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1 – The Archaeological Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje at the time of its construction. Photo by Maja Gori, 2008.
2 – Roman gladiator. Part of a statuary group in Rruga Taulantia, Durrës, Albania. Photo by Filippo Carlà-Uhink, September 2019.

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The Origins and Evolution of Ancient Spartan Identity in the Mani Peninsula, Greece

Abstract Through a careful analysis of the historical records of travels to the Mani peninsula from the 16th century onward, I argue that the commonly-ascribed identity of the Maniots, as descended directly from the Spartans of Classical Antiquity, is a modern construction that was: a) externally imposed; and b) created largely in the 18th century. In this article, I provide a timeline of Spartan identification in Mani, discuss the historical, military, and political circumstances that led to the formation of this identification, and conclude with a brief examination of the modern re-appropriation of ancient Spartan identity in recent years within the far-right fascist political group, Golden Dawn, whose leading members identified strongly both with Mani and ancient Sparta. Ultimately, in this work I provide context for the progression and evolution of Spartan identity in this small corner of the Greek world.

Keywords Mani peninsula, Sparta, European travellers, Greek independence, Golden Dawn

1. INTRODUCTION

The regional flag of the remote Mani peninsula of southern Lakonia, Greece, bears the slogan “Η ΤΑΝ Η ΕΠΙ ΤΑΣ” (*e tan e epi tas*), a phrase made famous by the movie *300*, but whose roots extend much further back into classical antiquity. The Spartan saying, translated as “Either this or upon this”, is quoted by Plutarch (*Moralia* 241f) and is usually understood to mean that Spartan men were expected to return home from war either victorious (i.e. with “this”, their shields), or dead—on them. The motto on the Maniot flag, proclaiming this quintessential Spartan expression, evokes the notorious fierceness of the ancient Spartans and their superiority as warriors above all else. The Mani peninsula, however, is decidedly not Sparta—ancient or modern. Mani begins roughly 40 km south of Sparta, and it is geographically isolated from the rest of Lakonia and the Peloponnese by the imposing Taygetus mountain range (Figure 1). In antiquity, the various settlements of Mani were in the geographic territory of Lakonia (a part of the *chora* of ancient Sparta), but they were never considered Spartan—that honour was bestowed solely on the inhabitants of the city of Lakedaimon (Sparta) itself. And yet, the belief that the Maniots are the true descendants of the ancient Spartans has infiltrated scholarship, popular thought, and Maniot self-identity. An examination of this constructed identity matters because not only has it become widely accepted, but modern writers often describe the inhabitants of Mani as the descendants of the ancient Spartans without contextualizing this claim.¹ While there is nothing inherently wrong with referencing—or believing—

1 For example: Benedict Nightingale’s 1996 article in the *New York Times*, ‘Sparta Without the Spartans’ in which he writes “Anyone who wishes to search for the Spartans and their legacy should venture farther afield; south to the Mani, the arid peninsula to which many of the original citizens fled 1,600 years ago” <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/04/travel/sparta-without-the-spartans.html>; or the 2017 BBC article by Stav Dimitropoulos entitled ‘The People Descended from Spartans’ that says that, following the Theban sack of Sparta in 371 BCE, “the Spartans living on the Mani peninsula, sheltered from the rest of the Peloponnese by the Taygetos mountains, held strong, defending their territory for centuries from the Thebans, and later Ottoman, Egyptian and Franc forces, among others.” <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20171024-the-people-descended-from-spartans>. This narrative of flight and resettlement was popularized in Fermor (1958) 27, 45–47. The issue with this statement is that ancient Spartan identity was directly tied to the place, and if there had been some mass exodus to Mani (of which there is no evidence), those runaways living on the Mani peninsula in antiquity would cease to be Lakedaimonian (see Gardner 2018 for an argument against Spartan control of the settlements of Mani in antiquity).



Figure 1 Map showing location of Mani (modern limits indicated by yellow dotted line) in relation to Sparta. Image courtesy of Rebecca M. Seifried, © 2020.

this perceived ancestry, it is worth tracing the history of this claimed heritage to see how the construction of this identity originated and evolved. I am not arguing for any ethnic or ancestral claims on the part of any inhabitants of Greece at any period of history. Instead, the goal here is to trace the origin of this identification and to connect the historical dots that led to this association.

