8 Sparta and Metal Music's Reception of Ancient History

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He came from the city of Sparta
Some say he's the best
He bears one thing on his mind
To free all the rest

Sound Barrier, 'Gladiator'

1986 was a watershed for metal's reception of ancient history. While the French bands Sortilège and ADX had released the songs 'Gladiateur' and 'Caligula' in 1983 and 1984, respectively, it was Iron Maiden's 'Alexander the Great' (1986) that demonstrated and popularised the congeniality of antiquity to metal.[1] Alexander has since become a prolific figure therein, an archetypal 'metal king' and talisman of power, masculinity and tradition for artists throughout Greece and the European diaspora.[2] His reception was also examined by the first scholarly analyses of the appropriation of ancient Mediterranean history and culture by hundreds of metal bands across the globe.[3]

1986 also saw the release of the song 'Gladiator' by the US-American band Sound Barrier, and with it the inception of another popular ancient topic in metal, the Greek city-state of Sparta. As one of the first metal bands to consist of all Black musicians, Sound Barrier sought to disrupt the white hegemony of the genre. In 'Gladiator', they trace their spiritual ancestry to Spartacus, the archetypal rebel slave who challenged Rome. Ancient sources identify Spartacus as Thracian, but Sound Barrier derive his name from Sparta. Such an ethnic origin, the song suggests, explains not only Spartacus' status as a consummate warrior but also his drive to liberate those like him from imperial oppression.

Metal's reception of Sparta is overwhelmingly inspired by and filtered through the products of Laconophilia – the admiration of Sparta – in popular media and culture. Sparta's symbolism of strength and defiance appeals to the traditional ethos of metal and its (counter-)culture. While many bands appropriate Sparta to celebrate their Greek or European heritage – some

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harnessing it for political agendas – the majority arguably see in Spartan warrior-citizens a reflection of the metal scene: the few united against the many, fighting for liberty and tradition against the forces of modernity. Spartan metal is an instructive representative of the genre's reception of antiquity at large.

Laconophilia from Antiquity to the Metal Ages

Laconophilia in metal is but a recent example of 'love of the Laconian', specifically Sparta, the militarist city-state that dominated much of southern Greece from the seventh to fourth century BCE.[4] It was during the decline and fall of Spartan supremacy that Laconophilia entered Greek intellectual thought when the Athenian Xenophon authored the earliest extant account of Spartan society at home, of not only its political constitution but also its rigorous state-run education system that forged all males who survived the eugenic scrutiny of their infancy into a citizen class of professional soldiers.[5] Plato, who, like Xenophon, had no love for Athenian democracy, took inspiration from Sparta's authoritarian society in his political philosophy.[6] Four centuries later, Plutarch indulged a nostalgia for Greek glory under the Roman Empire with works on Spartan society such as the *Life of Lycurgus* and *Sayings of Spartan Women*.[7] Laconophilia was at its origin a reaction to these authors' respective political establishments. Such agendas should provoke scepticism of how real the Sparta of these non-Spartan admirers was, separated by space and at least a century's time from the men who fell at Thermopylae, and there is tantalisingly little written or archaeological evidence from the Spartans themselves to paint a more accurate picture.[8]

These ancient accounts from non-Spartans form the basis of what moderns call the 'Spartan mirage', which spellbound philosophers, statesmen and artists throughout modern history, including Niccolò Machiavelli, Jacque-Louis David and Adolf Hitler.[9] Most beloved by modern Laconophiliacs is the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, as recounted by Herodotus, another non-Spartan. This was an infantry engagement with the massive taskforce of Xerxes, king of the vast, multinational Persian Empire.[10] In the face of his impending conquest of Greece, all but 31 city-states pre-emptively capitulated. Sparta took command of this Hellenic alliance, which designated the pass of Thermopylae as the most suitable choke-point to halt the Persian army from advancing into central Greece. Exaggerating numbers to enhance the Greek achievement, Herodotus counts Xerxes' infantry at 1.7 million,

