



**Searching for a Winner: *Exoterike Harmonia*: Outer Harmony; Leonidas Organizes His Coalition; The Battle of Antirhion: The Application of *Aphobia*: No Fear**

- 18) Leonidas anticipated that Xerxes and the Persians would once again try to invade Greece and his wisdom inspired him to develop a coalition to defend the various city-states.
- 19) Defense of the Gulf of Corinth was critical and the participation of the two major cities that guarded its narrow entrance was imperative. Leonidas's strategy was to seal off the Gulf to prevent a Persian sea assault from the northwest.
- 20) He had convinced Rhion [ Ῥίον ], the Peloponnesian [ Πελοπόννησος ] port on the south to join his coalition. But Antirhion [ Ἀντιρῆιον \an-ti-rhe'on\ ], the Akarnanian \a-kar-na-ne'an\ [ Ἀκαρνανία ] city to the north refused.
- 21) He mobilized four of the army's twelve units, a total of twenty-eight hundred in all. Alexandros, six years too young to be called was frustrated. His father Olympieus was a commander in the Wild Olive regiment and his mentor Dienekes headed the Herakles platoon.
- 22) That night Alexandros determined that he would follow the army to Antirhion to observe the battle. This was in violation of policy but his decision to go forced his squire-in-training, Xenones, to accompany him. We pick up Pressfield's narrative:

**Pressfield, *Gates of Fire*, 98-109:**

The battle took place on a dusty plain to the west of the city of Antirhion. A stream, the Akanathus \a-ka-na'thus\, meandered across the plain, bisecting it at the midpoint.

Alexandros and I had secured a vantage along the landward bluff, no more than a furlong above the site where the massed formations must clash.

Shields, helmets and foot-long spearpoints had been burnished to a mirror's gleam; they flashed brilliantly in the sun, investing the massed formation with the appearance of some colossal milling machine, made not so much of men as of bronze and iron.

Now the Spartans and Tegeates [ **Τεγεάτης**, (L&S, 1765). ] advanced to their positions in the line. First the Skiritai [ **Σκιρίται**, light-armed division of the Spartan army named for the town Skiros, **Σκίρος**, in the district of Arkadia, Ἄρκαδία (L&S, 1611). ], on the left, forty-eight shields across and eight deep; next the Selassian Stephanos [from the Lakedaemonian city north of Sparta ], the Laurel regiment, eleven hundred *periōikic* [ **περίοικος**, (inhabitants of the towns dependent on Sparta (L&S, 1380). ) hoplites. To the right of these massed the six hundred heavy infantry of Tegea [ **Τεγέα** ]; then the *agema* [ **ἄγημα**, a division (L&S, 9). ] of the Knights in the line's center, Polynikes prominent among them, thirty shields across and five deep, to fight around and protect the person of the king. Right of these, dressing their line, moved into place the Wild Olive regiment, a hundred and forty-four across, with the Panther battalion adjacent the Knights, then the Huntress with Olympieus in the forerank, and the Menelaion [ **Μενέλαος**, "abiding-men" (L&S, 1102). ]. On their right, already on their marks, massed the battalions of the Herakles [ **Ἡρακλῆς**, men of Heraclea, **Ἡρακλέα** (L&S, 777). ], another hundred and forty-four across, with Dienekes clearly visible at the head of his thirty-six man *enomotia* [ **ἐνωμοτία**, (L&S, 579). ], four nine-man files, or *stichoi* [ **στίχος**, a file of soldiers (L&S, 1646). ], anchoring the right. The total, excluding armed squires ranging as auxiliaries, exceeded forty-five hundred and extended wing to wing across the plain for nearly six hundred meters.



Across from these the Antirhionians and their Syrakusan [ Συρακόσιος, “Syracusan” (L&S, 1731). ] allies had massed their numbers, the same width as the Spartans but six or more shields deeper.

It took no diviner’s gift to determine their state of agitation. “Watch their spearpoints,” Alexandros said, pointing to the massed foe as they jostled and jockeyed into their ranks. “See them tremble. Even the plumes on their helmets are quaking.” I looked. In the Spartan line the iron-bladed forest of eight-footers rose solid as a spike fence, each shaft upright and aligned, dressed straight as a geometer’s line and none moving. Across among the enemy, shafts wove and wobbled; all save the Syrakusans in the center were misaligned in rank and file. Some shafts actually clattered against their neighbor’s, chattering like teeth.

