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The Archaic Greek Way of War: Reassessing Martial Identities

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Recently, classical scholarship has had to revisit a once-settled debate: the hoplite revolution and adoption of phalanx combat. The hoplite-exclusive phalanx, which needed cohesion, mass, and level terrain to most effectively operate is known to have become the standard form of Greek warfare in the Classical period. However, precisely when the shift was made from the fluid form of combat we see portrayed in Homeric epic to phalanx combat remains an unsettled topic in the history of Archaic Greece (ca. 650-480 BCE). Much as Peter Krentz, Hans Van Wees, and others have pointed out in their work over the past decade, there are several issues with what had over time become the established beliefs around this topic. This has rekindled long-standing debates once settled, revolving around competing theories on when the hoplite panoply, and phalanx formation itself, became standard practice among the Greek city states.

These varying schools of thought have focused on different pieces of evidence (archaeological, literary, etc.) and interpretations to try and place an origin point for

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when the Greek city states had adopted phalanx combat. The current debate focuses around Marathon (490 BCE), and Herodotus' depiction of Athenian battlefield actions. Herodotus' description seems to be indicative of changes to standard Greek combat doctrine, with evidence for the use of mixed formations, rather than having exclusively hoplite formations form the core of how Greeks fought. This has forced a reassessment of past certainties, most notably put forward by Hans Van Wees, who argued that Marathon helped to push the Greeks toward universal phalanx adoption rather than being evidence of established protocol. The Athenian victory demonstrated the efficacy of a massed charge by shock troops intent on closing the distance with an enemy known for ranged combat.[1] Moreover, Herodotus' depiction of the battle mentions the absence of light infantry or cavalry among the Athenians, implying that this was contrary to their normal practice. Further, while the triumph of Athenian arms at Marathon helped push the Greeks toward developing this formation further, there is still uncertainty over how much this formed Greek combat doctrine before the Persian invasion only ten years later.[2]

The previous orthodoxy that had dominated academic scholarship on Archaic Greek history had placed phalanx adoption far earlier, some as early as the seventh century, based on depictions in art and archaeological evidence. One key piece was the Chigi Vase, which seemed to depict lines of hoplites advancing into battle to the tune of pipes, which Thucydides describes in his account of the Spartans at the battle of Mantinea.[3] Others have cited Tyrtaios, the Spartan lyric poet, and his descriptions of combat between the Spartans and Messenians. However, these pieces of evidence are not conclusive, and there are inherent weaknesses to them. The Chigi Vase depiction, while ostensibly from the seventh century, shows far too much spacing between the lines, and each combatant carrying more than one spear in their off-hand. Concerning the literary evidence, Tyrtaios' depictions of combat also describe the presence of non-

[1] Hans Van Wees 2004 article prompted the discussion, and Krentz's work provides a solid outline of the discussion that followed, see Hans Van Wees, "The Development of the Hoplite Phalanx: Iconography and Reality in the 7th Century," in Hans Van Wees (ed.), *War and Violence in Classical Greece*, London, pp. 125-166, and Peter Krentz, "Fighting by the Rules: The Invention of the Hoplite Agôn," *The Journal of the Armenian School of Classical Studies at Athens,* Vol. 71 (2002), pp. 23-39, pg. 36ff.

[2] Peter Krentz, "Marathon and the Development of the Exclusive Hoplite Phalanx," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement*, No. 124 (2013): pp. 35-44, p. 36.

[3] Thucydides 5.70, Krentz, "Marathon" (2013), p. 39.

hoplite combatants within the formation, arguing against the use of an exclusive hoplite formation.[4] Together, these challenge the orthodox view that the Greeks had committed fully to phalanx-use by so early a date.

Other scholars take a different tack and have argued that phalanx warfare had been developed to preserve the hoplite-dominated socio-military system from the demographic decline that frequent, inter-state warfare would have caused. Such rigidly ordered combat allowed disputes to be settled in a relatively quick, and sometimes entirely bloodless, manner at a time when interstate warfare was frequent, and armies were composed of largely citizen forces.[5] There is, unfortunately, a lack of concrete evidence to support this view, and the existing literary evidence does not support any universal adoption before the upheaval of the Persian Wars.[6] Further, such a view relies on an equipment-centric argument, postulating that the hoplite panoply could only be used in one system, thus defining the operational combat doctrine. This argument rules out the idea that the panoply of a hoplite could have developed separately from the formation. Instead, it argues for a linked development – no phalanx without a hoplite, no hoplite without a phalanx.[7]

In hopes of approaching this debate from a different angle, we analyze a key change that can be seen in the attitudes toward and perceptions of martial practices as evidenced in the existing sources, comparing the prior system with what we can see in Herodotus. If there had been a significant change in how Greeks fought, one would expect to see a similar shift in the attitude of martial practice – both in the perceptions and expectations of those that were its main practitioners, and the society within which they operated. Any significant change in how a society prosecutes hostilities would be accompanied by a proportional shift in martial values and identity. By comparing the

[4] Krentz, "Marathon," pp. 36-39.
[5] Krentz, "Fighting by the Rules," p. 24.
[6] The term 'hoplite' does not see its first use in literature until the first quarter of the 5th C by Pindar (ca. 470 BCE), Herodotus' depictions of Thermopylae (use of feigned retreats) and Plataea (each Spartan was accompanied by seven helots not equipped as hoplites) do not support exclusively hoplite formations, and both Herodotus and Thucydides avoid using the term in their narratives. See Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.211.3, Fernando Echeverría Rey, "Hoplite and Phalanx in Archaic and Classical Greece: A Reassessment," *Classical Philology* 107 (2012): pp. 291-318, p. 300, and Krentz, "Marathon," p. 43.
[7] Ibid., p. 40.

evidence we have from before Marathon, and comparing it to that which followed, we can get a sense of how much Greek martial identity had changed.

