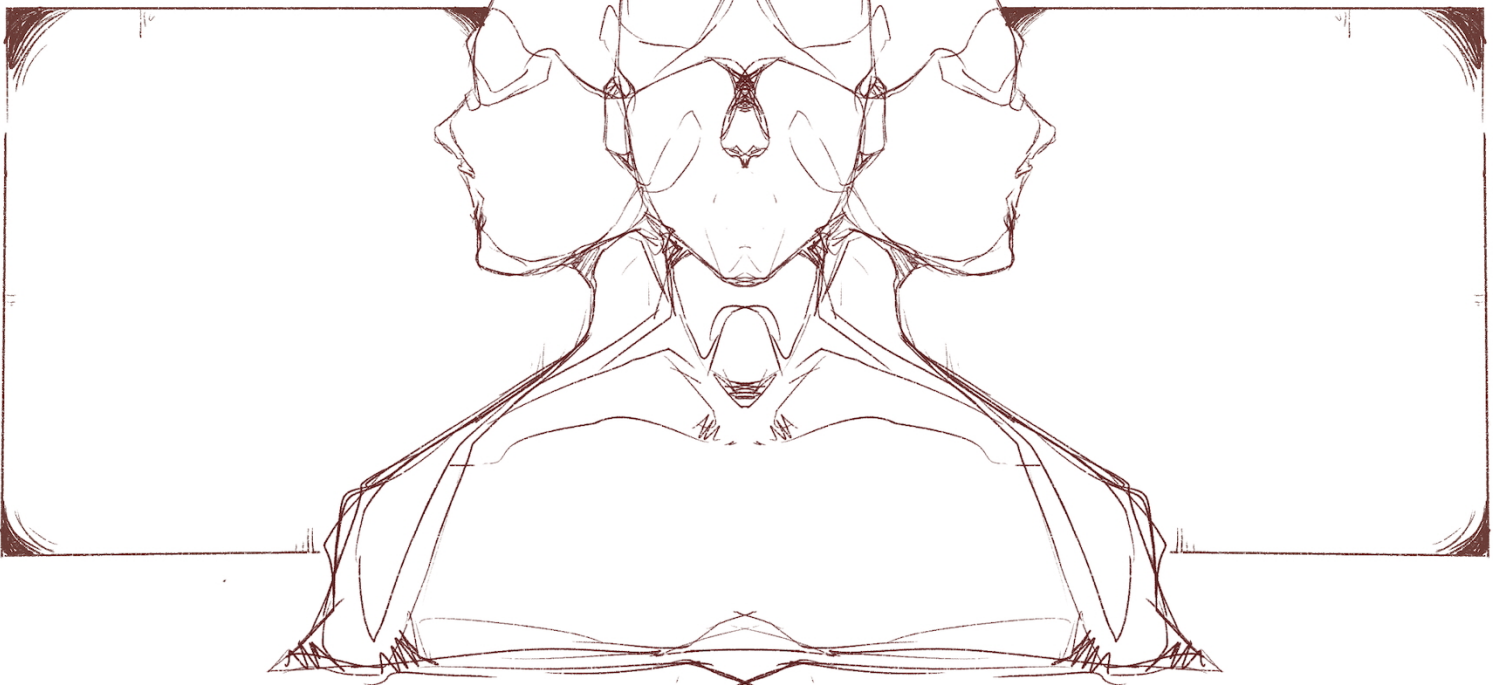




Excerpts from *Battlefield Emotions in Late Antiquity: A Study of Fear and Motivation in Roman Military Treatises* by Lukasz Rozyeki (Brill Publishing, 2021)

“Every [sane] soldier standing face to face with an enemy is afraid of death. This is true for any army, regardless of morale^[i] or mental preparation . . . Irrespective of the level of training, the means of motivation, the use of draconian punishments, or the strength of social relations among soldiers, every military force nears its breaking point during battle. The side whose soldiers are able to resist their instincts [to flee] for longer, will usually win. Most battles in history resulted in one side retreating, and examples of a defeated force that chose death instead of running away are the stuff of legends to this day . . .” ^[ii] (p. 8).

“At close quarters, a soldier has to stand face to face with the enemy, endure the mental and physical pressure, and survive by killing his opponent. The feelings associated with this process can not have changed much, especially considering the course of many battles in Late Antiquity, which frequently ended with one side panicking and fleeing once its morale had been broken . . .” ^[iv]

History includes numerous examples of bayonet charges^[v] that allowed the charging side to break the spirit of numerically superior defenders and force them to retreat^[vi]. It is worth noting that the attackers would normally attempt to enhance the terrifying effect of the charge through war cries^[vii], music, and the unwavering demeanor of the officers leading the attack^[viii]. It would be inappropriate to dismiss such stratagems as simple battlefield theatrics, because very often it really was the shouting and the belligerent attitude of the enemy that caused one of the sides to retreat without a fight^[ix].

