

**'GO, TELL THE PRUSSIANS...':
THE SPARTAN PARADIGM IN PRUSSIAN MILITARY THOUGHT DURING
THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore a variety of ways in which the history and *mores* of Classical Sparta were portrayed as a valuable paradigm in Prussian military thought during the nineteenth century – a subject which has thus far received very little scholarly attention. For instance, as Stephen Hodkinson and Ian Macgregor Morris have rightly noted (Hodkinson 2012: xxiii, n.31), this strand of identification with Sparta finds no mention whatsoever in Elizabeth Rawson's magisterial overview of the Spartan tradition in European thought (1969); nor has it been explored in any detail by Volker Losemann in his recent article on 'The Spartan Tradition in Germany' (2012).¹ Additionally, the paper will examine some of the negative reactions to this laconophilia which can be found in the writing of turn-of-the-century anti-militarist authors, focusing in particular on the work of one prolific novelist and author of *Antimilitärischetendenznovellen* (anti-military polemical novellas), Arthur Zapp (1852-1925).

In order to set the scene, a brief note on the Prussian historical context will be required.² The kingdom of Prussia first came to prominence in Europe during the early eighteenth century, under the reigns of King Frederick William I (1713-1740), and his son King Frederick II, 'Frederick the Great' (1740-1786). Before this period, Prussia's dominions had formed a loosely-knit agglomeration of territories acquired by dynastic succession, some separated by hundreds of miles from Prussia's original heartland in the Mark Brandenburg – see Figure 1 below (cf. Clark 2006: 1-18). Lying geographically in the centre of Europe, unsecured by any natural boundaries, Prussia had always been vulnerable to the kind of invasion and devastation by rapacious foreign armies which she had experienced most catastrophically during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). This conflict inflicted incalculable damage upon her civilian population and infrastructure; in some areas over half of the inhabitants were killed, or died from war-related causes such as malnutrition and disease (ibid. 19-37). As Christopher Clark has noted, the legacy of the repeated occasions when Prussia had stood on the brink of political extinction was 'an abiding sense of vulnerability that left a distinctive imprint on the state's political culture' (ibid. xxv). These occasions not only included the multiple incursions during the Thirty Years' War, but also those during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's ignominious rout of the Prussian Army at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt in 1806, and the humiliating terms of the Peace of Tilsit (9 July 1807), which reduced Prussia to a rump state 'deprived of huge tracts of territory, and saddled with an enormous debt, a war indemnity and a French occupation' (Simms 1998: 75), were remembered with particular bitterness.

In practical terms, this vulnerability led Prussia's sovereigns to develop her military capabilities to a disproportionate degree relative to her small size, so that she soon possessed one of the most powerful and professionalised standing armies in Europe (Clark 2006: 95). As one contemporary observer is said to have remarked, 'Prussia is not a state that possesses an army, but rather an army that possesses a state' (ibid. 215).³

This emphasis upon the military also extended itself to the founding of the Royal Prussian Cadet-Corps, the Prussian Army's principal institution for training officers. Originally created in 1717 by King Frederick William I, the corps was initially intended in part as a means of edifying and educating the young Frederick the Great. However, from the second decade of the nineteenth century onwards, the system of cadet-schools began to spread throughout Prussia, training boys from the age of ten in order to prepare them for a career in the Prussian Officer-Corps.⁴ It is within these military educational institutions that one of the most striking and influential examples of German military laconophilia can be found.

In general, the Prussian cadet-schools seem to have cultivated a tradition of encouraging their charges both to identify themselves with Spartan boys, and to see their tough training in the cadet-corps as a modern-day reflection of ancient Spartan educational

methods. Evidence can be found in all genres of cadet-school literature (whether historical accounts, memoirs, novels or children's stories) to suggest that cadets, their educators, and contemporary commentators on the system all subscribed to the idea of the schools as a Prussian 'Sparta *rediviva*' or '*neu-Sparta*'.⁵ In particular, contemporary memoirs and novels suggest that pupils treated the *spartanische Jugend* (Spartan boys) as role-models, especially in connection with the unflinching endurance of hardship.⁶

A prime example of this can be found in a book of autobiographical cadet-stories by Johannes Dewall, which were inspired by the author's time at the preparatory cadet-school at Bensberg (near Cologne). Dewall explains that the cadets were possessed by a continual anxiety to prove themselves 'Spartan' enough – even to the point of coining a verb '*spartanern*': 'to be like a Spartan'. Thus, they would constantly compete with each other over who could bear the most painful of self-inflicted torments:

Twenty-five strokes of the cane on the muscles before breakfast; why, that's nothing, no one turns a hair at that anymore, even when it hurts so much and one's arms are streaming with blood: fifty with the whip, that's laughed to scorn; someone took this so far, that he [burnt] a piece of rubber into his hand, just because he had read somewhere-or-other that someone else had done it. So, ultimately, everyone vies with everyone else in '*spartanern*', attempting the most incredible and reckless deeds... The new cadets hear and look on, astounded, and naturally they try to follow in the footsteps of their older models until they surpass them. (Dewall 1884: 49)⁷

A similar example can be found in Otto von Corvin's autobiography, as he remembers his time at the preparatory cadet-school in Potsdam:

[Once, one of the boys] threw me down in wrestling, and my left arm was very badly dislocated. I delayed going to the doctor; but I was in the most awful pain all night, and my arm was double its size next morning. Dr Baumann handled it somewhat roughly, and when I could not suppress a little cry of pain, he said, in a sneering manner, 'Pshaw! A soldier should be able to dance on needles!' which mortified me much, and hurt me more than my arm, which I had to wear in a sling for nearly two months...

