance from the mid-seventh century B.C. occurs in one of Tyrtaios’ battle harangues: “Come, let everyone stand fast, with legs set well apart and both feet fixed firmly on the ground, biting his lip with his teeth.”³¹ A similar notion seems to be entertained by his contemporary Archilochos:

I have no liking for a general who is tall, walks with a swaggering gait, takes pride in his curls, and is partly shaven. Let mine be one who is short, has a bent look about the shins, stands firmly on his feet, and is full of courage.³²

Archilochos, the mercenary-poet, knew what he was about, and his particular requirements of an ideal commander—quite incompatible with contemporary aristocratic ideals—reflect the experienced soldier’s eye for the essentials of combat and for a ‘soldiers’ general’, and again the focus is on legs and feet as crucial in establishing a sure footing.

The famous exhortatory cry “give me just one more step!”

³⁰ For a view of yeoman farmers comprising something like a middle class, see V. D. Hanson, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization* (Berkeley 1995) 5, 22, 193, 219, 359, 366–368, 398, and “The Hoplite Narrative,” in D. Kagan et al. (eds.), *Men of Bronze. Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton 2013) 256–275. For the opposing view—that in the archaic period there were in practical terms only two economic classes, leisured gentlemen farmers comprising a maximum of 15% of the citizen mass, and everyone else more or less forced to work for them—see H. van Wees, “Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development,” in *Men of Bronze* 222–255, at 222–240.

³¹ Tyrt. fr.11.21–22 West, ἀλλά τις εὖ διαβὰς μενέτω ποσὶν ἀμφοτέροισι / στρηιχθεῖς ἐπὶ γῆς, χεῖλος ὁδοῦσι δακῶν (transl. Gerber).

³² Archil. fr.114 West, οὐ φιλέω μέγαν στρατηγὸν οὐδὲ διαπεπλιγμένον / οὐδὲ βοστρύχοισι γάρυρον οὐδ’ ὑπεξυρημένον, / ἀλλά μοι σμικρὸς τις εἶη καὶ περὶ κνήμας ἰδεῖν / ροϊκός, ἀσφαλέως βεβηκῶς ποσσὶ, καρδίης πλέως (transl. Gerber).

ascribed to two different commanders, bears this out: in the grueling physical push-and-shove on the hoplite battlefield, achieving a firm foothold was important enough to merit specific mention in the exhortations.³³

In works on military matters from the Classical period we find a similar interest in the feet. Xenophon, who had his sons brought up according to local custom in Sparta, extolled the genius of Lykourgos as exemplified in the rigorous Spartan education and training program, the *agōgē*. This famously tough regimen, which Xenophon compares favourably with the pampering of youth elsewhere in Greece (which includes providing them with footwear), provided for the feet:

Instead of softening the boys' feet with sandals he required them to harden their feet by going barefoot. He believed that if they developed this ability, they would climb hills much more easily and descend steep inclines with less danger, and that a youth who had accustomed himself to go barefoot would both leap, jump and run more nimbly than a boy in sandals.³⁴

This is echoed by the Spartan Megillos in Plato's *Laws*, who approves of the *krypteia* as a “wonderfully severe training” (θαυμαστῶς πολύπρονος πρὸς τὰς καρτερήσεις), including going barefoot in winter, something the Athenian later takes up as a particular requirement of the citizens of the ideal state to ensure prowess in war (633B–C, 942D).

Of course, the emphasis on *anypodēsia* specifically as part of the *agōgē* might be taken to mean that this was an exception, and that Spartans normally wore footwear in the field once they had completed their education. Michael Lipka adduces several types

³³ Polyæn. 2.3.2, “ἐν βῆμα χαρίσασθέ μοι, καὶ τὴν νίκην ἔξομεν.” ἐπέισθησαν, ἐνίκησαν (Erameinondas; see also *Excerpt.* 14.4); cf. 3.9.27 (Iphikrates; see also *Excerpt.* 14.12)—and cf. 4.3.8 for a rather similar concept (Alexander).

