

Combat Motivation and Cohesion in the Age of Justinian

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One topic that regularly recurs in the scholarship on modern warfare is combat cohesion and motivation. Many volumes have been published on these topics, and there is no sign that this interest might abate any time soon. That interest has only rarely filtered down to scholarship of the ancient and late antique worlds, however.¹ The sixth century is well suited to analyses of these issues given the abundance of varied and high quality evidence, despite the lack of attention given the subject by modern scholars. This chapter seeks to remedy this by offering an introduction to combat cohesion and motivation in the sixth century. It forms the second half of a two-part project on the subject, and the core this project is the evidence of Procopius.² Procopius describes more than thirty battles or sieges from the age of Justinian,³ and his battle narratives have been the subject of a good deal of research.⁴ Yet there is much more work to do on sixth-century combat and our understanding Procopius' value as a source for military history. By introducing the subject of combat cohesion and motivation in the sixth century, this paper seeks to move the discussion forward.⁵

The first part of this paper will be concerned with motivation, and will explore the much discussed "ratio of fire" and its applicability in an ancient context, the presumed bellicosity of some soldiers that many of our sources hint at, and the role of fear in motivating soldiers to fight and to maintain their cohesion. Indeed, fear serves as the segue to combat cohesion, and here the discussion picks up where the first paper left off.⁶ There are two forms of cohesion that will form the basis of this analysis: horizontal cohesion, the cohesion generated by the relationship between peers in the military, and after providing an overview of unit cohesion we turn to regimental pride and unit standards; and vertical cohesion, which is the cohesion involving leaders and their subordinates, which will include the subjects of training and the wider role of

¹ To list just a few examples, for modern warfare see Marshall (1947), Holmes (1986), and Engen (2009, 2016), and for ancient warfare Goldsworthy (1996), Hanson (2000), and Crowley (2012).

² For the first half, see Whately (forthcoming).

³ Whately 2016a, 238-243.

⁴ Kaegi 1990; Breccia 2004; Syväne 2004; Rance 2005; Lillington-Martin 2007; Janniard 2011; Petitjean 2014; Whately 2016a.

⁵ Space precludes a detailed analysis of this subject, which means some topics will be discussed cursorily, while others will be excluded.

⁶ Whately forthcoming.

the commander. Procopius' Wars is an integral component of any examination of sixth-century combat, and as such will form the core of this analysis. The aim, however, is a holistic approach to cohesion and motivation, so Procopius' accounts will be supplemented by other sixth-century sources of evidence including the accounts of Syrianus and Maurice, the incidental details found in the works of historians like Agathias and Theophylact Simocatta, the legal evidence, and the physical evidence.

I. Combat Motivation

Ratio of Fire

A much discussed factor in combat motivation, and to a lesser extent unit cohesion, is "ratio of fire", which refers to the proportion of combatants who use their weapons. Scholars have questioned how many men fired their weapons in the heat of battle, and the impetus for this is the influential work of S. L. A. Marshall.⁷ Marshall, based on a wealth of interviews that he conducted with US troops during World War II, argued that only one in five US soldiers actually fired their weapons, a low number which increased slightly due to training improvements by the time of the Korean and later Vietnam wars. As an aside, Marshall was also one of the first scholars to put a great deal of emphasis on unit cohesion, another being the nineteenth century French officer Ardant du Picq.⁸ Getting back to ratio of fire, this notion that western men were generally averse to using their weapons in the throes of combat has been picked up more recently by Grossman, a former lieutenant colonel, who has written two influential books.⁹ Following Marshall, Grossman too argued that only a few men used their weapons in combat. If this was a universal tendency, an aversion to killing, then sixth-century soldiers would need a great deal of motivating indeed.

Adrian Goldsworthy, who wrote a pivotal study of battle in republican and imperial Rome, suggested that only one quarter of Roman soldiers might have actively tried to kill their opponents, a nuanced take on Marshall's claims. Of course, evidence for how often soldiers used their weapons in ancient combat is hard, if not well nigh impossible, to come by. Ancient historians, arguably our most detailed sources for ancient battles, display little interest in the feats of the ordinary soldier, exceptional circumstances aside, as per the conventions of their

⁷ Marshall 1947.

⁸ Du Picq 1987 – he died in 1870 and the work was published posthumously.

⁹ Grossman 1995, 2004.

chosen genre. Is there another way to determine, or at least guess at, the kill rates in sixth-century combat?

