



Spartan Morale: social practices to manage combat stress.

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Abstract

This paper examines social practices to manage combat stress in Spartan hoplites in the 5th century. By utilising a modern multi-layered psychological profile designed by Jason Crowley, it considers the role of specific elements of Spartan society (its social structure, education system and its treatment of cowards) in promoting combat resilience. The model has been updated to consider modern combat psychology and unique challenges presented by the source material in relation to Sparta. By applying this methodology, this paper utilizes a specific case study of Spartan conflict – the second invasion of Xerxes – to assess the effectiveness of the identified social practices. Identifying the methodological layers within a Spartan context allowed this paper to discuss how 5th century Spartan hoplites maintained the will to engage in high stress situations such as melee combat.

Introduction

The impact of combat on the physiological and psychological wellbeing of soldiers has been a major area of research since the 20th century. Since then, major advancements in psychology and medical technology have taken place, allowing researchers to gain a much more sophisticated understanding of the impact of combat stress on modern soldiers. In a classical context, where such theoretical concepts and technological means were absent, psychological trauma still occurred even when contemporaries were not able to explore or articulate these issues in quite the same way. Nevertheless, extensive exploration of these past societies has enabled modern scholars to analyse the surviving evidence to design frameworks to understand the psychology of classical peoples with the benefit of modern research¹.

The purpose of this paper is to adapt an existing modern framework, created by Jason Crowley, and apply it retrospectively to Spartan soldiers to identify the impact of combat on soldiers of the period. The principal consideration throughout this paper will be how Spartan soldiers coped with the strain of combat and how individuals were conditioned to maintain their morale during high stress scenarios. Due to the significant volume of evidence regarding classical combat it is a safe assumption that soldiers were able to cope with the strain of combat until a point. However, the limits of individual soldiers were different due to individual resilience to combat stress. Several factors could influence the individual's resilience, including the type of combat (night attacks compared to pitched battles) or the impact of a rout. To provide in depth analysis of the concept of morale, this paper identifies specific instances of combat primarily in the 5th Century BC, using classical documentation of the second invasion of Xerxes during the Persian Wars as the primary source material. Specific instances of combat such as the Battle of Thermopylae and Plataea will be analysed to identify where specific coping mechanisms were employed by Sparta to maintain the mental fortitude of their soldiers.

In 2012, Crowley created a methodology that identified distinct relationships within social and military structures in which an Athenian soldier could find combat motivation. He determined that these three main relationships could build upon one another or supersede

¹ Crowley, 2012.

prior relationships in specific circumstances. The three relationships Crowley identifies are the primary group, the military unit and the socio-political system. Identifying these relationships enabled Crowley to explore instances of combat carried out by citizen soldiers, acknowledging their willingness to engage in combat when neither forced nor remunerated for doing so². By themselves, these relationships can limit the effectiveness of the model by ignoring the influence of additional factors. Crowley acknowledges soldier recruitment, mobilisation and deployment as having relevant impact on the effectiveness of these relationships and combats this limitation of the model.

In the case of socio-political systems, Crowley notes the unique elements of each polis affects the type of relationship between its system and its soldiers. Noting several combinations based on the persuasive power asserted by the state (fear, conditioning, remunerative) and the commitment of the individual to playing their part in the state's survival (unwilling, moral, calculative)³. This paper assesses these relationships in a Spartan context to determine the effectiveness of the model and apply them in layers to create a well-rounded picture of Spartan combat motivation.

Morale as a focus in modern scholarship is more commonly explored in later societies such as the Imperial Roman army rather than their classical Greek counterparts.⁴ The modern definition of morale "is a state of mind that either encourages or impedes action"⁵. When focusing this concept on the morale of modern soldiers, this definition becomes more specific: "The greatest combat commanders have always understood that morale reflects the mental, moral and physical condition of their troops. These conditions, in turn, directly relate to the troops' courage, confidence, discipline, enthusiasm, and willingness to endure the sacrifices and hardships of military duty"⁶. This understanding is not only present in modern military commanders but also in their classical contemporaries. While the modern understanding of psychology, medical and technological advancements were unavailable to classical commanders to identify mental injury as a result of combat stress, they still had a rudimentary understanding of morale. For example, Xenophon records instances of

² Crowley, 2012.

³ Crowley, 2012: 19.

⁴ Ureche, 2014.

⁵ Wells, 2022.

⁶ Wells, 2022.

commanders acknowledging the compliance relationships identified by Crowley as part of his work⁷ and these references enable this paper to identify key passages which can form the body of the methodological framework.

In the context of this work, the use of the term morale will utilise both the modern and combat specific definitions. Due to the fact both definitions are relevant to the aim of this paper, with the combat specific definition highlighting the perspective of military commanders while the modern definition demonstrates the most primary choice of soldiers to either act in line with the needs of the state or render them unable to act. Focusing primarily on the mental condition of Spartan hoplites to determine the mechanisms instilled in its soldiers by the state to maintain soldier obedience and willingness to endure the strains of combat.

This field of research is important to the understanding of classical Sparta due to limited research in the field of combat motivation psychology for that polis. Research, such as the work of Crowley, tends to focus on Athenian culture due to the high level of surviving source material written by classical authors regarding that culture. Sparta is well documented in the surviving source material. However, the accounts of events and instances of conflict are recorded by non-Spartan authors and in many cases written retrospectively, such as the work of Plutarch. Modern scholarship acknowledges this limitation of the source material and dubbed it the 'Spartan Mirage'. Considering the outside perspective of these authors is important to ensure that the methodology identified in this paper is applied fairly and accounts for exaggeration in Spartan military accomplishments in the source material. Additionally, due to the abstract concepts that form the focus of this paper there is little material or archaeological evidence that can be used to support or disprove the conclusions drawn. As a result, this paper will rely on literary evidence to provide insight to Spartan soldiers' mental state during identified instances of combat. In doing so, this paper will account for the evidence providing more insight into the impact of combat stress on soldiers as a body within society in comparison to the limited recording of instances of the psychological impact on individual soldiers. When discussing these specific instances of conflict, this paper will account for second-hand testimony as many of the surviving source

⁷ Xen. *Anab.* 2.6.10

materials are recorded after the fact and by authors who were not present during these combat situations.

To maintain a cohesive narrative, this paper begins by assessing Crowley's methodology to extract the structure from an Athenian context to reapply it to Sparta. This ensures that the methodology is applied to elements of the Spartan state both relevantly and logically. Once the relevant elements of the methodology are identified, the paper establishes the fundamental differences between the Athenian and Spartan systems. By identifying the distinctive elements of Spartan society, the relationships Crowley identified can be explored between the Spartan state and its soldiers. Once the layers of the methodology are applied to a Spartan context, this paper explores key instances of conflict to determine how Spartan forces coped with the strains of combat and whether the relationships developed were a contributing factor to the Spartan hoplites willingness to fight.

Chapter 2: Adapting Crowley's methodology

Crowley's methodology was designed to examine the psychology of Athenian hoplites, but Crowley's layered structure can be extrapolated and reapplied within a Spartan context. This section evaluates the elements that make up this methodology alongside modern psycho-physiological studies. This allows this paper to determine the sections which can be utilised in a methodology to assess the impact of combat stress on Spartan hoplites and identify coping mechanisms utilised in a classical context to maintain morale.

The methodology begins by exploring a concept Crowley titles the 'architecture of aggression'. In the context of the work, this paper has interpreted this term to refer to the structures or building blocks that exist both psychologically and physically within a societal system that enables it to engage in aggressive and violent activity like combat while developing and sustaining a society. When exploring aggression, Crowley draws on a metaphor by du Picq that centres around a fight with a lion⁸. The metaphor suggests that when there are no bonds between brave men, they would not band together to fight the lion regardless of their individual bravery. However, in the case of men who are significantly less brave alone but have bonds that bind them together, that combined camaraderie would allow them to face the Lion as one. While this metaphor does demonstrate the desired imagery, particularly in relation to the bonds between intimately familiar individuals, it is limited. The metaphor doesn't provide information on environmental motivations such as available weaponry, armour, fortification, or whether the individuals could flee. For example, encountering a lion in the wild in comparison to a Roman arena would likely influence the individual's choice to band together and fight. Before exploring Crowley's methodology's identified layers that represents this metaphor in practice, this paper must consider additional biological and external stimuli that influences classical soldiers. This allows this paper to consider the weighting of different coping mechanisms utilised by Spartan hoplites to manage combat stress in relation to other sources. Due to the lack of evidence related to mental conditions in the classical period, modern psychological models can be used to explain psychophysiological responses that can be applied retrospectively to the classical soldier.

⁸ Crowley, 2012: 10.

The variety of modern research into the psychophysiological responses of soldiers creates a broad field of study that can shed light onto the psychological impact of war on classical soldiers. While this enables retrospective application of concepts and models to better understand the classical world, it must be applied with consideration to prevent forcing instances from classical sources into specific frameworks created by modern understandings of medical conditions. In order to mitigate this issue as much as possible, this paper will need to consider the differences between modern and classical contexts. While the understanding of how the human mind works has developed, so has the modern world. Responses to stress stimuli could be biologically similar, but the stress stimuli itself that the modern understandings are based on do differ between modern and classical combat situations and this will need to be a foremost consideration when analysing specific instances of combat in the source material.

Research was carried out by Clemente-Suárez and Robles-Pérez who theorised that military action could be distinguished into two categories. The first category is symmetrical combat, this includes front line battlefield combat with a defined enemy. Symmetrical combat could be the most direct comparison to the type of conflict experienced by classical armies outside of siege scenarios. The second category is asymmetrical combat which focuses on conflict in urban areas with the presence of civilians and an undefined battlefield⁹, mostly seen in modern insurgency combat situations. While these categories are useful to draw distinctions between the types of combat situations, it should be noted that instances of conflict are rarely limited to one or the other, with the latter not being a creation of modern-day military tactics.

Long drawn-out conflicts such as the Peloponnesian Wars are an example of numerous multi-phased combat situations that featured skirmishes, missile phases, insurgency, and pitched battles¹⁰ that required the soldiers to adapt. Examples of adaptability in classical combat is the development of the peltast unit as light infantry. Thucydides notes that Peltast units retreating from Spartan hoplites were able to attack while retreating due to their movements being less limited because of heavy infantry armour¹¹. Considering the

⁹ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 247.

¹⁰ Thuc. 5.63-74; Hdt. 1.82; Diod. 14.41.2-4.

¹¹ Thuc. 4.43.

type of forces the Spartan hoplites are facing when analysing instances of combat enables this paper to classify the type of combat the forces are engaged in, as well as comparing the recorded psycho-physiological responses appropriately. Taking this into account when analysing instances of Spartan conflict allows this paper to draw on a wider variety of source material when applying the layers of Crowley's methodological profile. Alongside considering different types of conflict, it is important to consider internal influences that could affect a soldier's response to combat stress. Doing so enables a more accurate assessment of classical understandings of biological responses.