The example of the Spartan youths appealed to us greatly as a model – we used to drill ourselves in enduring all possible tortures, and it was for this reason that the Doctor's scorn wounded me so deeply. Bearing blows, sticking needles into our flesh or making deep cuts were the usual; however, some of these exercises were even more refined, such as the burning of elastic bands into our hands, melting a snowball over the palm of the hand, or letting a cock-chafer crawl over your face without turning a hair. This last is not as easy as it might sound, especially when the cock-chafer tickles your mouth or nostrils with its prickly feet... (Corvin 1861: 75-6)

In general, it seems that the cadets took an extraordinary amount of pride in identifying themselves as '*Spartanerjünglinge*' (Spartan youths). Expressions such as 'he must become a proper Spartan' were used of new pupils, and boys were bullied if ever they showed themselves un-Spartan by tale-telling (*petzen*).⁸ One of the most famous cadet-school novels, which was published at the turn of the twentieth century, and went into more than a dozen editions over the next two decades, was actually entitled *Spartanerjünglinge* (Szczepanski n.d.). This book places particular emphasis on Plutarch's 'fox-tale' (*Life of Lycurgus* 18.1), a version of which was apparently held up to cadets in history lessons as a supreme example to be emulated (ibid. 30).

Ultimately, it seems that this self-identification with young Spartans became instrumental in helping boys to accept the hardships of military socialisation, and was therefore encouraged both by older cadets and by the school authorities. However, in political debates concerning the cadet-corps, Sparta then became a conceptual weapon in the battle between the forces of reactionary monarchist conservatism and the adherents of

Social Democracy and liberalism.⁹ The fact that the cadet-schools had become generally identified with Sparta contributed to the criticisms levelled at the corps, in particular by liberals, antimilitarist thinkers and Social Democrats, who saw the schools as a blight upon the nation, and wanted them abolished.

After Germany's catastrophic defeat in World War I, no holds were barred in these critics' accusations of brutality, which they often saw as being caused by the schools' flawed appropriation of 'Spartan' values. Thus, in 1919, one Social-Democratic author, Hans-Joachim Freiherr von Reitzenstein, wrote a short story entitled 'Sparta', in which the hideous consequences of a ten-year-old cadet's bullying by his seniors nearly led to his losing a hand (Reitzenstein 1920: 36-51). Similarly, the new Social-Democratic teachers at the schools – which the post-war Socialist government under Friedrich Ebert tried to demilitarise following the demands of the Treaty of Versailles – apparently attempted to demonise the way in which the cadets had always been taught Spartan history (focussing on the glories of Spartan warrior life and the spirit of Thermopylae). The new teachers insisted instead on the selfishness and bloodthirstiness of the Classical Spartan kings, and on the primacy of the 'democratic' innovations of the Hellenistic reformer-kings Agis IV and Cleomenes III (Nickol 1935: 98-100). In disgust, the ex-cadets and their reactionary supporters then fought back by emphasising what they saw as the truly Spartan virtues of the cadet-corps, identifying themselves ever more strongly as '*Spartanerjünglinge*' in the teeth of Social-Democratic and antimilitarist opposition.

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In the rest of this paper, I will examine Prussian military idealisations of Sparta during the long nineteenth century in more general terms, through discussion of a number of representative texts. The works in question testify both to the importance which was placed on the Spartan example in a martial context, and the way in which idealised and – sometimes – distorted visions of Spartan history and *mores* were held up as a model which could serve Prussia well in the present day. These examples show that ideas of Sparta could play a role in multiple political contexts, whether regarding Prussia's defeats, political upheavals, and final triumphant victories in the Napoleonic Wars, the debates over the contested role of the military which ended in the constitutional crisis (*Heeres- und Verfassungskonflikt*) of the 1860s, or even in castigations of the Prussian Officer-Corps' descent into debauchery and dissipation in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In all of these situations, Sparta was often considered as a moral and historical example with the power both to illuminate burning current issues, and to stimulate contemporary debate.

Interestingly, the examples discussed here also demonstrate the level of general knowledge of Classical culture and ancient history which was prevalent during this period among military men, most of whom would not have had a full-blown 'humanistic' education at a Classical *Gymnasium* (at which Latin and Greek were *de rigueur*), but would have attended schools with the curriculum of a *Realschule* (which taught Latin, but no Greek).¹⁰ Indeed, we also find odd misreadings or misapprehensions in these texts, which may be significant for our understanding of the way in which the content of the ancient sources on Sparta was disseminated and appropriated during this period.