On the one hand, we have the princes of Homer's epics, who were not shy at voicing their motivations. These princes enjoyed the benefits of station: wealth, comfort, etc., but to balance these benefits, ventured into the forefront of the battlefield. They acted as the rulers of their communities, but they felt compelled to meet certain social expectations. Those social expectations we find discussed in Homer's *Iliad*, in the snatches of hushed conversations and monologues by or between characters seemingly left unobserved. In those relatively quiet moments, our princes are allowed to drop their manly facades, let the exterior image of prince and warrior fall away, and be normal men for a moment. Raw and vulnerable, they express what it felt like to operate under the weight of the social gaze, to feel the weight of social expectation on their shoulders to act a certain way, and expose themselves to terrifying situations. While these moments were intended for entertainment, they can still provide us a sense of the perceived values of martial practitioners for this early period of Greek history.

For the period following Homer, there is no shortage of literary sources. For this study, we will focus our attention on evidence drawn from Herodotus, as the main thrust of the emerging debate is the result of new interpretations of his text. Herodotus' chronicle recounts the events, as they have been related to him through eyewitnesses, oral traditions, and written accounts, of the Persian Wars. While Herodotus does have a flair for the dramatic, he does present us with several key points that can give us an insight into the Archaic Greek martial identity. Most notably, there are several important episodes, namely his descriptions of Plataea and his discussion concerning Aristodemus specifically, that indicate subtle changes in the priorities of Greek martial identity. Herodotus' chronicle does not shy away from providing detail in some areas, either from a desire to entertain or to be exhaustive in his approach. In these episodes, we get hints, just as from Homer – intentional or otherwise – about greater trends and subtly shared ideals that might not be explicitly presented (i.e. common practices).

While ostensibly the perceived value of the martial practitioner has not changed, their role in their respective societies has changed significantly. In Homeric Greek society, largely modeled on Mycenaean ideas but reflecting Dark Age (ca. 1100–750 BCE) Greek society more generally, martial practitioners were the overlords of society,

ruling from the top of the hierarchy. They were the princes who, maintaining a retinue of companions, provided a degree of security to their communities through their skill-at-arms, and their reputations. In the Archaic Greek society that we see in Herodotus, martial practitioners have gone from being the few to the many. Tied as this is to a clear change in who among Greek communities fought, martial practitioners instead represented something akin to a citizen-soldier. In most cases they were citizens of their communities who, in time of war, would be called upon to go to the defence of their communities, providing their own arms and armour.

Examining the characteristics of the martial identity of each period (expectation, social obligation, martial values, etc.) on display in these works, we can get a sense as to how different Greek warfare had become. The greater the shift in that martial identity, the more indicative it will be of the degree to which warfare had changed in Greek minds. There is no argument that the warrior's social position had changed, and his role therein, but the greater the change in how he was expected to fight, the greater the variation there would be in martial identity.

Naturally, before delving into such a complicated discourse, some mention should be made concerning our sources. Homer's epics represent some of the earliest surviving works in all of Western literature, but they should not be seen as a single, monolithic creation.[8] Multiple schools of thought have theorized how the Homeric corpus has come down to us through the ages, and the debate between them remains unsettled. The Analyst school, for example, posits that Homer represents a layered construction built around a core tale, an initial composition, which was then expanded over time.[9] The Unitarian school, meanwhile, argues for the idea of a singular act of composition, espousing the idea that the artistic unity of the piece points toward a sole composer.[10] The Parry-Lord Oralist school, somewhat paralleling the Analyst theory, explains the composition of the Homeric corpus through oral poetry, resulting in the accumulation of episodes, with new layers being added to the story resulting from

[8] For more discussion of Homer's textual transmission, see M.L. West, *The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition and Analytical Commentary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3, and Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1996, pp. 109-110.

[9] Philip H. Young, *The Printed Homer: A 3,000 Year Publishing and Translation History of the Iliad and the Odyssey*, (London: McFarland & Co., 2003), p. 21.

[10] Despite the errors, inconsistencies, and gaps that scholars have pointed out in the narrative. See Young, *The Printed Homer,* pp. 19-22.

improvisation in the moment of performance. This was done by performers to make the story more reflective of new audiences or locales, incorporating local heroes that, in some cases, became permanent fixtures in the corpus, such as Sarpedon, Glaukos, and Aeneas, among others.[11]

Ultimately, the manner in which the Homeric corpus came into existence does not ultimately influence what it presents to us. These works, while ostensibly targeted at an event in the distant Greek past – the end of the Mycenaean period (ca. 1600-1100 BCE) – reflect the world of Dark Age Greece. While Mycenaean and Bronze Age elements are present to give the story the fixtures of greater antiquity, the simple warrior society we see depicted does not match the sophisticated palace culture of Mycenaean society.[12] Instead, it better represents the society of Dark Age Greece resulting from the downfall of Mycenaean palace culture, and the loss of central planning, with the ruling elite replaced by aristocratic federations acting as guardians and rulers. The rustic aristocracy we see in Homer is a reflection of that system of petty warfare, and personal government dependent on the personal qualities of leaders – not the organized or stable society of Mycenae's palaces.[13]

While Homer's work contains elements of Mycenaean culture and practice, we can establish a rough idea of the period his work was contemporary with. The typically accepted date for the fall of Troy is around 1200 BCE, with the full text of the Iliad becoming available from at least the end of the sixth century.[14] It was intended to entertain a Hellenic audience who likely could draw some kind of lineage to the heroes depicted therein. This is due to the Peisistratid recension, wherein the Athenian tyrant, or one of his sons, commissioned a standardization of the text for recitation in the

[11] Each of these characters represent traditions from different periods. See Young, *The Printed Homer,* pp. 22-28, West, *The Making of the Iliad* pp. 63-65, and Albert B. Lord, "Homer as Oral Poet," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 72 (1968): pp. 1-46.