Through a careful analysis of the historical records of travels to the Mani peninsula from the 16th century onward, I argue that the identity of the inhabitants of Mani as descended directly from the Spartans of Classical Antiquity is a modern construction that was: a) externally imposed; and b) created largely in the 18th century. In this article, I will provide a timeline of Spartan identification in Mani, discuss the historical, military, and political circumstances that led to the formation of this identification, and conclude with a brief case study that features a prominent, recent example of the manifestation of Spartan-Maniot identity—that is, the modern re-appropriation of ancient Spartan identity within the notorious far-right fascist political group, Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή), whose leading members identified strongly both with Mani and with their self-claimed Spartan ancestors. This case study is included to highlight the way in which this identity transformed from one that was externally imposed to one that is internally expressed in various situations. It is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss the appropriation of Spartan identity beyond the Mani peninsula, or to broadly examine national and global appropriations of the Hellenic past to foster modern political discourse; the shaping of modern identities based on the ancient past, both in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, is a topic that has received substantial attention in scholarship, and the formation of Maniot identity—and the study thereof—resides within these established frameworks, but has yet received its own dedicated study.² Ultimately, by tracing the history of Spartan identity in the Mani peninsula from its origin to its current manifestation, I provide context for the progression and evolution of ancient identity and present-day uses of the classical past in this small corner of the Greek world.

² See, for example, Damaskos and Plantzos (2008); Hamilakis (2007); Hamilakis (1996); Hamilakis and Yalouri (1999).

2. TRAVELLERS TO THE MANI PENINSULA DURING THE 15TH–17TH CENTURIES

The post-antique identification of the inhabitants of the Mani peninsula as the direct descendants of the ancient Spartans begins with foreign travellers who journeyed to the peninsula in the 18th century CE; this will be expounded in the following section. However, since our oldest records of the classical legacy of the inhabitants of Mani are much earlier than the 18th century, it is necessary to include these in order to demonstrate how the inhabitants were externally perceived prior to their later identification as the descendants of the ancient Spartans. In his 10th-century CE treatise on the administration of the Byzantine empire, the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos wrote that, “The inhabitants of the city of Maïna are not of the race of the aforesaid Slavs, but of ancient Romans, and even to this day they are called ‘Hellenes’ by the local inhabitants, because in the very ancient times they were idolaters and worshippers of images after the fashion of the ancient Hellenes.”³ In this account, the inhabitants were called Greeks because of the purported holdout of ancient pagan religion in this part of the empire. No association with the Spartans is made in his text, but his words are quoted by later authors to demonstrate the early connection between the Maniots and the people of classical antiquity.⁴

In the early 16th century (1535) Cyriacus of Ancona travelled to Mani but made no connection between Mani and Sparta except to describe Gytheio as “once an important city on the Laconian shore and a famous naval base of the city of the Lacedaimonians”.⁵ Gytheio, located on the northeastern coast of the Mani peninsula on the Lakonian Gulf, was indeed the location of the ancient port of Sparta, but in Cyriacus’ work no link is made between the ancient Spartans and the modern inhabitants of Gytheio or anywhere else in the peninsula.

³ *De Administrando Imperio* 50.71–82; Moravcsik and Jenkins (1967) 237. Constantine himself never actually visited Mani nor did he travel at all, since he was ill for much of his life, but this account will become important for the externally constructed identity of the Maniot peoples in later texts that relied, in turn, on Constantine’s (Fallmerayer, see below).

⁴ This is in contrast to the claim that appears in Stamatoyannopoulos et al. (2017) that makes it seem as though Constantine himself travelled to Mani and sought “the ancient inhabitants of Laconia, the Hellenes, who continued to adhere to the ancient Greek religion (644).” The Maniots were almost certainly entirely Christian by this point, see Drandakis (1986) 15–16.

⁵ Bodnar and Foss (2003) 327.

