

**The Classification and Subsequent Categorisation of the combat  
scenes within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad in Comparison to  
Reality**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

The classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes, both shown and described within the Homeric epic of the Iliad is the task that shall be attempted within this dissertation piece. This is the primary goal of this piece and due to this being a rather large and overbearing goal, we shall need to break our objective down into smaller more manageable directives for us to endeavour upon. Firstly the task of understanding which of our modern scholarship and of course our ancient sources shall be the most useful in helping us to discover the requirements for our classifications and subsequent categorisations of the combat scenes both shown and described within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad. Secondly we need to correctly ascertain our requirements that allows to adequately identify and then classify our combats scenes from within the Iliad into their respective categories. As explained the correctly identified modern scholarship and ancient sources that have been selected for the use within this dissertation piece shall allow a smoother acquisition of our requirements for our classifications that shall then lead further into our categorisation. The modern scholarship that shall be used is as follows, Hans van Wees is one of our primary modern scholars that shall be used, specifically in the forms of his book “Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities” and his articles entitled “The Homeric way of war: The Iliad and the Hoplite Phalanx” both one and two, along with his other articles entitled “Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad”, and “Leaders of Men? Military Organisation in the Iliad”. Hans Van Wees, however, shall not be the only modern scholar who’s work shall be aiding us in our endeavour, the work of we also be using is that of the works of J.K Anderson, entitled “Military Theory and Practice in the age of Xenophon” and finally, the last modern scholar who’s work shall be of use to us in our pursuit is that of Paul Cartledge’s work, thusly entitled “The Spartans: The World of the

Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece. From Utopia to Crisis and Collapse”

Of course modern scholarship is not the only viable source for our classification, we must also ensure that we use the correct texts from ancient authors, ancient sources such as Xenophon’s work entitled “Hellenica” and along with his “Anabasis”, Thucydides work of “The Peloponnesian War” and finally Herodotus’ “Histories”.

With these sources, both ancient authors and modern scholars, our endeavour to correctly classify and then subsequently categorise the combat scenes both shown and described within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad shall hopefully be a more subsequently cohesive and more legitimate in our findings.

Due to the combined use of the entirety of the modern scholarship that has been selected such as the work of Hans Van Veen and the selected ancient sources that shall be used as to enable us to create some form of Juxtaposition between the correlated information that creates of base requirements for the hopefully successful classification of the elected combat scenes that we shall be endeavouring to analyse and then, subsequently categorise into the three category’s that shall be laid out in full detail further along within this dissertation.

## **Chapter One – Categorisation & Methodology**

Within the Homeric Epic of the Iliad there are multiple combat scenes shown and described to the reader. These scenes are more commonly associated with the hero's that are depicted and contained within the epic of the Iliad. And considering that the base aim for this dissertation piece is to endeavour to analyse and categorise the combat scenes we must first be able to distinguish the level of the accuracy for the combat scenes in relation to reality. The way in which we shall endeavour to analyse the real world accuracy of these combat scene is by utilising a variety of both modern scholarship and ancient sources as a basis and comparisons. The main selected pieces of modern scholarship that we shall be using to aid us in our endeavour to ascertain the correct categorisation for the combat scenes within the epic of the Iliad is that of Hans Van Wees. Who can be argued as being one of the leading minds in the aspect of ancient Greek Combat, specifically for his work upon the topic of the Greek phalanx, because of this the majority of our modern scholarship shall come from Hans van Wees, specifically in the forms of his book "Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities" and his articles entitled "The Homeric way of war: The Iliad and the Hoplite Phalanx" both one and two. However Hans Van Wees is not the only modern scholar or piece of modern scholarship that we shall be using to aid us in our endeavour, we shall also be using the works of J.K Anderson, entitled "Military Theory and Practice in the age of Xenophon". These few key pieces of modern scholarship are what we shall be using to create a basis for our categorisation system.

When attempting to accurately classify and categorise the combat scene seen and described within Homer's Epic of the Iliad, it is easily expected that the key to this

endeavour shall be the requirements that then shall lead into the classification of the combat scenes and then furthermore on the eventual categorisation of the given combat scenes. Due to this, the categories that will be used must be clearly defined within the initial stages of the work so as to allow for accurate and straightforward use further along within the work. What allows us to even attempt to work upon our requirements for the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scene within the Iliad is that of our modern scholarship and how it fits within categories after it has been classified, within its own rights as more or less useful for any of the singular categories that we shall be focussing upon.

### **Realistic Combat**

The requirements for a combat scene to be classified within this category are relatively straight forward and simple in reference to the name of the category, the combat seen and described within the Epics seems to be accurate in accordance to evidence from ancient sources of Greek combat, which has then been compared and aided by modern scholarship. The combat scenes that shall be within this category do indeed need to fit within the certain given criteria, which is mainly a close representation of the type of combat scene that appears within the modern scholarship that has been previously stated within this dissertation. More accurately, the modern scholarship primarily used for the classification purposes of this category shall be that of Hans Van Wees, mainly his book entitled “Greek Combat: Myths and Realities” which shall be used, however this piece of modern scholarship shall be aided by some of his other works, such as “The Homeric way of war: The Iliad and the Hoplite Phalanx”. Within this section the use of Paul Cartledge’s work, thusly entitled “The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece. From Utopia to Crisis and Collapse” and the work of J.K Anderson, entitled “Military Theory and Practice in the age of Xenophon” shall also be used.