[12] Young, *The Printed Homer,* pp. 30-31, and Ruth Scodel, *Listening to Homer: Tradition, Narrative, and Audience*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 2.

[13] Joachim Latacz, *Homer: His Art and His World*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 40, and O.T.P.K. Dickinson, "Homer, the Poet of the Dark Age," *Greece and Rome*. 33 (1986): pp. 20-37, pp. 32-33.

[14] Richard Lattimore, "Introduction," in Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, Richard Lattimore (trans.), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 11-55, pp. 13, 18.

rhapsodic competition during the Great Panathenaia.[15] Notably, it was not edited to target an Attic audience, as there are few if any, references to the Athenians. This tells us that it was already a well-established text at that point, pushing its origin well back into the Dark Age period.[16] Thus, it can be said to largely reflect society before the reforms of the Archaic period of Greek society that is the purview of Herodotus' work.

Herodotus, as a source, is much easier to situate in the grand scheme of Greek history. Hailing from Halicarnassus on the Ionian Coast of the Aegean Sea, Herodotus has a simple goal: he wanted to record the deeds of Greeks and barbarians (Persians) and why they fought, so it would not be lost to antiquity. By his own reckoning, Herodotus places himself no more than four hundred years after Homer, which coincides with our own approximation based on the Peisistratid recension.[17] Further, as Marincola has pointed out, while we are not certain that Herodotus' work is complete, we can place his work and performances roughly between the 450s and 420s BCE based on dateable references within it. The last such reference comes to 430 BCE, and he is believed to have died shortly afterward, between 430 and 425 BCE.[18] This situates Herodotus comfortably in the generation following the events of the Persian Wars, the main focus of the second part of this study, and thus his work represents an important access point to the perceptions of martial value and expectation in the fifth century. It is necessary to take into account a degree of exaggeration in his work, glorifying as he does the actions of his predecessors, as well as his own pro-Hellenic leanings.

We begin our examination of these comparable martial identities with Homeric society as revealed in the Iliad. As stated above, Homer is depicting largely Dark Age Greek society with Bronze Age and Mycenaean characters, heroes, and accoutrements (i.e. tower shields, boar-tusk helmets, bronze weapons, etc.) mixed in to better indicate the antiquity of depicted events.[19] Within that depiction there are some key points

[15] This was a religious festival held every four years in Athens. They included athletic competition, religious events, and other cultural contests. See Young, *The Printed Homer* p. 30, and Lattimore, "Introduction," p. 32.
[16] West, *The Making of the Iliad* pp. 74-76, and Young, *The Printed Homer,* pp. 39-42.
[17] Herodotus, *The Histories,* 2.53.
[18] This later mention concerns the deme of Decelea in the aftermath of Plataea presents an endpoint to his material. See John Marincola, "Introduction," in Herodotus, *The Histories*, Aubrey De Selincourt (trans.), (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), pp. ix-xxxix, pp. xii-xiii.
[19] Young, *The Printed Homer,* p. 30.

where the expectations placed upon Greek heroes are expressed in no uncertain terms. One of the earliest moments we see is that of Agamemnon scolding those who hang back from the fighting:

> Son of Poteos, the king supported of God: and you, too,
> you with your mind forever on profit and your ways of treachery,
> why do you stand here skulking aside, and wait for the others?
> For you two it is becoming to stand among the foremost
> fighters, and endure your share of the blaze of battle;
> since indeed you two are first to hear of the feasting
> whenever we Achaians make ready a feast of the princes.
> There it is your pleasure to eat the roast flesh, to drink
> as much as you please the cups of the wine that is sweet as honey.
> Now, though, you would be pleased to look on though ten battalions
> of Achaians were to fight with the pitiless bronze before you.[20]

As the leader of the Greek forces tells us, these princes readily feast, and enjoy the luxuries of their station, and so should stand in the forefront of battle 'enduring their share of the blaze of battle.' Such a one-for-one balancing of the social equation oversimplifies both Homeric society and combat.[21] Both concepts were anything but straightforward, but rather more complex constructions revolving around martial conceptions of personal worth, as we will unpack below.

As stated above, Homeric warfare was a unique concept and requires deeper explanation to help us interpret Agamemnon's scolding of his fellow princes. When one considers the world of Homeric Warrior epic – a world that has been embodied in popular culture, both in visual and literary mediums (i.e. film, etc.) – one would expect to find individuals predominantly devoted to the pursuit of personal glory. This has also predominantly been the orthodox view of the Homeric prince in scholarship. Scholars have seen these princes in the same vein as primitive warriors, devoted to their personal fame, especially when compared to the idea of a modern soldier, who does the

[20] Iliad 4:338-348

[21] For the purpose of simplicity in nomenclature, references to *Homeric combat*, or *Homeric society* are intended to refer to the system represented in Homer, but representative of Dark Age Greece.

job they are trained to do, in a disciplined and efficient manner.[22] Homeric warfare, however, was not a raging melee of irrational, bloodthirsty princelings driven to gain some modicum of immortality in the exercise of their skill-at-arms. Instead, Homeric princes fought in a careful, measured, and practical manner. While they court danger, they did so in a measured and careful way, only venturing into the forefront at opportune moments, or during emergencies, to strike, prove their bravery, and then retreat.[23]