One possible solution is to look closely at the numbers reported in ancient battles and to work out the average number of casualties per man. Many historians give us the number of participants in a battle, as well as the number of casualties, and in many instances the numbers that historians report are fairly reliable, with Procopius a particularly notable example.¹⁰ In the Battle of Dara, for instance, Procopius gives the following figures for the two armies: 25,000 for the Romans (1.13.23), and 40,000 for the Persians (1.13.23). By the end of the battle, we learn that the Persians had suffered about 5,000 casualties (1.14.51), though Procopius does not tell us the number of Roman casualties. Using those numbers, and assuming they are accurate, if no one killed more than one man then the Romans needed only one fifth of their force to try and succeed in killing a Persian opponent. Procopius does not tell us how many men were wounded, however. And such a practice would then suggest that only the smallest of fractions of Persian men would have made an attempt to kill Romans, and succeeded, which would make the Persians soft indeed, and so support many of the Persian stereotypes we find in the sources.¹¹ What is more, all of this ignores any attempts on either side not to get killed. In other words, it seems unlikely that those who perished just stood there while their foes hacked away, but rather they are likely to have ducked, dodged, blocked, parried and more.¹² Furthermore, in other instances, presumably involving many of the same groups of men, the results were quite different – either the men suddenly found some hidden courage, or the opposite. A more systematic approach than this preliminary one might yield better results, but it seems more than likely that it would not. As noted, deducing ratio of fire on the basis of sixth-century evidence would seem near impossible.

As it happens, more recent scholarship has revealed the weaknesses of Marshall's findings, especially with respect to ratio of fire.¹³ In a study on the combat effectiveness of Canadian soldiers in World War II, Engen was able to draw on a number of still accessible – unlike Marshall's – reports compiled after combat that dealt specifically with the degree to which

¹⁰ On Procopius' use of numbers in combat in general see Whately (2016b).

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of this topic see Börm (2007).

¹² James 2010.

¹³ See, especially, Engen 2009.

soldiers used their weapons.¹⁴ Engen reveals that Canadian soldiers did not have the same hesitation in using their weapons that Marshall alleges the Americans had. Indeed, Engen's forceful rebuttal casts doubt on whether ratio of fire is even applicable to militaries, modern and ancient.¹⁵ Unless we decide that Canadian soldiers are unique in their propensity to fire at the enemy, ratio of fire is not an established means of determining combat motivation, let alone effectiveness.

Bellicose Soldiers

We cannot determine the ratio of fire for the sixth century based on the available evidence for combat. What we do occasionally find, however, is reference to particularly bellicose soldiers, those who might have been more willing to kill in battle. Procopius rarely discusses the bellicosity of individual soldiers, except for a few remarks on the quality of Belisarius' personal retinue.¹⁶ Indeed, Procopius is loath to highlight individual soldiers, especially those of the rank-and-file, unless they perform remarkable deeds.¹⁷ Many of our additional textual sources for the sixth century do, however.

Syrianus Magister wrote the *Peri Strategias* and some additional texts perhaps as early as the sixth century.¹⁸ Syrianus spent a good part of his time in that work discussing the phalanx, seemingly an ancient formation, but one with some current applicability. His discussion eventually turns to whom should stand where, and he makes the following salient points:

The front rank men...squad leaders, should stand out from the rest of the army because of their courage and physical strength, for they have to bear the brunt of the hand-to-hand fighting and wear such heavy armour. The other major officers should be no less distinguished for courage and physical strength. They should also be far superior to the others in combat experience and good sense, each one according to his rank and the number of troops under his command...

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ See, too, Janniard's comments (2011, 403).

¹⁶ Procopius (7.1.20) claims that the 7,000 horsemen that Belisarius recruited using his own resources would shy away from standing at the front of a battle line, or challenging men to single combat.

¹⁷ See Whately 2016a: 31-34.

¹⁸ Admittedly, scholarly opinion seems to be leaning towards a ninth century date largely on the basis of the excellent points made by Rance (2007). To my mind, however, Syrianus' mention of Belisarius (idem, 709-711) and his terminology for Arabs (idem, 711-714) leave the possibility for a sixth century date open.

The rear guard should possess no less courage and physical strength than the men stationed in the second rank. They should also be notably superior to other troops in experience and good sense, for they are responsible for forming and keeping the men in their place in line. In action, moreover, they must keep the men ahead of them in close order, so that the phalanx may maintain its compact formation and present a stronger and more formidable front to the enemy...Fifth in importance are the leaders of half files, who help in maintaining order in the files and who keep the men in front of them in closer order, just as the rear guard who, by themselves, cannot tighten up the ranks of the whole phalanx.¹⁹

In the passage Syrianus, like other ancient writers, sees value in cohesion, not surprising in a discussion of the phalanx, but like the others he is interested in cohesion of the larger whole. While the functioning of the larger whole may be contingent on the workings of several smaller groups, on the surface, at least, that is not immediately apparent. As we have seen, we do not have much in the way of direct evidence for these small groups, numbering 6-10 men, in our sources, or at least for permanent groupings of that size at this time. Vegetius' *contubernia* have more to do with his vague *antiqua legio* than contemporary practice, and Maurice's small groups might be ad hoc structures organized for combat – contingent on circumstances, then, and not a regular formation. Furthermore, in Syrianus' eyes, cohesion of the group has more to do with the efforts of the various officers and commanders in the ranks, as well as the experience and bravery of the men at the front, rear, and flanks of the line, than anything else, a point to which we will return below.