³⁴ Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 2.3, ἀντί γε μὴν τοῦ ἀπαλύνειν τοὺς πόδας ὑποδήμασιν ἔταξεν ἀνυποδησία κρατύνειν, νομίζων, εἰ τοῦτ' ἀσκήσειαν, πολὺ μὲν ῥῆον ἂν ὀρθιάδε βαίνειν, ἀσφαλέστερον δὲ πρηνῆ καταβαίνειν, καὶ πηδήσαι δὲ καὶ ἀναθορεῖν καὶ δραμεῖν θάττον τὸν ἀνυπόδητον, εἰ ἡσκηκῶς εἴη τοὺς πόδας, ἢ τὸν ὑποδεδεμένον (transl. Marchant and Bowersock, modified). See also Plut. *Lyc.* 16.11.

of footwear associated with Sparta and Spartans in support of this view.³⁵ One author he cites is Kritias, whose extant fragments on the Spartan constitution unsurprisingly reveal him as a Lakonophile.³⁶ He speaks approvingly of Spartans as wearing “extremely comfortable and useful” (ἥδιστα καὶ χρησιμώτατα) footwear and cloaks, but does so in the context of an enumeration of “the smallest things in daily life” (τὰ μικρότατα ἐς τὴν δίαιταν), whereas his effusive praise of the unique Spartan mug, the *kōthōn*, repeatedly emphasises its usefulness on campaigns because of its built-in water filtration capability (Kritias B 34 = Athen. 483B–C). In a parallel quotation by Plutarch, evidently derived from the same source, Kritias speaks of the *kōthōn* in similar terms, on a background of general Spartan craft excellence including more unwarlike examples such as couches, chariots, and tables (κλινητῆρες καὶ δίφροι καὶ τράπεζαι, B 68 = Plut. *Lyc.* 9.4).

Lipka goes on to say that “[i]n practice, the aim of barefootedness was hardly the increase of mobility in the open country [... q]uite the opposite: a special kind of footwear, the κρηπίδες, are constantly associated with the most mobile part of the army, the light-armed.”³⁷ The authority cited in support of this is Pollux, who, in the context of listing names for footwear with a short definition, defines *krēpides* as “military wear” (φόρημα στρατιωτικόν, 7.85). Apart from the fact, however, that several hundred years separate Pollux from Greek warfare of the Archaic and Classical period, other, earlier sources also describe *krēpides* as footwear for stage actors.³⁸ Theokritos’ *Idyll* 15, in which two festival-attending Alexandrian women complain that

³⁵ M. Lipka, *Xenophon’s Spartan Constitution* (Berlin 2002) 121.

³⁶ 88 B 32–37 D.-K.; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.34; N. Humble, *Xenophon of Athens. A Socratic on Sparta* (Cambridge 2021) 88.

³⁷ Lipka, *Xenophon’s Spartan Constitution* 121.

³⁸ Istros *FGrHist* 334 F 36 (= *V.Sophocl.* 6): “Istros also says that [Sophokles] invented the white *krēpides* worn by actors and members of the chorus” (φησὶ δὲ καὶ Ἴστρος τὰς λευκάς κρηπίδας αὐτὸν ἐξευρηκέναι, αἷς ὑποδεδεμένονται οἷ τε ὑποκριταὶ καὶ οἱ χορευταί).

the city streets are thronged with people and four-in-hands (“everywhere *krēpides*, everywhere men wearing *chlamydes*”),³⁹ has sometimes, on the authority of the scholiast, been taken to mean that these men must be soldiers, but as Gow astutely points out, both *krēpides* and *chlamydes* formed part of Macedonian national dress and were regularly worn at court, just as there is no good reason why troops would be patrolling the streets on a public holiday.⁴⁰

Building on this, Lipka expands on the general importance of footwear for light-armed troops by citing the equipment reforms introduced by Iphikrates for his mercenary forces in 374 (Diod. 15.44.2–4, Nepos *Iph.* 11.1.3–4). The main source is Diodoros: “He made soldiers’ boots that were easy to untie and light and they continue to this day to be called ‘iphicratids’ after him.”⁴¹ Now, there is some confusion in Diodoros’ text itself, since some of the reforms seem to be directed towards *hoplite* equipment, but there is no doubt that the changes introduced by Iphikrates applied to his own mercenary troops, who were peltasts.⁴² The

³⁹ *Id.* 15.4–6, ὃ τὰς ἀλεμάτω ψυχᾶς· μόλις ὕμιν ἐσώθην. / Πραξινόα, πολλῶ μὲν ὄχλω, πολλῶν δὲ τεθρίππων· / παντᾶ κρητίδες, παντᾶ χλαμυδηφόροι ἄνδρες.

⁴⁰ A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus II* (Cambridge 1950) 268: “More probably therefore Gorgo means merely that the Greek or Macedonian element in the population is conspicuous in the streets wearing its national clothes, which it perhaps reserved for ceremonial occasions; they will be going to the races.” See also K. Erbacher, *Griechisches Schuhwerk. Eine antiquarische Untersuchung* (Würzburg 1914) 13: “Neben der Chlamys getragen [...] von der Masse der gewöhnlichen Leute, die sich das Fest ansehen.”