The medical and psychological support available to modern soldiers is a direct result of the advancement of medicine and technology. While modern studies are not based on the classical hoplites that this paper is focusing on, it is interesting to extrapolate the recorded impacts and apply them retrospectively. Utilising modern findings allows for a better understanding of the impact of high stress situations such as combat. The experiment conducted by Clemente-Suárez and Robles-Pérez aimed to determine the physiological responses of the test subjects based on exposure to simulated melee combat. For the purposes of the study, melee combat was determined to be the "most common type of combat situation"¹² which could also most accurately recreate the conditions of classical soldiers. This experiment recreates the scenarios that would recreate the experiences of Spartan hoplites and be directly applicable to them in a way that would not apply to non-professional armies in the period. The research hypothesised that "combat would increase the physiological response as well as the rating of perceived exertion and decrease the cortical arousal"¹³ which in turn impaired performance in "superior cognitive processes, such as memory"¹⁴. In practical terms, this increase in physiological response would manifest in an increase in strength. The body achieves this through increased activity in the individuals muscle fibre and activation of anaerobic metabolism¹⁵. This allows the

¹² Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 249.

¹³ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 248; *Cortical arousal: Activation of the reticular formation of the brain. Cortical arousal increases wakefulness, vigilance, muscle tone and heart rate.* Kent, 2007.

¹⁴ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres. 2018. 247

¹⁵ Bumgardner, 2022. *Anaerobic metabolism: A form of metabolism in the human body that processes carbohydrates in the place of oxygen as the body cannot keep up with the demands of the muscles. This type of metabolism also produces lactic acid which degrades muscle function over time.* [Anaerobic Metabolism vs. Aerobic Metabolism \(verywellfit.com\)](https://www.verywellfit.com/anaerobic-metabolism-vs-aerobic-metabolism/)

individual's body to keep up with the exertions of combat. Even in their literature, such as Homer's *Iliad*, there was recognition that sustained combat would take a physical toll on the fighter regardless of their mental fortitude or intent¹⁶.

The study identified that reduced cortical arousal manifests in "fatigue and impairment in executive functions required for information processing and decision-making"¹⁷. This suggests that an individual is less capable of making informed decisions or differentiating friend from foe¹⁸ during instances of high stress such as melee combat. This effect is enhanced when considering the underlying panic soldiers may experience when moving through hostile territory¹⁹. Thucydides discusses how night attacks tended to sow the most panic amongst forces²⁰. Particularly off the back of a defeat like what the Gauls experienced after their defeat at Delphi²¹. Cardena and Ustinova argue that the recordings of the Gauls turning on their own comrades could indicate a cognitive disorder which can be found in acute post-traumatic reactions²². While there are likely parallels in the symptoms, the example cited is heavily overlaid with themes of divine wrath limiting how accurate the facts are in the sources. This limitation is acknowledged by Cardena and Ustinova, however the source material must be considered subjectively separate to the period's belief in the divine to extract evidence of physiological and psychological response to the stress stimuli created during a night attack.

While the understanding of these reactions at a cellular level was not available in the classical world, ancient authors have observed physical reactions in individuals in their writings. Instances of soldiers going blind before battle are evidenced in source materials²³ in this case, the soldiers were dismissed from the army at Thermopylae and given the option to return to Sparta. The case of Eurytus and Aristodemus presents an interesting comparison of individual response to the same stress stimuli. Given the opportunity to leave, the men could not agree. Eurytus forced a Helot to lead him into combat and dying

¹⁶ Hom. Il. 19.154

¹⁷ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 250; Li, Jiao, Chen and Wang, 2004.

¹⁸ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 250.

¹⁹ Cardena and Ustinova, 2014: 741.

²⁰ Thuc. 7.80; Hdt. 7.43.

²¹ Paus. 10.23.5.

²² Cardena and Ustinova, 2014: 742.

²³ Hdt. 7.229-232.

because of being mentally and physically impacted. From the case of Eurytus, there is clear evidence of the fight response winning out in rash judgement. It can also suggest the influence of the Spartan state is at play regarding their approach to combat. In the case of Aristodemus, we see the opposing side of this state mentality. Aristodemus returned to Sparta, giving in to the flight response, he is faced with the anger of the citizens at home and branded a coward. Where these men were both afflicted with the same apparent ailment, they responded differently when presented with the choice to fight or flee, suggesting the mental resilience of the individual is the final barrier between maintaining mental faculty and succumbing to combat stress. Cardena and Ustinova suggest that it was more than coincidence that Sparta, a state that prioritised military valor, had several recorded instances of soldiers exhibiting the signs of mental disorders²⁴. If the polis' commitment to military valor is considered a direct causation of the number of these recorded instances, it becomes more impressive that the citizens of Sparta would continue to fight. Bearing this in mind when evidencing the impacts of conflict will ensure that this paper considers the weight of physiological responses to combat stress, not just psychological ones.

The Clemente-Suárez and Robles-Pérez experiment also found that exposure of the test subjects to a threatening situation would also trigger the activation of the fight or flight response²⁵. This response allows the body's nervous system to prepare the body to deal with the source of the threat²⁶. The activation of the fight or flight response can be attributed to the lack of control soldiers have over all possible hazards and outcomes of high stress combat situations. This is supported by the research's determination that the unpredictable nature of melee combat is a trigger for increased stress stimuli²⁷. While the psychological explanation of the fight or flight response would not be available to classical authors, they have recorded the impact of this response across conflicts. From anticipating their enemies to flee from them²⁸ to dealing with desertion by their own forces²⁹, the examples pulled from classical work suggest that the authors observed these responses in

²⁴ Cardena and Ustinova, 2014: 743.

²⁵ Sandin, 2003.

²⁶ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 250.

²⁷ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 250.

²⁸ Hdt. 7.210; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5

²⁹ Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.

soldiers of the period. Soldiers were often labelled cowards when they succumbed to the fight or flight response, with specific laws in each *polis* on how they punished this reaction. The research found the results of the experiment to be consistent with “an increase in sympathetic and HHA axis activation expected in fight-or-flight responses for stressful situations”³⁰, suggesting that how the human body responds to the strain of combat is ingrained at a biological level. While the medical science is modern in comparison to the focus of this paper, the literary evidence of this response provides evidence of a high stress situation that met the threshold to trigger this response. Being able to recognise this response in classical soldiers allows this paper to acknowledge the influence of utilised coping mechanisms on preventing the flight response from manifesting.

The physiological responses evidenced in this experiment are interesting when considering the context of classical combat. Where medical advancements were limited; the chance of death was significantly higher because of untreatable injury or infection. Garland and Gill suggest that the Hippocratic texts do not acknowledge mental disorders beyond an expression of ‘mental frenzy’³¹. The lack of identification of mental disorders in the Classical period would directly correlate to a lack of direct treatment options in comparison with their physical counter parts³². This limitation in the source material should be considered when identifying instances that demonstrate a soldier’s morale. In cases where mental injury impairs an individual’s judgement there is not a clear line to suggest whether they lost their motivation to fight or are no longer of sound mind to make that decision. Considering that biological responses identified in the Clemente-Suárez and Robles-Pérez study can be mapped back to the classical soldier, it is more impressive that they would be able to overcome those ingrained responses to face the stresses of combat. Additionally, the physiological responses of combat stress on the individual, this paper identifies more contextually the layers from Crowley’s methodology which identify the external support mechanisms for the classical soldier. Utilizing both internal and external concepts allow for a multi-layered and balanced, psychological approach to combat to apply to the Spartan hoplites.

³⁰ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018: 249

³¹ Garland, 2010; Gill, 1985.

³² Cardena and Ustinova, 2014: 744.

The first layer of Crowley's methodological profile explores a concept he refers to as the Primary Group. The Primary Group refers to the bonds built via "intimate face to face association and cooperation"³³, resulting in a "fusion of individualities in a common whole"³⁴. The Primary Group does have limitations, at the most basic level there is a limit on the number of people an individual can intimately interact with to reach the threshold for the Primary Group to form. That said, instances of conflict would naturally increase the individuals "natural desire for affiliation"³⁵. This creates an interesting question around the integration of new members to this group, particularly if the new members must be assimilated quickly. The members of the Primary Group become "psychologically interdependent"³⁶ which is a concept explored by modern scholarship for the perceived benefits the members receive, arguing that "comradeship reinforces cohesion"³⁷. This in turn, grants them additional resilience to the pressure of combat, manifesting in a; reduction in anxiety³⁸, an increase in endurance³⁹, morale⁴⁰, and resistance to psychiatric breakdown⁴¹. Throughout analysis of combat trauma by modern scholars, the question raised is what constitutes resilience? Monoson focuses their definition on Socrates, painting him as the 'ideal' soldier because of his combat experience. That his 'resilience' is demonstrated through his "ability to remain himself under shifting and trying conditions"⁴². When analysing instances of combat, it is important to identify whether the reactions of the soldiers in question is a negative result of psychological injury, or demonstrates resistance as a result of coping mechanisms due to the influence of the primary group or military unit. Due to the limited source material from Spartan authors, evidence for the formation of primary groups will likely be minimal and will need to be supplemented with additional layers of Crowley's methodology. At this stage, the second layer, the military unit, becomes a relevant measure of cohesion over the Primary Group.

³³ Cooley, 1983: 23.

³⁴ Cooley, 1983: 23.

³⁵ Hoiberg, 1980: 212-43; Kellet, 1982: 62-65.

³⁶ Crowley, 2012: 8.

³⁷ Crowley, 2012: 9.

³⁸ Kellet, 1982: XIX, 45.

³⁹ Watson 1980: 94.

⁴⁰ Wilson, 1987: XVI, 174.

⁴¹ Kellet, 1982: 41, 101; van Crevald, 1982: 91-100.

⁴² Rabel, 2016: 164; Monoson, 2014: 133.

Contrasting with the Primary Group, the military unit removes the necessity of individual intimacy due to the sheer size of the military unit in question. Instead, it focuses on the individual's dependency on the military structure and association of its members to that structure to create what Crowley terms "artificial cohesion"⁴³. Considering the limitations of the Primary Group, scholarly debate questions whether the Primary Group is important only in theory⁴⁴: Rush and Bartov represent two stances in favour of this debate⁴⁵.

Rush utilises a case study of the American 22nd Infantry regiment in 1944. During the eighteen-day conflict, Rush observes the unit were able to continue to fight effectively as a result of individual replacements to the rank of the unit. This demonstrated two threads of logic, firstly that the unit was not negatively affected by the lack of Primary Groups within the unit. Secondly, its absence can be positively replaced where the structure of the military unit and its leadership supersedes the need for intimate bonds between individuals⁴⁶.

Bartov, while agreeing that the necessity of a Primary Group is limited, focuses their case study on the German Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. In this case, Bartov argues that due to the nature of the force, the Primary Groups absence can be replaced by the combined force's ideology and coercion by the state⁴⁷. The debates presented by both Rush and Bartov vary in analytical depth⁴⁸ but they do highlight an interesting discussion around several competing concepts⁴⁹. Firstly, the Primary Group is not alone, additional influences are present on the individual ranging from the quality of their leadership, their personal and wider ideology, and the discipline of their forces. Crowley demonstrates that for the purposes of this methodology, the Primary Group is encompassed by the military unit and argues that the additional application of each layer would "strengthen the soldiers will to fight"⁵⁰. Based on the discussions presented by Rush and Bartov it can be argued that providing the military unit meets certain requirements regarding discipline and leadership the Primary Group can be left as a theoretical

⁴³ Crowley, 2012: 15.