In terms of Ancient sources and their authors, most of the appropriate sources that shall be used within this category, shall also be used as a comparison or at least for some juxtaposition within the defining of the requirements and classifications of criteria for all three of our categories, and as previously mentioned the ancient authors and their works that shall aid us are Xenophon's work entitled "Hellenica" and along with his "Anabasis", Thucydides work of "The Peloponnesian War" and finally Herodotus' "Histories".

Within the work of Hans Van Wees, specifically *The Homeric Way of War: The 'Iliad' and the Hoplite Phalanx*, a clear definition of realistic combat can be found in relation to a few passages that described moments that are indeed "<sup>1</sup>reminiscent of the phalanx" and that they can be regarded as "late interpolations"<sup>2</sup>, passages from within the *Iliad* such as "Shield pressed against shield, helmet against helmet"<sup>3</sup>. The combination of the modern scholarship that has been selected along with the texts from ancient sources that have been chosen to aid in the given endeavour for the classification and then subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both described and shown within the Homeric Epic of *The Iliad* will definitely aid us in attaining the correct prerequisite requirements for this current category of complete realistic combat.

### **Hyper – Realistic combat**

This category has a slightly more lax classification criteria and requirements. This is due to the fact that this category focuses on a more stylised version of combat that is seen more throughout the epic of the *Iliad*. Meaning that the combat scenes within the epic of the *Iliad* shall be considered exaggerated in comparison to their counterparts that

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<sup>1</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>2</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>3</sup> Wees 1994: 3

have been classified as being within the requirements for the realistic category of fighting. Once again, as is the same with our previous category of realistic combat, the requirements for a combat scene to be classified as hyper-realistic combat come from the use of our modern scholarship. For this category the modern scholarship that shall be used is rather similar to the category of realistic combat, initially we shall mainly use the work of Hans Van Wees, more specifically his work entitled “Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad”. However the works of Hans Van Wees shall not be the only modern scholarship that enables us to correctly classify and categorise combat scenes from within the Iliad into this category. The works of Paul Cartledge thusly entitled, *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece*. From *Utopia to Crisis and Collapse* shall also enable us to complete the task at hand.

As stated within the previous categories description, the use of ancient authors works shall not go un-used, and since they are mainly being used as a comparative device against our modern scholarship, all of the aforementioned ancient works shall be used, which are Thucydides work of “The Peloponnesian War”, Xenophon’s work entitled “Hellenica” and along with his “Anabasis”, and finally Herodotus’ “Histories”. A clear signifier of hyper-realistic combat can be evidenced from within modern scholarship, were soldiers are fighting in a relatively realistic manner such as rank and file, but yet do indulge in some rather more fantastical situations such as being in a line similar to a phalanx but breaking the line to engage in combat with a single target. “A Homeric army proceeds to fight in exactly the same way as an Archaic or Classical hoplite phalanx: the men form up in dense formation”<sup>4</sup> this is said to happen either before or after independent “preliminary skirmishing”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>5</sup> Wees 1994: 3

## **Fantastical combat**

This category is perhaps the most separate we have from our first category of realistic combat, which it should be since the fantastical combat category is just that, fantastical, meaning that the combat scenes from seen and described within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad that meet the requirements to be classified and subsequently placed within this category are that of such fiction that they hold no link or even slight connection to the combat that has been evidenced to exist within our real world parameters that we have gained from our modern scholarship. Rabel's "Approaches to Homer" and Hans Van Wees' "Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad" do come into their own within this category, through these pieces of modern scholarship we shall be able to correctly ascertain the requirements for the classification of combat scenes from within The Iliad and their subsequent categorisation.

Once again, upon the subject matter of the use of ancient authors and their work, such as Xenophon's work entitled "Hellenica" and along with his "Anabasis", Thucydides work of "The Peloponnesian War", and finally Herodotus' "Histories". Shall all be used in conjuncture with the appropriate pieces of modern scholarship that has already been stated within this categories description.

Within scholarship, fantastical combat is described regularly as heroic combat, feats of extreme strength or intense bravery in the face of incredible danger, such as the actions of the heroes in most Epics, for example from Homer's The Odyssey, when Odysseus uses a long wooden pole to blind the cyclops Polyphemus. Hans Van Wees states within his work of "Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad" that "shouting threats"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wees 1988: 4

and “shaking his sharp spear”<sup>7</sup> can be seen as a form of heroic one on one combat and can therefore be assumed to be fantastical as most combat would have been fought in lines such as a phalanx. Hans Van Wees also describes combat within the Iliad as such “A man picks an adversary and moves as near to him as is necessary to shoot an arrow, cast a spear or stone, or stab with spear”<sup>8</sup> due to this it can be seen as fantastical combat because of his statement that regular rules or types of warfare “do not apply to the Iliad”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wees 1988: 4

<sup>8</sup> Wees 1988: 4

<sup>9</sup> Wees 1988: 4

## **Chapter Two – Fantastical Combat**

As stated previously this category of completely fantastical combat is perhaps the most separate we have from our first category of realistic combat, which it should be since the fantastical combat category is just that, fantastical, meaning that the combat scenes from seen and described within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad that meet the requirements to be classified and subsequently placed within this category are that of such fiction that they hold no link or even slight connection to the combat that has been evidenced to exist within our real world parameters that we have gained from our modern scholarship. Rabel's "Approaches to Homer" and Hans Van Wees' "Kings in Combat: Battles and Heroes in the Iliad" do come into their own within this category, through these pieces of modern scholarship we shall be able to correctly ascertain the requirements for the classification of combat scenes from within The Iliad and their subsequent categorisation.