⁴¹ Diod. 15.44.4, τὰς τε ὑποδέσεις τοῖς στρατιώταις εὐλύτους καὶ κούφας ἐποίησε, τὰς μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἰφικρατίδας ἀπ’ ἐκείνου καλουμένας (transl. Oldfather).

⁴² G. Wrightson, *Combined Arms Warfare in Ancient Greece* (London 2019) 139; H. W. Parke, *Greek Mercenary Soldiers* (Oxford 1933) 80. Diodoros’ notion that hoplites received new shields, *peltai*, and were henceforth known as peltasts on that basis, is simply wrong: not only did peltasts exist long before this point, but hoplites as the heavy infantry mainstay of the army continued for a long time. Lipka, *Xenophon’s Spartan Constitution* 21, says that Iphikrates “established a new military unit of light-armed, the peltasts, in 393.”

peltast as a warrior type was native to Thrace (though the type existed throughout Anatolia, see Hdt. 7.72.1), and their earliest certain mention in our sources is in the context of Athenian operations in the regions bordering on Thrace.⁴³

Herodotos, while not using the term ‘peltast’, nevertheless seems to give a rundown of standard peltast equipment when describing Xerxes’ invasion corps in 480: “The Thracians [...] wore fox-skin caps, and tunics with colourful *zeiras* [= cloaks] thrown over them; on their feet and shins they wore fawn-skin footwear. They carried javelins, *peltas*, and small daggers.”⁴⁴ Peltasts are a frequent enough motif on Attic vase paintings (appearing a full century before the Peloponnesian War),⁴⁵ where they are normally equipped according to Herodotos’ description (though some are depicted with only the shield and javelins). The eponymous *peltē* was a light crescent-shaped shield, and the light nature of peltast equipment made them, in a Greek context, an intermediate class between heavy-armed hoplites and the *psiloi* who carried no shield⁴⁶—though they primarily functioned as skirmishers, well adapted to hit-and-run tactics. It is conceivable that peltasts and their equipment went together conceptually, in a development similar to the much later appearance of ‘ethnic’ troop type units, such as hussars, uhlans, or zouaves (complete with ‘native’ equipment), in armies far from where they originated, such as those of France and the USA in the nineteenth

⁴³ Thuc. 2.29.5 (where they remain a promise), and see 4.28.4.

⁴⁴ Hdt. 7.75.1, Θρήικες δὲ ἐπὶ μὲν τῆσι κεφαλῆσι ἄλωπεκέας ἔχοντες ἐστρατεύοντο, περὶ δὲ τὸ σῶμα κιθῶνας, ἐπὶ δὲ ζειράς περιβεβλημένοι ποικίλας, περὶ δὲ τοὺς πόδας τε καὶ τὰς κνήμας πέδιλα νεβρῶν, πρὸς δὲ ἀκόντια τε καὶ πέλτας καὶ ἐγχειρίδια μικρά (transl. Purvis, modified). For corresponding descriptions of peltast equipment see e.g. Arr. *Tact.* 3.1–4; cf. Ael. *Tact.* 2.7–9, Asclepiod. 1.2.

⁴⁵ J. E. Lendon, *Soldiers and Ghosts. A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven 2005) 95.

⁴⁶ J. G. P. Best, *Thracian Peltasts and their Influence on Greek Warfare* (Groningen 1969) 4.

century.⁴⁷ It may have been felt that troop type and equipment to a certain extent belonged together, or that their fighting prowess and/or requested special abilities depended on their ‘natural’ weapons and equipment—so that they were equipped accordingly, even when raised from the populations of Greek *poleis* nowhere near Thrace. Alternatively, it may be that their fawn-skin boots enabled them as skirmishers to roam over and through *any* type of terrain in the mountains, including thorny undergrowth, and ice and snow in the winter.

As Iphikrates was always a peltast commander and largely won his renown as such, it was this troop type that he sought to reform: evidently, he wished to enable them to engage hoplites directly, in static combat, by adopting some of their features, notably extending the peltasts’ reach with the addition of a long thrusting-spear and a longer sword.⁴⁸ As for the ‘iphicratids’, however, boots with tough soles (Polyaen. 1.39.2.) had always been a part of traditional peltast equipment, certainly among the original Thracian warriors, and possibly also when native Greeks acted the part. It cannot be concluded on that basis that hoplites, or other Greek troop types, wore footwear, nor that such a change came about as a result of this.