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though modern historians reduce it to around 200,000.[11] The Hellenic alliance sent to Thermopylae a force of 7,000. Leonidas, one of Sparta's two kings, was constrained by religious reasons to take only his royal bodyguard of 300 Spartiates, though he also brought 1,000 hoplites of *perioikoi*, that is the second-class free citizens of Laconia, plus as many helots, enslaved Greeks who were regularly humiliated and even terrorised by public decree.[12] For two days, the narrowness of the pass, combined with the determination of the more heavily armed Greeks, converted Xerxes' numerical advantage into heavy casualties. On the third day, however, the Greeks found themselves outflanked after a local Greek traitor, Ephialtes, informed Xerxes of a path through the mountains to the Greek rear. Leonidas dismissed the majority of his forces but stayed behind with the Laconian contingent plus a few hundred Thespians and Thebans, looking out for the safety of the retreating force, but perhaps also his own glory. So, they made their last stand until all perished, taking many enemies down with them. The retreating Greek forces regrouped and, with their full complement of men and ships, dealt the Persians decisive defeats at Salamis and Plataea. Greece was liberated, and the Persians never returned.

Thermopylae was remembered by ancients and moderns alike as not only a sacrificial holding action that inspired subsequent Greek victories but also a symbolic defence of liberty against tyranny, or more accurately, of political self-determination against foreign imperialism. The Spartans' valour was first immortalised in the epitaph attributed to the poet Simonides inscribed at the battlefield: 'Stranger, tell the Spartans that here we lie, obeying their words'.[13] These words have been taken to be that of their law governing conduct in battle: 'not to retreat from the battlefield even when outnumbered, to maintain formation, and to either win or die'.[14]

The memorialisation of this battle brought Sparta into the popular imagination in the aftermath of the Second World War. The 1940s saw Greece suffer first a Nazi occupation and then a devastating civil war that ended in the victory of the American-backed Greek Government Army over the Soviet-backed Democratic Army of Greece. The United States helped symbolise this halting of the advance of communism by funding a memorial to Leonidas and the 300 at the site of Thermopylae in 1955. In 1962, at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and erection of the Berlin Wall, the Rudolph Maté film *The 300 Spartans* similarly suggested an analogy of Greece and Persia to NATO and the Warsaw Pact.[15]

For the popularisation of Thermopylae in the twenty-first century, the groundwork was laid in 1998 by Steven Pressfield's bestselling novel *Gates*

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of Fire and Frank Miller's comic *300*.[16] The latter was adapted to the silver screen by Zack Snyder in 2006, following Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004) in inaugurating a renaissance of cinematic antiquity. Like the Cold War *300 Spartans*, *300* (2006) was quickly contextualised in a post-9/11 America embroiled in wars in the Middle East.[17] Iranians understandably condemned its orientalising and dehumanising portrayal of their Persian ancestors.[18] Globally, the film was a box-office hit grossing over 450 million dollars. Its CGI-heavy bringing-to-life of the graphic novel influenced subsequent cinematography and metal music videos, such as Firewind's 'Ode to Leonidas' (2016) and Ex Deo's 'The Final War (Battle of Actium)' (2010). Laconophilia in popular culture has maintained its momentum in the years since *300*'s premiere, including in political discourse, with American conservatives adopting the phrase *molōn labe* ('come and take them'), which Leonidas allegedly replied to Xerxes' demand that the Spartans lay down their weapons, in defence of gun rights.[19]

Likewise, *300* impacted Sparta's reception in metal both profoundly and measurably. At the time of writing, a search of the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* for lyrics and song titles that include the words 'Sparta', 'Spartan(s)', 'Thermopylae' and 'Leonidas' renders 143 songs. The distribution by date of release strongly correlates with *300*'s premiere in 2006: 24 were recorded in the decade prior to the premiere, 70 in the decade after, 22 in 2008 and 2009 alone.[20] *300*'s influence on metal, especially its depiction of hypermasculine warriors, is not without precedent. The 1982 film *Conan the Barbarian* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger directly inspired the hegemonically masculine imagery and sword-and-sorcery lyrics of the American band Manowar and myriad bands that followed in their footsteps.[21] *300*'s predominant and even exclusive influence in many of these songs is evident not only in album artwork, such as Sparta's *No Retreat No Surrender* (2016) and Sacred Gate's *Tides of War* (2013) but even more so in direct quotations of the film and deviations from the historical record. Like Manowar, Spartan metal's focus on hypermasculinity frequently has a hypersexual and misogynistic dimension present in either film. In contrast to Manowar's depiction of women as sexual objects, however, Spartan women, though noted for their strength and independence in the ancient sources, are almost completely invisible in Spartan metal, re-entrenching metal's chronic exscription of women.[22]