Combat scenes that can be seen throughout the entirety of the Homeric Epic of The Iliad can be seen as primarily fantastical in nature and therefore can be easily classified into the fantastical category, this is due to the fact that The Iliad is an Epic poem, and it is in its base form a work of fiction.

In the endeavour to show the use of fantastical combat within the Iliad, the first combat scene that be touched upon in thorough detail is that from nearer the end of the Iliad

itself, this particular scene in from within the twenty second book of The Iliad and is especially important in connection to the narrative as it is the book that focuses upon the death of Hector (“Hektor”<sup>10</sup>), the prince of Troy, at the hand of the mighty Achilles (“Achilleus”<sup>11</sup>). This particular combat scene is an excellent scene when it comes to portraying the idea of fantastical combat as it contains nearly all factors that are being used as base requirements for this category. Firstly we shall begin with the use of the language surrounding the actual combat, more specifically, the use of epitaphs. The epitaph used for Achilles here is “swift-footed”<sup>12</sup>, meaning that he is nimble and fast like a “hawk”<sup>13</sup>. This initial statement about Achilles conveys a lot of information, not only about his fighting style but also his fighting prowess, which is also additionally evidenced by the use of the phrasing of the following sentence, “so Achilles flew straight for Hector in full fury”<sup>14</sup>. This descriptive terminology used here is very useful as signifying that this is indeed heroic combat, as it is clearly a one on one form of combat, Achilles versus Hector, there is no one else here to aid or distract from the fighting at hand, due to this fact it is here we see a large argument for the purpose and use of fantastical combat with the Homeric Epic of The Iliad, just as there is nothing going on to distract either Hector or Achilles from there one on one fight, there is nothing else going on to distract the audience from this action piece as well, fantastical combat seems to be a story telling aid in some sense. This form of combat seen here where one hero fights exclusively against another was not commonplace or even rarely heard of in Greek antiquity. A formation or even some form of basic line would have nearly always been employed during combat within Greek antiquity.

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<sup>10</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 22.132

<sup>11</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 22.112

<sup>12</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 22.14-15

<sup>13</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 22.136

<sup>14</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 22.144

Another fine example of the combat scenes both described and shown within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad being of a fantastical nature is that of book sixteen, entitled The Death of Patroklos. “Patroklos first cast with his shining spear straight into the eye of battle, where the fighters swarmed thickest”<sup>15</sup>. This sentence is almost a text book example of fantastical combat scenes within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad. It focuses purely on one person, Patroklos, our main hero for this specific combat scene, “Patroklos first cast”<sup>16</sup> the very simplistic nature of this phrase conveys a much similar atmosphere to that of the previous scene with Achilles and Hector that we have just been endeavouring to classify to ascertain if it does indeed belong within the category of this dissertation section. yet with some slight difference, mainly by the fact that Patroklos is a singular focus point yet his enemy is not a singular focus point he “Strikes where the fighters swarmed thickest”<sup>17</sup> this is not heroic one on one combat, yet it is still heroic one versus many combat, which can be argued is used to show the fighting capability of the main hero of the combat scene as he is strong enough and skilled enough to fight multiple enemies at once.

Both of these combat scenes that we have touched upon in order to establish the legitimacy and the purpose of fantastical combat that can be seen within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad, and since they fit the requirements and parameters that have been set out in order to classify said combat scenes into the fantastical combat category, and as a basis of these parameters, these combat scenes do indeed fit with our base descriptions from our selected modern scholarship, “A man picks an adversary and moves as near to him as is necessary to shoot an arrow, cast a spear or stone, or stab with spear”<sup>18</sup>. This

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<sup>15</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.284-285

<sup>16</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.284-285

<sup>17</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.284.285

<sup>18</sup> Wees 1988: 4

correlates correctly to our given examples here and creates a lovely pre-existing connection that we have between the selected extracts that show fantastical combat and our chosen pieces of modern scholarship that allowed us to create our base requirements for the said combat scenes to be classified correctly into the fantastical combat category.

“do not press on without me to fight the war-loving Trojans”<sup>19</sup> this line in its entirety goes as long way to aid in our understanding of how fantastical combat is not only portrayed within the Epic of The Iliad, but is understood and thought about by the hero’s and from a hero’s perspective within the Epic itself.

“But Apollo went into the press of fighting, and set a dire confusion among the Argives, and gave glory to Hektor and the Trojans”<sup>20</sup> this descriptive extract from book sixteen from the Iliad has a very typical descriptor in relation to fantastical combat within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad. Godly or even divine intervention only happen within fantastical combat and only when in relation to the fighting of Homeric hero’s. This specific narrative based factor, is very easily explainable as belonging within and being able to be classified as the fantastical combat category simply due to its base nature, the straight forward fact that a god of divine entity has intervened within the combat.