In short, the mere existence of such footwear does not warrant the conclusion that it was worn as a rule, let alone in the field. While there is some textual basis to suggest that certain types of footwear might be employed by some light-armed troop types, it is not conclusive. It is also problematic that the testimony is primarily derived from later periods, and in some cases from sources with a limited understanding of the subject at hand.

⁴⁷ *Contra* Best, *Peltasts* 12: “I do not believe I am oversimplifying matters by stating that the peltasts in Thracian dress on vase-paintings are indeed Thracians and not, for instance, Athenians dressed in this foreign garb.”

⁴⁸ The extent—and, indeed, reality—of these reforms is debated: Best, *Peltasts* 102–110, and Wrightson, *Combined Arms* 139–142, are inclined to dismiss them altogether, but see N. Sekunda, “The Chronology of the Iphicratean Peltast Reform,” in N. Sekunda et al., *Iphicrates, Peltasts and Lechaenum* (Gdańsk 2014) 126–144, at 129–137, for an opposing view.

3. *Military anypodēsia?* The textual evidence

On the other hand, there is some evidence that under normal circumstances, the absence of footwear during campaigns was to be expected. In the few instances where hoplites are explicitly said to be wearing footwear—or when the lack of it is at all remarked upon—it is under extreme weather conditions, such as deep winter campaigns. A passage from Xenophon’s *Hellenika* is particularly illuminating:

For as long as it was summer, the soldiers who were with Eteonikos at Chios subsisted on the produce of the land and by working the land for a price. But when winter came and they were in addition poorly clad (γυμνοί) and barefoot (ἀνυπόδητοι), they joined together and plotted to attack the city of Chios.⁴⁹

This shows not only that these troops must have set out for a summer campaign without footwear as a matter of course, but also that this became a concern only with the onset of winter.

A similar case can be found in the *Anabasis* where Kyros’ hapless Greek mercenaries find themselves in the harsh Armenian winter and must fashion makeshift *karbatinai*, cut from untanned leather, to give some measure of protection against snow and frostbite, as their previous footwear had “given out” (ἐπέλιπε, *An.* 4.5.13–14).

During the Athenian siege of Poteidaia in the early Peloponnesian War, there set in the “most horrible frost” (πάγου οἴου δεινοτάτου), so that nobody ventured outside or—if they absolutely had to leave their tents—“wrapped ourselves up in anything we could lay our hands on and wore footwear, tying extra pieces of felt or sheepskin around it,” whereas Sokrates went out wearing his same old light cloak and unshod, “and even like that made better progress on the ice than the other soldiers

⁴⁹ *Hell.* 2.1.1, οἱ δ’ ἐν τῇ Χίῳ μετὰ τοῦ Ἐτεονίκου στρατιῶται ὄντες, ἕως μὲν θέρος ἦν, ἀπὸ τε τῆς ὥρας ἐτρέφοντο καὶ ἐργαζόμενοι μισθοῦ κατὰ τὴν χώραν· ἐπεὶ δὲ χειμῶν ἐγένετο καὶ τροφὴν οὐκ εἶχον γυμνοί τε ἦσαν καὶ ἀνυπόδητοι, συνίσταντο ἀλλήλοις καὶ συνετίθεντο ὡς τῇ Χίῳ ἐπιθησόμενοι (transl. Marincola).

did in their footwear.”⁵⁰

Yet another example is furnished by a late source, Polyainos (second century A.D.), who says that Iphikrates at one point galvanised his troops, demoralised because poorly equipped and fed, to fight a battle in winter frost by walking from tent to tent in even worse equipment and exhorting them: “When they saw their general in such poor clothing and without any footwear, yet exerting himself for their common safety, they followed him willingly.”⁵¹

Much has been made of Thucydides’ puzzling description of 212 Plataians’ and Athenians’ equipment during their breakout from the besieged Plataia in the winter of 428/7: “They were lightly armed, and had shoes only on their left foot to give them a safer grip in the mud.”⁵² Commentators are divided between those who accept the given reason more or less at face value, and those who, seeing this as an instance of Thucydides’ rationalist avoidance of religious or supernatural elements (supposedly to the point of actively suppressing actual religious motivations for choices in the human and societal sphere),⁵³ identify it as a case

⁵⁰ Pl. *Smp.* 220A6–C1, καί ποτε ὄντος πάγου οἴου δεινοτάτου, καί πάντων ἢ οὐκ ἐξιόντων ἔνδοθεν, ἢ εἴ τις ἐξίοι, ἡμφισμένων τε θαυμαστά δὴ ὅσα καί ὑποδεδεμένων καί ἐνειλιγμένων τοὺς πόδας εἰς πῖλους καί ἀρνακίδας, οὗτος δ’ ἐν τούτοις ἐξήει ἔχων ἰμάτιον μὲν τοιοῦτον οἴονπερ καὶ πρότερον εἰώθει φορεῖν, ἀνυπόδητος δὲ διὰ τοῦ κρυστάλλου ῥῶον ἐπορεύετο ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι ὑποδεδεμένοι (transl. Nehamas and Woodruff, modified).