Following Cyriacus, Bertandon de la Borderie journeyed to the Mani peninsula in 1537 but did not actually set foot on land. From his anchor at Porto Kagio, he called the people he saw coming down from the hills simply “Greeks”, and it was the opposite peninsula, Malea, which he referred to as “Sparta”.⁶ The last traveller to visit Mani in the 16th century (whose records survive) was Giuseppe Rosaccio, whose 1598 account of the “*forteza d’Maina*” describes these inhabitants of Lakonia as proud, untamed, and cruel—but makes no association with Sparta.⁷

During the 17th century there is a slight increase in the number of foreign travellers to Greece, due to the contemporary popularity of antiquarianism and renewed interest in ancient Greece throughout western Europe. As Saïtas notes, travel during this period was marked by a tendency “to look for the ancient civilization behind the visible features of contemporary Greek life.”⁸ The burgeoning fascination with ancient Greece and the desire to discover traces of antiquity in the contemporary landscape and inhabitants of the country, coupled with Mani’s reputation as a place that continuously opposed Turkish rule, eventually led to the identification of the people therein as the real Greeks. Indeed, Sieur de la Guilletiere⁹ calls the inhabitants the “true Greeks” (“*veritables Grecs*”), but I argue that this identity is largely formed in the face of the other—that is, the ruling Ottomans. They are not necessarily “true Greeks” because of any behavioural, ethnic, or cultural tie to the ancient peoples living in the same place; they are “true Greeks” because their opposition to the Turks makes them non-Turks.¹⁰ At one point in his narrative, Guilletiere even comments that the local Lakonian people he is with are, in fact, *not* the true descendants of the Lakedaimonians because of their proclivity to drink alcohol.¹¹

6 Bourrilly (1911) 16–18.

7 Rosaccio (1598) 41–42.

8 Saïtas (1996) 27; Tsigakou (1981) 16–18; Constantine (1984) 7–24.

9 A person who likely did not exist, his ‘account’ was written down by his ‘brother’, Guillet de Saint-Georges, but was probably based not on an actual visit but on the accounts of French Capuchin friars living in Greece. Saïtas (1996) 33.

10 Here we might also look to Jonathan Hall’s theories of identity formation, including his thesis regarding strengthened collective ethnic identity in times of military action, although there is no evidence that the Maniots themselves self-identify as “true Greeks” at this early period: for example Hall (2002) 19–24; Guillet de Saint-George (1675) 33, 36.

11 Guillet de Saint-George (1676) 36: “Les Grecs qui nous ensournirent se mirent avec nous, & nous montrèrent l’exemple de bien boire. Ce ne sont plus ces Anciens Lacede-

Ultimately, in the written accounts of Mani up to and including the 17th century, the consistent pattern of describing the Maniots as fearless, fierce, and barbaric is much more prevalent than any suggested links to the ancient Greeks.¹² This description complements the image presented to us in these records of the Maniots as the only people in Greece who could—and did—successfully prevent the Ottomans from invading, and this reputation continues to be a major aspect of externally perceived identity in the succeeding centuries.

3. 18TH-CENTURY TRAVELLERS TO THE MANI PENINSULA AND THE ORIGINS OF SPARTAN IDENTITY

By the 18th century, the reputation of Maniots as warlike—and of Mani itself as a dangerous place due to inter-generational vendettas—had penetrated Western European thought, largely due to the travellers' accounts of the preceding century.¹³ The danger present in Mani proved a source of intrigue, and appealed to some as motivation for visiting the place itself. It is during this time that the earliest surviving accounts describing the inhabitants of Mani as the descendants of the Lakedaimonians occur, although it is nearly impossible to pinpoint exactly who first drew this comparison because of the varying lengths of time that passed between when individual travellers set foot in Mani and the year in which their accounts were published.

For example, John Montagu (the 4th Earl of Sandwich) visited Mani in 1738, but his tome was not published until 1799. So, while he was the earliest traveller who set foot in Mani and made a direct written connection between the contempora-

moniens, qui au dire de Plutarque beuvoient sobrement, qui au rapport de Xenophon ne beuvoient qu'à leur soif, & qui selon Athenée, ne beuvoient jamais l'un à l'autre, comme saisoient les autres Grecs pour se mieux exciter à la debauche." It is not clear at this point exactly where Guilletaire claims to be. Their ship was diverted from the Malea peninsula due to bad winds and they put in at "Colokina", which he says is on the mouth of the river Eurotas (situating them near modern Leimonas on the north coast of the Lakonian Gulf, or the Gulf of Colochina); the issue with this is that Guilletaire says that Tsyli (ancient Trinasus) is east of Colokina, but Trinasus itself is west of the mouth of the Eurotas river; Guillet de Saint-George (1675) 62; Leake (1830) 194–195.