This is also largely a reflection of the nature of combat during this time period. Greek warfare was very open, taking place on an open field, and between a mixture of troops. Unlike the rigid formations and carefully delineated bodies of troop types in Classical Greek warfare, the Dark Age Greek battlefield that we see in Homer is open and fluid, featuring a mix of ranged and direct contact infantry alongside chariot-mounted combatants. As a result, we have a battlefield that is constantly shifting – allowing princes to advance and engage their counterparts as they felt capable, or when it was opportune.[24] There were moment of extreme highs, which we can see in the Iliad as princes on both sides struggle to secure bodies and their attendant spoils. Just as quickly, these flare-ups can die off as coalitions of princes drive off the enemy, and the action moves elsewhere. Much as Van Wees points out, at any one point, much of the opposing bodies of combatants would not be directly in contact.[25] While princes were expected to take a lead in the fighting when it happened, these lulls in the action were an expected part of combat. No prince was expected to persist beyond reasonable lengths: wounds, endurance, fear, long odds – these were all acceptable reasons to break contact. Few situations stand out where a hero was expected or compelled to face terrifying odds or persevere in the face of injury. These do occur and will be the focus of some of our analysis, but they largely revolve around each prince's judgment of how the situation required them to act.[26] Nor was there any major tactical downside to princes retreating. Unlike Classical Greek warfare, where conceding the battlefield was

[22] Hans Van Wees, "Heroes, Knights and Nutters: Warrior Mentality in Homer," in *Battle in Antiquity*, eds. Alan B. Lloyd, et al., (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2009), pp. 1-86, p. 1.
[23] Ibid., p. 39.
[24] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[25] Ibid., p. 2.
[26] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

an indication of defeat, in Homeric combat the army was able to retire, rally, regroup, and return to the fray.[27]

As a result, the Homeric battlefield was very different from what we see depicted in later Greek warfare. It was a constantly shifting front of princes darting forward to cast spears at targets of opportunity, psyching themselves and other princes up for a daring deed. There was the constant presence of the rank and file of their retainers doing the same, and the odd mad scramble for spoils when a spear cast struck true. Now was the forefront a place to linger, and had little to recommend it, as any blow was potentially fatal. Martial exchanges rarely exceeded an exchange of spear casts or a few blows. The Homeric princes were deadly, since the battlefield, after all, was where they displayed their capability and forged their reputation.[28] There was, however, no structure or system to force compliance on these princes to perform public displays of their excellence. Rather, they set that bar based on their expectations, and those which they perceived others held for them.[29] Much as we will see in our analyses, Homeric princes were not compelled to act but actively decided to act out of a desire to avoid shame and support their comrades.[30]

Keeping these ideas in mind, perhaps one of the most straightforward discussions comes from an interaction between Glaukos and Sarpedon a little later in the narrative. In that episode, we find that, while Agamemnon's chastisement of the stragglers is apt, it represents a perceived social contract in Homeric princely society.[31] Speaking to encourage his fellow Trojan, Sarpedon says the following:

> Glaukos, why is it you and I are honoured before others
> with pride of place, the choice meats and the filled wine cups
> in Lykia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals,
> and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of the Xanthos,
> good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for the planting of wheat?

[27] Ibid., p. 9.
[28] See, for example, the duel between Menelaos and Paris, or that between Hektor and Aias, Iliad 3:340-380, and 7:180-322. See also Van Wees, "Heroes, Knights and Nutters," pp. 6, 12-13, and 38-39.
[29] Van Wees, "Heroes, Knights and Nutters," pp. 10, 13, and 17.
[30] Ibid., pp. 23-25.
[31] Social contract in the sense of an informal obligation between prince and community, rather than in the Hobbesian sense.

> Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lykians
> to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle,
> so that a man of the close-armoured Lykians may say of us:
> "Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia,
> these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed
> and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength
> of value to them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians."[32]

Much as Finkelberg points out in her work on Homeric values, while status can be inherited, that is not what drives the hero to act. Instead, it is the expectations of onlookers, the social gaze, which really drives the hero here.[33] Much as the Trojan princes tell us, there is an almost palpable fear that onlookers will judge the prince unworthy if they fail to act, and it pushes Sarpedon to take his place in the front lines (coincidentally in this instance, against the very princes Agamemnon chastised earlier). They choose to bear the risk of fighting so that no one can question whether they deserve their status, but rather so they see it as justified.

Nor is this an isolated moment in Homeric epic – key heroes express similar ideas in moments varying from high risk to quiet dialogues: Diomedes, Odysseus, Achilleus, and Hektor all have moments where they express similar ideas and emotions. Diomedes repeatedly refuses to retreat or back down from a fight, because he perceives such behavior to be ignoble. Even while facing extreme odds, with an ally urging him to withdraw from the fight, Diomedes responds:

> Argue me not toward flight, since I have no thought of obeying you.
> No, for it would be ignoble for me to shrink back in the fighting
> or to lurk aside, since my fighting strength stays steady forever.
> I shrink indeed from mounting behind the horses, but as I am
> now, I will face these. Pallas Athene will not let me run from them.[34]

[32] Iliad 12:310-321

[33] Social gaze in the sense of the perceived onlookers at any one moment witnessing events play out on the battlefield, representative of the prince's community. Margalit Finkelberg, "Timē and Aretē in Homer," *The Classical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1998): pp. 14-28, p. 18.