⁵¹ Polyæn. 3.9.34, οἱ δὲ προθύμως ἠκολούθησαν ὀρώντες τὸν στρατηγὸν ταπεινῶς ἡσθημένον καὶ ἀνυπόδητον ὑπὲρ τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας προθυμούμενον. It may be observed that Iphikrates’ trick here recalls Phokion, who, on campaigns at least, may have had similar objectives (see n.5 above).

⁵² Thuc. 3.22.2, ἦσαν δὲ εὐσταλεῖς τε τῇ ὀπλίσει καὶ τὸν ἀριστερὸν μόνον πόδα ὑποδεδεμένοι ἀσφαλείας ἕνεκα τῆς πρὸς τὸν πηλόν (transl. Hammond).

⁵³ S. Hornblower, *Thucydidean Themes* (Oxford 2010). The present passage is dismissed at 28–29: “That is, their reason for leaving one foot unshod was not, as Thucydides thought, in order to get a better footing in the mud, although this quaint explanation satisfied Gomme.” Yet, as Hornblower admits, its inclusion *at all* is difficult to explain if Thucydides’ object was to tone

of the quasi-religious practice termed ‘monosandalism’ in modern scholarship.⁵⁴ The disinclination to accept Thucydides’ explanation is typically based on the breakout party’s baffling decision not to carry out their night action with *both* feet either shod or bare: surely, if either provided the better grip, it would be twice as effective to use it on both feet.⁵⁵ Yet even if Thucydides is in bad faith here, he must have been confident that his explanation would be accepted by his readers, and so cannot be dismissed out of hand. Sue Blundell, in a well-balanced article on monosandalism, discusses this passage and relates an experiment of her own, in which having one foot bare increased its traction in mud, in contrast to the other, sandalled one.⁵⁶

An additional reason, one suspects, may have been the bitter winter cold. Thucydides is explicit that the breakout party chose a stormy night with rain or sleet to avoid detection: slush ice had in fact formed on the surface of the water in the ditch through

down or obscure the real, religious motivation: “But just *why* he gave the detail, and the unsatisfactory explanation for the detail, remain totally baffling questions” (29).

⁵⁴ For suppressed ‘monosandalism’ in the case of the Plataians see especially P. Lévêque and P. Vidal-Naquet, “Épaminondas Pythagorien ou le problème tactique de la droite et de la gauche,” *Historia* 9 (1960) 294–308, at 298–299, stating “[v]oilà donc l’historien pris, qu’on nous passe l’expression, en flagrant délit de rationalisme abusif”; L. Edmunds, “Thucydides on Monosandalism (3.22.2),” in *GRBM* 10 (1984) 71–75 (with an overview of further skeptics at 71 n.1). Monosandalism, as encountered primarily in myths, seems to be connected with direct contact with the earth, and hence with chthonic deities, and perhaps on something liminal and rites of passage (as the putting on or taking off of shoes typically precedes leaving or entering); see R. L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography* II (Oxford 2013) 206–207. However, the connection between these clearly observable religious and ritualistic practices and the behaviour of the Plataians in 428/7 is not easily established. Moreover, evidence for monosandalism in this region and in the fifth century B.C. is scarce, and the present passage is in fact the only historical one in Greek literature, as pointed out by Blundell, in *Shoes, Slippers and Sandals* 221.

⁵⁵ Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet, *Historia* 9 (1960) 299; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* I (Oxford 1991) 407.

⁵⁶ Blundell, in *Shoes, Slippers and Sandals* 218–219.

which they had to wade. It was, in other words, a very cold winter night: the exact conditions under which footwear might be expected anyway, as protection against the cold ground. By wearing only one, the Plataians may have achieved some measure of protection against the cold while ensuring the necessary grip, during fighting in the icy mud, for the supporting foot generating thrust in most combat stances. An additional point which, to my knowledge, has been so far overlooked is the fact that Thucydides' statement may only have been intended to cover the initial escape action and fighting. Each man may well have brought his unworn sandal along, to be put on when on the road to Athens: in terms of weight or encumbrance a spare would have made very little difference and could easily be tucked under the tunic or in a belt.