⁴⁴ Crowley, 2012: 11.

⁴⁵ Crowley, 2012: 13.

⁴⁶ Rush, 2001: 285, 300, 335.

⁴⁷ Bartov, 1992: 5-7.

⁴⁸ Crowley, 2012: 15.

⁴⁹ Crowley, 2012: 15.

⁵⁰ Crowley, 2012: 18.

consideration. That said, no military system is autonomous and is in turn, encompassed by the Socio-Political System⁵¹.

In the cases where a military unit is the measure of cohesion between individuals it will require a clear socio-political structure that supports the sustainability of those unit formations. In comparison to the limited evidence of Primary Groups, evidence of the military structure of Spartan Hoplite units will be available from multiple sources allowing for the appropriate level of engagement. This will include religious practices that influence the rituals of these units. To best deconstruct the elements of the military unit, the methodology must have a clear picture of the socio-political system that supports it.

The third sphere, the Socio-Political system varies the most depending upon which civilisation the methodology is being applied to. Due to this, Crowley has identified the ‘two component compliance relationship’. This considers the interaction between two distinct elements, the first being the soldiers commitment to their socio-political system, whichever system that may be. It identifies three branches of commitment that an individual can demonstrate: alienative, calculative and moral.

The second element is the method of power employed by that system: coercive by relying on force, remunerative through monetary incentives, or normative that appeals to the soldier’s sense of civic obligation and ethical correctness. By considering the different branches of these elements, Crowley identifies nine possible compliance relationships, of which three are viable for long term sustainability. These are best demonstrated in the table below:

Commitment	Power
Alienative	Coercive
Moral	Remunerative
Calculative	Normative
Moral	Coercive
Calculative	Remunerative
Alienative	Normative
Coercive	Coercive
Alienative	Remunerative
Moral	Normative

Fig. 1. Based on the table presented by Crowley⁵².

Crowley suggests “these compliance relationships, while employed to achieve the same aim, reflect markedly differing principles and employ radically diverging approaches, and so, naturally achieve variable results on the battlefield”⁵³.

⁵¹ Crowley, 2012: 17; van Crevald, 1982: 18.4

⁵² Crowley, 2012: 19.

⁵³ Crowley, 2012: 19

Incorporating the compliance relationship into this section of the model allows the methodology to be applied to any socio-political system. This is because it isn't dependent on system specific markers like social class or the professionalism of its military. Rather the compliance relationships focus more on the relationship between the individual soldier and their political system. This is useful when removing the model from an Athenian context due to the stark contrasts between how Sparta and Athens ran as political states. Where Athens formed its military from its citizenry who held alternative primary professions, Spartan citizens were born to form part of its military. It can also allow for the model to be applied regardless of the differences in the formation and maintenance of their military forces.

Crowley identifies three relationships he has deemed compatible. Firstly, the alienative/coercive relationship is weak due to the reliance on unwilling soldiers being led by force and is severely limited in its efficiency as it would need to operate in a close-order battlefield where transgressions can be seen and punished by those in leadership⁵⁴. Generals who rely on fear to achieve certain outcomes are often seen in source material. Xerxes, of Persia, is an example of this. Following the battle of Salamis, he executed several Phoenicians who led a retreat following the Persian army being tricked into the strait⁵⁵. The second, calculative/remunerative hinges on what a soldier feels in relation to the reward offered. In a case where the soldier feels no amount of money is worth dying for, the relationship fails⁵⁶. Demosthenes mentions mercenary forces throughout his speeches. With acknowledgement of the weakness of the calculative/remunerative relationship even without the specific definition in place. Demosthenes was openly critical of the Athenian reliance on mercenary forces without Athenian soldiers or commanders in place⁵⁷. Demosthenes alludes that should a mercenary band decide to leave, the man who hired them would have no choice but to follow as he would be unable to command them unless he were able to pay them⁵⁸. Later evidence suggests that the remunerative relationship is prominent in the period, particularly when accounting for a high number of exiles who took on mercenary work during the fourth century⁵⁹. Both relationships appeal psychologically to

⁵⁴ Crowley, 2012: 19.

⁵⁵ Diod. 11.19.4.

⁵⁶ Crowley, 2012: 19.

⁵⁷ Dem. 4 26.

⁵⁸ Dem. 4 24.

⁵⁹ Xen. *Anab.* 1.2; Xen. *Anab.* 2.5.22.

baser human instincts; fear and greed⁶⁰. By identifying examples of how the Spartan state conducts itself and relied on these compliance relationships, this paper can provide a balanced approach identifying the compliance relationship most applicable to this methodology. In place of a coercive or remunerative relationship, the image presented in the source material of Sparta is an army who fights for their polis and King out of a moral obligation.

The third relationship identified by Crowley and the one that this paper has applied analytically is the moral/normative relationship. Crowley argues that the limited effectiveness of the former two relationships is a positive thing. With the third relationship appealing to the individual's moral commitment and normative power of the state⁶¹ it comes down to the individual's discipline because of external conditioning and internal commitment to the state's survival. Because of the deep rooted psychological threads of these concepts, it "ensures that compliance is perceived by the soldier to be the only legitimate response to the demand to fight"⁶². This relationship best reflects many instances of Spartan conflict when considering the structure of the city state.

The following chapter of this paper identifies elements of the Spartan state structure that curate's resilience to combat stress within its soldiers and identifies at which points the primary group, military unit and moral/normative compliance relationship are formed and leveraged to maintain morale in combat.

⁶⁰ Crowley, 2012: 19.

⁶¹ Crowley, 2012: 20; Wilson, 1987: 167

⁶² Crowley, 2023:20; Henderson, 1985: 23-24; Wesbrook, 1980: 261-265.

Chapter 3: Social practices of the Spartan state

This chapter examines how Spartan soldiers were conditioned to be resilient to the psychological strain of combat, specifically through the structure of Spartan society, its education system and other social practices such as cultural norms regarding cowardice. By doing this, we can determine at what point primary groups became established into Spartan military units, as well as the development of compliance relationships between the social system and its soldiers.

A lot of ancient authors place special emphasis on the courage and valour of Spartan soldiers, highlighting their devotion to the state and their Kings. Based on the representation of the Spartan state in the source material, the compliance relationship identified by Crowley that most accurately fits the state is a moral/normative relationship. By analysing a key case of Spartan combat, the second invasion of Xerxes in the Persian Wars, this chapter assesses the accuracy of this identified relationship by considering several elements of the Spartan military's formation within the methodology framework. This chapter considers where an idealised perception of the Spartan state exists, whether a moral/normative compliance relationship is the most applicable of those identified by the model methodology. This will also question whether the promotion of this ideal was the result of external author observation or pushed by the state itself.

Crowley's methodology identifies four key themes within the Athenian social system to determine how it's military has been constructed. This paper has utilised these key indicators to establish the Spartan system within this layer of the methodology. The key themes employed by Crowley are as follows:

1. How were soldiers recruited?
2. How were military ranks assigned?
3. How were those soldiers trained?
4. Were young soldiers garrisoned or sent straight into active service?

Due to the differences between the Spartan and Athenian system, I will apply these themes in a different order to maintain a coherent exploration of the former system (3, 4, 1, 2).

Firstly, by exploring the core differences in the Spartan social system.

Sparta: a unique city state

The structure of the Spartan social system allowed for focused training of 'full time' hoplites who represent one of the earliest examples of professional military forces. Cartledge explores this point, explaining that the Spartans were:

“...professionals who practiced the craft (technē) of war, not as a spare-time relaxation nor as a painful interruption of ordinary life, but as a full time occupation.”⁶³

It is important to note that while the use of the term professionalism regarding Spartan soldiers can be compared to modern definitions of 'professionalism'⁶⁴, it is different to the modern understanding of a professional occupation which centralises around being paid a wage for a service. For the purpose of this paper, classical professionalism will be defined as a citizen whose primary profession is to serve as a soldier, loyal to the state they hold citizenship to. This definition excludes citizen militias and mercenary forces. Scholarship recognises Spartan professionalism in the period with Cartledge determining it exists in “a world of amateurs”⁶⁵ supporting this paper's exclusion of citizen militias in this case.

By acknowledging this difference, this paper focuses on the comparison between classical Spartan soldiers and those in other contemporary poleis. For this chapter, primary comparison is drawn with Athens. This allows for the identification of specific Spartan societal systems that prepare Spartan soldiers to cope with combat stress. To begin, this paper identifies the primary difference between Spartan society and their Athenian counterparts.

The reformation of Spartan society is attributed to Lycurgus, a so-called Lawgiver whose goal was to use political measures to promote equality among the citizenry, a minimum level of health and fitness and an avoidance of luxurious living⁶⁶. By redistributing the land of the citizenry, Lycurgus reduced the number of “indigent and helpless people”⁶⁷ ensuring

⁶³ Cartledge, 1977: 16.

⁶⁴ [PROFESSIONALISM | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary](#) – “the combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people.”

⁶⁵ Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 10.8; Cartledge, 1977: 11.

⁶⁶ Plut. *Lyc.* 8

⁶⁷ Plut. *Lyc.* 8

all free men have a holding with which they could survive on the land, as well as intending to reduce crime. Lycurgus treated envy, poverty, and wealth as afflictions on the state and the political reforms implemented aimed to ensure all male full citizens stood equal within society⁶⁸. Due to the prevalence of the oral tradition in Greece⁶⁹ and the details of these reforms would have been passed down through oral transmission, it is impossible to say with certainty that these reforms were the work of a singular individual or that it was indeed Lycurgus. Hammond determines that based on the quality of the written historical accounts made by Thucydides in conjunction with Aristotle's understanding on societal constitutions that modern scholarship can accept the recordings of the Spartan reforms are based on a semblance of truth⁷⁰. Further by accepting Herodotus and other authors attributing the reforms to Lycurgus there has been general acceptance in academic circles that there is "a relationship between Lycurgus the legislator"⁷¹ and the Lycurgus who forms the centre of a cult following. The cult of Lycurgus has evidence in surviving inscriptions⁷² of its existence and Hammond concludes that while we can accept the existence of a relationship between these individuals, we cannot with surety claim Lycurgus existed and was solely responsible for these reforms.

The biggest difference between the Spartan and Athenian military system is that the Athenian military could be likened to a citizen militia, where military service was encouraged, and success was rewarded, but wasn't the citizens primary profession⁷³. Where the soldiers who make up the Athenian forces have alternative primary professions, such as farmers and tradesmen, Spartan citizens were first and foremost soldiers⁷⁴. That is not to say that Athenian citizens did not receive combat training of any kind.