SPARTA AS A PATRIOTIC MODEL AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The first text to be discussed – an article from the *Jahrbücher der preußischen Monarchie* (Yearbook of the Prussian Monarchy) – appeared as early as 1798.¹¹ The article, entitled '*Wäre es möglich, den patriotischen Heldengeist der preußischen Nation noch mehr zu erheben?*' ('Could it be possible to arouse the patriotic heroic spirit of the Prussian nation yet further?'), begins with the question:

If that Spartan soldier – the only one left alive out of the three-hundred heroes who died for the Fatherland at Thermopylae – chose death rather than the shame that awaited him, and if this heroic spirit was so broadly prevalent among the Greek peoples, one may fairly ask why our own army, which is by no means

inferior to those Greek peoples in the art of war, is not animated by an identical spirit? (Anon. 1798: 245)

The article goes on to discuss the necessity of emulating such a model by creating an *Ersatzreligion* (pseudo-religion), or, failing that, a system of praise, blame, and conscription, which could revitalise the Prussian army's failing patriotic spirit. Following the imperative of the Greek city-state, the author reiterates that anyone who is not prepared to defend the Fatherland betrays the first duty that he owes to the state; he is therefore no true citizen (ibid. 247, 248, 253-4). The implication is that Prussia must equal Sparta in instilling her citizens with self-sacrificial love of the Fatherland, since mercenaries can never form a suitable substitute for heroic citizens.

This article exemplifies a number of trends which can also be traced in the other texts under discussion. Firstly, the author assumes that his audience's knowledge of Greek and Spartan military history will be sufficient for them to grasp the relevant historical context straight away – in this instance, which Spartan soldier he is referring to. At the same time, we also find a generalising tendency which extends the heroism of one Spartan (or group of Spartans) to embrace all of the 'Greek peoples', and which focuses on the trope of the sole survivor, rather than on the subtleties of the Herodotean account, which in fact states that *two* Spartans were left alive out of the 300 Thermopylaean heroes (Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.229).

This passage also demonstrates how readily Sparta could be represented as *the* paradigm of Greek military patriotism – such collocations of Sparta and Greece in terms of German militarism can be found not only throughout the nineteenth century, but also during the twentieth, particularly in the Third Reich.¹² Yet, at the same time, we also find Prussia being compared explicitly with Greece, in a way which suggests that such comparison must have meaningful implications for the present. As far as the author is concerned, Greece is not merely a long-dead ancient civilisation; rather, she provides a standard of military excellence which Prussia must match in order to survive the onslaught of Napoleon's armies – just as, in the spheres of art, architecture and literary culture, emulation of Greek style was seen as one of the highest ideals, to be aspired to at all costs.

We can therefore see this article not only as an impassioned attempt to bolster Prussian morale in the aftermath of the War of the First Coalition (1792-97), during which Napoleonic forces had already encroached upon German territories in the Rhineland, but also as a practical, military application of that philhellenism which had already become so prevalent in Prusso-German culture since the age of Winckelmann.¹³

SPARTAN EMULATION AFTER THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

If Spartan warriorhood and the heroic death of Leonidas at Thermopylae were considered appropriate models to spur on the Prussian army even before Prussia's subjugation in the Napoleonic Wars,¹⁴ it seems that the Spartan paradigm had lost none of its power during the process of reform and recovery following the Wars of Liberation (1813-14).

In 1821, the *Militair-Wochenblatt*, the official military periodical published by the Prussian Ministry of War,¹⁵ printed an unprecedentedly long-running series of ancient-historical articles entitled '*Alt-Griechische Tapferkeit, oder die denkwürdigen Tage von Marathon, Thermopylä, Salamis und Platäa, hinsichtlich der Kriegeszucht und Stellordnung der alten Griechen*' ('Ancient Greek Bravery, or the memorable days of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis and Plataea, with reference to the training for war and rank-organisation of the ancient Greeks').¹⁶

This account of Greek *mores* and the Greek art of war contains a curious yet vivid mixture of fact and fantasy, despite the author's claim to have made reference to the ancient sources (ibid. 1994). For instance, Leonidas' 300 Spartans are referred to as the 'Sacred Band' (ibid. 2029, 2036), when this was in fact the title of the troop of 300 homosexually-paired Theban warriors which was instrumental in defeating the Spartans at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 B.C. Additionally, the author describes Leonidas and his men as rampaging through the Persian camp and even breaking into Xerxes' tent (ibid. 1995, 2035), which implies a confusion with Alexander the Great's campaigns against Darius III in 333 B.C. (cf. Arrian, *Anabasis*, 2.11-12).