The idea that there were practical advantages to leaving one foot bare did not, at any rate, seem strange or quaint to Euripides, in whose *Meleagros* the sons of Thestios participated in the hunt for the Kalydonian boar "each with his left foot unshod while the other was sandalled, so the knee should carry less weight, *as is the custom for all the Aitolians*"⁵⁷—nor to Aristotle, who felt compelled to call out Euripides for getting this detail wrong:

Now, Euripides says that Thestios' sons walked with their left foot unshod. [...] But the Aitolians have the exact opposite custom: they wear footwear on their left foot and keep the right unshod. The dominant foot has to be light, I suppose, the other one does not.⁵⁸

Gomme's parallel from Scott's *Last Minstrel* ("Each better knee

⁵⁷ Eur. fr.530 Kannicht (= Macrob. *Sat.* 5.18.17), οἱ δὲ Θεστίου παῖδες τὸ λαῖον ἵχνος ἀνάρβυλοι ποδός, / τὸ δ' ἐν πεδίλοις, ὡς ἐλαφρίζον γόνυ / ἔχουεν, ὅς δὴ πᾶσιν Αἰτωλοῖς νόμος (transl. Collard and Cropp, emphasis added).

⁵⁸ Arist. fr.74 Rose (= Macrob. *Sat.* 5.18.17), τοὺς δὲ Θεστίου κόρους τὸν μὲν ἀριστερὸν πόδα φησὶν Εὐριπίδης ἐλθεῖν ἔχοντας ἀνυπόδετον [...]. οἷς δὴ πᾶν τοῦναντίον ἔθος τοῖς Αἰτωλοῖς· τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἀριστερὸν ὑποδέδενται, τὸν δὲ δεξιὸν ἀνυποδετοῦσιν. δεῖ γὰρ οἶμαι τὸν ἡγούμενον ἔχειν ἐλαφρόν, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν ἐμμένοντα.

was bared, to aid / the warriors in the escalade”)⁵⁹ incurs the derision of Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet: “On s’étonnera de voir ainsi les genoux comparés aux pieds, les rochers à la boue.”⁶⁰ But this is surely not the point of the comparison: rather, it is to point out that under certain circumstances it may be advantageous to have the favoured or stronger body part of a pair bare and thus unencumbered.

5. *Military anypodēsia?* *The archaeological evidence*⁶¹

Depictions of hoplites wearing sandals in combat seem to be the exception in any visual medium during the period.⁶² The following observations are not based on systematic investigation, but rather on reviewing representations under relevant lemmata in iconographic resources such as *LIMC*, and in databases like the Beazley Archive Pottery Database and Arachne. Jarva lists an impressive overview of shod warriors in iconography, but for the purposes of this survey I can find no more than two of these representations actually showing shod hoplites in combat: the vast majority are either not hoplites, not in combat or, in some cases, not showing footwear at all.⁶³

In vase painting, one rare example is a black-figure neck amphora from ca. 575–550 attributed to the Camtar Painter and showing an Amazonomachy, in which Telamon plunges his sword into Glauke; he is clearly wearing some sort of closed footwear with lacing extending up the ankle and past the lower part

⁵⁹ A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* II (Oxford 1956) 238.

⁶⁰ Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet, *Historia* 9 (1960) 299 n.29 (calling it “le commentaire, étrange sur ce point, de A. W. Gomme”).

⁶¹ For invaluable assistance and expertise in this section, I am indebted to Jan Stubbe Østergaard.

⁶² It should be emphasised that depictions of hoplite footwear in non-combat contexts are not included in this survey.

⁶³ Jarva, *Archaiologia* 106–109. To give one example of the last category, I am unable to find “hoplites provided with footwear” in two of the six representations listed by Jarva 108 and n.665 (namely *ARV*² 429.21 and 599.2 [= *BAPD* 205065 and 206930]).

81 of his greaves.⁶⁴ Of the five warriors depicted in this scene, he is the only one to be shod.

Two more are both Attic red-figure neck amphoras, datable to ca. 425–375, and attributed to the Suessula Painter. The first shows a hoplite attacked by two Amazons: otherwise naked, he is wearing black boots (resembling nothing so much as modern neoprene water shoes), extending to the middle of his lower legs.⁶⁵ Another hoplite nearby, though also apparently in action, has bare feet. The other shows a fight between two hoplites (one naked, the other wearing a cloak) and two young warriors more lightly equipped;⁶⁶ all are wearing black boots identical to those on the previous amphora, something that apparently held some kind of fascination for this painter.