In his detailed and comprehensive account of the mechanics of sixth-century cavalry, and to a lesser extent infantry, combat, Maurice regularly identifies a group of soldiers whom he labels *koursoures* (κούρσορες). Dennis translated the term as “assault troops”,²⁰ and Maurice claims these are the troops who move out from the main line to attack a retreating foe.²¹ That very definition implies that the *koursoures* were more willing to engage their foes than not, especially given the dangers inherent in attacking a fleeing opponent. The term is used

¹⁹ Peri Strat. 15.87-117, trans. Dennis.

²⁰ Note, for example, Dennis' (1984, 15) translation at Maur. Strat. 1.3.15.

²¹ Note the comments of Janniard (2011, 63, 184, 377, 383 n. 1213).

throughout the text, and we even find it in select papyri including one from Nessana.²² In the case of the latter, however, the term refers to something else, probably couriers, rather than mobile front-line attackers.²³ The term is used dozens of times in the *Strategikon* as assault troops, however.²⁴ When Maurice turns to the structure of his armies, he makes it clear that the *koursores* are to be positioned at the front in ordinary battles, in other words not just deployed at the end during the pursuit.²⁵ The implication is that they should, ideally, be able to meet the enemy in battle themselves, and that if they are pushed back for whatever reason, they will return to combat and fight at the front as soon as they have had a chance to regroup. By and large, Maurice seems to imply that some soldiers would be more willing to fight than others, and that they should be given every opportunity to do so.

One anonymous author, Agathias, and Theophylact Simocatta recognize that some soldiers were more warlike than others, so seeming to support the view of Syrianus and Maurice that some men were more warlike and so better at maintaining cohesion. The anonymous author of the Dialogue of Political Science, though not, at least based on the surviving evidence, a classicizing historian, also implies that some men will be more likely to keep their position in line than others.²⁶ Agathias, for instance, refers to an incident in which Stephanus, a commander, collected two hundred of the bravest and best-armed cavalry for an expedition (1.17.4). In another example, Theophylact emphasizes the bellicosity of some soldiers in his description of the Siege of Constantina. In that account the general Romanus manages to separate the brave from the weak, and apparently selects the most warlike (*τὸ μὲν μάχιμον*), though Theophylact does not get into what this might have entailed.²⁷ A book earlier, while discussing Heraclius, father of the emperor Heraclius, Theophylact notes that Commentiolus marched to Anchialus, and that when he got there he reviewed his troops to separate the brave from the ineffectual.²⁸ Thus, while we do not have evidence for sixth-century ratio of fire rates,

²² P. Ness. 3.35. cf. P. Ant. 2.109, P. Cair. Masp. 2.67242, P. Cair. Masp. 3.67288, P. Horak 33, P. Oxy. 16.1901, P. Oxy. 16.1920, and many more.

²³ Note the comments of Trombley (2007, 330).

²⁴ Maur. Strat. 1.3.16, 2.3.1, 2.4.11, 2.5.5, 3.5.7, 3.5.11, 3.5.12, 3.5.14, 3.5.15, 3.5.16, 3.5.17, 3.6.1, 3.8.1, 3.8.2, 3.12.2, 6.2.1, 6.3.1, 6.3.1, 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 6.5.1, 7.16a.1, 7.16a.6, 11.2.27, 12.2.1.

²⁵ Maur. Strat. 3.12.2. Procopius might well be alluding to these types of soldiers at 7.1.20, referring to Belisarius' private soldiers, *bucellarii*, and not soldiers employed by the state, at least directly.

²⁶ Anonymous, Dialogue of Political Science 4.19.

²⁷ Theophyl. Sim. 3.7.9.

²⁸ Theophyl. Sim. 2.10.8-9. See too Peter's inspection, and positive impression, of the troops at Asemus, also described by Theophylact (Theophyl. Sim. 7.3.3-4).

there is some evidence that our sources believed that some soldiers were more motivated in combat than others.

Fear and the Law

One point where the line between motivation and cohesion blurs is when it comes to fear, for fear can both motivate soldiers to fight and to stay together in the line.²⁹ Procopius, like his successors Agathias and Theophylact Simocatta, addresses fear a few times. All three historians reveal some insight into the psychology of soldiers; sometimes it is the fear of Roman soldiers in battle, and sometimes it is the fear of Rome's foes.³⁰ A few examples will suffice.