In general, the anonymous author consistently presents Leonidas' and the Spartans' defence of Thermopylae as the most glowing paradigm of sacrificial heroism, and Sparta as the ultimate purveyor of strict soldierliness.¹⁷ Thus, in his discussion of the ancient Greeks' 'masculine discipline' (*Manneszucht*), he states that:

The Laws of Lycurgus were intended especially to make fearless soldiers of [the Spartans], and, of all the Greeks, they observed the strictest and most correct military discipline. The power of this little State, in which one could number scarcely 9000 citizens, was founded purely on their gigantic physical strength (*die Riesensstärke ihres Körpers*). As long as they preserved this, they not only shared power over Greece with Athens, but, for a time, they were the sole masters, and increased their power over foreign peoples. (ibid. 2004-5)

The author implies that, if such a small *polis* as Sparta could manage not only to preserve her autonomy, but also to gain mastery over foreign states, by instilling her citizens with military discipline, then their way of life must certainly be one which Prussia should aim to emulate in the present.

Attention is also frequently drawn to the contemporary relevance of Greek experiences of suppression and slavery under the Persian yoke during the invasions of Darius and Xerxes (499-480 B.C.). For Prussian readers, who had suffered similarly under French occupation, little imagination was needed to recast the overweening Persian despots as avatars of Napoleon.¹⁸ However, since the brave Greeks had been able to see off the Oriental hordes, just as French troops had finally been driven from Prussian soil, the author comments that 'it should not be untimely to remember these [memorable victories], in order to compile a living proof that true courage and love of the Fatherland are irresistible...' (ibid. 1995).

It should be noted, however, that although the author is impressed with the 'ancient Greek bravery' displayed at the other 'memorable' battles listed in the article's title, none of these are so lauded and lionised as the Battle of Thermopylae. The contemporary relevance of the Thermopylean example is explicitly highlighted above all in the author's concluding remarks on the battle, and on the other Greeks' desire to emulate the Spartans' heroism:

The [Three-hundred] fell so that, even thousands of years later, they could arouse astonished or aspiring admiration in the hearts of all who love their Fatherland, and live once more within them!... The self-sacrifice of Leonidas and his companions was more effective than the most magnificent victory: he taught the Greeks to know the secret of their strength, and the Persians to know the secret of their weakness...

One must hold fast to this moment, if ever noble peoples and those oppressed by barbarians wish to rid themselves of their fetters, or if anyone wishes to clap them in chains. (ibid. 2036; emphasis original)

Emulation of Sparta is depicted here as both prevention and cure for putative future humiliations and incursions by hostile armies – ultimately, the author is convinced that, to achieve liberty in such a situation, or to preserve it indefinitely, one need only follow the ancient Greeks' example. Thus, once again, we find Greek history being portrayed as of direct relevance for alleviating contemporary anxieties precipitated by recent events – particularly Prussia's total and ignominious defeat at Jena (1806), which would remain a running sore in her national consciousness until her victory over the French at the Battle of Sedan (1871).¹⁹ Here, the warrior-discipline of the Greeks (and the Spartans in particular) is portrayed as providing a useful paradigm which, if adhered to, can save the Prussian people from further ignominy in the future.

THE SPARTAN PARADIGM DURING THE 1860S

If we skip forward a few decades, two instances from the 1860s offer a glimpse of the easy currency which the Spartan example still enjoyed in public debate regarding the Prussian military forty years later, after further internal upheavals (in particular the revolutions of 1848) had weakened the position of the Officer-Corps.

At a speech on the 'military spirit' given at an officers' club in Berlin in 1860, and subsequently published by the Prussian Army, the anonymous speaker engages directly with episodes from Xenophon's *Anabasis*. His thesis aims to prove not only that discipline through fear is the best way to command an army, but also that such a Spartan method, advocated in the *Anabasis* by the Lacedaemonian general Clearchus, is in fact the 'original type of old Prussian discipline' (*der Urtypus altpreußischer Zucht*), as instigated by Frederick William I (*Militärische Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 1860: 29). Although the speaker admits that the Athenian Xenophon's own attempts to lead his men by commanding their willing obedience were initially successful, once the march of the Ten Thousand and its attendant dangers were over, Xenophon was unable to keep them under his control. The moral drawn is that rank-and-file soldiers are simply not always capable of raising themselves to this higher level of obedience unless motivated by fear – they succumb to bad influences too easily. The speaker concludes that, though the rule of fear should, when possible, be tempered by appealing to subordinates' own will to obey, 'the true principle clearly emerges that as far as we are concerned, first and foremost, the Spartan's rigorous discipline must rule' (*ibid.* 30). Spartan techniques of command are thus advocated as useful even for modern armies, since the speaker believes that human nature still responds in much the same way to authority today as it did in Classical Greece (*ibid.* 28).

Meanwhile, during a debate in the Prussian House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*) in September 1862, one Freiherr von Vincke attempted to bring his fellow representatives round to his way of thinking regarding the importance of a standing army and a reform of the *Landwehr* (militia) system, by appealing first of all to a Spartan precedent.²⁰ He begins:

Gentlemen, the proof is already present in Greek history. Sparta had – that you will acknowledge – the best standing army that a state has ever possessed. The entire ruling class was trained in warfare from infancy, and had no other purpose than to fight for their Fatherland, since all remaining civilian affairs were dealt with by the helots. That was a standing army which can be established as a paradigm and an ideal. In the Peloponnesian War, Sparta was superior to all other states, until these began to train standing armies for themselves.