Crowley explores this point when establishing the recruitment methods used by the Athenians to raise hoplite troops, noting that they employed an ephebic training system where young Athenians aged between eighteen and twenty participated in a two-year

⁶⁸ Plut. *Lyc.* 8.

⁶⁹ Thuc. 1.4; Thuc. 1.9; Details for some historical accounts are procured from other later sources, including the works of Plutarch.

⁷⁰ Hammond, 1950: 57.

⁷¹ Hammond, 1950: 53.

⁷² Wilde *Lakonische Kulte.* 281 f.

⁷³ Liddel, 2007: 1.7.

⁷⁴ Ridley, 1979: 508.

training period⁷⁵. However, this system's implementation cannot be firmly dated prior to 334 BC⁷⁶, significantly later than their Spartan counterparts. Scholarship suggests that the reform of the ephebic training system was a result of the Theban defeat by Alexander highlighting how far behind the Spartans the Athenian hoplites were in terms of combat readiness compared to their Macedonian counterparts⁷⁷. While this point can demonstrate that military education was formalised for the Spartan youth far earlier, the source material Crowley has engaged with has been referenced incorrectly⁷⁸. A later section of Aristotle's work better demonstrates the Athenian ephebic system of combat training by providing evidence to what the training entailed⁷⁹, allowing direct comparison to be drawn with the Spartan curriculum. Although this comparison is based on an educational system in a later period, the example's application is relevant to demonstrate that Sparta had benefitted from an organised educational system significantly earlier than its contemporary.

In earlier scholarship, the Spartan state is sometimes referred to as 'militaristic', alluding to a supposed Spartan desire to participate in conflict⁸⁰. More modern discussions suggest that the state proactively tried to avoid conflict, utilising diplomacy where possible⁸¹. Hodkinson suggests that the view of Sparta being a militaristic society is the result of the Spartan mirage⁸² and the perception of Sparta being a valour driven state. When analysing combat motivation within the state, identifying the way the Spartan state operated is relevant to the perspective relevant evidence is viewed from. The term disciplinarian may be a better fit for the Spartan state, based on the combat ready citizen body who had dedicated their lives to creating a combat effective fighting force under a strict doctrine implemented by the state. Identifying this difference will ensure the evidence explored in this chapter is approached from a neutral perspective, not steering into the 'militaristic' mirage narrative.

One of the largest unique elements of the Spartan state was its common property approach led by the reforms of Lycurgus⁸³. Specific Spartan systems such as the approach to the serf

⁷⁵ Crowley, 2012: 25; Aristot. *Const. Ath.* 42.

⁷⁶ Crowley, 2012: 25.

⁷⁷ Friend, 2019: 48; Plut. *Alex.* 11.12.

⁷⁸ Crowley, 2012: 25; Aristot. *Const. Ath.* 40. 2.

⁷⁹ Aristot. *Const. Ath.* 42.

⁸⁰ Ollier, 1933.

⁸¹ Cartledge, 1977: 11; Hodkinson, 2006.

⁸² Hodkinson, 2006.

⁸³ Plut. *Lyc.* 8.

class of Helots, created a co-dependent social system. Aristotle debated the effectiveness of the system⁸⁴ arguing that privately owned property was more effective. However, Aristotle does acknowledge that later writers reflecting on the Spartan constitution praised its founder for the way in which the legislation was formed based on Spartan participation in conquest and war⁸⁵. In the case of Sparta, commonly owned land and provisions that could be utilised where needed across the country provided a wide-reaching support system for the social structure of the citizenry and its military interests. In a social system where the labour typically covered by citizenry primary professions is provided by a state-owned serf system, this creates a vacuum for the citizenry to pursue alternative professions⁸⁶. In the case of Sparta this was its military. This particular social construction highlights an economic, social and political motivator for Spartan citizens to engage in combat training based on its state ideals.

Powell proposes an interesting approach to the development of ideals in Spartan Society which is relevant to this application of this paper's methodology. The method attempts to identify reality in idealized source material, arguing that criticism of Sparta even in original source material is "embedded in the context of a profound admiration" for the state⁸⁷. This concept is heavily evident within ancient source material, such as Socrates and his followers⁸⁸. Powell's method suggests that each ideal demonstrated by the Spartan citizenry is born from a fundamental fear held by the state.

The first example relevant to this discussion is in relation to the Helot population. Powell states that the Spartans "lived their lives surrounded by the Helots, whose population was enormous and politically unreliable"⁸⁹. He draws on Aristotle's observation that the Helots were constantly watching Sparta for signs of weakness⁹⁰, the latter who recognised the danger in showing weakness to the serf class. This fear of weakness lead to specific ideals being instilled in the citizen body, the example Powell uses is their approach to

⁸⁴ Aristot. *Pol.* 2.1263a.

⁸⁵ Aristot. *Pol.* 7.1333b.

⁸⁶ Cartledge, 1977: 16; Thuc. 1.141.6.

⁸⁷ Powell, 2010: 151.

⁸⁸ Plato. *Rep.* 8. 544c; Muller, 2010: 192.

⁸⁹ Powell, 2010: 152.

⁹⁰ Arist. *Pol.* 2. 1269a.

intoxication⁹¹. Plato comments that drunkenness was forbidden⁹², while Plutarch frequently asserts that sobriety became integral to the Spartan education system⁹³ and the youth of Sparta were “taught to despise the effect of wine”⁹⁴. This example demonstrates the Spartan ideal of ‘sobriety’ that was instilled in its citizenry was born from the Spartan King's and elders fundamental fear of being perceived as weak by the Helots and their enemies. This method is a useful mechanism to assess the social practices utilised in Sparta while attempting to separate the idealised history from actuality. The model is relevant to the discussion of morale particularly as it enables the understanding of how Spartan society's ideals developed and reflected in the wider citizen body, for example in the case of sobriety, it is likely that the Spartan citizen would take pride in their rejection of intoxication and gain a sense of superiority through their commitment to maintaining a level head at all times while the governing bodies of Sparta would benefit from a citizen body not easily overcome but a Helot uprising.

Development of a Spartan hoplite

To maintain this chapter's cohesive narrative, it now explores the development of the Spartan hoplite. From their education through to the garrison of troops and the way they were provisioned.

The Spartan system introduces combat from a young age to condition the citizenry against fear of fighting. Cartledge explains that “warfare between massed phalanxes... required above all disciplined cohesion and unyielding physical and moral strength”⁹⁵, and the Spartan public education system, the Agoge, existed to instil this strength and discipline.

The Agoge system was the formal education system for Spartan children, it was also famous across Greece for its rigorous programme. The Agoge system was respected by other polis and would see wealthy individuals from other states participate in the system for the

⁹¹ Powell, 2010: 152.

⁹² Plato. *Laws*. 637a-b.

⁹³ Plut. *Lyc*. 28.

⁹⁴ Powell, 2010: 152; Plut. *Dem*. 1.4.

⁹⁵ Cartledge, 1977: 15-16.

perceived benefits of its training⁹⁶. The impact of this Agoge's prestige on the citizenry was likely positive. Knowing that the training received was revered by other poleis would increase the hoplites confidence in their capabilities and pride in the state. For their enemies who may have undergone a significantly lower quality form of combat training, this would have had a negative psychological response due to how inadequately they may have felt they were trained in comparison.

Completion of the Agoge was a prerequisite to achieve full Spartan citizenship⁹⁷. This system provided the opportunity for the entire potential citizenry to have achieved an adept level of combat training and indoctrination to the states values, on which the core of the Spartan military could be built upon. By having a minimum combat training requirement for all citizens to achieve full citizen status, the wider population would have undergone the same basic training and be indoctrinated into Spartan specific military tactics and terminology aiding in military cohesion when the citizenry was called to arms. This would allow for different individuals who were not necessarily trained together to be allocated to the same unit and achieve faster integration and performance cohesion. This would in turn give the individual confidence in the training they received and their role within the wider unit.

This system provided the opportunity to form a strong mental attachment to the values of the state, this can be seen in how Sparta excluded their ruling class from the core educational systems. Sparta was ruled by two kings from distinct families. As the kings were expected to lead soldiers on campaign, they did not participate in the public education system⁹⁸. It can be argued that this was to prevent future damage to the effectiveness of the military unit and devotion to the social political system evidenced through the moral/normative compliance relationship. If the future king was defeated during training, the soldiers who trained alongside him may not treat him with the required reverence and obedience; private tutorage assured the king's leadership status.

The primary counter argument to this is the experiences of Agesilaus, who was the younger brother of the future king, Agis. The Agoge existed in Plutarch's opinion, based on the views

⁹⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 8.1337a.

⁹⁷ Cawkwell, 1983: 393.

⁹⁸ Plut. *Ages.* 1.2.

of Simonides⁹⁹, to teach their youth obedience. So as the younger brother of the future king, Agesilaus would be expected to obey the order of their king the same as any other citizen. As a result, Agesilaus experienced the public education of the Agoge over the private tuition those who would be king experienced. Following the death of Agis, Agesilaus became the next king of Sparta but had experienced the public education all other members of the citizenry had participated in. The earlier concerns for why the kings were trained separately, while still valid assumptions for the impact it could have on the effectiveness of the Spartan military units, were widely disproved. Plutarch records that as Agesilaus had experienced this public education “he had been educated to obey before he came to command”,¹⁰⁰ resulting in the relationship between leader and the lead being stronger, as Agesilaus was “much more in harmony with his subjects than any of the kings; to the commanding and kingly traits which were his by nature there had been added by his public training those of popularity and kindliness”¹⁰¹. The experience of Agesilaus suggests that the system had been designed to protect its command structure to maintain military cohesion but in specific instances, the incorporation of those in positions of command with the rank and file of the military units has proactively strengthened the perceived compliance relationship between the king and the soldiers.

Exploring the activities utilised in the agoge, the source material and modern scholars generally reach the agreement that the Spartan ideal of “hard labour would instil military courage”¹⁰². Powell suggests this is a direct evolution of the Spartan fear of weakness in the eyes of helots and enemies to an extreme where masculine quality is idealised to prevent softness or weakness and the punishment that accompanies it¹⁰³.

Following the Agoge, Spartan youth were promoted to a communal mess¹⁰⁴ becoming a “full-fledged citizen warrior”¹⁰⁵. As part of the common mess, the new citizens maintained the skills developed in the agoge through participating in activities like hunting¹⁰⁶ while also

⁹⁹ Plut. *Ages.* 1.

¹⁰⁰ Plut. *Ages.* 1.

¹⁰¹ Plut. *Ages.* 1.

¹⁰² Powell, 2010: 153; Plato. *Laws.* 633b; Thuc. 2.39.1; Arist. *Pol.* 1338b.

¹⁰³ Powell, 2010: 153.

¹⁰⁴ Cartledge, 1977: 16.

¹⁰⁵ Plut. *Mor.* 714b.