Starting with Procopius, elements of the Roman army were scared when they discovered their enemy's position at the Battle of Callinicum (1.18.9), while we find the Romans trying to frighten their foes by means of stratagems in the Battle of Satala (1.15.12). The Romans employ similar techniques in Africa at the Battle of Mt. Bourgaon (4.12.12-22) and in the build-up to the Battle of Tricamarum (4.1.8). Exhortations too often contained references to fear. In his speech to the Vandals before the Battle of Tricamarum, Gelimer attempts to persuade his men to use fear to guide them to victory (4.2.13).³¹ Agathias, as narrator, comments on the employment of similar tactics in his account of the Siege of Cumae. There select Roman and allied commanders were to scare the Goths away from an encampment set up on the River Po (1.11.4). Sometimes fear might even impel a general to abandon or postpone plans for battle even if his troops were eager, as was the case with the general Romanus when faced with an overwhelming number of Persians at Constantina,³² and Belisarius decades earlier at Callinicum.³³

We do not find fear only in the literary sources, however, for there are indirect references to it in the legal evidence too. There are a number of pieces of legislation from the Digest that pertain specifically to combat: 49.3.13 indicates that soldiers who lose their weapons in wartime (*in bello*) should suffer capital punishment. A couple of lines later we find this: "a man who has fallen out of line is normally either beaten with rods or changes his branch of service according

²⁹ Janniard (2011, 379) does not put much stock in some of du Picq's views (idem, 338-340; 373, n. 1183; 402), though he notes the role fear of the breaking of the line can play.

³⁰ Cf. Janniard 2011, 394.

³¹ On Vandal War battle exhortations see Whately (2016a, 134-136). Note, too, the insightful reading of Kaldellis (2004, 29-33), which follows the work of De Romilly (1956, 144-150) on Thucydides.

³² Theophyl. Sim. 3.7.12.

³³ Procop. Wars 1.18.17-24.

to the circumstances”.³⁴ At the same time, we read that the soldier who first flees from the battle line faces capital punishment, and with his fellow soldiers looking on, no less.³⁵ While these three instructions come from the works of jurists written some three hundred or so years earlier, their inclusion by the compilers of the Digest shows their sixth-century relevance.³⁶ The Digest is not the only sixth-century work that argues that soldiers be punished in these circumstances, for Maurice says as much in the *Strategikon*.³⁷ Indeed, although the Justinianic Code and the subsequent Novels do not delve into combat in particular, there is legislation concerning the possession of arms that indicates imperial authorities held it to be a serious matter.³⁸ Ownership of weapons was to be controlled, if at all possible.

Fear, then, would seem to have been a significant motivating force, and in certain contexts it might have enabled greater cohesion in battle. On the other hand, it could be used to achieve the opposite effect. In some instances fear would motivate soldiers to abandon their line and flee, rather than to stay together. Although we questioned the validity of Marshall’s ratio of fire above, these ancient accounts of fleeing from battle would seem to indicate that some of the same psychological factors motivated sixth-century soldiers as their more recent counterparts.

II. Combat Cohesion

Bands of Brothers

As noted above, this chapter effectively serves as the second of two parts. The first part, from a collection on unit cohesion in ancient warfare, examined the evidence for unit cohesion in sixth-century combat.³⁹ What that study revealed is that we have very little evidence for units of the size required, eight to ten men, to determine whether unit cohesion, or horizontal peer bonding, is a factor in combat.⁴⁰ Procopius does not describe such small units, and the military manuals, for the most part, limit their discussions to short-term divisions.⁴¹ The only possible

³⁴ Dig. 49.3.16. trans. Watson.

³⁵ Dig. 49.6.3.

³⁶ Note the comments of Robinson (1997, 105-119).

³⁷ Maur. Strat. 1.8.20.

³⁸ Cod Iust. 11.47.

³⁹ Whately forthcoming.

⁴⁰ For definitions, see Siebold 2006.

⁴¹ Veg. Mil. 2.7.5, 2.8.8, 2.13.6-7, 2.19.3, 2.21.4, and 2.25.2; Maur. Strat. 1.6, 1.81., 2.6, 7.3.1. See too Treadgold 1995, 93; Janniard 2011; Whately 2016b. Urbicius, in his early sixth century *Epitadeuma* (4.26), refers to a *dekania*, which is a ten-man unit (see Greatrex, Elton, and Burgess 2005, 60-61). *Dekania* also appears in Maurice (Maur.

reference to an eight- to ten-man unit in operation comes from a lone papyrus from Nessana, P. Ness. 3.37, which refers to allocations of men by *dekarch*, the presumptive leader of a *dekarchy*,⁴² dispatched for an unknown operation in Egypt. Although we should not dismiss it outright, we best explain combat cohesion motivation using alternative means.⁴³

Regimental Pride

One of the factors that Engen raises in his account of combat motivation in the Canadian army is regimental pride.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, our evidence for sixth-century regiments is sparse, not only in comparison to the World War II material, but also in comparison to early and high Rome imperial era material.⁴⁵ Procopius' language for regiments is vague, and the legal, papyrological, and epigraphic evidence is incomplete.⁴⁶ Jones discusses the identifiable sixth-century regiments.⁴⁷ Jones' list, however, is compiled using a wide range of sources, and often our only evidence comes from a lone mention in a text, or a chance inscription.