These three, however, represent all that I have been able to find of pictorial representations of shod hoplites in combat. Two fringe cases are interesting: an early Classical tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix by the Sosias Painter shows Achilles bandaging Patroklos' left arm, wounded by an arrow. This is clearly an emergency procedure: both are wearing their scale corslets. But where Achilles is wearing sandals, Patroklos is barefooted. The two were in fact never on the field of battle at Troy at the same time: while Patroklos was fighting, Achilles pointedly remained *hors de combat* until Patroklos' death. Interestingly, then, the active fighter in this scene is barefooted, whereas the undisputed non-combatant is wearing sandals.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese inv. RC5564 (= *ABV* 84.1; *BAPD* 300779). See also Jarva, *Archaïologia* 108 and nn.665 and 671.

⁶⁵ New York, Metropolitan Museum inv. 44.11.12 (= *ARV*² 1344.3; *BAPD* 217570). See also Jarva, *Archaïologia* 109 and n.676.

⁶⁶ New York, Metropolitan Museum inv. 44.11.13 (= *ARV*² 1344.5; *BAPD* 217572). See also Jarva, *Archaïologia* 109 and n.676.

⁶⁷ Kylix by the Sosias Painter: Berlin, Antikensammlung F 2278 (= *ARV*² 21.1; *BAPD* 200108); J. Østergaard and A. Schwartz, "A Late Archaic/Early Classical Greek Relief with Two Hoplites," *JdI* 137 (2022) 1–38, at 17 with fig. 17 and n.62.

In sculpture, the funerary stele of Lykeas and Chairedemos, found on Salamis and datable to ca. 420, shows two hoplites, probably on their way to or from battle, wearing sandals.⁶⁸

The archaeological evidence for hoplites fighting barefoot is, by contrast, overwhelming. While the subject has not been comprehensively dealt with, an exhaustive treatment is out of the question in the present context; instead, a limited, representative selection, spanning the period and encompassing its principal visual media of vase painting and sculpture, must suffice.

In vase painting, hoplites are shown in one of the four registers of the Late Proto-Corinthian Chigi vase, an olpe of ca. 640, with nothing to suggest a mythological context.⁶⁹ Moving on to the black-figure vase paintings of the sixth century, the gigantomachy on an Attic psykter in Houston stands for a host of similarly barefooted fighters.⁷⁰ From the Late Classical Period, ca. 430, we have another gigantomachy, on a squat lekythos by the painter Aison.⁷¹ A mythological context is all-pervasive in Archaic and Classical sculpture depicting fighting on foot, from the gigantomachy of the Siphnian frieze to the individual Greeks fighting Amazons, centaurs, and Giants in the metopes of the Parthenon and the battle scenes on the Alexander Sarcophagus.⁷² Rounding out this minimal overview, a bronze statuette

⁶⁸ Piraeus, Archaeological Museum inv. 385; A. Scholl, "Aigina, Megara, Salamis. Zur Heroisierung des Verstorbenen im frühen attischen Grabrelief der Klassik," *JdI* 133 (2018) 187–239, at 188–195, esp. 191 (fig. 21).

⁶⁹ Rome, Villa Giulia 22679; T. Rasmussen, "Interpretations of the Chigi Vase," *BABesch* 91 (2016) 29–41, esp. 34–36.

⁷⁰ Menil Collection 70.53 (= *ARV*² 21.1; *BAPD* 478 with bibliography).

⁷¹ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale RC 239 (= *ARV*² 1174.6; *BAPD* 215562; J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases. The Classical Period* (London 1989) fig. 293.

⁷² The Siphnian frieze: Delphi, Archaeological Museum; V. Brinkmann, *Beobachtungen zum formalen Aufbau und zum Sinngehalt der Frieze des Siphnierschatzhauses* (Munich 1994), esp. 56–62. The Parthenon metopes: London, The British Museum and Athens, The Acropolis Museum; I. Jenkins, *The Parthenon*

may be mentioned: the hoplite on the frieze around the neck of the Archaic krater from Vix, ca. 530.⁷³

It may be asked whether the Greek penchant for displaying the male body naked extends to pictorial representations of combat, where it is by no means unusual. But the important point is that while hoplites are shown in many different degrees of undress, the feet are unique in their insistently pervasive nakedness: they are the only body part to be naked in very nearly all cases across the board. Even when pictorial representations of hoplites are emphatically not otherwise naked (i.e., ‘realistic’), the feet are almost invariably bare. It therefore does not seem possible to understand this persistent trait by means of any of the various modern interpretations of the implications of artistic nakedness (such as idealisation or heroisation).⁷⁴

