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Hoplites and *Zeugitai*: A Military Role to a Political One?

We are all familiar with the view of the Greek hoplite as a middle-class farmer/soldier whose increasing military importance opened up an increased political role for him in the evolving archaic *polis*. This view of the hoplite appears to be in no small measure the result of a conflation of two etymologies of the Greek word *zeugites*, the name of members of the next-to-lowest of the Solonic census classes, together with an unconscious extension of conclusions about Athens to Greece in general.

The older of the two etymologies, that the *zeugites* was the owner of a *zeugos*, a yoke of oxen, explains how the *zeugitai* came to be thought of as working farmers. The etymology, however, is based on a somewhat corrupt version of a passage in Pollux (8.132), which is probably talking about taxes, not the Solonic classes (which are discussed at 8.130).

No ancient source identifies *zeugitai* as hoplites or hoplites with *zeugitai*. The identification can be traced backed to A. Böckh (1817), who, thinking of the Roman *centuriae*, assigned distinct military roles to the four Solonic classes. The identification was picked, via G. Gilbert, by C. Cichorius, who in 1894 proposed the "military" etymology of *zeugites*, that it describes a member of a rank in a hoplite phalanx. This etymology has problems of its own, principally that the use of *zugon* is limited to descriptions of the Spartan and Macedonian/hellenistic armies.

Böckh, Gilbert and Cichorius have been largely forgotten in modern discussions of archaic Athens, but thanks especially to Cichorius' etymology, their identification of *zeugitai* and hoplites has, as it were, taken on a life of its own. Combined with the earlier identification of *zeugitai* as middling farmers ó the "yoke-of-oxen" etymology ó it has in fact produced the image of the farmer-hoplite citizen-soldier with which we began.

Athens, however, was simply not a major military state in the late seventh and early sixth centuries. Indeed, there is little evidence of a "national" army (as opposed to forces raised by local power figures) before the reforms of Kleisthenes. This makes it *a priori* unlikely that Solon would have used military categories for the allocation of political power. Once we assume, however, that the *zeugitai* were identical with the hoplite phalanx it becomes quite easy to reason from the success of the *zeugitai* in gaining partial access to political power under Solon that in the early sixth century Athenian hoplites played a greater military role ó and indeed, in order to mobilize an effective phalanx, that the *polis* itself was more politically integrated ó than the historical record would otherwise lead us to believe.

And so, if there is in fact no convincing reason to accept either the "yoke-of-oxen" or the "military" etymology of *zeugites* perhaps it is best to admit that the word's etymology, like that of *thes*, is still a mystery, and stop confusing military roles (service as a hoplite) with political ones (membership in the Solonic *zeugite* class).