

DECORATED HOPLITE SHIELD-BANDS FROM THE PELOPONNESE (700–450BC)

There are fewer images more evocative of ancient warfare than the hoplite warrior, with his distinctive round shield. Modern discussions of Greek warfare have traditionally stressed the technological impact of hoplite shields, how they changed the fighting style of ancient armies, facilitating the introduction of the famous phalanx formation. Relatively little emphasis has been placed on the shields as personal, individually commissioned objects; it is less commonly known, for instance, that hoplite shields were often personalised on their obverse side by the warriors who carried them. This project will redress this scholarly gap by studying a unique body of material culture, decorated shield-bands from the Peloponnese in southern Greece. Dating to the Archaic era (c. 700–450 BC), the shield-bands consisted of bronze strips placed inside the shield and were adorned with small images chosen by the warriors themselves. These depictions featured scenes of mythical heroes, war-time brutality and gendered violence, offering us a source of images and stories which accompanied individual men into combat. The Peloponnesian shield-bands are, therefore, a unique gateway into the mindset of Archaic warriors and their idealisation and experience of combat.

This project will entail a comprehensive study and catalogue of the decorated hoplite shield-bands, using interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of Archaeology, Classics and Art History. Its main goal will be to collect and document the surviving evidence of the shield-bands and to investigate what the latter can tell us about the cultural construction and individual perception of combat among the Archaic Peloponnesian *poleis*. The project will also investigate the relationship between the hoplite shield-bands and the way individuals experienced combat. Why did warriors choose to add them to their equipment? What governed their decisions regarding the imagery depicted on the bands? Was the latter meant to admonish, inspire, or perhaps desensitise men to the horrors of war? Were the images on the bands unique compared to scenes depicted on other material objects? By answering such question, the project will examine the role of artistic images in the traumatic environment of combat. Moving away from the traditional issues of military formations, tactics and narratives of major battles, which until recent years have dominated most scholarly treatments of ancient Greek warfare, the project will focus instead on the perception and experience of military conflict by individual soldiers at its forefront. As such, its outcomes will provide an important and lasting contribution to the field of ancient Greek warfare, which continues to attract major academic and public interest.