[34] Iliad 5.252-256

Diomedes refuses his companion's urging and chooses to face danger, determined to perform great deeds and claim the glory for himself. His princely strength, not to mention the patronage of his goddess, demands his action, even when he faces steep odds. Although the added variable of divine favour makes his motivations a bit more uncertain, it is clear that he sees his identity as a prince and warrior as dependent on his willingness to face down such odds. These perceptions clearly drive his actions and compel him to act where other princes do not.

This is not the only time we see Diomedes wrestle with his warrior drive. His reluctance to turn down a challenge despite deadly odds also occurs in Iliad Book Eight, where Zeus sends omens to indicate that the Trojans are turning the tide of the battle.[35] In this episode, Diomedes has been counseled by aged Nestor, the most respected among the Greeks for his experience and skill at command, to give way before what Nestor correctly interprets as the will of Zeus. Diomedes' only expressed concern in following this advice is that Hektor will witness his moment of perceived shame and mock him for it. Nestor counters that Diomedes' reputation for bravery will render any such mockery preposterous, considering his habit for bravery (even when it is ill-advised). Hektor indeed taunts the fleeing Greek, and Diomedes barely resists the urge to turn and confront him. Even in the face of deadly odds, a skilled enemy, and the pronounced will of the gods, Diomedes' warrior spirit rankles at leaving the forefront of the battle. The interplay of pride and expectation is strong here, and we see it at war in the mind of Diomedes. The prince knows he is expected to confront the enemy, much as is expressed in the exchange between Glaukos and Sarpedon. Clearly, shame, or fear that he will be judged unfavourably, is enforcing Diomedes' actions, causing him to wrestle with his martial identity.[36]

As our observations so far of Glaukos, Sarpedon, and Diomedes can all attest to, these princes believe their community expects them to behave and act in a certain manner. This aspect of their identity as warriors demands that they risk themselves in combat to justify their worth and that they deserve their status. These unvoiced expectations are further exemplified by the exchange that we see between Andromache and Hektor in Iliad Book Six. Hektor, the pre-eminent Trojan hero, snatches a moment

[35] Iliad 8:145-166.

[36] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Two Faces of Courage," *Philosophy* 612 (1996): pp. 151-171, p. 162.

with his wife and infant son, and Andromache tries to persuade him to take fewer risks. She urges him to let others do the fighting, as she knows that he faces Achilleus. She, after all, has extensive experience with the son of Thetis – who slew both her father and all of her brothers. Tearfully, she urges Hektor to refrain from meeting the Greeks in an open field, but to commit to a strong, defensive position, where the Greeks had failed to press them in the past. Hektor's response is a clear indication of the perceived social expectations upon him:

> The tall Hektor of the shining helm answered her: 'All these
> things are in my mind also, lady; yet I would feel deep shame
> before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments,
> if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting;
> and the spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant
> and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans,
> winning for my own self great glory, and for my father.[37]

The weight of expectation drives Hektor back into the fray – neither his own warrior's spirit nor the gaze of his fellow Trojans, will let him do anything less. There is a sense that Hektor would like to do just as she suggests. However, his heroic spirit forces him to persist and prevents him from acting contrary to the demands of his duty, his social role.

This heroic spirit, which defines itself in conjunction with social expectations, is a reflection of the hero's perception of his status as much as reality. We see it motivate Odysseus, who debates his action in Iliad Book Eleven. Diomedes, who had been wounded by the enemy, has called for his charioteer and is forced from the field. Odysseus, who had come to his aid, is now left alone against the on-rushing enemy, and gives voice to the following soliloquy, speaking 'to his own great-hearted spirit:'

> Ah me, what will become of me? It will be a great evil
> if I run, fearing their multitude, yet deadlier if I am caught
> alone; and Kronos' son drove to flight the rest of the Danaans.
> Yet still, why does the heart within me debate on these things?
> Since I know that it is the cowards who walk out of the fighting,
> but if one is to win honour in battle, he must by all means
> stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another.[38]

[37] Iliad 6:440-446

In Odysseus' own words, one wins honour by facing the enemy bravely and performing great deeds publicly, and what follows is an *aristeia* for the Ithacan hero, where he faces down overwhelming odds before the other Greek heroes rally to his aid.[39]

Two further episodes need to be considered before we have a fuller idea of the social expectation placed on the Homeric prince. The key hero of the Iliad, Achilleus, presents us with another key piece of evidence in Iliad Book 18, where he is grieving the death of Patroklos, his friend, and in some later traditions, his lover.[40] Here he is voicing his lament and regrets to his mother, Thetis:

> I must die soon, then; since I was not to stand by my companion
> when he was killed. And now, far away from the land of his fathers,
> he has perished, and lacked my fighting strength to defend him.
> Now, since I am not going back to the beloved land of my fathers,
> since I was no light of safety to Patroklos, nor to my other
> companions, who in their numbers went down before glorious Hektor,
> but sit here beside my ships, a useless weight on the good land,
> I, who am such as no other of the bronze-armoured Achaians
> in battle, thought there are others also better in council…"[41]

As we can see, Achilleus' main regret here is that he was not there to protect Patroklos, that his anger at Agamemnon had kept him from guarding his fellow prince. In the lines that follow, he goes so far as to label himself worthless because, as Finkelberg has pointed out, he kept his *aretē* (excellence) to himself. It was not intended to be a private virtue, to be hoarded, but rather it needs to be publically displayed to have worth.[42] In that moment it is clear that Achilleus sees his own worth in relation to that of his martial skill and, more importantly, the value it represents to the community.

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[38] Iliad 11:404-410

[39] An *aristeia* is a moment in Homeric epic where the hero rampages across the battlefield, slaying multiple opponents. It is meant to show the hero's martial excellence.