Alexandros was tallying the battalions in the Syrakusans’ ranks. He made their total at twenty-four hundred shields, with twelve to fifteen hundred mercenaries and an additional three thousand citizen militiamen from the city of Antirhion herself. The enemy’s numbers totaled half again that of the Spartans’. It was not enough and the foe knew it.

Now the clamor began.

Among the enemy’s ranks, the bravest began banging the ash of their spear shafts upon the bronze bowls of their shields, creating a tumult of *pseudoandreia* [ ψευδοανδρεία, “false courage” (L&S, 128). ] which reverberated across and around the mountain-enclosed plain.

The roar multiplied threefold, then five, then ten, as the enemy rear ranks and flankers picked the clamor up and contributed their own bluster and bronze-banging. Soon the entire fifty-four hundred were following the war cry. The commander thrust his spear forward and the mass surged behind him into the advance.

The Spartans had neither moved nor made a sound.

The Spartans stood as one because each possessed the mental attitude of the winner: **ἄφοβία, *aphobia***: no fear! This is a key principle in Scripture and consistently implored by the Lord to the armies of Israel.

#### Thieme, *War: Moral or Immoral?* 29:

You cannot function in a military situation when you are neutralized by fear. Fear in the face of overwhelming odds is natural; but catering to it becomes a sin for a believer, since God has made provision for it.

**Deuteronomy 20:1** - “When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots, and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you.”

**Psalms 46:10** - Be still [ רָפָא *rapa*: to relax (Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius, 951) ] and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

**v. 11** - The Lord of the armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The Spartan army is poised, fearless, and patient. It will await the command of its leader King Leonidas. The warriors are prepared, they are confident, and they are professional instruments of death about to be unleashed as one.



### Pressfield:

They waited patiently in their scarlet-cloaked ranks, neither grim nor rigid, but speaking quietly to each other words of encouragement and cheer, securing the final preparation for actions they had rehearsed hundred of times in training and performed dozens and scores more in battle.

Note the example of mutual support and encouragement for each other in the face of pressure and testing.

The sophisticated believer is not ignorant of these things and thus is able to comfort his fellow believer who may be experiencing intense pressure for the first time. Wisdom accumulates in the soul of the seasoned veteran who has encountered numerous engagements in the Invisible War. This knowledge can be passed on to others. The confidence of the veteran soldier can be transmitted to the less-advanced believer as he faces the advancing levels of testing in the sophisticated spiritual life.

The key asset one possesses as he confronts such circumstances is the first piece of advice Moses gave the First Generation as they stood trapped between Pharaoh's Egyptian army and the waters of Little Bitter Lake:

**Exodus 14:13** - "Do not fear! Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever."

### Pressfield:

Here came the foe, picking up the pace of his advance. A fast walk. A swinging stride. The line was extending and fanning open to the right, "winging out" as men in fear edged into the shadow of the shield of the comrade to their right; already one could see the enemy ranks stagger and fall from alignment as the bravest surged forward and the hesitant shrank back.

Leonidas and his priests still stood exposed out front.

The shallow stream yet waited before the enemy. The foe's generals, expecting the Spartans to advance first, had formed their lines so that this watercourse stood midway between the armies. In the enemy's plan, no doubt, the sinuous defile of the river would disorder the Lakedaemonian ranks and render them vulnerable at the moment of attack. The Spartans, however, had outwitted them. As soon as the bronze-banging began, the enemy commanders knew they could not restrain their ranks longer; they must advance while their men's blood was up, or all fervor would dissipate and terror flood inevitably into the vacuum.

Here we see the stark contrast between the leadership of the enemy versus that of Leonidas; the preparation of the enemy's forces versus that of the Spartan allies; and the mental attitudes of the enemy ranks versus those of Sparta's. These principles are expressed by:

### Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*, 34-35:

A clever general avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks it when it is sluggish and inclined to return. This is the art of studying moods. Disciplined and clam, he awaits the appearance of disorder and hubbub among the enemy. This is the art of retaining self-possession.



To wait at ease while the enemy is toiling and struggling is the art of husbanding one's strength. To refrain from intercepting an enemy whose banners are in perfect order, to refrain from attacking an army drawn up in calm and confident array—this is the art of studying circumstances. Do not swallow a bait offered by the enemy.

The enemy commander thought he could lure Leonidas into making the initial charge and then use the Akanathus, the river that dissected the battlefield, to his advantage. Leonidas had fought too many battles to fall for that one.