Vincke proceeds to back up his argument with concrete Thucydidean and Xenophonic examples – claiming, for instance, that the Spartans were only defeated at Leuctra because the Thebans under Epaminondas had finally succeeded in raising a standing army to match their own – before going on to treat an example in Roman history.

However, as soon as he stops talking about Sparta, his listeners become more and more restive – the stenographic reports note that isolated unrest (*Unruhe*) quickly spreads throughout the assembly (*Unruhe in der Versammlung*). It is perhaps noteworthy, given the unruly mood of Vincke's audience at this point, that neither his claims regarding Sparta's absolute priority as the military state *par excellence*, nor his appeal to her paradigmatic worth, appear to have been contested.

Both these passages clearly reveal how well-grounded in Classical history many career-soldiers and politicians were, and how valid and natural it seemed to them to draw such involved ancient-historical parallels (requiring in-depth knowledge of the ancient texts), both in public speeches and in parliament, without needing the kind of preparatory explanations which would be unavoidable if such comparisons were adduced today. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the timetables at the Prussian War Academy (*Kriegsakademie*) during this period prescribed two hours' teaching a week on the 'Greek and Roman art of war', and that tactics lessons also seem to have frequently adduced examples from Classical history (Lenski 1922: 126-7).

Even at the cadet-schools, which did not follow a humanistic syllabus, teaching placed a strong emphasis on Classical history, with a particular penchant for examples of military prowess, battles, and self-sacrifice (cf. Nickol 1935: 98). Some commentators went so far as to suggest that, in this regard, the cadet-corps actually went one better than the *Gymnasien* (Classical grammar-schools), in that cadet-school history-teaching was not completely subordinated to the study of ancient languages (*Militair-Wochenblatt* 1873: 194-6).²¹ Greece and Rome actually had a higher profile than Germany and Prussia in the list of

historical subjects about which cadets were supposed to have special knowledge, both in the cadet-schools' *Verordnungsblatt* (decree) from 3 February 1844,²² and in the syllabus for the cadet-school leaving-exam, the *Portepée-Fähnrichsexamen* (Military Education Commission 1870: 183). Sample papers show that a large proportion of the historical questions on this examination concerned the ancient world – including 'The Lycurgan Constitution' (ibid. 185-6, 531-4). Clearly, then, a well-educated Prussian officer was supposed to have such Classical parallels at his fingertips.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN DEBAUCHERY AND SPARTAN VALUES IN THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER-CORPS

By the end of the nineteenth century, once the rise in popularity of the Prussian military following the victories of the Franco-Prussian War (19 July 1870–10 May 1871) had waned somewhat, the Officer-Corps began to elicit strong criticism for its descent into luxury and excess.²³ Officers were condemned by contemporary commentators for 'dancing round the golden calf', in the sense of living far beyond their means, drinking and gambling to disgraceful excess, and constantly seeking 'bad' marriages to wealthy heiresses, known colloquially as *Goldfische* (goldfish), in order to secure undeservedly exalted social status (*Militärische Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 1899: 2527).

In this connection, a two-part *Militair-Wochenblatt* article by the Berlin Military Association, published in 1899 and entitled '*Das Offizierkorps und die Geselligkeit*' ('The Officer-Corps and Conviviality'), sought to recall its officer readership to the chaste frugality which had reigned over the Officer-Corps seventy years earlier. As one of the crucial conditions for achieving this state, the author invokes that '*Spartanerthum*' (Spartan-dom) of flesh and blood which once made Prussia great, whose disappearance can only be remedied by a return to the ancient sources of its power, and whose strengthening must be considered a 'categorical imperative' (ibid. 2527).²⁴

However, another group of critics, the authors of the turn-of-the-century form of polemical, anti-militaristic fiction known as the *Antimilitärischetendenznovellen*,²⁵ were concerned to castigate the new sybaritism of the officer-corps in a more novel way. Appeals to Sparta-as-paradigm could be used negatively in this context, if one remembered the analogous decline into luxury and cruelty to subordinates for which Sparta became notorious after her victory over Athens in the Peloponnesian War (404 B.C.), and which ultimately, in the view of many commentators, led to her downfall as an imperial state.²⁶ This, it may be deduced, is the reasoning behind the best-selling turn-of-the-century polemical novelist Arthur Zapp's decision to draw attention to Prussia as '*Sparta rediviva*' in the title of two of his anti-militarist works; the first being a book of two novellas entitled *Im modernen Sparta. Erbauliche Zeitbilder* ('In Modern Sparta. Edifying Slices of Life') which was published in 1887, and the second a novel, *Im neuen Sparta* ('In the New Sparta'), which was published the following year.

Zapp (1852-1925) had himself been an Officer in the Prussian Army for a short period, after having fought in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) as a schoolboy volunteer. He is perhaps a little better known for his novelettes, such as *Die Rose von Sesenheim* (The Rose of Sesenheim, 1887) and *Mädchen, die man nicht heiratet* (Girls One Doesn't Marry, 1912). However, his hard-hitting satirical exposés of life in the Officer-Corps (sometimes written under the pseudonym V.E. Teranus) form a considerable proportion of his prolific output, and the two volumes under discussion here can be seen as representative of his contribution to the anti-militarist genre.