Which, as can be understood, is not exactly a typically realistic feature within any form of combat. This can be taken even one step further, as Apollo does not just intervene within one contained combat scene between two hero’s but “and gave glory to Hektor and the Trojans”<sup>21</sup> meaning that this entire engagement has been decided a victor already, and a victory for Hector and the Trojans. Due to this, the Homeric descriptions of the way in which Patroklos fights and the entire one versus one combat scenario that

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<sup>19</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.88

<sup>20</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.718-756

<sup>21</sup> Hom. *Ili.* 16.718-756

we are used to within this the category is essentially made null and void, because the outcome of this specific battle is already pre-determined.

“Then these two fought over Keribones like two lions, who are both Hungry and fight in high fury on the peak of a mountain over a deer that’s is killed”<sup>22</sup> the descriptive language used within this extract here is very typical of the Homeric Epics.

“Elements of fantasy in Homer, perhaps less obvious, elements of fantasy in Homer’s image of heroic arms and armour, particularly with respect to the weight and size of pieces of equipment, and the use of valuable materials in their construction”<sup>23</sup>. There is an aspect of fantastical combat within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad, and that is of the fantastical arms and armour, in essence the equipment that the heroes use is not in any way a standard form of armament, but are instead used as a way to show the importance of the hero, or character that they are either wielded by or at the very least associated with. ”put on his gleaming armour”<sup>24</sup>

“Patroklos began to arm himself in gleaming bronze”<sup>25</sup> this extract from the Homeric Epic of the Iliad, is rather commonplace within the entirety of not only the Iliad, but also of most Homeric Epics and is even found within other non – Homeric Epics as well. This however applies more specifically to the “gleaming bronze”<sup>26</sup> section of this extract. It can be argued that the polishing armour is not very high on the list of priorities when in an armed conflict scenario, however to have a set of “gleaming bronze”<sup>27</sup> armour it implies either one of two things, either an extraordinarily impeccable cleaning and maintain routine, which is not mentioned at any other point

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<sup>22</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.756-757

<sup>23</sup> Wees 1994: 2

<sup>24</sup> Hom. Ili. 15.113-153

<sup>25</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>26</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>27</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

throughout the Homeric Epic of The Iliad, or and this seems more plausible, it is used as a signifier for the Homeric hero's heroism. They stand out amongst the rest of the everyday non heroic soldiers.

“Crafted star-bright corselet of the fast runner”<sup>28</sup>, being one of the more uncommon descriptive sentences throughout the Homeric Epic of The Iliad. Not only does it convey the physical description of the armour piece but it does also explain the weight of the armour piece and possible what the main benefit from wearing can be, it seems to be a light weight armour “fast runner”<sup>29</sup>, implies that a when worn the wearers movement is not impaired in any drastic way. A very suitable and fantastical piece of armour deserving of a hero engaging in fantastical combat.

“over his shoulder he slung a bronze sword, the hilt nailed with silver”<sup>30</sup>, this extract from book sixteen of the Iliad, goes a long way to show the audience the, almost ostentatious nature of the weapons and armour that belong and are used by the hero's that again are seen within the Iliad. This descriptor of the hilt of the sword being “nailed with silver”<sup>31</sup> couples nicely with Hans Van Wees' statement that typically the hero's within a Homeric epic, especially those within the Iliad often wield weapons and/or armour that have “valuable materials in their construction”<sup>32</sup>. This well used descriptive method that appears throughout the Homeric Epics is an advantage to our endeavour to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad as it does add another fantastical element to the overall feel of the Iliad.

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<sup>28</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>29</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>30</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>31</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>32</sup> Wees 1994: 2

As can be seen throughout this chapter, in terms of the classification and subsequent categorisation of combat scenes both described and shown within the Iliad, the fantastical category does seem to be the one that benefits the most, as The Iliad is at its core a fantastical piece of literature. Due to this it can be argued that the majority of the combat seen within the Iliad is that of a fantastical nature as the setting of heroic combat does benefit greatly from having a more fantastical style. There is the ability and option to focus solely on the combat between heroes' or if the hero is fighting on his own against crowds of other non-heroic enemies.

### **Chapter Three – Hyper – Realistic Combat**

Within this chapter there shall be an attempt to accurately portray the reasons as to why the selected combat scenes from within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad can be classified and then subsequently categorised as a form of hyper realistic combat, which as previously explained, means that the combat shown is a mixture of both completely realistic combat and completely fantastical combat, i.e. the combat scenes within this section is more believable than the combat scenes shown within the fantastical combat section yet are still far too unreliable and unbelievable to be classified within the category of realistic combat. As with the category of fantastical combat, combat scenes that could potentially be classified as hyper realistic are far more in number and frequency than those of a completely realistic nature. This category has a slightly more lax classification criteria and requirements. This is due to the fact that this category focuses on a more stylised version of combat that is seen more throughout the epic of the Iliad. This is indeed an allowed feature as it helps the combat of the so called 'standard'

soldiers mesh and better intertwine with the level of combat that is shown in association with the heroes of the epic.