¹² Çelebi (2011 [1685]) Book 8; Randolph (1675) 9–10; Coronelli (1686) 91.

¹³ Saïtas (1996) 43.

ry inhabitants and ancient Spartans, his was not the first publication to appear that did so. That honour belongs to the French cartographer Jacques Nicolas Bellin, who—to make matters even more convoluted—published his book in 1771, but never actually set foot in Mani himself; the information contained within his work was apparently obtained from an unnamed ship captain who travelled to Mani in 1735.¹⁴ The passage of interest in Bellin’s work described the Maniots as “people who descended from the ancient Lakedaimonians” and the “bravest of the Greeks”:

In this province you will find the Maniots, the people who are descended from the ancient Lakedaimonians: they are the bravest of the Greeks and although their forces do not exceed twelve thousand soldiers, they have never been conquered nor put to use by the Turks, who would perhaps not derive any advantage from it anyway: their land is protected by the mountains in which they live, which makes it very difficult to coerce them.¹⁵

Prior to Montagu’s 1799 publication, at least one additional account appeared in print that echoed these Spartan-Maniot identifications: Marie-Gabriel Florent Auguste, the count of Choiseul-Gouffier’s 1782 *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce*. After visiting Mani in 1776, Choiseul-Gouffier described the inhabitants as

descendants of the ancient Spartans [...] where today, on Mount Taygetos these robust, sober, invincible men, as free as they were in the time of Lycurgus, successfully defend their freedom against the Turks, the same freedom that they steadfastly maintained against the strength of the Roman empire [...] These are the only people, these mountain-dwellers, who have earned the title of Greeks.¹⁶

14 Saitas (1996) 46; Bellin (1771) 2.

15 Bellin (1771) 180: “C’est dans cette province que sont les Mainotes, peuples qui descendent des anciens Lacédémoniens: ils passent pour les plus braves des Grecs; & quoique leurs troupes n’aillent pas au-delà de douze mille soldats, ils n’ont jamais pu être vaincus ni mis à contribution par les Turcs, qui n’en tiroient peut-être aucun avantage: d’ailleurs leur pays est défendu de toutes parts par des montagnes où ils se retirent, & où il seroit très difficile de les forcer.” Translation by author.

16 Choiseul-Gouffier (1782) ix. Translation by author.

He goes on to add that, with regard to the ongoing struggle against the Turks, heroic actions take place in Mani that go unnoticed, but that deserve to be written down for posterity by the pen of Thucydides or Xenophon. Thus, in the account of Choiseul-Gouffier, the thematic insertion of classical antiquity in the description of the actions and behaviour of the people of Mani is pervasive.

This brings us to Montagu's account which, to reiterate, was not published until 1799 despite the fact that he visited Mani much earlier, in 1738. In this work, the basis for the connection between the ancient and modern inhabitants of the Peloponnese is laid out clearly, although perhaps unintentionally; in discussing the ancient Greeks, the Earl of Sandwich wrote: "The inhabitants of the Peloponnesus [sic] were ever esteemed as the most warlike people, and the bravest soldiers of all Greece; especially the Spartans, whose many great actions are too well known to have any occasion to be mentioned in this place."¹⁷

A description of the modern inhabitants of Mani begins on the next page, after a description of ancient Tainaron:

All this part of the country is at present inhabited by the descendants of the ancient Lacedaemonians, who still preserve their love of liberty to so great a degree, as never to have debased themselves under the yoke of the Turkish empire; but flying to the mountains, which are almost inaccessible, live in open defiance of that power, which has found means to enslave all the rest of Greece.¹⁸

Like Choiseul-Gouffier, the Earl had received a formal education grounded in classical antiquity, and was particularly interested in finding and identifying the remains of the ancient Greeks, both in the surviving traces of material culture and, evidently, in the traits that manifested themselves in the valorized contemporary inhabitants of the Mani peninsula.¹⁹ Montagu's account represents the earliest voyage that resulted in a corresponding publication that explicitly identified the modern inhabitants of the Mani peninsula with their perceived Spartan forebearers; whether Montagu himself was the first to draw this analogy is not certain. That is to say, it is unclear whether he himself derived this comparison between ancient Spartan and modern Maniot peoples during his own voyage or

¹⁷ Sandwich (1799) 28.