One such example comes from Theophylact Simocatta who, unlike Procopius, occasionally employs technical military terminology.⁴⁸ And unlike Procopius, he identifies one of the military units that features in his narrative; Theophylact calls the soldiers stationed in Beroia in Syria the *Quartoparthoi* (*τοῦ καταλόγου γεγονέναι τῶν Κουαρτοπάρθων*), in other words the legio IV Parthia, a legion whose history stretched back several hundred years.⁴⁹ That one passage, however, is the only place where he names the regiment. As it happens, our comparative evidence is not any better: there is no record of such a unit in any published Latin or Greek inscription, the most likely type of evidence to corroborate Theophylact. The *Notitia Dignitatum* records *Equites quarti clibanarii Parthi* serving under the *magister militum per Orientem*.⁵⁰ The document also records a legio IV Parthia based in Circesium under the dux

Strat. 12.9.1.4) and Hesychius (E 6178), as well as the works of some earlier authors like Aelian (Tact. 5.2.3) and Arrian (Tact. 6.2.1), and some later ones like the *Suda* (Onom. Tact. 5).

⁴² See Kraemer 1958, 114.

⁴³ See MacCoun, Kier, and Belkin 2006; Daddis 2010; Engen 2016.

⁴⁴ Engen (2016) discusses it throughout, but see, for instance, p. 115-128.

⁴⁵ On the latter see Rankov's (2007) overview.

⁴⁶ Note, for instance, the comments of Jones (1964, 654-664) and Elton (2007, 282-284). See too Müller (1912) for Procopius' and Agathias' discussion of regimental structures, including, of relevance here, his overview of uses of the term *κατάλογος* (1912, 101-107).

⁴⁷ Jones 1964, 655.

⁴⁸ On Procopius' lack of technicality see Whately (2016a, 93-96).

⁴⁹ Theophyl. Sim. 2.6.9.

⁵⁰ Not. Dign. Or. 7.8.

Osrhoenae.⁵¹ Of those two, the latter is the unit most likely to be identified with Theophylact's.⁵² Theophylact names Circesium on a number of occasions in his History,⁵³ and at no point does he imply that the city had a military garrison. When the unit would have been transferred from Circesium to Beroia is unclear, though Theophylact's statement implies that it would have been well before he was writing in the early seventh century. Procopius, writing several decades earlier, mentions some of the construction work implemented by Justinian at Circesium in his Buildings.⁵⁴ Significantly for our purposes, in addition to the building works, Procopius says he stationed some troops (*στρατιωτικῶν δὲ καταλόγων*) under the command of a duke (*δοῦκα καλοῦσι*).⁵⁵ Given the *Notitia Dignitatum*, dated to the beginning of the fifth century, still had the IV Parthia based at Circesium ultimately under the command of a duke (of Osrhoenae), and since we have no reason to doubt Procopius' claims about Circesium's dilapidated state, it seems likely the legion was transferred to Beroia later in the fifth century.⁵⁶ Still, identifying Theophylact's unit with one in the *Notitia Dignitatum* gets us no closer to establishing anything of the regiment's character, and this for a unit that would seem to be better documented than most. As noted above, there is no epigraphic record for the legion, nor have Circesium or Beroia (modern Aleppo) received any sustained archaeological investigation, so we have no material record of a Roman military presence.

Theophylact's account does provide some additional evidence, however. The episode in question does not take place at Beroia, but rather in the environs of Dara, some distance away, and involves the travails of an unnamed Roman soldier recovered by the elder Heraclius' scouts on a reconnaissance mission.⁵⁷ He is gravely wounded: Theophylact claims the dying soldier had been wounded four times using arrows, a spear, and a javelin.⁵⁸ This soldier, compared to Alexander the Great, Leonidas, and Callimachus (the Athenian commander at Marathon),⁵⁹ is given a death scene worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster, and as is befitting a heroic individual. It is after his death that Theophylact alludes to the reports that the man was from the Beroian

⁵¹ Not. Dign. Or. 35.24.

⁵² See Whitby and Whitby (1986, 51, n. 16).

⁵³ Theophyl. Sim. 3.10.6-8, 3.17.5, 4.10.4-5, 5.1.2.

⁵⁴ Procop. Build. 2.6.1-11.

⁵⁵ Procop. Build. 2.6.9.

⁵⁶ Whitby 1986, 727-728.

⁵⁷ Theophyl. Sim. 2.6.1.

⁵⁸ Theophyl. Sim. 2.6.2-3.

⁵⁹ Theophyl. Sim. 2.6.6.

regiment. Given that Theophylact specifically calls him a hero when he names the unit, it could be that his fellow soldiers in the IV Parthia were well known for their military prowess. Indeed, several pages later Theophylact narrates a comparable heroic scene, in which the individual in question is named, but his regiment is not.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the naming of the unit seems incidental, and might better reflect Theophylact's source rather than the legion's particular aptitude for combat. If anything, the evidence is circumstantial. Assuming we take Theophylact at his word, someone might have made a note of the man's regiment, and it seems reasonable to suppose that his bravery would have been a source of pride to his comrades.⁶¹ Given we have no other evidence for soldiers from Beroia, we will never know.