“the Achaians will not hold me for long, even though they have formed themselves into a wall”<sup>33</sup> this rather short and still rather simplistic sentence is actually very useful in helping us to grasp the extent of the possibility that there are scenes within Homer’s *The Iliad* that can be classified not entirely as fantastical combat but yet do meet the criteria to be classified and subsequently categorised as hyper realistic combat, if not realistic combat. The Achaians “formed themselves into a wall”<sup>34</sup> which may sound very basic when read in the context of *The Iliad*, yet when examined closer in the context of classifying and categorising combat scenes from within *The Iliad* it is key as it helps us like the combat seen within this scene to that of either classical or even archaic Greece, as “formed themselves into a wall”<sup>35</sup> can be taken as a Homeric version of a phalanx. As Hans Van Wees states within his work of ‘*The Homeric Way of War*’, “a Homeric army proceeds to fight in exactly the same way as an Archaic or Classical hoplite phalanx: the men form up in dense formation”<sup>36</sup> this is said to happen either before or after independent “preliminary skirmishing”<sup>37</sup>. This shows that the closest type of ancient Greek warfare that we can associate with the combat seen within Homer’s epic of *The Iliad* is that of either classical Greece or Archaic Greece, more specifically that of phalanx formations. This association may purely come from a need from Homer to create a combat or warfare situation that indeed needed to be thought of as having some form of real world accuracy to create a better sense of understanding of the larger scale events within *The Iliad*. Yet was only used sparingly and with a sense of semi disbelief

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<sup>33</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.148-187

<sup>34</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.148-187

<sup>35</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.148-187

<sup>36</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>37</sup> Wees 1994: 3

in relation to realistic combat, it needed to seem plausible, yet not completely unbelievable when considering the combat of the soldiers who were at Troy yet who did not have the fortune to be a Homeric hero.

“it is not executing a manoeuvre to achieve a tighter formation. The crowd spontaneously grows denser because the men are keen to fight”<sup>38</sup>. This statement from Hans Van wees’ work entitled the Homeric way of war: the Iliad and the hoplite phalanx helps us in our understanding of why the combat that can be seen throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad adheres to the requirements that then allow it to be classified and then subsequently categorised into the area of hyper realistic combat. Formations and tactics can be seen that relate to real world classical Greek and archaic Greek tactics, and the fact that they are mentioned and used throughout Homer’s The Iliad aids us in our endeavour, yet they are rarely shown to be done on purpose, and if they happen to be applied to the combat scenes with intention they are either very occasionally successful or they do not aid in the combat in any sense. After that they appear as if by complete accident. Non heroic soldiers may be described as grouping together or forming a line yet this is not intentional and has just happened due to the combat that is happening at the time.

“The shining crestholders of their horsehair-plumed helmets touched when they nodded, so close together did they stand”<sup>39</sup> this extract is a good example of how the combat that is shown and described within the Homeric epic of The Iliad. This extract also does fit well within our pre described requirements that then allowed us to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat, as it states that the soldiers are standing close together and that they are so close with the line of soldiers in front that “their horsehair-

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<sup>38</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>39</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.131-133

plumed helmets touched when they nodded, so close together did they stand”<sup>40</sup> this can be taken as a sign that two line of opposing soldiers have met in combat line to line, as an archaic Greek or even classical Greek phalanx would do. However it is not specifically stated that when their helmets are touching they are facing an opposing force. It could be taken to mean that there are multiple ranks of soldiers that are tightly packed in a formation together, if this is the case, it possibly can be taken, not necessarily as a combat formation but as a tight marching formation. There is a third option to be pursued here, it is quite possible that as we have seen before when looking at previous extracts that the soldiers that are mentioned here could have been grouped together on the battle field as they are keen to partake in the combat alongside the Homeric hero’s. If any of these three possibilities are correct then the argument for hyper realistic combat that is seen within the Homeric epic of the Iliad is evidenced here.

By the end of the work entitled *The Homeric Way of War*, by Hans Van Wees, he does conclude that, “although certain passages in the Iliad may put one in mind of the hoplite phalanx, such passages are neither interpolations nor evidence that the presence of a phalanx-style formation is assumed throughout.”<sup>41</sup>, this is interesting as from the perspective of a modern scholar who is looking for accuracy and realism within the combat that has been either seen or described throughout the course of Homer’s *The Iliad* this conclusion is not too out of the ordinary, yet to argue his conclusion, there may not be an accurate representation of an Archaic Greek or classical Greek phalanx or at the very least phalanx like formation within the Homeric epic of *The Iliad*. Yet this is because it is being looked for from a realism point of view. When looking at the evidence for a classical Greek or even an archaic Greek phalanx or at the very least

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<sup>40</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.131-133

<sup>41</sup> Wees 1994: 4

phalanx type formation, if one take the point of view of looking for it in a hyper realistic state then the evidence of such a formation does appear, or at least becomes easier to discern. This is the base reason that the requirements that were imposed to allow us to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat scenes that are both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad as being in a state of hyper realistic combat were in such a lax state in comparison to the requirements that were imposed to allow us to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat scenes that are both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad as fantastical combat. As well as requirements that were imposed to allow us to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat scenes that are both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad as completely one hundred percent realistic combat.