¹⁰⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 1256b; Cartledge, 1977: 23-26.

providing for the mess they were allocated to continuously to maintain citizenship¹⁰⁷. Participating in communal activities would have ensured that the primary groups established in the agoge would be brought into every day civilian life allowing for faster military unit cohesion when sent on campaign. Cartledge also notes that the new citizens were prevented from cohabiting with their wives until the age of 30¹⁰⁸, Powell suggests that this rule prevented variety in hoplite thought processes by diminishing the role of family¹⁰⁹ in favour of the indoctrinated state mentality. This allowed for focus being on the concept of the ideal citizen and preventing discrepancies in hoplite thought process and their actions as a result¹¹⁰. Powell's discussion on the Spartan state fearing weakness can also be evidenced by this rule, where femininity can be interpreted as a softness or weakness in the eyes of the state¹¹¹. This restriction on the social activity of Spartan hoplites suggests that the effectiveness of the military unit was reliant on the soldiers exhibiting the same attitudes in their personal lives as when on the battlefield.

Mobilising Spartan hoplites

As the Spartan citizenry were the primary units within its military, being a Spartan citizen and a hoplite were almost synonymous. During the period, Sparta was a unique exception to the standard formation of armies in that calling upon the citizenry to put aside their primary professions was not required. Other states such as Athens employed methods that can be likened to modern day conscription and appealed to a sense of civic duty¹¹². For the Spartan citizenry, being a soldier was their primary profession and was in line with the values of the state requiring very little recruitment.

Source material on rank assignments for the Spartan army are scarce. What the sources do provide is evidence on the importance of the Kings in mobilising the army and positions of honour. Xenophon details how the King will make a sacrifice to the gods under the

¹⁰⁷ Figueira, 1984: 88.

¹⁰⁸ Cartledge, 1977: 17.

¹⁰⁹ Powell, 2010: 156-7.

¹¹⁰ Powell, 2010: 156-7.

¹¹¹ Powell, 2010: 157.

¹¹² Friend, 2019: 5.

supervision of the Ephors¹¹³. This duty was the sole responsibility of the King and was taken very seriously. If the sacrifice was interpreted to be favourable, the King would gather the “colonels, captains, lieutenants, commandants of foreign contingents, commanders of the baggage train, and, in addition, any general from the states who chooses to be present”¹¹⁴. This section gives insight into the various ranks within Spartan units however the source material is limited in how these ranks are assigned. Xenophon provides further insight still into the number of roles present in the command structure; “The men so equipped were divided into six regiments of cavalry and infantry. The officers of each citizen regiment comprise one colonel, four captains, eight first lieutenants and sixteen second lieutenants”¹¹⁵. Suggesting that there was a heavy command structure in place intended to hold the unit’s discipline to maintain unit cohesion and combat effectiveness.

Plutarch presents evidence of a place of honour in the military formation beside the King reserved for the winner of the great games¹¹⁶. Suggesting that honorary places within the army’s formation existed separate to the rank structure. This role presents a unique opportunity for an increase in battlefield morale developed outside of a live combat situation. Not only for the individual awarded the honour but for those who are inspired to compete in the games for that honour. Considering the perspective aimed towards ensuring the state’s survival, this can also be interpreted as a safeguarding measure on behalf of the state to have a publicly demonstrated fighter of superior skill set next to the King.

Ultimate authority to mobilise the Spartan army rested with the King, evidence suggests that the state participates in several rounds of diplomatic process such as the votes at a congress in Sparta in 423 BC¹¹⁷ to ensure the state truly intended to participate in a conflict. Parmeggiani highlights the importance of consideration for the democratic elements of going to war¹¹⁸ and the evidence presented in Thucydides. In this specific example, a first vote took place to determine whether the Athenians had breached the Thirty Years Peace,

¹¹³ Xen. *Con. Lac.* 13.2-3.

¹¹⁴ Xen. *Con. Lac.* 13.5.

¹¹⁵ Xen. *Const. Lac.* 11.

¹¹⁶ Plut. *Lyc.* 22.4

¹¹⁷ Thuc. 1.87.2; Parmeggiani, 2018: 244.

¹¹⁸ Parmeggiani, 2018; Williams, 1998: 97; Thuc. 1.118.3.

then a second vote took place on whether the allies wished to go to war¹¹⁹. Following these votes, Sparta consulted the oracles at Delphi to determine if “fighting against Athens would be the best thing”¹²⁰. These multiple rounds of democratic process and diplomacy showcase Spartan reluctance to engage in conflict and while the King was able to mobilise the army, the call to arms required evidence that the course of action was the correct one. These cases evidence the indoctrination of the citizenry into the role of the King in military matters from carrying out religious rituals (sacrifices, sending for consultation with the oracles etc.) through to awarding positions of honour beside them on the battlefield.

Glorious death and a disgraced life; punishment of Spartan cowardice

For this paper, a discussion of social practices in relation to cowardice and punishment in Sparta are relevant. Where the source material celebrates the greatness of Spartan hoplites, this identification allows this chapter to determine whether individual fear of being branded a coward has an impact on maintaining a willingness to fight and supplement other social practices like agoge training. In a state who prided themselves on the ideal citizen who represented key state principles, “those who did not honour these principles laid themselves open to sanction”¹²¹. Powell discusses the “public outing of cowards... [who were] compelled to broadcast their misery”¹²² were forced to do so for two reasons. The first would be personal punishment, submitting to the humiliation inflicted by the wider citizenry meant that “at a personal level, the risk of military failure was very real”¹²³. The second reason is that the disgraced individual would serve as a lesson to the rest of the citizen body¹²⁴. There are scholarly discussions on the treatment of cowards in Sparta, identifying both legal¹²⁵ and social sanctions¹²⁶ enforced by both the state and the fellow citizenry.

¹¹⁹ Thuc. 1.87.4.

¹²⁰ Thuc. 1.118.3; Parmeggiani, 2018: 244.

¹²¹ Ducat, 2006. 1.

¹²² Powell, 2010: 153.

¹²³ Powell, 2010: 153; Hdt. 7.231-2; Hdt. 9.71; Xen. *Const. Lac.* 9.5.

¹²⁴ Powell, 2010: 153.

¹²⁵ MacDowell, 1986: 42-6.

¹²⁶ Link, 1994: 22-3, 84-5.

Ducat identifies Sparta did not have specific definitions to identify and punish cowardice in comparison to their contemporaries in Athens, but there are identifiable common themes; defaulting, abandoning a post and in a broad term cowardice¹²⁷. These themes considered the details of the specific situation that has occurred rather than a dedicated set of criteria to hold individuals to account. For example, in the case of 'defaulting', Spartan hoplites are prevented by law and social expectation from retreating or fleeing from an enemy¹²⁸. This does not however, apply to tactical withdrawals which can be considered lawful if carried out under orders¹²⁹. This can be seen during the Battle of Plataea in 479BC when the allied forces called for a tactical withdrawal¹³⁰. The Spartan contingent initially refused, explaining that a retreat would bring dishonour to Sparta¹³¹ but the unit did withdraw alongside the wider force suggesting that the tactical withdrawal was acceptable under their understanding of their state's doctrine. Ducat continues to propose that the contributing factor in these cases is that "runaways stop fighting"¹³² whereas a tactical withdrawal is, in its simplest terms, reorganising the army in a different location with the intention to continue to fight.

Ducat also discusses that being evacuated because of being wounded is not the same as demonstrating cowardice and the resulting evacuees were not branded tremblers as a result¹³³. Ducat agrees with Loraux's assertion that the source material presents an ethical judgement on Xenophon's part rather than accepted practice¹³⁴. Ducat questions whether an ethical "notion of salvation" has any place in these scenarios¹³⁵, rather that the removal of the injured from the battlefield is a military and tactical decision. Based on the logic that those injured would be unable to defend themselves or their allies, having those injured present in the thick of battle would divide the attention of the allied force between the combat in front of them and the defence of their allies to prevent death or capture¹³⁶. This

¹²⁷ Ducat, 2006. 10.

¹²⁸ Hdt. 7.104.

¹²⁹ Ducat, 2006. 10-11.

¹³⁰ Hdt. 9.53.4.

¹³¹ Hdt. 9.53.

¹³² Ducat, 2006. 11.

¹³³ Ducat. 2006. 11.

¹³⁴ Ducat, 2006. 11; Loraux, 1977: 111-113.

¹³⁵ Ducat, 2006. 11-12.

¹³⁶ Spencer and Harrison, 2008: 176. The impact of soldiers being held captive and being used as political bargaining tools is seen in the period, including the Peloponnesian Wars within the same century.

makes for a logical and sound tactical decision to remove those injured from the field of battle suggesting they were unable to fight rather than an unwillingness to which would align with the mentality of tremblers.

Plutarch provides an overview of the citizen rights that tremblers lost¹³⁷ but also presents interesting evidence of when application of these laws have been avoided¹³⁸. The conflicting evidence suggests that the treatment and punishment of tremblers was often not applied consistently. In the case of Aristodemus, a survivor of Thermopylae, he was met with harsh treatment from the wider citizenry, Ducat argues that this harsh treatment contrasts with the treatment of the prisoners of Sphacteria calling it lenient by comparison¹³⁹. The actions of the Spartan forces at Sphacteria represent one of the first times a Spartan force surrendered rather than fighting until the annihilation of its unit. Considering the evidence discussed in this chapter so far regarding the treatment of Tremblers both by the citizenry and by the state through Law, the Battle of Sphacteria showcases where the compliance relationship between Sparta and its unit broke down and the social practices indoctrinated into its hoplites were overcome by the desire for self-preservation. In the case of a force surrendering and the resulting capture, Ducat suggests that “prisoners are an effective weapon in the hands of the enemy”¹⁴⁰ and this is what the Spartan state held against those captured on Sphacteria. Ducat also suggests that tremblers lost the right to fight in the states army, on the grounds that “his presence could deprive the phalanx of the cohesion that it was indispensable to it”¹⁴¹ while the impact on individuals combat resilience is a valid justification for this assumption, evidence argues the contrary; the case of Aristodemus fighting alongside the Spartan forces at Plataea after surviving Thermopylae indicates it is possible for an individual branded a trembler to remain within the Spartan fighting force. This could be a result of state willingness to allow tremblers the opportunity to redeem themselves and by extension restore the honour of the state but could also be a result of the state being one of the smallest in terms of citizenry¹⁴² and regardless of the individuals standing in relation to the remaining citizenry, they held a significant level of combat

¹³⁷ Plut. *Ages.* 30.3.

¹³⁸ Plut. *Ages.* 30.4.

¹³⁹ Ducat, 2006. 7.

¹⁴⁰ Thuc. 4.40.1; Ducat, 2006: 11.

¹⁴¹ Ducat, 2006: 16.

¹⁴² Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1; Powell, 2010: 151.

training as a result of the agoge and wasting that combat potential is illogical. Particularly when accounting for the decline in the number of individuals who held full Spartan citizenship during the 4th Century¹⁴³.

Scholarship argues that the punishment of tremblers was enforced less frequently from around 331BC, likely due to “many traditional Spartan practices... [falling] into disuse”¹⁴⁴.

This could be attributed to social change in the state alongside the long-term impact this kind of negative reinforcement has had on psychological resilience in the citizen population over time. This social practice begins to break down the view of Sparta as a moral state, whose citizens dedicate themselves to the art of war to further the aims of the state.