[40] Van Wees, "Heroes, Knights and Nutters," p. 19.

[41] Iliad 18:98-106

[42] Finkelberg, Timē and Aretē in Homer," p. 23.

The final piece of evidence brings us back once again to Hektor. In Iliad Book 22, we see two-linked moments where Hektor wrestles with his identity as a warrior, debating his own fate. At the start of the book, the audience observes as Priam and Hecuba both shout, from a vantage point above, their urgings to Hektor to retreat inside the walls and take shelter. They can see Achilleus coming for his vengeance, and beg their son to give way. Hektor debates this with his own spirit as well:

> Ah me! If I go no inside the wall and the gateway,
> Poulydamas will be first to put a reproach upon me,
> since he tried to make me lead the Trojans inside the city
> on that accursed night when brilliant Achilleus rose up,
> and I would not obey him, but that would have been far better.
> Now, since by my own recklessness I have ruined my people,
> I feel shame before the Trojans and the Trojan women with trailing
> robes, that someone who is less of a man than I will say of me:
> "Hektor believed in his own strength and ruined his people."
> Thus they will speak; and as for me, it would be much better
> at that time, to go against Achilleus, and slay him, and come back,
> or else be killed by him in glory in front of the city.[43]

After a long debate, Hektor takes up his arms and chooses to face the avenging hero, realizing that his choices had caused disaster to befall the Trojans. Despite the odds, he feels the need to act and try to atone for his mistake, either by defeating him or dying at the Greek's hand. Hektor's monologue, addressing his own great spirit, reveals the weight of shame that he feels for letting his pride over-ride good advice.[44] He feels great shame, even though no one has voiced any condemnation of his actions – it is entirely his own perception. That perception demands atonement, a public display, and it is once again an obligation his self-image as a warrior creates from his perceived obligation to his community. The option to simply hide behind the walls is discarded immediately. Choosing his own safety does not even seem to occur to the Trojan prince as an option.

[43] Iliad 22:99-110

[44] In a previous episode, upon observance of an omen, Poulydamas had urged Hektor to retreat, that it signified disaster. Instead, Hektor pridefully scorns the interpretation, which ultimately brings about the Trojan hero's death.

The final clash of Hektor and Achilleus only reinforces this decision. Hektor turns to meet the pursuing Greek hero only after being tricked by Athena, who appeared to him in the guise of Deiphobos, another of Priam's sons. At Athena's urging, Hektor casts his spear at Achilleus, strikes, but fails to pierce Achilleus' godly-wrought shield. Still, even once the ruse was revealed to him, and he is confronted with the abandonment of the gods, as well as the near-certainty of his death, Hektor still feels compelled to this course of action:

> No use. Here at last the gods have summoned me deathward.
> I thought Deiphobos the hero was here close beside me,
> but he is behind the wall and it Athene cheating me,
> and now evil death is close to me, and no longer far away,
> and there is no way out. So it must long since have been pleasing
> to Zeus, and Zeus' son who strikes from afar, this way; though before this
> they defended me gladly. But now death is upon me.
> Let me at least not die without a struggle, inglorious,
> but do some big things first, that men to come shall know of it.[45]

At this point, there is no reason to assume that Hektor could not still have made it back into the city safely. Instead, he is determined that his death means something, that it be memorable – that his actions meet his perceived expectations of his people. His failure as a leader obligates him to act, even if both his failure and obligation are only expectations he has created for himself.

When we take a moment and review the actions of our heroes in these chosen instances, we can define several key aspects of the Homeric prince's martial identity.[46] First, as princes, they feel an obligation, of self-determined degrees, to perform great deeds to exhibit their aretē, which we know is a public good, only having worth when exhibited before witnesses for the benefit of the community.[47] Second, the only entity of enforcement is shame – the weight of social expectation. Or, much as Hektor so eloquently describes it, the gaze of his fellow Trojans.[48] No law or person exists to strip

[45] Iliad 22: 297-305

[46] Similar events occur involving other heroes. See for example: Menelaos at Iliad 17:91-105, Agenor at Iliad 21:553-570, etc.

[47] Finkelberg, Timē and Aretē in Homer," p. 24.

[48] Iliad 6: 440-446

them of their privileges if they shirk combat; their land, wealth, etc., remains theirs regardless of whether they act appropriately.[49] Third, as a result, each prince's perception of their obligations defines their warrior's drive. They set the bar by which they choose to act or retreat. They set the terms of their obligation and set out to balance the benefits they receive from society with the risks they take. Some feel the weight of that obligation keenly, and it pushes them to act. It forces Odysseus to face uncertain odds, Diomedes to fight on despite safety being close, by Hektor to go to his death despite the safety of Troy's walls being within reach. In each of these instances, the prince has both a clear choice and a clear route to safety. They actively make the decisions they do and gain the admiration of observers for performing these grand gestures.

Of course, such gestures are still primarily self-motivated, stemming from a desire to avoid personal shame rather than simply to protect their fellows. While they feel obligated to act, we cannot forget that the obligation is personally motivated. It is to ensure that they are deemed worthy of their status. There is no noble altruism here – but rather a self-enforcing expectation of active martial valour. While the fear of communal condemnation motivates them, the princes are still inherently preoccupied with their own reputation for worth. In the end, the prince may be a protector of his community, but his concern is perpetually turned inward, even if the parameters of his identity are set by exterior factors like the social gaze.[50]

These martial values are, as far as we can tell, markedly different from those we see in Herodotus and the Archaic Age. Greek society has changed from the aristocratic federations we have observed in Homer, running the gamut from Sparta's dual monarchy to Athens' democracy. While it is not clear what form Greek warfare has taken, it is clear enough that the position of the warrior within the greater social hierarchy has changed. The martial burden has shifted, and a greater part of the population takes up arms when necessary. As a result, the martial practitioner is no longer the overlord, but a citizen, a part of a much larger body. He provides his own

[49] Scodel, *Listening to Homer* pp. 193-194.