We should also remember that close combat did not usually result in heavy casualties.^[x] It was only in the final stages of each battle, i.e. during the pursuit of fleeing forces, that the losing side would be massacred. This can be explained in several ways. First of all, fleeing soldiers lose any interest in fighting or even defending themselves. All heavy pieces of equipment, such as shields, were normally discarded, so as not to slow the men down. A panicking mob^[xi] is much more dangerous than an individual – innate human conformity and the instinct for self-preservation lead people to focus solely on getting as far away from danger as possible, without regard for their surroundings or brothers in arms. The result is that often even the units that were determined to continue fighting would be disrupted and swept away by the wave of retreating men^[xii], and fleeing soldiers would lose their lives by drowning or falling off heights . . . The accounts of ancient chroniclers are filled with mentions of routed troops who died while crossing rivers^[xiii] or swamps or chose to jump off a cliff^[xiv].

This makes terror an immensely effective weapon of war^[xv], scattering and even destroying an enemy force. All one needs is to make them afraid and wait for the inevitable result – panic” (pp. 21-24).

Notes:

[i] On the subject of morale in the Roman army, see: Petru Ureche, "The Soldier's Morale in the Roman Army," *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 1/3 (2014): 3-7; Mike Bishop, "On parade: status display and morale in the Roman army," in *Akten des 14. Internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum vol. 2*, ed. Herman Vetters and Manfred Kandler (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 21-30; Doug A. Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," in *Battle in Antiquity*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Classical Press of Wales, 1996), 199-218. Morale in the period of question has also been the subject of interest of Philip Rance, who has emphasized the poor state of research into the issue. Philip Rance, "simulacra Pugnae: The Literacy and Historical tradition of Mock Battles in the Roman and Early Byzantine Army," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41/3 (2000): 224.

[ii] As a case in point, we only need to remind ourselves how the actions of King Leonidas at the Battle of Thermopylae affected future generations.

[iii] Iliad, 13. 290-295.

[iv] The psychological basis for this behavior has been described in works commissioned by the Polish Armed Forces: Stanisław Konieczny, *Strach i odwaga w działaniach bojowych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1964); Stanisław Konieczny, *Panika wojenna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1969).

[v] Philip Sabin also pinpointed the similarity between a bayonet attack and ancient war. Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," 13.

[vi] Example of successful bayonet charges that broke the enemy are numerous; the fight for Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg; or the probably most extraordinary assault in the history of close-combat fighting when the 65th Infantry Regiment (The Borinqueneers) of the 3rd US division charged a whole Chinese division during the War in Korea, which resulted in the death of nearly 6,000 defenders and the capture of a further 2,000; or the recent bayonet clash by the British Prince of Wales' Royal Regiment, which took place on 14 May 2004 in Iraq. In each of these examples the prospect of imminent hand-to-hand combat and the resolve of the assaulting side led to them achieving a spectacular success.

[vii] The effectiveness of battle cries during a clash was mentioned, e.g. by Vegetius: Veg. 3.18. This aspect will be described comprehensively in further sections of the work.

[viii] The attitude of the commanding officer is one of the most crucial factors on the battlefield. See, e.g.: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War*, 145-149; Loreto, "Il generale e la Biblioteca," 563-589. On the psychology of managing small groups, see Fred Fiedler, "The Contingency Model: A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness," in *Small Groups Key Readings*, ed. John M. Levine and Richard L. Moreland (New York & Hove: Psychology Press, 2006), 369-382.

[ix] Compare Tacitus's description of the Germanic war cry: *They mostly emit harsh tones and an intermittent murmur, and they hold their shields close to their mouths, whereby the voice, bouncing off the shields, rises in strength, becoming fuller and deeper.* Tacitus, *De Origine et situ Germanorum*, 3-4.

[x] This is related to wanting to protect one's life. Any soldier equipped with a shield will primarily attempt to ensure safety by staying behind it. Actively engaging the opponent, which requires much bravery, will not be a priority.

[xi] The term "mob" is used by the author to signify a group of people galvanized into action. Stefan Baley, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii społecznej* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1959), 127; Andranik Akopov and Levon A. Beklaryan. "Simulation of human crowd behavior in extreme situations," *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics* 79/1 (2012): 121-138.

[xii] This happened, for example, at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. Nikeforos Bryennios, 1. 17-18 and Attaliates, 20. 23-24.

[xiii] See: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 55-56.

[xiv] See: *Theophylacti Simocatae historiae*; ed. Carolus de Boor and Peter Wirth, De Gruyter: Stutgardiae, 1972. 1. 12. 1-8. Further referred to as: Sym.

[xv] See, for example, how Seleukos Nikator defeated the opposing army without bloodshed: Polyaeus, 4. 9. 3.