Instead, supporting the theory presented by Powell that the Spartan state was merely afraid to present weakness to their enemies. The treatment of tremblers subverts the idealised moral/normative compliance relationship. While the state ideals instilled in soldiers during their early education aimed to support an idea of Spartan combat effectiveness, the citizenry were coerced through fear of being branded a trembler and facing the social and legal consequences of this judgement, to avoid certain behaviours that would be deemed cowardly.

To conclude, Spartan society was designed to present an aura of strength in the eyes of enemies abroad and those closer to home¹⁴⁵. The system was built around interworking social practices that indoctrinated the citizenry into following a disciplined doctrine that produced a combat ready citizen fighting force. The impact of the mirage is clear when assessing the social practices of the Spartan state. Where our evidence is provided predominantly by authors from alternative geographical and cultural backgrounds and in some cases, existing well after the events they are describing, has influenced the source materials presentation of a moral and valour driven state. Comparatively this paper has accepted the perception that a Spartan fear of weakness¹⁴⁶ led to the implementation of

¹⁴³ Cartledge, 2002: 118.

¹⁴⁴ Ducat, 2006: 2; Ehrenberg, 1937; Loraux, 1997: 108-9.

¹⁴⁵ Powell, 2010: 152.

¹⁴⁶ Arist. *Pol.* 2.1269a.

specific systems like its educational system to produce combat effective soldiers. With this being the result of a desire to defend the state rather than coveting combat¹⁴⁷.

Primary groups were formed during participation in the education system, instilling the ideas of the state into future citizens and were further developed in the military units by requiring citizens to participate in social norms, such as dining together in a common mess¹⁴⁸, to prevent subversion from the state ideals. The state's compliance relationship most accurately reflected in Sparta is a moral/normative relationship due to the system appealing to the individual's moral commitment to upholding specific ideals related to strength and the survival of the state (moral). There is an argument that the state practice towards those branded tremblers leans into a coercive power dynamic, however the indoctrination through external conditioning experienced by all citizenry into this mentality suggests that the treatment of these individuals are in line with the values of the state and were broadly accepted by the citizenry in their understanding of their civic expectations and ethical correctness (normative). This is supported by the actions of those branded tremblers who attempt to redeem themselves in the eyes of the state and their fellow citizen¹⁴⁹.

This chapter has identified these social practices and the establishment of the layers of the methodology to bring Crowley's methodology into a Spartan context. The subsequent chapter applies this methodology to a specific case study of Spartan conflict while accounting for the impact of the state's social practices on individual and unit wide combat resilience.

¹⁴⁷ Cartledge, 1977: 11.

¹⁴⁸ Cartledge, 1977: 16.

¹⁴⁹ Hdt. 7.232.

Chapter 4: Specific instances of Spartan combat

Classical combat was harrowing. Van Wees describes the experience of classical combat as “physically and psychologically draining”¹⁵⁰. The preparation for battle was often a means to maintain a semblance of calm before engaging in the brutal exertion combat brings. From repainting shields to sharpening spears or in the case of the Spartan hoplites, braiding their hair¹⁵¹. Wees notes that it was important for hoplites to keep a handle on all emotions, not just fear, to maintain unit cohesion and prevent mistakes that would result in defeat¹⁵².

Most city states had laws and social norms that resulted in the punishment and ostracism of cowards, in the case of Sparta cowards were branded ‘tremblers’¹⁵³ and expected to forgo personal grooming and alter their appearances so the rest of the citizenry would know of their shame alongside losing their citizen status¹⁵⁴. Such punishments suggest that the Spartan hoplite was not infallible and supports the importance of individual resilience to combat stress. With the social practices employed in Sparta to prepare its soldiers for the strain of combat and the punishments outlined should they bring dishonour to the state, this chapter explores specific instances of combat during the second invasion of Xerxes in the 5th century.

The Persian Wars demonstrate Sparta being a respected leader and possessing military might that is recognised by its allies when facing a ‘foreign’ threat. This conflict provides examples of alliances with other poleis with differing ideals and how they were set aside to create an early example of Greek identity. Comparatively, the Peloponnesian Wars demonstrate internal Greek conflict that results from these differing ideals and demonstrates a political approach to Spartan military tactics and the influence their allies had on the way they conducted war. Looking at specific instances of Spartan combat show the compliance relationships between the state and its soldiers as well as how the compliance relationships of other city states work alongside one another towards a broader goal. When our ancient authors discuss specific instances of conflict, it is rare for them to stress the impact of combat on the psychological well-being of individuals. When there is

¹⁵⁰ Van Wees, 2004: 192.

¹⁵¹ Van Wees, 2004: 192; Hdt. 7.208-9.

¹⁵² Van Wees, 2004: 193; Thuc. 5.70; Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.7

¹⁵³ Van Wees, 2004: 194.

¹⁵⁴ Xen. 9.4-5; Plut. *Ages.* 30.3-4.

discussion of themes like morale, this can be more abstract or broader in scope, tied into discussions of (idiosyncratic) Spartan social practices that tie into warfare. The exception explored in this chapter are the three survivors of Thermopylae discussed by Herodotus, which will be discussed in the context of the Battle of Thermopylae.

The Persian Wars

The Persian wars are well documented in surviving ancient sources, from the original invasion of Greece by the Persian Emperor Darius¹⁵⁵ through to the final defeat of his son Xerxes by the opposing allied Greek states¹⁵⁶. The prelude to the Battle of Thermopylae begins with Darius' defeat at Marathon in 490BC¹⁵⁷ which forced him to retreat from Hellas, marking the end of the first Persian invasion of Greece. Bringing with him a second army, which ancient sources suggest numbered over five million strong including the supporting supply chain¹⁵⁸, Xerxes crossed the Hellespont back into Greece utilising bridges designed by Egyptian and Phoenician engineers¹⁵⁹, many Greek city states came together to determine the way they would respond to the renewed Persian threat.

Battle of Thermopylae 480BC

The Battle of Thermopylae is one of the most well-known instances of Spartan combat and is utilised even in the modern day to exemplify courage and sacrifice. The lead up to this battle demonstrates Spartan interactions with other poleis and the impact of their self-perceived superiority, as a result of their social system indoctrination. The Battle of Thermopylae presents a key case study in the impact the states social practices had on maintaining morale in the face of overwhelming odds.

During a congress at the Isthmus in Corinth in 481BC, a year prior to the Battle of Thermopylae, over seventy Greek states gathered to determine what approach would be

¹⁵⁵ Diod. 11.2.1.

¹⁵⁶ Hdt. 9.76.1.

¹⁵⁷ Hdt. 6.116.

¹⁵⁸ Hdt. 7.186; Scholarship debates these figures and present alternative estimations to the size of Persian forces such as Delbrueck, 1887: 164 estimating around 55,000 fighting men at most.

¹⁵⁹ Hdt. 7.34.1.

taken to respond to the Persian invasion under Emperor Xerxes¹⁶⁰. Long term adversaries Sparta and Athens put aside their differences, with Leonidas, King of Sparta, taking on the overall leadership of a coalition of over thirty city states¹⁶¹. It can be inferred from source material that their overall leadership was allocated as a result of a broad acceptance of their capability as a fighting unit and for producing superior commanders. Diodorus records an interaction between Xerxes and a Spartan exile, Demaratus, who indicated to Xerxes that not only are the Spartan hoplites better fighters than the Persian army they would also fight harder and risk losing their lives to maintain their freedom from Persian rule¹⁶². Justin develops this interaction further stating that, even in exile, Demaratus sent information regarding Xerxes' invasion to the Greek forces¹⁶³. These introductory passages showcase a cultural perception that the Greeks had a higher quality of bravery and combat capability than the Persian forces as well as a deep-rooted loyalty to the Spartan state that would form the core of combat motivation.

The allied Greek forces sent spies into Asia to determine Xerxes' movements¹⁶⁴. Upon being discovered, Xerxes had his men show the spies the entirety of his army and sent them on their way unharmed¹⁶⁵. This decision was made by Xerxes based on two factors; executing three men would not cripple the Greek force but the damage they could do alive by taking back the knowledge on what they had seen was worth more to their war effort¹⁶⁶. This demonstrates a classical awareness of the impact of morale in relation to the performance of soldiers in battle and the anxieties that might arise when facing an enemy force with superior numbers. Herodotus attributes Xerxes' actions to prevent the allied Greeks from being able to fight and "that there would be no need to march against them"¹⁶⁷ as a result.

Alongside the spies sent into Asia, envoys were sent to other poleis to gather allies. This included to Argos,¹⁶⁸ who denied the request based on Sparta's refusal to relinquish

¹⁶⁰ Hdt. 7.175.

¹⁶¹ Hdt. 7.204.

¹⁶² Diod. 11.6; Just. 2.10.

¹⁶³ Just. 2.10.

¹⁶⁴ Hdt. 7.146.1.

¹⁶⁵ Hdt. 7.146.3.

¹⁶⁶ Hdt. 7.147.1.

¹⁶⁷ Hdt. 7.147.1.

¹⁶⁸ Hdt. 7.149.

command of the land forces,¹⁶⁹ and Sicily¹⁷⁰. Interestingly in Syracuse, Gelon made it clear that Sparta was no ally of theirs based on Sparta's previous failures to provide aid to Syracuse when called on¹⁷¹, but was willing to put this aside and made an offer of over twenty-eight thousand soldiers of various skill set, triremes, and provisions until the end of the war¹⁷². This contribution would have drastically increased the force available to field at Thermopylae and bolster the naval contingent sent to Artemision. The impact of an increase in the allied Greek force size—even though they would still have been outnumbered—on morale would have been overwhelmingly positive and from a tactical perspective increased their probability of success. The condition Gelon set in place for this to be granted was Gelon would be the general of the allied Greek force¹⁷³. The Spartan envoy rejected this immediately, stating “put the thought out of your minds that we will give up the command to you.”¹⁷⁴ Demonstrating Spartan perception of the capability of their Kings as Generals and the states elitist mentality regarding military matters. It also demonstrates consistency in this approach when accounting for the same reaction in Argos¹⁷⁵.

This is further demonstrated by Gelon's offer to split the command with the land forces to remain under Spartan command while the fleet would be under Gelon's command¹⁷⁶. At this stage, the Athenian envoy refused him, stating that when Gelon was looking to command the whole army they could rely on the Spartans to refuse him but when splitting the command based on land and sea, they were required to speak for themselves as command of the fleet was not something that the Spartan commanders wanted for themselves¹⁷⁷. This exchange highlights the Spartan envoys confidence in the performance of a Spartan commander leading a ground force. It also demonstrates the envoys from different states, who as individuals would hold their own beliefs and have different life experiences, ensuring that their state is formally represented in the united army command structure. This passage demonstrates military cohesion between Athenian and Spartan

¹⁶⁹ Hdt. 7.149.2.

¹⁷⁰ Hdt. 7.153.1.

¹⁷¹ Hdt. 7.158.1.