As metal is at its core a reaction to the mainstream, its appropriation of the classical world often follows suit. In recounting how he pioneered the subgenre of 'Viking metal', Quorthon of the Swedish band Bathory explained his

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preference for popular over more historically accurate accounts of the past, adopting the imagery of

> proud and strong nordsmen, shiny blades of broadswords, dragon ships and a party-'til-you-puke type of living up there in the great halls . . . an image of my ancestors and that era not too far away from the romanticised and, to a great extent, utterly wrong image most people have of that period in time through countless Hollywood productions.[23]

Bathory, which until 1987 had been devoted to Satanic themes, set the precedent for harnessing popular conceptions of ancient and medieval history and folklore, especially elements tied to themes of masculinity, violence, sensuality and freedom, for proud expressions of cultural and national heritage.[24] Bands in Greece, Italy and throughout the European diaspora have also fixated on Greco-Roman antiquity as a locus of identity and as a supposedly real world where their core values as metalheads were validated and celebrated.[25] Much as Viking metal exchanged Satanic for historical themes, so 'Mediterranean Metal' channelled antipathy to Christianity by appeal to pre-Christian roots.[26] As was also arguably the case with Bathory, appeals to antiquity to transgress contemporary zeitgeists can also extend from concerns for the preservation and revivification of national and European heritage in the face of immigration, multiculturalism and globalism.[27] Spartan metal often assimilates Spartan soldiers into the very legacy of nineteenth-century Romantic nationalism that Bathory prolonged.

Chaos and Dionysus, Ares and Hades

Metal does not simply recycle popular images of antiquity but repurposes and recreates antiquity in its own image and in line with its own spirituality. In religious terms, Deena Weinstein theorises metal as a virtual ditheism of Chaos and Dionysus.[28] Chaos is the antithesis of order, symbolising metal's inherent opposition to systems of social, political, religious and economic conformity and control. Dionysus, in turn, is the god of spiritual liberation of the self from the control of rationality and socially prescribed behaviours and identities, and thus the freedom to gratify one's animal instincts.[29]

The first metal song devoted exclusively to Sparta is the American band Stormtroopers of Death's 'Moment Truth', released in 1999, a year after Pressfield's *Gates of Fire* and Miller's *300* were published. The lyrics

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integrate metal's chaotic and Dionysian themes into the Herodotean narrative of Thermopylae:

steel and flesh clash in battle, blood stains the fields
bodies burst, limbs are severed still they don't yield
300,000 adversaries dressed in their best
300 Spartans stand as one they're not so impressed
the moment of truth is finally here
it's better that you make a stand, war is near
hold your ground, never plead, They'd rather
die on their feet than live on their knees
Go! Fight! F**k! Kill!
Spartans!

The song advocates dying for liberty over submitting to slavery, reflecting the Greek belief that such was the nature of Persian rule. The will to defend personal autonomy in defiance of authority channels homicidal and suicidal instincts. The Spartans transcend bodily mutilation in their resolve, while the Persians exchange their embodied humanity for exotic dress, perpetuating ancient stereotypes of eastern men draping their bodies in 'feminine' dress in contrast to the Greeks, who celebrated the male body in heroic nudity.[30] The Persians' superficiality negates their numerical superiority of 300,000 to 300, a figure bereft of helots and Greek allies that highlights the shared identity of the Spartans as the few against the many. The exhortation 'Fight! F**k! Kill', finally, advocates the total release of irrational bestial and sexual passions.