In both works, a character of the traditional Spartan mould, a 'good' officer or general, who is frugal, clean-living, decent, and possessed of a highly-developed sense of honour, is contrasted with a feckless, morally indigent character who treats money as if it were water, and is concerned primarily with wine, women and self-aggrandisement. In the 'edifying slices of life' contained in the 1887 volume, these characters are the eponymous protagonists of the two novellas, *General Brutus* and *Leutnant Don Juan*.

The epigraph to *Leutnant Don Juan* reads 'We Greeks, we are truly licentious when it comes to women. We Greeks, we Greeks!' (Zapp 1887: 7). The Lieutenant in question, a renowned womaniser named Erich Hardegge, makes a bet with his fellow lieutenants that within three months he can win the heart of the beautiful governess Frieda Halm, who is

currently the companion of Clara Richter, the 19-year-old daughter of a wealthy (but untitled) industrialist. Erich toys with Frieda, declaring his undying love, and promising that he will reveal his intentions to her mother when he gets leave at Christmas. He takes Frieda to Berlin, tricks her into staying the night with him and succumbing to his seductions, then betrays her – did she really think that he would marry a poor kid like her? Besides, his father has refused to pay his debts, and the only way to get rid of them and save himself is to marry an heiress (a ‘goldfish’). His only concession – because he did find Frieda more fun than his other conquests, and so feels that he must preserve her honour – is to lie to the other lieutenants and pretend that he has lost the bet (even though this means treating them to 25 demijohns of Veuve Cliquot!).

Erich then concentrates all his efforts on securing Clara Richter’s hand instead – her wealth is all that matters (things are made easier for him because Frieda is kept away at her sick mother’s bedside). He is sure that Clara’s letters will prepare Frieda well enough for the fateful *fait accompli*. Yet Frieda still trusts him absolutely, and is utterly unprepared when she hears that Clara is now engaged to Erich. Unable to live with her shame and betrayal, she seeks him out where he is staying in Potsdam. When he tells her that the whole thing is true, she shoots him and then herself – yet Erich survives; miraculously, his wound was not a mortal one.

At first, Herr Richter wants to call the engagement with Clara off, but quickly concludes that the scandal will rapidly be forgotten, whereas if he has a Royal Prussian Lieutenant for his son, the coveted title of *Kommerzienrat* (Councillor of Commerce) will surely soon be his. And his wife is already making all her society friends jealous with her references to ‘my son-in-law – the Lieutenant!’ Thus the marriage goes ahead, and, soon after, Herr Richter is elevated to the aristocracy.

In the second novella, *General Brutus*, Erich’s polar opposite, General von Hartleben, takes centre-stage. The General adores asceticism, simplicity and frugality; in short, he is the archetypal old soldier. Now, he is utterly incensed by his Lieutenant-son’s appeal for an injection of cash to help him pay his debts, which he has accrued by living beyond his means in a vain attempt to keep up with the lavish and dissipated life-style of his fellow lieutenants.

In a letter, the General’s son, Kurt, begs him to consider his ill-doing from the point of view of a loving father, not a strict military superior – he blames the harsh, frugal training in the cadet-schools for causing him to start tasting all the pleasures of life to excess, as soon as he was finally free to do so. He explains that his regiment has become much more expensive and exclusive than it was in General von Hartleben’s day, and thus he feels that in order to keep up appearances he has to do all the same ridiculously extravagant things (such as buying bespoke sleighs at a moment’s notice) as his fellow-lieutenants, who have allowances of as many thousand Thalers a month as he has hundreds.

So, Kurt has got into debt, and then, to add insult to injury, he begins to gamble in the belief that he can pay off his debtors with his winnings. But when his beginner’s luck runs out, he falls into the hands of the money-lenders – with 20,000 Marks to pay, he gambles again and loses a further 5,000 Marks, payable in three days. The friend whom Kurt expects to bail him out is called away unexpectedly, so he decides to forge his signature as guarantor of the debt – but then fails to inform him.

The General burns the letter, biting his lip until it bleeds – Kurt must pay the price for his misdeeds, and his besmirching of the family name. Momentarily, he decides to spare him and pay the debts out of his daughters’ dowries – but then he remembers meeting the Kaiser in the Tiergarten with Kurt when he had just started at the cadet-school in Potsdam, and that the Kaiser told Kurt that he hoped to hear great things of him – it was one of the proudest moments in the General’s life.

In anger, General von Hartleben decides that the Officer-Corps would be a whited sepulchre if its members were incapable of discipline, duty, and iron toughness – exactly those values which are presented most consistently as ‘Spartan’ in the cadet-school literature. Kurt is guilty of ‘the poison of corruption and a lax outlook’ (ibid. 124), and must therefore die. Instead of replying to the letter, he sends a parcel containing only his revolver. When Kurt opens it, the message is clear, and so General von Hartleben’s only son shoots himself.

