

Brasidas ῥίψασπις  
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Brasidas was famously the exception to classical Sparta's supposedly inflexible injunction to return home "with one's shield or on it," having been conspicuously deprived of his shield by the Athenians at Pylos; yet he survived the encounter and went on to be celebrated after his death at Amphipolis as a paradigmatically courageous figure. This paper examines Brasidas' cultural utility as such a figure by considering the paradox that the fifth-century Spartan won praise for a battlefield outcome that conventionally exposed one to reproach as a cowardly ῥίψασπις or "shield-flinger."

The contrast with the invocation of Patroclus in Plato's *Laws* (944a-c) as one open to reproach for the loss of his arms underscores the extent to which Brasidas was memorialized by posterity as an ironic inversion of the ῥίψασπις figure—as one whose arms proved unequal to him rather than the other way around (see e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 190b [*Reg. et imp. apophth.*], 219c [*Apophth. Lac.*]).

Relevant in this connection is the famous comparison of Brasidas with Achilles attributed to Alcibiades by Plato in the *Symposium* (221c) and the Iliadic flavor that has been detected in Thucydides' treatments of Brasidas (Hornblower, *Comm on Thuc. II* [1996] 38-61). Consideration of the contexts in which Brasidas is invoked in later antiquity and in Byzantium underscores the extent to which the Pylos episode particularly resonated in the minds of posterity.

An epilogue considers why Plutarch might have resisted or rejected the possibility of composing a *Life* of Brasidas.