Stormtroopers of Death were only the first to view Thermopylae as a context for performing masculinity and indulging violent animal instincts to disrupt the forces of control. This is frequently illustrated not merely by appeals to the ecstasy of violence and bloodlust but also by comparisons of Spartan hoplites to animal predators, especially lions. This choice of animal may draw in part from the name of Leonidas, whom various songs call 'Son of the lion' (Firewind, 'Ode to Leonidas', 2016), 'the Lion of Sparta' (Holy Martyr, 'The Lion of Sparta', 2008) and 'the Lion King' (Sacred Blood, 'Gates of Fire', 2008). Such analogies recast this historical battle in the mould of Homeric poetry: as numerous warriors in the *Iliad* such as Diomedes (*Il.* 5.134–143), Hector and Ajax (*Il.* 7.255–257) are likened to lions hunting their prey on the battlefield, so the Spartans in metal to '[w]ild lions seeking their prey' (Axe Battler, 'Marching Phalanxes', 2014) and '300 lions' (Arrayan Path, 'Molon Lave', 2010), while in Sacred Blood's 'Gates of Fire' (2008), they resemble 'raging lions' in their zeal to recover the corpse of their

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fallen king, much as Aeneas in the *Iliad* is compared to a lion, as he guards that of Pandarus (*Il.* 5.297–303).

Identifying the Spartans as predators also draws from metalheads' common equations between themselves as wolves and the mainstream as sheep.[31] The Persians, accordingly, and matching their depiction in *300*, are not only orientalised and effeminised by their attire but also dehumanised by their own animalisation.[32] They are not like the sheepish Trojans slaughtered by the leonine Diomedes, however – not prey for predators, but livestock for human butchers: '[s]lay them like sheep and like cattle' (Validor, 'To the Last Man', 2016); '[w]ave after wave, butchering the pigs' (Necronomichrist, 'Tree of Doubt', 2009); '[b]utchered like cattle' (Battlecry, 'Hot Gates of Hell', 2006). The Persians also become animals that threaten humans, often reduced to a singular 'serpent' (e.g., The Monolith Deathcult, 'Demigod', 2008) or 'beast' (e.g., Dragony, 'Sparta (Elegy of Heroes)', 2011).

That more than one band rhymes 'beast' with 'east' also plays into the ancient Greek othering of eastern barbarians. According to Hippocrates and Aristotle, the subjects of the Persian kings were natural slaves, who preferred their slavery, while the Greeks were natural masters.[33] Such a dichotomy between Greek, and by extension, western liberty versus eastern slavery, is evident throughout this catalogue of songs, and even whole albums. The 2010 album *Obsessed by War* by the Greek band Unholy Archangel uses as its cover art a classical vase painting of a long-haired Greek hoplite subduing an exotically dressed Persian soldier (Figure 8.1). The band frequently writes songs about the superiority of Greeks in war, not only of the Spartans but of those who conquered the peoples of Asia, namely Alexander and Dionysus. True to their name, Unholy Archangel also intersperse anti-Christian themes more typical of black metal, forming a thematic unity where Christianity is seen, like the Persians, as a foreign nemesis of Hellenic culture. Like Scandinavian bands nostalgic for Vikingdom, and Italian bands for Roman glory, Greek bands like Unholy Archangel often seek to recover authentic national identity from times before, and in spite of, Christianity.[34]

Greek patriotism, moreover, is often expressed through the unity of the Greeks, whereby the war against Persia anticipates a Greek nationhood not achieved until the nineteenth-century war of independence against the Ottomans. The 2006 song 'Ἢ τὰν ἢ ἐπὶ τᾶς' by Zemial is a notable example. Its lone mention of helots fighting at Thermopylae suggests the inclusion of Greeks of all classes, while the song ends with a quotation from Aeschylus' play *Persians* (472 BCE), the famous battle exhortation taken out of the context of the battle of Salamis: 'On you now Sons of Hellas! Free your native land; free your people, the fanes of your Fathers' Gods and the tombs

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Figure 8.1 Cover artwork to Unholy Archangel's album Obsessed by War (Kill Yourself Productions, 2010), featuring an Attic red-figure kylix from c. 460 BCE (National Museum of Scotland) (© Elias Siatounes / Unholy Archangel)

of your Ancestors. Now you battle for ALL!'.[35] These lines are often cited as one of the earliest expressions of panhellenism and calls for Greek unification.[36]