### Pressfield:

Now the river worked against the enemy. His foreranks descended into the defile, yet a quarter mile from the Spartans. Up they came, their already disordered dress and interval disintegrating further. They were again on the flat now, but with the river to their rear, the most perilous place it could be in the event of a rout.

Leonidas stood patiently watching. The enemy was now a fifth of a mile off and accelerating the pace of his advance. The Spartans still hadn't moved. Dekton (the priest) handed over the she-goat's leash.

Leonidas performed the *sphagia* [σφαγία, cutting the throat of a sacrificial animal (L&S, 1737).], crying aloud to Artemis Huntress [Ἄρτεμις, goddess of the hunt; also known in Sparta as Ortheia, Ὀρθεία, and who presided over the blood rites of young people who fought one another (*Dictionary of Ancient Greek Civilization, Methuen & Co., 1966, 63-64*).] and the Muses [daughters of Zeus (*Ibid.* 300).], then piercing with his own sword the throat of the sacrificial goat whose haunches he pinned from behind with his knees, his left hand hauling the beast's jaw exposed as the blade thrust through its throat. No eye in the formation failed to see the blood gush and spill into Gaia [Γαῖα, "earth" (L&S, 335).], maternal earth, splattering as it fell Leonidas' bronze greaves and painting crimson his feet in their oxhide battle soles.

The king turned to face the Skiritai, Spartiates, *perioikoi* and Tegeates, who still held, patient and silent, in their massed ranks. He extended his sword, dark and dripping the blood of holy sacrifice, first heavenward toward the gods whose aid he now summoned, then around, toward the fast-advancing enemy.

"Zeus [Ζεύς, supreme ruler among the Greeks gods] Savior and Eros [Ἔρως]!" his voice thundered, eclipsed but not unheard in the cacophonous din. "Lakedaemon!"

The *sarpinx* sounded "Advance!," trumpeters sustaining the eardrum-numbing note ten paces after the men had stepped off, and now the pipers' wail cut through, shrill notes of their *auloi* [αὐλοί, flutes (L&S, 276).] piercing the melée like the cry of a thousand Furies.

**Grant, Michael and John Hazel. *Gods and Mortals in Classical Mythology: A Dictionary.* (New York: Dorset Press, 1979), 145-46:**

**FURIES** (Greek: *Erinues* [Ἐρινύες], Latin: *Furia* \fu-re'-i). The Furies, female spirits of justice and vengeance, personify very ancient retributive ideas. Their number was usually left indeterminate. In a wide sense, the Furies stood for the rightness of things within the established order. They were understood as the persecutors of men and women who transgressed 'natural' laws. It was believed that human beings might not have the possibility or even the right to punish such horrible crimes, and it was left to the dead man's Furies to pursue their perpetrator and exact retribution.



In Arcadia they were known as *Maniai* [ **μανία**, “madness” (L&S, 1079). ], ‘senders of madness.’ The Furies were often thought of as having their natural abode in Tartarus [ **Τάρταρος**, “the nether world” (L&S, 1759). ] where, when not issuing forth on to the earth to punish living sinners, they applied everlasting torture to the eternally damned.

To the beat the Spartans and their allies advanced, eight-footers at the upright, their honed and polished spearpoints flashing in the sun. Now the foe broke into an all-out charge. Leonidas, displaying neither haste nor urgency, fell in step in his place in the front rank as it advanced to envelop him, with the Knights flowing impeccably into position upon his right and left.

Now from the Lakedaemonian ranks rose the paean [ **παιών**, a victory hymn (L&S, 1289). ], a hymn to Castor [ **Κάστωρ**; a Spartan hero; **Καστόπειος μέλος** “Castor’s Battle-March” (L&S, 882). ] ascending from four thousand throats. On the climactic beat of the second stanza the spears of the first three ranks snapped from the vertical into the attack.

Words cannot convey the impact of awe and terror produced upon the foe, any foe, by this seemingly uncomplex maneuver, called in Lakedaemon “spiking it” or “palming the pine,” so simple to perform on the parade ground and so formidable under conditions of life and death.

To behold it executed with such precision and fearlessness, no man surging forward out of control nor hanging back in dread, none edging right into the shadow of his rankmate’s shield, but all holding solid and unbreakable, tight as the scales on a serpent’s flank, the heart stopped in awe, the hair stood straight up upon the neck and shivers coursed powerfully the length of the spine.