¹⁷² Hdt. 7.158.4.

¹⁷³ Hdt. 7.158.5.

¹⁷⁴ Hdt. 7.159.

¹⁷⁵ Hdt. 7.149.2.

¹⁷⁶ Hdt. 7.160.2.

¹⁷⁷ Hdt. 7.161.2.

forces and their united interest in securing a powerful ally. The work of Funke discusses the strength of the Syracusan military¹⁷⁸. Considering the capability of this military force it demonstrates why the Syracusians were an attractive ally for the Greeks in 480 BC and emphasises the superiority mindset demonstrated by the Spartans in this interaction.

The allies decided to utilise a two-front defence, with Themistocles leading a naval assault on the Persian naval fleet in Artemision¹⁷⁹ while Leonidas lead a ground force to the pass at Thermopylae¹⁸⁰. Due to a religious festival taking place in Sparta, Leonidas was unable to commit the full strength of the Spartan military to the battle¹⁸¹. Cartledge argues that describing Sparta as militaristic is inaccurate, making the case that they are disciplinarian and while they produced one of the best ground units of the period the State was not actively seeking war¹⁸². Cartledge also suggests that the Spartan state had reservations about Thermopylae, as seen by the ephors concern Leonidas was marching with “too few soldiers”¹⁸³. Leonidas in this case refused the order to take more soldiers, taking three hundred of Spartan veteran soldiers to join the allied force¹⁸⁴. Herodotus suggests this is due to the Spartan opinion that the battle would not be over as quickly as it was and that the Spartan force sent with Leonidas was intended to maintain the morale of their allies and prevent desertion¹⁸⁵. Diodorus records similar sentiments, identifying the Locrians, a people who resided close to the passes of Thermopylae, who had already made offerings to the Persian forces change their minds and ally with the Greek forces “when they learned Leonidas had arrived at Thermopylae”¹⁸⁶. This passage demonstrates the impact Sparta has on its allies. In a context where the hoplites of Sparta are renowned for their phalanx combat, for other states whose military preparations or combat capability are not of the same calibre it drastically increased morale in those other states to have a powerful ally¹⁸⁷. This idea supports the development of a moral/normative compliance relationship between

¹⁷⁸ Funke, 2006: 153-173.

¹⁷⁹ Hdt. 7.177; Hammond, 1996: 5.

¹⁸⁰ Diod. 11.4.2.

¹⁸¹ Hdt. 7.206.

¹⁸² Cartledge, 2013: 83.

¹⁸³ Diod. 11.4.3; Cartledge, 2006: 95-96.

¹⁸⁴ Hdt. 7.206.

¹⁸⁵ Hdt. 7.206.

¹⁸⁶ Diod. 11.4.

¹⁸⁷ Diod. 11.8.

Sparta and its allies. Due to the driving factor in the Locrians being their state survival (moral drive) and its dependency on the perceived strength of the state.

The battle lasted for several days and was preventing Xerxes from making further progress through the pass. The utilisation of feigned retreat tactics¹⁸⁸ and combat shift patterns¹⁸⁹ employed by the allied Greeks, and the topography of the pass rendered Xerxes' superior numbers useless¹⁹⁰. Herodotus notes that the ranks of the allied Greek phalanx maintained a specific structure. While the anecdote can be considered a minor detail in the recount of events it provides an interesting consideration in the context of combat motivation. When considering the purpose of a phalanx formation to be to present an unbreakable wall in the face of an enemy—and in the case of Sparta to hold a disciplined line that would advance as one¹⁹¹—in a phalanx where the ranks are allocated based on the soldier's home nation unit cohesion would be higher within those ranks and they can be considered as primary groups. Lendon presents an interesting idea that "The phalanx evolved not only to allow satisfactory competition between individuals; it evolved also to constitute a symmetrical contest between the contending cities"¹⁹². Given the context of the conflict being to hold a specified position against a foreign entity, Thermopylae would give this idea credit. Further, the wider military unit layering primary groups who are bonded through civic identity and cycling them out to prevent physical exhaustion, it can be inferred that this military unit structure would have an overwhelmingly positive impact on morale as a result of a soldier seeing their countrymen either side of them rather than men from different poleis. This conflict presents a unique opportunity for different units of varying combat capability who are unused to fighting together to achieve an unprecedented level of cohesion. The impact of facing an alien invader rather than a neighbour they know and understand could account for this rapid cohesion and relationship development.

The actions of Ephialtes represented a turning point in the battle. Utilising information about a mountain path provided by Ephialtes¹⁹³, Xerxes was able to station forces on the far

¹⁸⁸ Hdt. 7.211.

¹⁸⁹ Hdt. 7.212.2.

¹⁹⁰ Hdt. 7.211.

¹⁹¹ Lendon, 2005: 63.

¹⁹² Lendon, 2005: 63.

¹⁹³ Hdt. 7.213.1.

side of the pass after scaring off the Phocians stationed there to guard it¹⁹⁴. As a result the allied forces no longer had the topographical advantage. Herodotus records two possible reasons for the retreat of a majority of the Thermopylae defensive forces, the first being that consultation of seers saw the impending death of the allied force which resulted in the desire to withdraw and the second that Leonidas sent them away himself to stage a second front with the remaining Spartan army¹⁹⁵. Diodorus presents the first narrative, indicating its popularity with ancient authors, going as far as to suggest those retreating were derided by Leonidas for their lack of courage¹⁹⁶. Regardless of the reason for the withdrawal of the force, the remaining numbers at Thermopylae included the three hundred Spartans who marched with Leonidas, seven hundred Thesbians and four hundred Thebans¹⁹⁷.

Hammond discusses how Herodotus acknowledges the Thebans had been taken under the command of Leonidas due to an accusation of 'medism' or having the intention of siding with the Persians¹⁹⁸. This suggests an alienative/coercive compliance relationship between the Theban military unit and the Spartan state, a form of compliance relationship not utilised by the state on its own citizenry units. The Theban forces would have been unable to retreat while under the command of the Spartan unit intending to stay. That said, these soldiers would have needed to maintain a level of morale to enable them to fight. This could be attributed to a sense of civic pride, intending to disperse any rumour of their intention to medise. However, the source material indicates that the Thebans only fought as long as they had to¹⁹⁹, surrendering to the Persians once Leonidas had fallen and the remaining Spartan and Thespian force pushed forward in a final advance²⁰⁰. Their surrender according to Herodotus resulted in some of the Thebans being branded, which Hammond suggests was the treatment of runaway slaves²⁰¹. The Theban force likely knew they were outclassed by the Spartan forces and while they outnumbered the Spartans, the Thespian force was staying at the pass willingly which presented a specific scenario where the Thebans could have been more afraid of angering the Spartans, who they were familiar with in combat,

¹⁹⁴ Hdt. 7.218.

¹⁹⁵ Hdt. 7.219; Hdt. 7.220.1; Just. 2.11.

¹⁹⁶ Diod. 11.9.

¹⁹⁷ Hdt. 7.222.

¹⁹⁸ Hammond, 1996: 13; Hdt. 7.205. 2-3; Hdt. 7.222.

¹⁹⁹ Hammond, 1996: 14; Hdt. 7.233.2.

²⁰⁰ Hammond, 1996: 14; Hdt. 7.223.1.

²⁰¹ Hammond 1996: 14.

than a foreign enemy. This is supported by the Theban surrender when the primary coercive force, the Spartan unit, was neutralised.

During the final days of this specific instance of combat, the Battle of Thermopylae exemplifies one of the earliest examples of an organic development of ethnic identity. While individuals can identify with multiple identities and express them in a variety of contexts, in the case of Thermopylae, rather than being Thespian or Spartan the soldiers present at the pass were Greek. Meaning those who could have been enemies prior to the invasion of Xerxes, decided to stand together demonstrating the development of military unit cohesion on a significantly larger scale. The morale maintained by the Spartan soldier to stay, and fight is reflective of their state first mentality but highlights an interesting caveat in the form of the Thespians who also remained behind at the pass. Without the state indoctrination the Spartans experienced, and training provided from a young age through the agoge, it demonstrates the compliance relationship between these men and their own home states. A sense of civic pride and desire to protect their homeland enabled those individuals to remain with the Spartans for who, following the order of their King, there would be no other alternative. Diodorus suggests that Leonidas' intention to remain at the pass was a suicide mission that the Spartan troops were enthusiastic to undertake²⁰². Implying that their conditioning to desire for a glorious death was much higher than self-preservation instincts seen in the flight response. This can also be attributed to the treatment of Tremblers in Sparta where there were severe socio-political sanctions for those hippeis who outlive a conflict in which a King dies²⁰³. Justin additionally states that an additional motivating factor for these hoplites was to "avenge their own deaths"²⁰⁴ indicating that through their social conditioning towards a state first mentality they still held an appreciation for their lives as individual members of the citizenry and fought for civic pride.

Direct application of this paper's methodology highlights Sparta's social practice of indoctrination to a state first mentality through its education system and its results in practice. The Spartan force demonstrates complete confidence in its command structure by following Leonidas, supplemented by the enforced treatment of those branded Tremblers,

²⁰² Diod. 11.9.

²⁰³ Thuc. 5.72.4; Ducat, 2006: 15.

²⁰⁴ Just. 2.11.

and a sense of civic pride which would push the Spartan citizenry to avoid this. Additionally, the way in which the envoys sent to Gelon before the battle turned down reinforcements for their army rather than remove command from a King demonstrates the clear hierarchy instilled in Spartan hoplites from a young age where losing the reinforcements was an acceptable alternative.

Survivors of Thermopylae

Herodotus records three distinct survivors of the Battle of Thermopylae. The first two, Eurytus and Aristodemus²⁰⁵ have already been discussed in the context of individual response to combat stress, but Herodotus records a potential second narrative. In the first narrative, Herodotus notes that the Spartan citizenry could have spared Aristodemus the level of scrutiny he endured if he had returned along with Eurytus rather than the latter joining the battle anyway²⁰⁶. In the second narrative, Aristodemus was a messenger who could have returned to the front in time for the battle but chose not to while other messengers returned and died²⁰⁷. Regardless of the particulars of the narrative, the repercussions were the same. Aristodemus was disgraced and without honour in the eyes of the citizenry²⁰⁸, “no Spartan would give him fire or speak to him... [and] taunted him by calling him Aristodemus the Trembler”²⁰⁹.

The third survivor Herodotus named is Pantites, who was a messenger sent to Thessaly²¹⁰ and was equally dishonoured on his return to Sparta. Contrasting the case of Aristodemus who sought redemption at a later conflict, Pantites hanged himself rather than face the continued dishonour of surviving the battle²¹¹. The contrasting reactions to the state enforced dishonour and alienation, which have massive psychological impacts of their own, of branded cowards can mirror the individual reaction to the initial stress stimuli.

²⁰⁵ Hdt. 7.231.

²⁰⁶ Hdt. 7.229.

²⁰⁷ Hdt. 7.230.

²⁰⁸ Hdt. 7.231.

²⁰⁹ Hdt. 7.231.

²¹⁰ Hdt. 7.232.