As a brief synopsis, the selection of combat scenes that we have analysed within this chapter as well as what could be argued as a majority of combat scenes both described and seen within the Homeric epic of The Iliad are that of hyper realistic combat. This category is by far the most common within Homer's The Iliad, alongside the separate category of Fantastical combat. This can be argued as being the result of one major reason, that being Homer himself. The Iliad, like most other epic, was written as a fictional narrative, designed primarily for entertainment. Because of this the combat that is shown within the Homeric epic of The Iliad would be of a similar calibre as to enhance the narrative within itself. The majority of the characters within The Iliad are that of Homeric hero's, they are better than humans in nearly every physical way, their faster, stronger, harder to kill and much, much better fighters. Therefore the combat scenes in which they are involved would be better and more creative than that of ordinary soldiers, which is why the fantastical element of the combat within The Iliad is in a much larger majority. It creates a better narrative, when in comparison the typical

archaic Greek and classical Greek battle tactics were relatively simple and straight forwards. In this epic of hero's the standard foot soldier and his real world tactics would both look and sound relatively boring, making not a not so epic narrative at certain points. This is where hyper realistic combat excels. It is by no means as exciting as the combat that contain heroes like Achilles and Hector, yet it creates a better narrative than completely realistic combat does. When you have soldiers that partaking in what can essentially be classed as an archaic Greek or even a classical Greek phalanx, to a reader or even to an audience it can be rather boring and when you keep in mind that the Homeric epic that is The Iliad, is at its core a narrative, then this isn't what is needed so by enhancing the base combat of regular soldiers in a manner that allows them to fit better within the narrative as a whole and also allows them to mesh better with the combat that is being portrayed by the heroes around them.

In terms of the arms and armaments that are used by these 'standard' foot soldiers not much is touched upon them to the same degree as they are when looking in relation to the arms and armaments of the heroes that are portrayed throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad. Yet there are some mentions in passing. Yet they are of all the same quality where nothing particularly stands out about them. This is a complete and utter juxtaposition to the arms and armaments of the Homeric heroes that we see, where as they stand out in "gleaming bronze"<sup>42</sup> armour, with weapons that are "nailed with silver"<sup>43</sup>. The weapons that are associated with just the 'standard' foot soldiers are relatively plain. They have swords, they have spears, and they have armour of course, yet they are not described with any extra flamboyance that people may associate with the Homeric epic of The Iliad. They are more simplistic in their description, as well as

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<sup>42</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

<sup>43</sup> Hom. Ili. 16.112-151

their design. And their function is also on a more simplistic and basic. They suit those who are using them. These soldiers are not great heroes, with epitaphs or even indeed they will not have great pomes and songs written about their deeds, the weapons and armour in which they entrust their lives are of a more basic style, yet they still do what they are meant to do, same as the soldiers.

#### **Chapter Four – Realistic Combat**

Realistic combat within the Homeric Epic of The Iliad, can be considered at a glance, an extreme rarity, due to the fact that most of the combat scenes that are seen or described within the Iliad are based around the actions of heroes, and hero's did not fight in any shape or form in accordance to how it is either agreed and summarized that the Greeks fought within their own antiquity. However there are some examples in certain sections of the Iliad that can pertain to the idea that realistic combat in some form did exist within the Iliad, however the main complication that does come to hand when dealing

with the classifications for this specific category are as much that when even the slightest possible piece of evidence that realistic combat does exist within the Iliad comes to light there is a rather large debate to be had on whether it is better suited for and better matches the requirements to be classified and subsequently categorised as realistic combat or does it better suit the requirements to then be classified and then subsequently categorised as hyper-realistic combat.

There is an inherent issue when considering the classification and subsequent categorisation of combats scenes that can be either seen or described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad. And that is the fact that The Iliad is a fantastical narrative, written for enjoyment, for pleasure, and to chronicle the great heroes of the past, it was not even in the slightest created to accurately portray the combat techniques or the combat tactics that were used at the time, therefore any accurate representation that does exist within the pages of homer's epic The Iliad, does not exist without scrutiny. This fact however makes the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of the Iliad both easier and more difficult and because of this, our pre-set requirements that aid us in our classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad must remain rather strict, more so than in either the fantastical combat and the hyper realistic combat sections of this dissertation.

There is however a second, yet by no means less important issue that must be tackled before the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of the Iliad as realistic combat can be begin in proper. This issue that has been reference to is that of the very large cross over between categories, this is mainly speaking of the cross over between the hyper realistic

combat category and our current category of realistic combat. This cross over does indeed hinder the progress of our classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of *The Iliad*. This is mainly down to the fact that many of the extracts from passages that could be used significantly to aid in our classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of *The Iliad* for this section, have already been used within the section of our hyper realistic category. Therefore, within this section there shall be a slightly different approach, as well as presenting extracts for the purpose of arguing the existence of realistic combat within Homer's epic of *The Iliad*, we shall also be presenting arguments for the non-existence of complete realistic combat within Homer's epic of *The Iliad*. In order to do this we shall rely heavily upon the works of Hans Van Wees to aid us in both our argument for the existence of completely realistic combat within the Homeric epic of *The Iliad*, and in our argument for the complete lack and non-existence of completely realistic combat within the Homeric epic of *The Iliad*. Yet there are a few issues when being aided by the work of Hans Van Wees. He has stated already in one of his works that there is no solid evidence for the existence of the archaic Greek or even the classical Greek phalanx formation, in any way, shape, or form. "I conclude that, although certain passages in the *Iliad* may put one in mind of the hoplite phalanx, such passages are neither interpolations nor evidence that the presence of a phalanx-style formation is assumed throughout."<sup>44</sup>, therefore part of our argument within this section shall be against Hans Van Wees, in order to properly articulate and confirm through our classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of *The Iliad* that completely realistic combat was seen and described in