[50] Ironically, Homeric status and expectation at its most basic is a system of honour based on the honor system.

arms but serves when called upon by his city – much as the Athenians do when the Persians arrive in 490 BCE.[51]

Where we gain the greatest insight from Herodotus occurs just after the battle of Plataea in 479 BCE. The Greeks, victorious in their clash with the Persian army, discuss who to give public honours to, and the argument presented shows us some continuity, but also significant changes:

> Much the greatest courage was shown, in my opinion, by Aristodemus – the man who had suffered the disgrace of being the sole survivor of the Three Hundred at Thermoylae. After him, the greatest personal distinction was won by the three Spartans, Posidonius, Philocyon, and Amompharetus. However, when, after the battle, the question of who had most distinguished himself was discussed, the Spartans present decided that Aristodemus had, indeed, performed great deeds, but that he had done so merely to retrieve his lost honour, rushing forward with the fury of a madman in his desire to be killed before his comrades' eyes; Posidonius, on the contrary, without any wish to be killed, had fought bravely, and was on that account the better man. It may, of course, have been envy which made them say this; in any case, the men I mentioned all received public honours except Aristodemus – Aristodemus got nothing, because he deliberately courted death for the reason already explained.[52]

Herodotus' reaction here is to laud the deeds performed by Aristodemus, who seems to have actively courted death out of a desire for recognition. One would not be mistaken to see an echo here of a princely *aristeia* reminiscent of Homer. Both Herodotus, and the other Greeks besides the Spartans, express admiration for his active valour. Much like a Homeric prince, he had acted out his bravery in a very public forum. Instead, the Spartans praised Posidonius, who set out only to do his duty, without desiring to die. There are several concepts to unpack here, and their preference represents a subtle change in martial virtues themselves perhaps indicative of how Greeks were now fighting.

First, and possibly most important, is to gain a better idea of who Aristodemus was: a survivor of the Spartan force that tried to hold Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BCE. Before the campaign that ended at Plataea, Leonidas, one of the two Spartan

[51] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 6.103-115.
[52] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 9.71.

kings, led a small force of Spartans (his personal bodyguard of three hundred) along with a comparable force of helots (used as logistics support and skirmishers) and a mixed force of other Greeks in a defensive action at the pass of Thermopylae. Located in Northern Greece, it represented a strategic choke-point to hold the Persians, as any detour around it would drastically delay their march.[53] Further, the intent was to bring further Spartan forces to bear after the *Karneia* festival had passed – during which the Spartan army could not march.[54] Of that picked force, all of whom had living sons, there were initially three survivors: Aristodemus, Eurytus, and Pantites. Their comrades had been betrayed by a Greek shepherd, Ephialtes, who had shown the Persians a path that led around behind the Greek position, and they were ultimately flanked and wiped out. In the time before the Persians cut them off, Leonidas managed to send most of the other Greeks home. Only the Thebans and Thespians remained with the Spartan force, the former as hostages, the second refusing to leave.[55]

As Herodotus relates in his account of the defeat at Thermopylae, in one version of the story Eurytus and Aristodemus had both been struck blind by an affliction of the eyes. Eurytus, hearing of the threat to his fellow Spartans, had quarreled with Aristodemus about what to do. Unable to agree, Eurytus had called for a helot to guide him to his comrades and had managed to join them in that last stand. In the other version of the story, they had both been dispatched with a message but, whereas Eurytus had hurried back in time to join his comrades, Aristodemus had dawdled. In both versions of the story, Aristodemus is seen to be choosing himself over his community, while his fellow Spartan, Eurytus, chooses death. Herodotus speculates that, had they chosen the same course, Aristodemus might have escaped disgrace.

Similarly, Herodotus also tells us about Pantites, who was dispatched into Thessaly with a message, and so returned to Sparta to find disgrace and the shame of his community awaiting him. Unlike Aristodemus, Pantites succumbed to the weight of that social judgement, and hung himself. Aristodemus, upon returning home, was labeled a *trembler*, and was shunned by his fellow Spartans, who refused to speak with him or even to give him a light to kindle his fire. He suffered the reproach and disgrace

[53] Herodotus also further discusses this choice in connection with an oracle from Delphi. For more, see Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.220-222.
[54] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.206
[55] Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.222

of all simply for ostensibly choosing his own safety, for surviving. Where Pantites had succumbed to that disgrace, Aristodemus instead sought redemption and fought to prove himself.[56]

It is in this idea of redemption that we see the second element that we need to unpack. The Spartans, while they agreed Aristodemus had fought bravely and performed great deeds, chose instead to honor Posidonius. To reiterate, the stated reason was that Posidonius had fought bravely, not desiring to die, but rather had done his duty rather than actively courting his death. The variation here is subtle, but telling: the Spartans considered Posidonius' deed superior not in ultimate terms, but due to his motivation. Much as the Spartans had pointed out, Aristodemus had fought selfishly, hoping to redeem himself by performing great deeds and dying in the act. He had once again been choosing himself, more concerned with salvaging his reputation than serving his community, which had condemned him in the first place. While the Spartans recognized the skill and excellence displayed, the motivation was still ultimately self-serving. They chose not to reward it, as it had been ultimately an act of atonement.[57] The Spartans, meanwhile admired Posidonius because he had fought out of duty and in service of his community. His goal had not been to die, and so his death had not been in the pursuit of personal glory, but rather public service.