The truth is, just as in the modern era, regiments would regularly need replenishment, particularly during long and drawn out campaigns.⁶² Engen put great stock in casualties too – while we have some good data about casualties in Procopian combat, Procopius deploys figures unevenly, and usually at the end of his accounts, which does not allow much time or space for him to reveal their impact on the motivation and morale of sixth-century soldiers. It is worth pointing out too that in many cases Procopius puts most of his emphasis on the casualties suffered by Rome's foes, like the Persians. Whitby has suggested that the Justinianic army, if 150,000 strong, needed about 6,000 soldiers a year.⁶³ Recruitment might have been far more difficult when the plague struck⁶⁴ whether it was an issue beforehand or not,⁶⁵ though we do not yet know the scale of its impact on the military.⁶⁶ We also do not even know the proportion of soldiers who served fulltime and the proportion of those recruited on a more ad hoc basis, as seems to have been the case for some sixth-century campaigns. While Procopius makes it clear that in some regions, like the eastern frontier, troops were readily available,⁶⁷ for some

⁶⁰ Theophyl. Sim. 2.18.15.

⁶¹ Colvin (2013) argues that if we read between the lines in Procopius' and Agathias' accounts of battle we can find evidence for the kinds of reports that might have recorded exceptional performance.

⁶² There is legislation in the *Codex Justinianus* (Cod. Iust. 12.35.17) that details how Justinian thought regiments ought to be kept up to strength. Failure to replace depleted units with fresh recruits also happens to be one of the ways that corrupt officials abused the military system during the reign of Justinian, or so Procopius (SH 24.6). Many years later, Heraclius struggled to find soldiers who had served under Maurice, only a decade or so earlier (Isid. Chron. 120). For a concise overview of recruitment in late antiquity with bibliography, see Whately (2013, 227-228).

⁶³ Whitby 1995, 83.

⁶⁴ For detailed discussions of various aspects of the plague see, among others, Stathakopoulos (2004), Little (2007), and Kaldellis (2007).

⁶⁵ Fotiou 1988.

⁶⁶ Teall 1965, 307-319; Whitby 1995, 103-110; Sarris 2007, 178; Meier 2016, 281.

⁶⁷ Procop. Wars 2.14.8-9.

campaigns recruitment seems to have been carried out as needed,⁶⁸ and this was no less true when Theophylact was writing,⁶⁹ which suggests it was a regular occurrence. If soldiers on campaign were in many instances most likely to be involved in large scale combat, and they, in turn, were recruited on ad hoc basis, there would have been little opportunity for regimental pride to development. We need to look elsewhere for combat cohesion and motivation.

Unit Standards

One further place where we might find evidence of motivation and cohesion comes from our evidence for unit standards, often called *banda* (singular *bandon*) at the end of antiquity.⁷⁰ Unit standards remained an important part of warfare at the end of antiquity and beyond.⁷¹ Maurice discusses the unit and the standard regularly in the *Strategikon*. The *bandon* as standard could take many forms, and there were recognizable colours and streamers for an individual *tagma*, a unit about 300 strong, roughly the same size as the *bandon* the unit, a *moira*, a unit 1,000 to 2,000 strong, the approximate size of the late antique legion,⁷² and a *meros*, a unit 6,000 to 7,000 men strong.⁷³ These standards served as symbols for divisions within a larger army, and were used not only to communicate tactical manoeuvres to those divisions, but also so that soldiers knew where to stand and move in battle.⁷⁴ Although Maurice never says so explicitly, that different divisions were to have their own standard and soldiers were positioned behind these on the march suggests that standards might, potentially, have functioned as a source of pride for the soldiers in any of these divisions.

Besides these select examples, we also have some physical evidence of their continued importance. At the fort of el-Lejjūn in Jordan, there is strong evidence that the shrine to the standard remained in use until soldiers ceased to occupy the site in the middle of the sixth century; moreover, it seems there was an active attempt to restore the shrine when the fort

⁶⁸ Procop. Wars 5.7.26. cf. 7.1.20.

⁶⁹ Theophyl Sim. 3.12.4, 8.

⁷⁰ Dennis 1981. Procopius usually calls a standard a *σημεῖον*, and archaizing term in keeping with his wider literary practices (see Wars 2.18.26). Theophylact treats *bandon* as unusual word (3.4.4), which he must qualify, in keeping with his own classicizing tendencies. Maurice provides the best evidence of their sixth-century usage. See Maur. Strat. 1.2 and 7B.16-17 for an explanation and discussion of the use of *banda*.

⁷¹ Dennis 1981.

⁷² Whately 2013, 221.

⁷³ See Janniard (2011, 22, 86).