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<sup>44</sup> Wees 1944: 4

multiple scenes throughout the entirety of the Homeric epic of The Iliad. “What evidence is there in the Iliad for a phalanx-style formation? In a few passages warriors are shown 'packing themselves together like a wall' these, and several less explicit passages are indeed reminiscent of the phalanx”<sup>45</sup>

“Shield pressed against shield, helmet against helmet”<sup>46</sup>. This extract from the Homeric epic The Iliad, was used within the works of Hans Van Wees, it was used in a capacity that never completely condemns the plausibility of complete realistic combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad, yet it is neither used to strongly argue the plausibility or even the existence of complete realistic combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad.

Firstly on the matter there is complete realistic combat seen and described within the Homeric epic of The Iliad.

“Shield pressed against shield, helmet against helmet”<sup>47</sup>. This extract is very simplistic within its wording, and therefore we can assume that it is rather simplistic with its meaning. This phrase of “Shield pressed against shield, helmet against helmet”<sup>48</sup>, gives a vivid imagery of two shield walls that have clashed and are hence forth pushing against each other, this, is very stereotypical of archaic Greek and classical Greek phalanx warfare. And unlike the extract from the passage that was used within the hyper realistic combat section of this dissertation, “The shining crestholders of their horsehair-plumed helmets touched when they nodded, so close together did they stand”<sup>49</sup> which was argued that could be interpreted as two ranks of the same line in close proximity together, there is no mistaking it within this extract, mainly due to the phrase “Shield pressed against shield”<sup>50</sup>, meaning that there had to be at least two, opposing lines in

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<sup>45</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>46</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>47</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>48</sup> Wees 1994: 3

<sup>49</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.131-133

<sup>50</sup> Wees 1994: 3

close quarters combat. Which is typical of archaic Greek and classical Greek phalanx fighting. This extract therefore does fit in with our requirements for the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad in a positive manner.

“the Achaians will not hold me for long, even though they have formed themselves into a wall”<sup>51</sup> This extract goes a long way to aid in our argument of the fact that there is some form of completely realistic combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad.

However there is an issue with this extract, similar to ones we have already had encounters with, and that is the fact that this extract has been used to, by way of classification and subsequent categorisation, aid the argument of hyper realistic combat and its existence within the Homeric epic of The Iliad, essentially meaning that this extract and the combat scenes it's from have been classified as an example of hyper realistic combat. once again we have come upon one of the main issues of the intended purpose of this dissertation, which is the fact that any of the scenes within the Homeric epic of The Iliad do indeed seem to be able to use as arguments for multiple categories even after the classification and subsequent categorisation of combat scenes that can be either seen or described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad

”This, to be sure, would be sound advice to a hoplite in a phalanx, but it is no less pertinent on a Homeric battlefield”<sup>52</sup> This extract from the work of Hans Van Wees, entitled *The Homeric Way of War: The 'Iliad' and the Hoplite Phalanx (II)* is a rather foreboding, yet telling extract it seems to show Hans Van Wees agreement with the argument for the completely realistic combat scenes within the Homeric epic of The

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<sup>51</sup> Hom. Ili. 13.148-187

<sup>52</sup> Wees 1994: 142

Iliad. This extract again links the already connected classification and category of realistic combat with the narrative that is the Homeric epic of The Iliad, but again there needs to be some form of partnership between the classification and categorisation that leads to realistic combat and the classification and categorisation that leads to hyper realistic combat. These two different categories are much closer in terms of criteria requirements, especially when in comparison to the similarities in classification and categorisation requirements and criteria of the other category, mainly the category of fantastical combat. Which is the overall category for the Homeric epic of The Iliad

“What evidence is there in the Iliad for a phalanx-style formation? In a few passages warriors are shown 'packing themselves together like a wall' these, and several less explicit passages are indeed reminiscent of the phalanx”<sup>53</sup>. As stated within this extract, what evidence is there within the Homeric epic of The Iliad that supports any form of combat scenes that contains even the furthest stretched variation of either the archaic Greek or classical Greek phalanx. This is Hans Van Wees statement upon the matter of the combat that is situated within the Homeric epic of The Iliad. This statement, shows that the idea of realistic combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad is a firm idea, however maybe not within the form that we assumed it might, or even should be. This statement from Hans Van Wees, touches upon the idea more of hyper realistic combat than it does of the idea of complete realistic combat scenes. However due to this, difference in classification, and categorisation the evidence that the more realistic of the combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad is there, however it seems it may have to be found in the hyper realistic classification and category as well as the realistic classification and category, the combination of the two does give string evidence of a

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<sup>53</sup> Wees 1994: 3

more realistic form of combat that can be witnessed and that runs throughout the Homeric epic of the Iliad.