Like its people, the geography of Greece is also adapted to the metal ethos. Local hot-springs gave Thermopylae its name, 'Hot Gates' or, more loosely, 'Gates of Fire', that in the Christianised paradigm within which metal traditionally operates become the gates of Hell. Indeed, the Plutarchian apophthegm 'tonight we dine in Hades' or, more often, 'Hell', is often quoted, matched in frequency to the Herodotean mention of Persian arrows blotting out the sun (both quoted in *300*), thereby enshrouding the battlefield in a Stygian darkness.[37] Several bands play with this notion of Thermopylae as the gates to the underworld. Hollywood quotations such as 'into Hell's mouth we march' communicate the Spartans' dutiful embrace of an honourable death. In hindsight of the result of both the battle and the war, the Persians' entry through Thermopylae symbolises both their own death and that of the Spartans guarding it. As the Greek band Macabre Omen puts it in 'Man of

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300 Voices' (2015), 'I shall fall into the Kingdom of Hades / And ensure I take with me, / Worthless lives of those, / Who stand in between . . . / The past, the present and the future'. As Thermopylae are its gates, so Greece is the underworld itself, and the Spartans are its infernal sentinels: '[m]any have sung / about the Gates of Fire / About the narrow way / which leads to Hell' sings the Finnish band Lord Vicar ('The Spartan', 2008); '[n]ow they're standing at the gates of fire, three hundred men with blood desire / Ready to die and make a stand, no one will pass through the gates of hell' writes the Greek band Tex ('Leonidas', 2011). Only in death may the Persians descend to Hades, and so the Greeks symbolise death itself. The German band Sacred Gate sing, '[t]he Persians want to send us to Hell / But they don't know / we are already the Styx, / a river of blood / We are Hades, / we are home now' ('Path to Glory', 2013).

Contrary to realms of eternal gloom and punishment supplied by a Greek and Christian mythology, the glamorisation of Hell has been a fundamental theme in metal since the 1980s. The antithesis of chthonic and celestial gods mirrors metal's contrariety to the social, political and religious mores of the mainstream.[38] In this paradigm, the Kingdom of God, with its demands of moral austerity and obedience, amounts to a system of tyranny and enslavement. The Kingdom of Satan, often syncretised with Hades, in contrast, represents the liberation from the bonds of morality and authority. It is with this mindset that several bands buy into Hollywood's distortion, itself drawing from ancient Greek misconceptions, of Xerxes as a god-king.[39] In metal, Spartans are the legions of Hell fighting not merely for political liberty but also personal autonomy against the tyranny of religion. Greece as the 'Kingdom of Satan' thus fits into its traditional symbolism in the context of the Persian Wars as the so-called bastion of freedom.

Thermopylae is not always a conflict between atheism and theism *per se*, but a struggle to defend European culture from eastern gods, be they Zoroastrian or Abrahamic. In the Iliadic tradition of divine intervention on the battlefield, Zeus, Ares and Heracles are all called upon as both the allies and ancestors of the Spartan race. 'Thunder from the sky, Gods of the Olympus / Marching by my side, Zeus Soter Nike / Ares God of War with Phobos and Deimos' sings the Italian band Holy Martyr ('Lakedaimon', 2008). Like Homeric warriors in prayer, the Greek band Sacred Blood plea 'Almighty ZEUS of eternal Olympus! / Send your thunderbolts to your sons! / Grant us with wrath to eradicate our enemies! / Crimson eyed God Ares! / Clang your sword on your shield, and let us / hear your roar!' ('The Defenders of Thermopylae', 2008). The berserker Ares is elevated from the buffoonish and seldom-worshipped

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god of the *Iliad* to a patron god of metal. Such preferment signals a key conversion of the Spartans into metal warriors, with a near-total absence of the discipline, austerity and tactical cunning that was the basis of Sparta's military success.[40] The strategy of Athena and the rationality and order of Apollo, two of Sparta's chief gods, are exchanged for the bloodlust and madness of Ares.

Much like their counterparts who glorify the anarchic individuality of Vikings and other 'barbarian' warriors fighting to preserve their land and culture,[41] Spartan metal songs often place Spartan strength and bloodlust in the service of something beyond the individual. The most quoted or paraphrased ancient source is the Simonidean epitaph, invariably following Cicero's influential translation of 'words' (*rhēmasi*) as 'laws' (*legibus*).[42] Echoing Herodotus' words, 'they are free but not totally free, for the law is their master', the Spartans here place their law higher than any human authority, even that of Leonidas, who while presented as the ideal Spartan and inspiration to his men, is not the reason they chose to fight and die.[43] In this respect, Leonidas is different from Alexander or Caesar, who in metal songs are often the sole focus.