⁷⁴ Maur. Strat. 1.2.

suffered significant damage at the start of the sixth century.⁷⁵ What the remains from el-Lejjūn do not tell us is which standards might have been housed in the fort: that for the local garrison alone, which seems to have been a legion,⁷⁶ or smaller divisions as well? Nevertheless, el-Lejjūn was not the only site in late antiquity where we have physical evidence for the importance of standards in late antiquity, for we find additional evidence in Britain, Moesia Inferior, and Egypt.⁷⁷

In fact, although the evidence is only circumstantial, references to standards in combat demonstrate their significance. Standards appear occasionally in Procopius' Wars, and they serve an important role in battle. If it falls or is captured the standard's rightful owners tend to despair, as the Persians do at the Battle of Dara.⁷⁸ At the Battle of Satala, which also takes place in the east, the Romans charge the Persians and the standard of their general in particular (1.15.15), a move which brings disorder and fear to the Persians (1.15.16). On the one hand, in this example from Satala, the charge of the group with the standard startles the Persians and lessens their motivation to keep fighting; on the other hand, the standard's capture serves as a motivating factor for the Romans. While we may not have direct evidence for a connection between standards and regimental pride, there is no reason to doubt that the standard played an important role in combat, and possibly both in motivation and cohesion.

Training

One other means of instilling the value of cohesion in a soldier was to train him well, a point not lost on scholars of modern militaries or ancient historians themselves. In his critique of the impact of unit cohesion, for instance, King,⁷⁹ whose focus was the British Army, emphasized the role of collective drill, while not necessarily downplaying the small groups.⁸⁰ In his detailed and comprehensive analysis of the mechanics of late antique combat, Janniard devotes considerable attention to the training required,⁸¹ at all levels, to effect complicated tactical

⁷⁵ Lain and Parker 2006, 156.

⁷⁶ Whately 2015b, 15.

⁷⁷ Lain and Parker 2006.

⁷⁸ 1.14.50-52. See too Shean 2010, 44-54; Whately 2016a, 98.

⁷⁹ King 2006, 510.

⁸⁰ cf. Siebold 2006, 293.

⁸¹ Janniard 2011, 177-183. See too his comments in the discussion of the depth of the battle line from the fourth to sixth centuries (idem, 217-228).

manoeuvring, and he notes that the manuals in particular put great stock in this training.⁸² Indeed, amongst ancient historians and writers, three of our most important sources, Polybius, Josephus, and Vegetius, who each cover a different period in Roman military history, highlight the impressive Roman training regimen.⁸³ Polybius and Josephus wrote well before the period under review here. Vegetius, who was not as far removed from the sixth century world, seems to anticipate the arguments of King, for one way to read his text is as a sustained argument in favour of the importance of training. Such a reading might make sense of the popularity of Vegetius' text in the Late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Indeed, to the surprise of many a Classicist, in terms of numbers of later copies of manuscripts, Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris* was the most popular text from the classical world.⁸⁴ If medieval and renaissance readers understood the *Epitoma Rei Militaris* as military-training text, perhaps we should too. Other late antique, even sixth-century, authors emphasized the importance of training, and those authors often argued that the individual who had the greatest responsibility in military training was the general, even the emperor. The debate between Menas and Thomas in the Dialogue on Political Science on military matters in book four delves into the importance of training.⁸⁵ In fact, a common *topos* found in ancient historiography was of the commander who restored the discipline of lazy troops by means of his rigidity and training prowess.⁸⁶ It is no surprise, then, to find Agathias referring to just this when he notes at the start of book two that Narses spent the beginning of spring in 554 engaging his troops in combat training.⁸⁷ Theophylact too records the general Justinian's efforts to improve the training of the troops under his command.⁸⁸

Though modern scholars, like Engen, have downplayed the significance of training in combat motivation and cohesion,⁸⁹ it remained an important component of the larger whole. Indeed, it suffices to say that for many an ancient Roman training was essential. Whether they were specifically interested in combat cohesion or not, the fact that they were interested in what made the Romans so successful in war presupposes an interest in cohesion, indirect or otherwise.

⁸² Idem, 178.

⁸³ The late Roman sources are discussed by Janniard (2011, 177-183).

⁸⁴ Whately 2015a, 249.

⁸⁵ Anonymous, *On Political Science* 4.14-25.

⁸⁶ Wheeler 1996.

⁸⁷ Agathias 2.1.2.

⁸⁸ Theophyl. Sim. 3.12.7. See too Howard-Johnston's (2006, 36) comments on the training programme implemented by the emperor Heraclius in 622.

⁸⁹ Engen 2016, 203.

The Role of the Commander

The last factor to discuss is the commander, for we have plenty of evidence of vertical cohesion, the bonding between leaders and subordinates, from the sixth century. The great man was for most of antiquity, classical or late, a prime force in historical change, and the classicizing historians in particular, upon whom so much of our knowledge of late antique military history depends, were particularly keen on the role of the individual in war.⁹⁰ Procopius' Wars is particularly notable in this regard,⁹¹ though this is, perhaps, only a little less true of the histories of Agathias and Theophylact.⁹² This stress on the great man and the individual was dictated by ancient theorists, some of whom argued that you should only include commanders and generals in descriptions of combat.⁹³ But there is reason to think that commanders served as more than a literary device, for there are many places where we find not just the action centred on the commanders, but the commanders in the thick of the action, fighting alongside their fellow-soldiers.⁹⁴ In that long passage from his *Peri Strategias* that we discussed above, Syrianus put significant stock in the role of the commander in maintaining cohesion and effectiveness.⁹⁵ Indeed, scholars have also stressed the role of commanders in maintaining cohesion, both in the army as a whole as well as in smaller groups,⁹⁶ in combat.⁹⁷