As when some colossal beast, brought to bay by the hounds, wheels in his fury, bristling with rage and baring his fangs, and plants himself in the power and fearlessness of his strength, so did the bronze and crimson phalanx of the Lakedaemonians now snap as one into its mode of murder.

The left wing of the enemy, eighty across, collapsed even before the shields of their *promachoi* [ **πρόμαχοι**, “those fighting before or in front” (L&S, 1489). ], the front-rankers, had come within thirty paces of the Spartans. A cry of dread rose from the throats of the foe, so primal it froze the blood, and then was swallowed in the tumult.

The enemy left broke from within.

The wing, whose advancing breadth had stood an instant earlier at forty-eight shields, abruptly became thirty, then twenty, then ten as panic flared like a gale-driven fire from terror-stricken pockets within the massed formation. Those in the first three ranks who turned in flight now collided with their comrades advancing from the rear. Shield rim caught upon shield rim, spear shaft upon spear shaft; a massive tangle of flesh and bronze ensued as men bearing seventy pounds of shield and armor stumbled and fell, becoming obstacles and impediments to their own advancing comrades. You could see the brave men stride on in the advance, crying out in rage to their countrymen as these abandoned them. Those who still clung to courage pushed past those who had forsaken it, calling out in outrage and fury, trampling the forerankers, or else, as valor deserted them too, jerked free and fled to save their own skins.

At the height of the foe’s confusion the Spartan right fell upon them. Now even the bravest of the enemy broke. Why should a man, however valorous, stand and die while right and left, fore and rear, his fellows deserted him? Shields were flung, spears cast wildly to the turf. Half a thousand men wheeled on their heels and stampeded in terror. At that instant the center and right of the enemy’s line crashed shields-on into the central corps of the Spartans.

That sound which all warriors know but which to Alexandros’ and my youthful ears had been heretofore unknown and unheard now ascended from the clash and collision of the *othismos* [ **ὄθισμός**, “shield against shield” (L&S, 2031). ].



Dienekes waded into the rout below us; we could see his cross-crested “curry brush” at the right of the Herakles, in the fore of the third platoon. As disordered as were the ranks of the enemy, so held the Spartans’ intact and cohesive. Their forerank did not charge wildly upon the foe, flailing like savages, nor did they advance with the stolid precision of the parade ground. Rather they surged, in unison, like a line of warships on the ram.

I had never appreciated how far beyond the interleaved bronze of the *promachoi*’s shields the murderous iron of their eight-footers could extend. These punched and struck, overhand, driven by the full force of the right arm and shoulder, across the upper rim of the shield; not just the spears of the front-rankers but those of the second and even the third, extending over their mate’s shoulders to form a thrashing engine that advanced like a wall of murder. As wolves in a pack take down the fleeing deer, so did the Spartan right fall upon the defenders of Antirhion, not in frenzied shrieking rage, lip-curved and fang-bared, but predator-like, cold-blooded, applying the steel with the wordless cohesion of the killing pack and the homicidal efficiency of the hunt.

Dienekes was turning them. Wheeling his platoon to take the enemy in flank. They were in the smoke now. It became impossible to see. Dust rose in such quantities beneath the churning feet of the men that the entire plain seemed afire, and from the choking cloud arose that sound, that terrible indescribable sound. We could sense rather than see the Herakles *lochos* (platoon), directly beneath us where the dust was thinner. They had routed the enemy left; their front ranks now surged into the business of cutting down those luckless bastards who had fallen or been trampled or whose panic-unstrung knees could not find strength to bear them swiftly enough from their own slaughter.

On the center and right, along the whole line the Spartans and Syrakusans clashed now shield-to-shield, helmet-to-helmet. Amid the maelstrom we could catch only glimpses, and those primarily of the rear-rankers, eight deep on the Lakedaemonian side, twelve and sixteen deep on the Syrakusan, as they thrust the three-foot-wide bowls of their *hoplon* shields flush against the backs of the men in the file before them and heaved and ground and shoved with all their strength, the soles of their footgear churning up trenches in the plain and slinging yet more dust into the already choking air.

No longer was it possible to distinguish individual men, or even units. We could see only the tidal surge and back-surge of the massed formations and hear without ceasing that terrible, blood-stilling sound.

As when a flood descends from the mountains and the wall of water crashed down the dry courses, smashing into the stone-founded steaks and woven brush of the husbandman’s dam, so did the Spartan line surge against the massed weight of the Syrakusans.