Such an attitude towards martial valor by the Spartans speaks to a very different kind of fighting and martial identity. The style of combat we see practised by Homeric princes operates on performing public deeds, actively risking death in the pursuit of performing those deeds, but ultimately out of a pursuit of self-validation. This public good is performed out of selfish motives. As explored above, Homeric combat was fluid and open enough that a daring prince could make himself seen, perform his action, and retreat without causing any added risk to his allies. On the other extreme we see in Greek history, is the rigid battlefield of Classical Greece where the hoplite-exclusive phalanx did not leave any room for such ostentatious displays of bravery or skill. The way the phalanx operated – in a tight, controlled, and collaborative manner – the burden of bravery on the hoplite was a very different form. Just like the prince, his identity as a martial practitioner existed within the social gaze. The hoplite had to

[56] For the full details of the survivors' story, see Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.229-232.

[57] The real conundrum for Sparta would have been dealing with Aristodemus if he had survived.

perform his role, as his fellows were relying on him for their own survival. Arguably, the risk to him was less, shared as it was by more combatants, but there was no fluidity to a Classical battlefield. Victory or defeat was decided in a conclusive confrontation where mass and cohesion brought results, not individual skill or acts of bravery. Each hoplite in the line relied on his neighbor to protect his exposed right flank, just as he did for his line-mate. Leaving the line jeopardized your fellow hoplites, and so standing your ground no matter the opposition was what defined bravery in this later period. Each hoplite was essentially choosing the public benefit over their own safety, and so that aspect of a warrior's martial identity was fundamentally different from Homeric combat. A warrior's value, instead of skill or active displays of excellence, was weighted more toward perseverance in the face of danger and injury, for the benefit of the whole, rather than private glory.

Taking these concepts as a whole, we can see that the choice of Posidonius is indicative of changing valuations of martial excellence. While we cannot be certain about the form in which Archaic Greek combat took place, the Aristodemus/Posidonius decision is a subtle nod that it existed somewhere between the two extremes above. The fact that many still admired Aristodemus' actions, despite his selfish motivations, showed that Greek combat practices were still open enough for ostentatious actions to be performed, and witnessed, by many. Moreover, it showed that the formation was not so rigid that individuals could not leave it to perform such deeds and leave a vulnerable point. However, the fact that the Spartans advocated for another, who had prioritized public welfare over personal glory, does indicate that changes were progressing toward a more hoplite and phalanx-based form of warfare. As a result, Archaic Greek combat is a hybrid mixture of the phalanx and Homeric *aristeia*. Clearly, there was a focus on standing one's ground and being motivated by public service, but the battlefield itself remained fluid enough to allow those skilled, and brazen enough to take the initiative, to do so without being a detriment to their fellows.[58]

While these differences exist, something can also be said for the consistencies that these episodes show in Greek martial identity. First of all, expectation remains a

[58] Aristodemus' line mates in a Classical phalanx, after all, would either have been rendered vulnerable, or been forced to follow him forward. This could have caused its own problems, as this could have opened more breaks in a rigid phalanx – in either event, it is doubtful if they would have appreciated his courage.

key component of martial identity in both cases. For both Homeric prince and Archaic citizen-soldier, the threat of judgement enforces proper action. The Homeric princes flinch away from any option that would leave their dedication, their worth to their society, in question, even if it is a personal construction resulting from the pursuit of self-validation. For the Archaic citizen-soldier, and the hoplite to follow, public scorn is an active and effective deterrent to selfish action that places the individual before the many. They were expected to serve the community, and so it operates similarly to Homeric combat, although the expectations were actual rather than perceived. Pantites, Eurytus, and Aristodemus all feel this scorn, and take different routes to deal with it. Eurytus rushes to his death, eager to prove he did not value self before all. Pantites takes his own life, ashamed for being seen to make the wrong choice. Aristodemus, on the other hand, seeks to perform some great deed to show he was not a *trembler*, and die in service to his community. His deed lays in the grey area between – self-motivated, but arguably out of a desire to atone for putting himself first initially.

The second shared idea was that there was no legal enforcement, but rather informal social roles and judgement. The prince operated within a system based on his perceptions. He takes action, and reacts to the demands of the battlefield, based on his judgements about what would safeguard him from the scorn of his fellows and any questions of his status. The Archaic citizen-soldier, while working under clear expectations of his role, likewise is not condemned legally, but rather publicly. His fellow-citizens enforce the norms of warrior expectation, much as Pantites and Aristodemus would live to experience first-hand. In both systems, fear of social condemnation is the true motivator, not a loss of status. Shame and public derision make death an appealing alternative for Hektor as much as Eurytus.

The true unifying element across both systems is that social gaze, pushing these warriors to embody the ideals of their martial identity before an audience of fellow practitioners. That gaze unites prince and citizen-soldier across the centuries. It influences their perceptions of expectations, enforces their fulfillment of their role, and acts as a counter-balance to selfish action. Princes take risks out of a perceived need to balance their books with society. The Archaic citizen takes his place in the line because he is accepting his share of the martial burden. Anything less earns them the scorn of their fellows, even if they suffer no active material or legal penalty. Their role as a

warrior, their identity as martial practitioners, is defined by that link to society. In the subtle variations of it, we can see that, while Greek combat doctrine had not settled into the rigid rules of the phalanx, it had moved toward something motivated by a communal trust, rather than personal glory. The Greek warrior of the Archaic age that saw off the Persian army may not have been the hoplite that would dominate the Classical period, but nor was he the warrior-overlord of the Homeric epic. His identity was something uniquely his own.

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