Throughout this section there has been an attempt to classify and then subsequently categorise the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad. When it comes to this particular category, there are more problems and difficult issues to overcome, especially more than the other two categories, such as the hyper realistic combat category, as well as the fantastical combat category. These issues mainly seem to arise from the fact that the requirements for the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad in order to aid the argument of existing realistic combat within the Homeric epic of The Iliad have to be far stricter. However due to all this it can be said that even though the current category of realistic combat has the least combat scenes that fit into the parameters of its category, it does seem to be the category that shares the most combat scenes with another category, meaning that there are multiple combat scenes throughout the entirety of the Homeric epic of The Iliad which can be easily debated as evidence of realistic combat seen within the Iliad, yet these scenes could also, just as easily, be classified and subsequently categorised as a different category, instead of realistic combat. Such is the same with most of the combat scenes throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad. Due to these problems with the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described within the Homeric epic of The Iliad.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusion & Source Issues**

## **Source Issues**

Throughout this dissertation piece there has been a few relative issues in regards to the sources. Of course referring to the modern scholarship and the ancient sources.

The main issue in which most of the work for this dissertation was hindered, from a modern scholarship point of view was that on Hans Van Wees, the issue was not in fact with his modern scholarship, the issue was that his scholarship was incredibly well thought out and put together, there was very little by way of modern scholarship that could be used to contradict his work. One of the main issue with the work of Hans Van Wees is that there is nearly no modern scholarship within the same calibre to be used to contradict his statements, the few pieces of modern scholarship that can be used are either far too early to be used accurately, due to Hans Van Wees annoying habit of having already either disagreed with their arguments or already taken their information into consideration and using it to reinforce his own arguments. In addition to this, a mass majority of all the scholarship that touched upon the works of Hans Van Wees was in German. However Hans Van Wees, does indeed critique his own work, within his own work. “What evidence is there in the Iliad for a phalanx-style formation? In a few passages warriors are shown 'packing themselves together like a wall' these, and several less explicit passages are indeed reminiscent of the phalanx”<sup>54</sup> Like any other source of information the reliability of both modern scholarship and ancient sources alike comes into question when trying to use them in a non-biased manner, as most scholars or the modern or ancient variety shall be biased based on a number of factors, where they are from, how old they are, and of course their own personal opinions on the subject matter that they are writing upon.

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<sup>54</sup> Wees 1994: 3

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this dissertation piece we have attempted the endeavour of creating generalised and understandable requirements that would allow us the ability to classifying and then subsequently categorise the selected combat scenes that are both shown and described from either a first person account or a second hand account, that are contained within the Homeric epic of The Iliad. These requirements that were used for the classification and categorisation of combat have been thoroughly thought out and put into use for each of the categories that were decided upon. These categories were as follows, realistic combat, hyper-realistic combat, and finally fantastical combat. Realistic combat can be argued as by far the hardest out of all the classification categories to associate with combat that is either seen or described within the Homeric epic of The Iliad since in its essence the Homeric epic of The Iliad is a work of fiction and was written as an entertaining narrative about the great Greek heroes, the combat scenes that fit the requirements enough so as to allow for the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad to place them within the category of the realistic warfare. Hyper realistic combat, is by far one of the most common types of combat that can be seen throughout the heroic epic of The Iliad. The requirements that had to be followed by extracts which then allowed us to begin the classification and subsequent categorisation of the combat scenes both seen and described throughout the Homeric epic of The Iliad. However the requirements for the classifications and then the subsequent categorisations were in a more relaxed form when dealing with this specific category. This is mainly due to the fact that since this category at its core is an in-between category of complete realistic combat and complete fantastical combat. due to this there was a lot of crossover between combat scene extracts from both perspectives,

there were many scenes that could have been both hyper realistic combat and complete fantastical combat, whereas on the other hand that were a variety of extracts that could have been used for the complete realistic combat category, but instead ended up fitting better within the hyper realistic combat category.

Fantastical combat, throughout the entirety of the Homeric epic of The Iliad, the category of total fantastical combat is the most widely applied to the combat scenes. This can easily be put down to the reasoning of the fact that The Iliad, one of Homer's epics, is at its core a fictitious narrative, it was made to be exciting and listened to for fun. As well as to document the greatly brave heroics of the Greek heroes. Therefore the combat that is seen within the Homeric epic of The Iliad must suit the general structure of the narrative, and in this scenarios, the structure is that if the heroic. Thereof the majority if the combat that in contained within the Homeric epic of the Iliad fits into the category of fantastical combat, by its own very nature.

Overall the combat that is contained within the Homeric epic of The Iliad, is significantly more fantastically based then any other category that they were measured against. However it can still be argued that this is because of the Iliad basic nature of being a story that's about heroes and great battles, therefore the majority of the combat that is seen within the Homeric epic of The Iliad must be well suited to the rest of the narrative. Yet this doesn't mean that there are no other forms of combat that reside in the Homeric epic of the Iliad. Realistic combat and hyper realistic combat do appear at times within the Iliad, and it is true that it is the hyper realistic category that appears more than the realistic category. But again that can simply be argued down to Homer writing a fictitious narrative that is designed to enthrall the reader, therefore that combat within must match the tone of the epic, and the tone of the Homeric epic of the Iliad is that of heroes and heroic feats and heroic combat.

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