The Syrakusan center, pounded and hammered by the Tegeate heavy infantry, the king and the Knights and the massed battalions of the Wild Olive, began to peel and founder.

The Skiritai had routed the enemy right. From the left the battalions of the Herakles rolled up the enemy flank. Each Syrakusan wingman forced to wheel to defend his unshielded side meant another drawn off from the forward push against the frontally advancing Spartans. The sound of the keening struggle seemed to rise for a moment, and then, went dead silent as desperate men summoned every reserve of valor from their shrieking, exhausted limbs. An eternity passed in the time it takes to draw a dozen breaths, and then, with the same sickening sound made by the mountain dam as it gives way, the Syrakusan line cracked and broke.

Now in the dust of the plain the slaughter began. The Spartan front-rankers, men of the first five age-classes, were the cream of the city in foot speed and strength, none save the officers over twenty-five years old. Many, like Polynikes in the van among the Knights, were sprinters of Olympic and near-Olympic stature with garland after garland won in games before the gods.



These now, loosed by Leonidas and driven on by their own lust for glory, pressed home the sentence of steel upon the fleeing Syrakusans.

When the trumpeters had blown the *sarpinx* and its mind-numbing wail sounded the call to still the slaughter, even the rawest untrained eye could read the field like a book.

There, on the Spartan right where the Herakles regiment had routed the Antirhionians, one saw the turf unchurned and the field beyond littered with enemy shields and helmets, spears and even breastplates, flung aside by the stampeding foe in his flight. Bodies lay scattered at intervals, facedown, with the shameful gashes of death delivered upon their fleeing backs.

On the right, where the stronger troops of the enemy had held longer against the Skiritai, the carnage spread thicker and more dense, the turf chewed more fiercely; along the battle wall which the foe had erected to anchor its flank, clumps of corpses could be seen, slain as they, trapped by their own wall, had struggled in vain to scale it.

Then the eye found the center, where the slaughter had achieved its most savage concentration. Here the earth was rent and torn as if a thousand span of oxen had assaulted it all day with the might of their hooves and the steel of their ploughs' deep-churning blades. The chewed-up dirt extended in a line three hundred meters across and a hundred deep where the feet of the contending formations had heaved and strained for purchase upon the earth. Bodies sprawled like a carpet upon the earth, mounded in places two and three deep. To the rear, across the plain where the Syrakusans had fled, and along the riven walls of the watercourse, more corpses could be seen in scattered perimeters manned by two and three, five and seven, where these in their flight had closed ranks and made their stand, doomed as castles of sand against the tide. They fell with wounds of honor, facing their Spartan foe, cut down from the front.

The Spartans were hauling bodies off the stacks of the dead, seeking friend or brother, wounded and clinging yet to life. As each groaning foeman was flung down, a *xiphos* [ *ξίφος*, "sword" (L&S, 1191). ] blade held him captive at the throat. "Hold!" Leonidas cried, motioning urgently to the trumpeters to resound the call to break off. "Attend them! Attend the enemy too!" he shouted, and the officers relayed the order up and down the line.

- 23) We have just read an account of a battle in which economy of force was employed by the Spartan alliance.
- 24) The mass or combat power of Sparta had been developed in thousands of hours of military training. Each hoplite had co-opted his weapons, tactics, fighting ability, discipline and morale, behind the leadership of Leonidas into a unified force.
- 25) This combat power was concentrated against the Antirhionian alliance with deadly efficiency, every aspect employed with surgical precision toward the objective of defeating the enemy
- 26) Supporting the effort was the prevailing mental attitude of *aphobia*—*ἀφοβία*: no fear!
- 27) In the face of a charging enemy the soldiers of Lakedaemon and Peloponnese \pe' la-pa-nez\ stood fast without distraction having total confidence in their training and in their leader, King Leonidas, who occupied the center of the first rank.
- 28) Now I don't want anyone to think I am comparing Leonidas with our Lord Jesus Christ. But we are noting his leadership and the training of his Lakedaemonian warriors as an illustration of the leadership and training available to the Christian warrior.



29) We have studied the Lord's admonition to Joshua as he was preparing to cross the Jordan and confront the various armies of the Hamitic population of Canaan:

**Joshua 1:9** - "Have I not commanded you? Be confident and Courageous! Do not fear to the point of panic nor allow dismay to destroy your courage. The Lord your God is with you wherever you go."