Here, we can see two possible Spartan examples being adduced – the original model of hardship, self-sacrifice and discipline advocated by General von Hartleben, and the ‘new Spartan’ luxury and dissipation embraced by Kurt von Hartleben and Erich Hardegg. As far as

Im neuen Sparta is concerned, the relevant parallels are still more strikingly revealed by a publisher's advertisement from 1890:

This novel, by this most celebrated author, whose stories receive sparkling reviews from the critics, is qualified to excite the attention of outstanding multitudes of the reading public. For the first time, the *inner life and activities* of the *German Officer Corps*, not only in their *military duties*, but in their *community* and in the *mess*, are portrayed with *realistic sharpness*, and with the *most exact expert knowledge*. It is shown what an important role the Lieutenant plays in the *new Sparta*, both in the State and in the community. The *idolatry* with which the *Lieutenant is treated* in middle-class circles is *illuminated with unbridled and courageous truth*. On the other hand, the author does full justice to the *truly excellent elements* in the Officer-Corps. The *conceited, inwardly hollow, arrogant Lieutenant*, who considers his post to be a medley of authorised privileges, is contrasted with the true-to-life depiction of the *earnestly striving, modestly-behaved Officer*.²⁷

We could consider this collocation of Sparta and the world of the Prussian officer-class as a cutting comment on the possible parallels between Prussian and Spartan military history: first famed for their frugality and invincibility, once the dizzy heights of imperial dominion had been attained, both powers began to rot from within, seduced by the allure of wealth and the perquisites of empire. Alternatively, one might suggest that Zapp is sneering at how very far contemporary Prussian lieutenants have fallen from the original Spartan ideal (as embodied by General von Hartleben), and how little their everyday life reflects those Spartan virtues which were constantly being adduced by the Prussian military as the ultimate example to which an officer should aspire.

At the very least, however, Zapp's choice of title suggests an acknowledgement of Sparta's paradigmatic prevalence in Prussian military society. That such a title would draw his readers in – among them the subscribers of the *Naturalistische Unterhaltungsbibliothek* (True-to-life Entertainment Library), under whose aegis *Im modernen Sparta* was first published – is suggested strongly by Zapp's contemporaneous choice of an almost identical title both for his novella-volume and for the novel.²⁸

CONCLUSION

These examples of the high value placed on the Spartan paradigm in military circles and contexts can, of course, only touch upon a theme which could no doubt be found in many other similar sources from this period. However, the instances of the phenomenon discussed above can at least provide a preliminary sketch of the contemporary cultural backdrop against which the systematic idealisation and identification with Sparta found in other spheres, such as the Prussian Cadet-Corps, can best be illuminated.²⁹

In general terms, we can see that, during the nineteenth century, the Spartan paradigm – often portrayed as representative of ancient Greece as a whole – was repeatedly adduced as a useful model for emulation by the Prussian military, in many different contexts. Such claims base their authority sometimes on 'facts' which are clearly derived from the ancient sources, and sometimes from a sort of 'fiction' created by variant readings or misreadings of the ancient texts.

The texts discussed here can therefore illuminate both the extent of the dissemination of Classical history and culture among Prussian officers in this period –Sparta seems to have played a particularly important role in the formation of Prussian militarist self-conceptions – and the ways in which this knowledge of ancient history was appropriated to serve current rhetorical ends. Meanwhile, in the hands of antimilitarist authors such as Arthur Zapp, the adulation of Sparta by the Prussian Officer-Corps could then be satirised. Prussia might style herself as a 'new Sparta', yet in fact, she could be depicted as following the corrupt model of the fourth-century Spartan Empire just as easily as the model of Lycurgan warriorly asceticism, which was so prized at the Prussian Cadet-Corps.

Finally, we can see this use of the Spartan paradigm above all as a *practical* application of that philhellenism which had flowered in Prussia-Germany since the late

eighteenth century. Here, far from its habitual preserves of salon and study, enthusiasm for Greek ideals could usefully be applied to the everyday problems of barracks and battlefield.³⁰



Figure 1 – Prussia's disparate possessions and acquisitions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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¹ Losemann mentions one particular Prussian cadet-school story, *Spartanerjünglinge* (Szczepanski n.d.) which contains the Spartan *topos*; however, his analysis does not link the novella with more general Prussian military attitudes. He also attempts, without substantiation, to claim that 'in the National Socialist elite education [Sparta] was far more deeply rooted than in the education of the Prussian *Spartanerjünglinge*' (Losemann 2012: 281). On the contrary, the extant evidence (cf. Roche 2012b) clearly shows that Spartan influence was all-pervasive at the cadet-schools, and that Spartan self-identification was consistently embraced by the cadets over a wide geographical and chronological span. Meanwhile, Rebenich (2002) and Albertz (2006) have focused upon the Thermopylaean trope rather than on phillaconism in general. Rebenich's treatment of this period tends to highlight literary and academic interpretations of the 'myth of Thermopylae' (2002: 324-7), while Albertz focuses upon its deployment in school textbooks. Finally, it should be noted that both Albertz and Losemann take 1870 as their starting-point, rather than the turn of the nineteenth century. For non-military and later ideological idealisations of Sparta, however, the articles by Losemann and Rebenich provide a useful overview (see further n.29 below), as does Karl Christ's invaluable survey, 'Spartaforschung und Spartabild' (1996). On German philhellenism more generally, see n.13 below.