The epitaph, delivered in the first-person plural, plays into another prevalent theme: the achievement of *kleos aphthiton*, of 'undying fame', by being sung about first by poets and now by metal bands.[44] 'Then and again sing of 300 men' runs the chorus to the Swedish band Sabaton's 2016 song 'Sparta'. From the very first song about Spartans by Stormtroopers of Death, these warriors followed Achilles in his choice of a short life with glory over a long life in obscurity, yet through its glamorisation of Hell, they reject Achilles' later regret that it was better to be a serf on earth than a lord in Hades.[45]

Spartan Metal and the Political Right

Umberto Eco wrote that 'the Ur-Fascist hero craves heroic death, advertised as the best reward for a heroic life'.[46] Metal originated as a white, working-class phenomenon and built its identity by an antipathy to mainstream establishments. Since the mainstream is now perceived by many as globalism and multiculturalism, Laconophilia in metal may express the desire to defend a sense of heritage from these forces as an extension of an artist's right-wing politics. One such artist is the guitarist of the American band Iced Earth, Jon Schaffer, who participated in the 2021 attack on the US Capitol. A decade prior, his side project Sons of Liberty recorded

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'Molon Labe' (2011), which narrates Thermopylae as a thinly veiled manifesto against big government and restrictions on firearms. The Belgian band Ancient Rites provide a more subtle example. Their lead songwriter, Gunther Theys, has expressed Eurocentric views and plays in right-wing nationalist bands.[47] Ancient Rites' song 'Thermopylae' is part of their 2006 album *Rvbicon*, whose songs combine the Spartans with the Crusaders, Julius Caesar and Arminius as touchstones of European heritage and defiance. Similarly, the German-Swiss-Austrian band Warkings embody this pan-European collective in their stage dress, under the pseudonyms Viking, Crusader, Spartan and Tribune, the latter two resembling *300*'s Leonidas and *Gladiator*'s Maximus, respectively.

Bands with formal and sympathetic ties to the resurgence of fascism in the twenty-first century have followed the Third Reich in emulating Sparta as an ancestral and model society.[48] Two such bands, Naer Mataron and Der Stürmer, are members of the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn, which gathers annually at Thermopylae, welding torches and renewing their anti-immigrant resolve. Naer Mataron express such sentiments in their 2000 song 'Wolf of Ions': 'I hold the heart and soul of an Ancient Spartan! Destroy now, the Plague from the east . . . I hear the voice of Leonidas, standing in the Thermopylae'. Der Stürmer reference Sparta in several songs and use a photograph of the statue of Leonidas in modern Sparta as the artwork for their 2002 EP *Iron Will & Discipline*. Beyond Greece, the Polish band Kataxu parallel the 1938 anti-Jewish pogrom of *Kristallnacht* with the Spartans' alleged practice hurling criminals and disabled infants off of Mt. Taygetus in 'The Manifesto of the Unity' (2005), while the British band Spearhead promote their social Darwinist worldview by embodying the Spartans' ritual murder of helots in 'Wolves of the Krypteia, We' (2018).[49] Far-right bands' appropriation of Sparta, along with Alexander and the Roman Empire, situate metal's congeniality to a romanticised antiquity within the wider ecosystem of right-wing groups throughout the world who remake classical civilisation in their own image.

Conclusion

Sparta in metal music, as in its reception throughout history, persists and thrives because of its adaptability. While historically rooted in Greece and adopting a peculiar system of laws, education and economics, the Spartans, and especially their last stand at Thermopylae, have a significance that,

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while often tied to ideology and claims of heritage, easily transcends those things and resonates with the core of metal. Though centred on musical performance, the metal scene treats feelings of social alienation and disempowerment by instilling a sense of belonging. That sense of power inspired by the music can take the form of a heroic individual or a group of heroes who overcome challenges and define their very identity as the adversary of the dominant society. With their long hair, defiant spirit and quest for immortal fame, the Spartans live on as metal heroes.