²¹¹ Hdt. 7.232.

The treatment of these survivors supports prior conclusions regarding state indoctrination. Where the expectation of these soldiers is instilled in the hoplites themselves by the agoge, this expectation is enforced by the wider citizen body including those who do not serve in the state military, such as Spartan women²¹².

Battle of Plataea 479BC

Following the Battle of Thermopylae, the ancient source material—in particular Diodorus—records two varying perceptions of the morale of the Spartan forces. In the first instance, the materials function as a complimentary eulogy that aims to immortalise the heroism of those who fell at Thermopylae²¹³ to give the impression that subsequent victories were incentivised by those sacrifices. The second passage, two chapters later, suggest that Spartan morale was at a low point after the loss and subsequent retreat to Salamis²¹⁴. These opposing viewpoints suggest that Diodorus' distance from the events at Thermopylae and Plataea have enabled the source material to hold multiple viewpoints on their effect on the morale of the Spartan hoplites in this period between battles.

Although Thermopylae was a victory for Xerxes, the Persian forces continued their invasion and suffered two decisive defeats. The first, at the hands of the Athenian-led fleet at Salamis²¹⁵. Following this out of fear that the Athenians would destroy the bridges used to cross the Hellespont and strand him in Greece, Xerxes fled back to Ionia and appointed his general Mardonius to continue the ground assault²¹⁶. The second defeat took place at Plataea in 479BC.

The allied Greeks had secured access to a river which would supply their forces with water while also limiting the effectiveness of the Persian cavalry²¹⁷, when the allied Greek forces were cut off from this water source, an Athenian commander Pausanias called for a tactical withdrawal at the request of the allied commanders²¹⁸. A Spartan commander,

²¹² Pomeroy, 2002: 51; Plut. *Mor.* 241.

²¹³ Diod. 11.11.

²¹⁴ Diod. 11.13.

²¹⁵ Hdt. 8.70.1.

²¹⁶ Diod. 11.19.6; Hdt. 8.115.1.

²¹⁷ Hdt. 9.50; Stephenson, 2016: 29-38.

²¹⁸ Hdt. 9.53.4.

Amompharetus, refused on the grounds a retreat would bring dishonour to Sparta²¹⁹. By the next morning, the Spartans had followed their allies and during the subsequent pitched battle Mardonius was killed and the Greek forces routed the remaining Persian allied forces who fell into disarray after their commander was killed²²⁰. This battle signified the end of the Persian Wars.

Plataea presents a second example of the influence that the threat of dishonour and the indoctrination to Spartan ideals has on its hoplites. In this case, it is best demonstrated by the exchange between Pausanias and Amompharetus. This example adds credit to the argument presented by Ducat suggesting that tactical withdrawals made under orders of a superior could be considered lawful²²¹ and those participating would not be subject to the sanctions of Tremblers. This mentality could be the justification for Amompharetus' change of heart.

Diodorus presents an interesting case where the morale of the allied forces was increased through competition with their allies;

“Nevertheless the powerful onset of the Greeks could be withstood neither by the wall the barbarians had erected not by their great numbers, but resistance of every kind was forced to give way; for it was a case of rivalry between the foremost peoples of Greece, the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians, who were buoyed up by reason of their former victories and supported by confidence in their valour.”²²²

This passage highlights two key motivators that maintained force morale: friendly competition and confidence born from prior victories. In the prior chapter, Diodorus records that the allied forces “endured every peril of battle willingly”²²³, this willingness can be attributed to a combination of honouring the sacrifices made at Thermopylae and an oath made prior to the battle²²⁴ as well as success of earlier skirmishes. Cartledge's thoughts on Thermopylae and the Spartan state's reluctance to engage in conflict unnecessarily can be linked to their concern regarding weakness at home and a helot revolt. His discussion also

²¹⁹ Hdt. 9.53.

²²⁰ Hdt. 9.63.2; Hdt. 9.65.1; Diod. 11.31.

²²¹ Ducat, 2006: 11.

²²² Diod. 11.32.4.

²²³ Diod. 11.31.1.

²²⁴ Diod. 11.29.3.

suggests that enthusiastic support of Leonidas' plan was the result of particularly zealous hoplites rather than a citizen wide blind devotion to the direction of their Kings. This is supported by Ducat's inference regarding the view of Tremblers who allowed the King to die being viewed worse than those who desert or lose their shield²²⁵.

In the lead up to this battle the allied forces repelled a night attack²²⁶ and killed a Persian cavalry commander, which bolstered their morale²²⁷. Both successes would instil a level of confidence in the forces capabilities and create optimism or hope in future success against the same enemy.

This conflict shows that Crowley's Athenian methodology is appropriate to apply to a Spartan context based on the parallels between the Spartan and Athenian hoplites behaviour. It reinforces the conclusion from the Thermopylae analysis relating to confidence in a Spartan hierarchy through the confidence expressed in the allied Greek forces superiority particularly under a Spartan commander. It also speaks to the view of the wider force on Spartan command structures in that the Athenian forces were willing to follow their orders and acknowledged their capability.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored key conflicts of the 5th Century, utilising examples from Sparta facing foreign and domestic threats. The evidence shows there was a classical understanding of morale and the impact it has on the performance of soldiers in the period²²⁸, informing the choices made by socio-political systems regarding the social practices it implements.

Sparta had promoted an image of strength, indoctrinating their citizens into a for-the-state mentality through its education system that has produced widely accepted, capable soldiers²²⁹. Additionally, the Battle of Thermopylae has evidenced the effect this has had on Sparta's allies²³⁰, as well as their dedication to their command structure, in particular their Kings²³¹. Modern scholars have argued that the battles where the Spartan ideal has been

²²⁵ Ducat, 2006: 14-15.

²²⁶ Diod. 11.30.2.

²²⁷ Diod. 11.30.4.

²²⁸ Hdt. 7.147.1.

²²⁹ Hdt. 7. 204.

²³⁰ Diod. 11.8.

²³¹ Hdt. 7.159.

glorified has been the result of 'zealous' members of the citizenry which is not representative of the Spartan state as a whole²³². Thermopylae is an example of the moral/normative compliance relationship being exemplified as a result. Comparatively, the Battle of Sphacteria evidences a breakdown in the indoctrination through education of Spartan soldiers and a case where the fear of being branded a Trembler was unable to overcome the survival instinct. These battles provide a glimpse into the social practices employed in Sparta to manage combat stress in action and can be used to assess the effectiveness of these practices outside the bounds of the Spartan state.

²³² Cartledge, 2013: 83.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to identify the social practices utilised by Sparta to mitigate the impact of combat on Spartan hoplites in the 5th century. By retrospectively applying a methodological framework designed by Jason Crowley²³³, updated with modern combat psychological studies²³⁴, this paper considered how Spartan soldiers maintained their morale during high stress situations. Utilising the framework designed by Crowley, this paper has been able to identify at what stages in the development of a Spartan citizen different relationships were established to promote combat resilience and unit cohesion.

The methodology framework identified three relationships that can be used to categorise the social practices used by Sparta to promote combat resilience amongst its citizens. These relationships are categorised as; the Primary Group, Military Unit and the relationship between the citizenry and the states Socio-Political system²³⁵. Applied to a Spartan context, the methodology identified three key social practices. The first being the structure of the state to prioritise military service for the male citizenry over alternative professions²³⁶. The second, its education system that indoctrinated its soldiers into a state first mentality²³⁷ and the third, its statewide treatment of those branded tremblers who exhibited cowardice in combat²³⁸.

The methodology identified the state's attempt to promote equality and avoidance of luxurious lifestyles²³⁹ as a key social practice, with modern scholarship and ancient source material suggest the state infrastructure was a result of the state's reluctance to show weakness to external forces as well as the helot population²⁴⁰. Issues with the source material due to the prominence of oral tradition and the mirage present challenges when identifying the effectiveness of this system²⁴¹. Based on the identified relationship combinations for the socio-political system this paper has acknowledged the moral/normative relationship to be the most applicable to 5th century Sparta while

²³³ Crowley, 2012.

²³⁴ Clemente-suarez, Palomera, and Robles-Peres, 2018; Bumgardner, 2022; Cardena and Ustinova, 2014.

²³⁵ Crowley, 2012.

²³⁶ Ridley, 1979: 508.

²³⁷ Powell, 2010: 156-7.

²³⁸ Hdt. 9.53; Ducat, 2006. 11; Loraux, 1997: 111-113.

²³⁹ Plut. *Lyc.* 8.

²⁴⁰ Powell, 2010: 152; Arist. *Pol.* 2. 1269a.

²⁴¹ Thuc. 1.4; Thuc. 1.9.

maintaining the state's disciplinarian²⁴² approach to maintaining acceptable citizen behaviour.

During the state's education system, soldiers formed primary group relationships through the rigorous training programme²⁴³, which began at an earlier age than their Athenian counterparts²⁴⁴. Faster unit cohesion when the soldiers were mobilised as part of Spartan forces could be attributed to the early formation of primary groups but further comparisons with other societies would allow for a stronger conclusion on this point. Due to the unique elements of Spartan society such as the common mess²⁴⁵, Primary Groups were promoted past the formal education system and into the citizens' place within wider society. Establishment of these primary groups would increase soldiers' confidence in their comrades and due to the expectation of all Spartan male citizens to serve as part of its military, the agoge provided an adept level of training that supplemented this confidence, thus having a direct positive impact on the morale of those soldiers heading into battle.

A key case study was the second invasion of Xerxes during the Persian Wars which demonstrated the cohesion of the wider military unit. From the state trust in its command structure, particularly the Kings²⁴⁶, through to the propaganda regarding Spartan hoplite supremacy in the period²⁴⁷. Modern scholarship identifies the mirage as a key consideration when working with the source material focused on this period²⁴⁸, this topic would benefit from further research in this area by identifying additional case studies up to and including the period of scholarly recognised Spartan decline. This would enable to the methodological framework to account for the impact of the mirage and issues with the source material such as non-Spartan authors recounting events from an earlier period.

Further consideration of additional social practices and their influence on combat resilience such as religious practice with specific reference to warfare cult practice (consultation of oracles, divination, hero cults and treatment of the war dead) would allow for a further study of Sparta in this area and further development of this psychological methodology. This

²⁴² Cartledge, 2013: 83.

²⁴³ Cartledge, 1977: 15-16.

²⁴⁴ Aristot. *Const. Ath.* 42.

²⁴⁵ Cartledge, 1977: 16.

²⁴⁶ Plut. *Ages.* 1;

²⁴⁷ Hodkinson, 2006.

²⁴⁸ Cartledge, 1977; Hodkinson, 2006.

would help to mitigate issues with elements of the methodology utilised by Crowley (deployment of Athenian soldiers) not being as clearly applicable to Spartan society due lack of surviving source material.

In conclusion, Spartan society was unique amongst its contemporaries. Creating a system to support the development of soldiers with a high level of resilience to the trauma of classical combat. This led to a cohesive fighting force capable of maintaining consistent morale throughout many instances of combat during the 5th century.

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