² Christopher Clark's recent history of Prussia, *Iron Kingdom* (2006), which I shall cite extensively here, is one of the best introductions to the subject. Also useful in this regard are Berger (2000, 2001), and Simms (1998).

³ For more on the Prussian army in general, see Craig (1955); Crousaz (1876); Demeter (1965); Messerschmidt (1976); Showalter (2000, 2001); Trox (1994).

⁴ For an overview of the history of the Prussian cadet-corps, see Crousaz (1857); Moncure (1993); Scharfenort (1892).

⁵ e.g. Dewall (1884); Gertner (1862); Scharfenort (1889); Szczepanski (n.d.) – see further Roche (2012b).

⁶ For a full treatment of this phenomenon, including a full discussion of the relationship of the Spartan *topos* at the cadet-schools with the ancient sources on Sparta, see Roche (2012b).

⁷ N.B. All translations are my own.

⁸ e.g. Dewall (1884: 50-3).

⁹ For more on these political oppositions, see Stargardt (1994); Trox (1994). It should be noted that the Social Democratic Party in Germany during this period was much more akin to the Communist party than its English counterpart has ever been; the party was subject to a period of draconian repression between 1878 and 1890, when all its meetings were banned and it was forbidden from presenting electoral lists. However, after its re-legalisation in 1890, the SPD became the largest polling party in Germany. See further Clark (2006: 563).

¹⁰ On the provenance of recruits to the Officer-Corps, see e.g. *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen der durch die Allerhöchste Verordnung vom 27. Dezember 1860 einberufenen beiden Häuser des Landtages. Haus der Abgeordneten. 7. Band. Anlagen zu den Verhandlungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten. Viertes Theil. Aktenstück No.170. Erster Bericht der Kommission über den Etat der Militär-Verwaltung für 1861, 1329-1333*. As yet, I have not uncovered sufficient evidence to ascertain whether the use of Sparta was mainly limited to the Officer-Corps alone, or whether it was often seen as important by the lower ranks also – this could be a fruitful area of future research (my thanks to Dr. Trevor Fear for raising this point).

¹¹ I am indebted to Katherine Hambridge for this reference.

¹² For more on this, see Roche (forthcoming 2012a).

¹³ For some general discussions of German philhellenism, see e.g. Butler (1935), Marchand (1996), Sünderhauf (2004); for more on German phil-laconism in particular, see Rawson (1969).

¹⁴ Particularly the defeats of Jena and Auerstedt (1806).

¹⁵ Trox (1990: 251).

¹⁶ *Militär-Wochenblatt* (1821).

¹⁷ See e.g. *ibid.* 2029-30, 2035-6.

¹⁸ Examples can be found at *ibid.* 1994-5, 2021, 2036. Additionally, the ‘millions of barbarians who overflowed Greece’ are described as ‘almost identical to the present-day Turks’ (*ibid.* 1995).

¹⁹ For more on this, see Fesser (1998).

²⁰ *Stenographische Berichte des Abgeordnetenhauses 1862, 45.Sitzung* (11 September 1862), 1587.

²¹ If Albisetti’s portrayal of a general lack of enthusiasm for Classical subjects in the *Gymnasien* during this period is correct (1983: 72-9), then the cadets may well have shown more enthusiasm for ancient history than many of their civilian counterparts.

²² *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, IV.HA [Hauptabteilung] Preußische Armee. Rep.13 ‘Militär-Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen, Kadettenkorps’, Nr.25, Bl.157*.

²³ See for example Faller (1901), Stargardt (1994); also the authors listed at n.25 below.

²⁴ For another example of ‘old Prussian simplicity’ (*altpreußische Einfachheit*) being linked to a Spartan paradigm, see Lenski (1922: 34).

²⁵ I am grateful to Elizabeth Roche for first drawing my attention to this genre. Some of the most popular *Antimilitärischetendenznovellen* included Franz Adam Beyerlein’s *Jena oder Sedan* (1903), Fritz Oswald Bilde’s *Aus einer kleinen Garnison* (1903), and Freiherr von Schlicht’s *Erstklassige Menschen* (1904).

²⁶ cf. e.g. Michell (1964); Cartledge (1987); Hamilton (1991). For more on this, see Roche (forthcoming 2013).

²⁷ Emphasis original – this advertisement can be found on the back of Lichtenstein 1890.

²⁸ Interestingly, the two novellas were later published (possibly c.1900) simply under the title *Leutnant Don Juan*, which perhaps implies that by this time a 'Spartan' title was not considered so attractive as it had been during the 1880s-1890s.

²⁹ For other, non-military, idealisations of Sparta during this period, cf. Bruck (1916), Spranger (1932), or, for an overview, Losemann (2012).

³⁰ It should also be noted that this particular form of phil-laconism and philhellenism can also be seen as instrumental in forming the roots of German adulation of Sparta in later periods – including during the Third Reich.