Notes

1. For a musicological discussion of this song's lyrics, see Lauro Meller, *Iron Maiden: A Journey through History* (Appris, 2018), pp. 46–53.
2. Iain Campbell, 'From Achilles to Alexander: The Classical World and the World of Metal', in Gerd Bayer (ed.), *Heavy Metal Music in Britain* (Ashgate, 2009), pp. 120–1; Osman Umurhan, 'Heavy Metal Music and the Appropriation of Greece and Rome', *Syllecta Classica* 23 (2012): 133–40; Christian T. Djurslev, 'The Metal King: Alexander the Great in Heavy Metal Music', *Metal Music Studies* 1/1 (2015): 127–41.
3. These now include Eleonora Cavallini, 'Achilles in the Age of Steel: Greek Myth in Modern Popular Music', *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* 9/1 (2009): 113–41; Campbell, 'From Achilles to Alexander'; Umurhan, 'Heavy Metal Music'; Djurslev, 'The Metal King'; K. F. B. Fletcher and Osman Umurhan (eds.), *Classical Antiquity in Heavy Metal Music* (Bloomsbury, 2019); Jeremy Swist, 'Satan's Empire: Ancient Rome's Anti-Christian Appeal in Extreme Metal', *Metal Music Studies* 5/1 (2019): 35–51; Helen González Vaquerizo, 'Κλέα ἀνδρῶν: Classical Heroes in the Heavy Metal', in Rosario López Gregoris and Cristóbal Macías Villalobos (eds.), *The Hero Reloaded: The Reinvention of the Classical Hero in Contemporary Mass Media* (John Benjamins, 2020), pp. 51–72.
4. For an introduction to Spartan history and society, see Nigel M. Kennell, *Spartans: A New History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
5. For Xenophon's reception of Sparta, see Anton Powell and Nicolas Richer (eds.), *Xenophon and Sparta* (Classical Press of Wales, 2020).
6. See Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, 'Spartan Echoes in Plato's *Republic*', in Paul Cartledge and Anton Powell (eds.), *The Greek Superpower: Sparta in the Self-Definitions of the Athenians* (Classical Press of Wales, 2018), pp. 185–214.
7. See Hugh Liebert, *Plutarch's Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 77–146, 189–218.
8. On the 'Spartan mirage', see Paul Cartledge, *Spartan Reflections* (University of California Press, 2001), pp. 169–84.

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9. For Sparta's reception from the Early Modern period to the present, see Stephen Hodkinson and Ian Macgregor Morris (eds.), *Sparta in Modern Thought* (Classical Press of Wales, 2012).
10. For Thermopylae and its legacy, see Chris Carey, *Thermopylae* (Oxford University Press, 2019).
11. *Ibid*., pp. 48–9.
12. Matthew Trundle, 'The Spartan *Krypteia*', in Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan (eds.), *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp. 60–76.
13. Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.228.2.
14. *Ibid*., 7.105.4.
15. Carey, *Thermopylae*, pp. 194–5.
16. See Lynn S. Fotheringham, 'The Positive Portrayal of Sparta in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction', in Stephen Hodkinson and Ian Macgregor Morris (eds.), *Sparta in Modern Thought* (Classical Press of Wales, 2012), pp. 393–428.
17. Carey, *Thermopylae*, p. 196.
18. Paul Burton, 'Eugenics, Infant Exposure, and the Enemy Within: A Pessimistic Reading of Zack Snyder's *300*', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 24 (2017): 308–9.
19. Sarah Bond, 'This Is Not Sparta', *Eidolon* (7 May 2018). https://eidolon.pub/this-is-not-sparta-392a9ccddf26 (accessed 12 July 2021).
20. The global increase in metal bands over this 20-year period was also a factor, as well as the recent resurgence of traditional and power metal, subgenres that most often treat historical themes. Nonetheless, there are Spartan-themed songs in nearly every subgenre.
21. Karl Spracklen, *Metal Music and the Re-imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race, and Nation* (Emerald, 2020), pp. 80–1.
22. On women's exclusion in metal, see Jasmine H. Shadrack, *Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity and Sound: Screaming the Abyss* (Emerald, 2020), pp. 25–31.
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24. Simon Trafford and Aleks Pluskowski, 'Antichrist Superstars: The Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal', in David W. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval* (McFarland, 2007), pp. 57–73; Spracklen, *Metal Music*, p. 92.
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