And yet, commanders played a major role in motivation too, which makes this a fitting topic with which to conclude. Fear, discussed several pages earlier, was one such motivational tool employed by commanders. Although the fear implied in the legal compilations is not necessarily the same sort of fear mentioned by the historians, there are instances where the behaviour of commanders seems to depend on punishing soldiers, often harshly (by execution, for instance), for losing weapons. For instance, while engaged in the siege at Lucca, Narses sent Stephanus and some men on ahead to Faventia to find out why some generals had deserted (Agathias 1.17.1). In his short speech, Stephanus rails against the cowardice and dereliction of duty on the part of the recalcitrant generals, and he implies that they might suffer significant

⁹⁰ Whately 2016a, 105-113, 152-157, 188-195.

⁹¹ Idem.

⁹² Whately 2008.

⁹³ Whately 2016a, 31-34.

⁹⁴ See Lee 1996, 210; Caesar BG 1.25.1, 2.25; Livy 44.41, Tac. Agr. 36, Dio 75.6.7, African Wars (Caesar) 16.4.

⁹⁵ Peri. Strat. 15.87-117.

⁹⁶ For the distinction see Southern (1996, 169).

⁹⁷ Lee 1996, 211; Driessen 2005, 159; Siebold 2006, 293.

punishment if they did not act differently (Agathias 1.17.6-7). In the march to Tricamarum, one soldier, a certain Laurus, commits treason and is impaled. Procopius notes that this case of capital punishment frightened the other soldiers considerably (4.1.8), which had the desired effect of dissuading others from contemplating treason themselves any time soon.

Above we noted that the author of the *Dialogue of Political Science* implies that some men would be more likely to keep their position in line than others.⁹⁸ Indeed, the author argues that these men were to be praised, and given appropriate rewards like crowns by their commanders. The role of punishments and rewards in motivating soldiers to perform on the field of battle deserves consideration. It surfaces in the latter half of Procopius' *Wars* when the star of the central figure in the text, Belisarius, starts to wane. It is at this point that Procopius provides his eulogy of Belisarius, a passage that consciously echoes a comparative episode in the work of the great classical historian Thucydides, which is concerned with Pericles.⁹⁹ During its course, Procopius sings the praises of the general, which includes some comments on Belisarius' employment of rewards for both soldiers and civilians.¹⁰⁰ Procopius may not provide specific examples, but the few types of reward that he gives reveal an interest in combat motivation on the part of Belisarius, though some of his practices would seem to contradict the law, at least when it comes to those points we highlighted above. Belisarius rewarded soldiers who had received wounds, and so who had presumably not shirked the heat of battle. He gave bracelets and necklaces to those who distinguished themselves, though Procopius does not specify what that might have entailed. On the other hand, Procopius claims that Belisarius would provide replacements for those who lost weapons, even horses, in battle. His actions contrast with those of some other sixth century generals including Philippicus, who distributed all manner of awards to the wounded and courageous after battle, but after a victory and for remarkable deeds.¹⁰¹ Indeed, by noting that one man received a Persian horse solely on the basis of performance in combat, Theophylact would seem to be rebutting Belisarius' wanton replacement of his men's lost horses – in other words, his distribution of a considerable prize in questionable circumstances (losing a possession).¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Anonymous, *Dialogue of Political Science* 4.19.

⁹⁹ Thuc. 2.65; Kaldellis 2004, 198. cf. Agathias 3.9.19; Whately 2017, 694.

¹⁰⁰ Procop. *Wars* 7.1.8.

¹⁰¹ Theophyl. *Sim.* 2.6.10-12.

¹⁰² Theophyl. *Sim.* 2.6.11.

As in so many other aspects of life, praise and blame undoubtedly served as major motivating tools in sixth-century combat, and it was the commander who was most closely connected to this.

Conclusion

In closing, we have seen that there is plenty of evidence for combat cohesion and motivation in the sixth century, even if that evidence does not always provide the sort of detail that we might want most. It should come as no surprise as well to see that Procopius provides a significant proportion of this evidence, but that we must go beyond Procopius if we want to build as holistic an image of East Rome's performance in battle as possible. That means using not just the evidence provided by other classicizing historians like Agathias and Theophylact Simocatta, but also the legal material, the evidence of the military handbooks, the papyrological material, and the even the physical evidence where it is relevant. The results of this paper are meant to be preliminary, and it is hoped that future work will examine the topic in greater detail.¹⁰³

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¹⁰³ There are some factors that were not discussed in this paper that deserve consideration like religion, the impact of the comforts of home, and task cohesion, among others. Note the comments of Crowley (2012, 21), Armstrong (2016, 119), and Engen (2016, 197-207).

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