As a curious aside, the footguards from the Archaic period found at Olympia may be mentioned: thin sheets of bronze with anatomical details such as veins and toes (in one case hinged), and apparently meant to be fitted to footwear and/or a pair of greaves. For whatever reason—possibly the very fact that they required a sole to be stitched onto—they do not seem to have caught on: very few specimens, three in all, have been found, and they have left no trace in iconography.⁷⁵

Sculptures in the British Museum (London 2007) 69–81; K. Schwalb, “Celebration of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon,” in J. Neils (ed.), *The Parthenon from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge 2005) 159–197. The Alexander Sarcophagus: Istanbul, Archaeological Museum inv. 370; V. von Graeve, *Der Alexandersarkophag und seine Werkstatt* (Berlin 1970).

⁷³ C. Rolley (ed.), *La tombe princière de Vix* (Paris 2003).

⁷⁴ For an overview of the topic see Østergaard and Schwartz, *JdI* 137 (2022) 12–13. Sekunda, *Spartan Army* 22, already rejected the notion of *anypodēsia* as purely artistic convention. Erbacher, *Schuhwerk* 40, contrasts the many ‘realistic’ depictions of ephebes wearing *krēpides* “im Gegensatz zu den Hoplitēn, die in heroischer Idealisierung mit ehernen Beinschienen und nackten Füßen erscheinen,” though without asking why some Athenian soldiers deserved this treatment in iconography, while others did not.

⁷⁵ Jarva, *Archaïologia* 105–106.

6. *Conclusions*

Preconceived cultural notions of footwear as an absolute necessity, internalised enough to be completely reflexive, are a formidable barrier to our understanding of alternatives in other times or cultures. Yet even today, in many places around the world people go barefoot as a matter of course, and their hardened foot soles (and overall healthier feet) give perfectly adequate support in rough terrain: indeed it was not so long ago that children in the countryside in our own part of the world went barefoot as a matter of course.⁷⁶ In 1542, the highland clergyman John Eldar wrote to king Henry VIII of England:

Moreover wherefore they call us in Scotland Redshanks, and in your grace's dominion of England *Rough-footed Scots*, please it your majesty to understand, that we of all people can tolerate, suffer, and away best with cold: for both summer and winter, (except when the frost is most vehement,) going always bare-legged and bare-footed, our delight and pleasure is not only in hunting of red-deer, wolves, foxes, and *graiies*, whereof we abound and have great plenty; but also in running, leaping, swimming, shooting, and throwing of darts. Therefore in so much as we use, and delight, so to go always, the tender delicate gentlemen of Scotland call us *Redshanks*.⁷⁷

Almost incredible as this seems to modern sensibilities, people in antiquity, especially in a Mediterranean climate, were no different, and outside of city centres the majority of the population likely went barefoot most of the time, except in the winter cold. Our literary sources, heavily skewed towards life in the city where *anypodēsia* must have been rather more unusual, should not blind us to the fact that living conditions for the majority of most populations are very dimly known to us, if at all, and may well have been very much different on a number of points.

⁷⁶ M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (London 1703) 194: "The Generality wear neither Shoes nor Stockings before they are seven, eight or ten years old."

⁷⁷ J. Pinkerton, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of the House of Stuart to that of Mary II* (London 1797) 396–397.

Sandals, by far the most common type of footwear, may offer a measure of protection for a delicate foot sole, but very little in the way of traction, and may in fact hamper it. Field work such as ploughing was no doubt done barefoot, as was any kind of sports and extreme distance running, and the same very likely applies to the gruelling work of hoplite fighting, where traction was of paramount importance. Certainly, there seem to be a number of references to unshod hoplites in the literary sources, and very few to the use of footwear unless explicitly in a winter context, while the importance of a firm stance is emphasised again and again.

Just as important, however, is the overwhelming amount of evidence provided by iconography, in which any footwear on hoplites in a fighting context is a very rare exception to a hard rule of naked feet, irrespective of whether or not they are otherwise portrayed as naked. To borrow a phrase, “a negative argument is not valueless if the negative is universal.”⁷⁸ No matter how counter-intuitive to us, we may have to face the possibility that hoplites routinely preferred to fight without footwear.⁷⁹

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⁷⁸ R. Carpenter, “The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet,” *AJA* 37 (1933) 8–29, at 26–27.

⁷⁹ This article has its origins in fruitful discussions with Jan Stubbe Østergaard in the course of our collaboration on another article (*JdI* 137 [2022] 1–38): for those, and for assistance with the more archaeological sections of the present work, I am indebted. I am also grateful to the external reviewer and the editorial board of *GRBS* for invaluable comments and suggestions.