¹⁸ Sandwich (1799) 31.

¹⁹ Sandwich (1799) i–iii.

if he internalized this identification from the publications of others (including Bellin and Choiseul-Gouffier) prior to his own work and subsequently adapted this narrative. If the former, then Montagu's elite status in society may have helped to circulate the stories of his voyage extensively and to promulgate the rumoured identity of the contemporary Maniots as the true descendants of the ancient Spartans. If the latter, then there exists the more likely possibility that this identification was simply part of the established discourse in Western Europe at the time.²⁰ That is to say that although we may never be able to pinpoint the precise origin of this identification—whether Montagu, Bellin, Choiseul-Gouffier, or otherwise—there are clues to the emergence of this identification in the contemporary political world, the externally observed traits and behaviours of the Maniots, and the ever-increasing western European infatuation with classical antiquity. At this point, some background on the contemporary political arena is necessary.

The Orlov Revolt, also known as the Insurrection of 1770, took place within the larger scope of the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774). This political revolt began when the Russian Count Alexis Orlov, commander of the Russian navy, landed in the Mani peninsula in February 1770. The Maniots (and other Greeks, particularly of the Peloponnese) joined forces with the Russians under the promise that should the Russians defeat the Turks, Greece would be liberated. Despite initial victories against the Ottomans, the revolt was, ultimately, a failure for the Russians and Greeks, lasting only until the summer of that same year.²¹ For our purposes, the significance of the revolt lay in the western European support for and promulgation of the insurrection; the possibility of a liberated Greece stirred the imaginations of philhellenes throughout England, France, and Germany and instilled in them the neo-classical hope of returning to the idealized “homeland of their literary, aesthetic, moral, and political ideals”.²² The media coverage of these events played directly into these desires for a free Greece by comparing the modern Greek fighters to their classical counterparts. As Constantine notes:

The revival in newspaper reports of the old names—Lacedaemonia, Peloponnesus—is a mark of the particular colouring of these hopes for Greece. The inhabitants of

²⁰ I thank the anonymous reviewer of this manuscript for this suggestion.

²¹ Stavrianos (1958) 189–191.

²² Constantine (1984) 169.

those regions were continually measured against their supposed ancestors. They performed on a public stage, and inevitably failed to meet their audience's demands.²³

As the final sentence suggests, the suppression of the Greco-Russian revolt by the Ottomans was met with critical denunciation of the Greeks as people who were unable to live up to the standards set by their ancient forebearers. The authors of these criticisms ranged from Voltaire to Catherine the Great, and an example that specifically called out the Maniots appeared in the European press: "[...] the Conduct of the Greeks, instead of favouring the Operations of the Russians, throws difficulties in the Way. The Maniotes (the ancient Lacedemonians) have given at Patras a Proof of their pretended Valour."²⁴

It is in this political context—namely in the immediate aftermath of the failed Orlov revolt and the subsequent European disappointment in the modern Greeks—that Bellin published his work (1771), and Choiseul-Gouffier travelled to Mani (1776). By the time Choiseul-Gouffier published his work in 1782, his preface recalled his disappointment as he embarked upon a journey to the idealized homeland of the classical Greeks yet faced the recent political events that didn't live up to the ancient glory reconstructed and reimagined by the Western European elite. It is in this preface that an older Choiseul-Gouffier wrote his account commending the Maniots; perhaps he found them an exception, or changed his mind by the time of writing.²⁵ Ultimately, the increasing philhellenism in the 18th century, coupled with the European media coverage of the Orlov revolt and first-hand observations of the behaviours of the Maniot warriors, first led to the identification of the contemporary inhabitants as the true descendants of ancient idealized Spartans, despite the fact that the travellers to this place and admirers of the inhabitants therein were well aware that the eponymous city was decisively not within the Mani peninsula.²⁶

²³ Constantine (1984) 170.

²⁴ Constantine (1984) 172; quoting the St. James' Chronicle (1770), vols. 1449 and 1500; Tsigakou (1982) 31.

²⁵ Constantine (1984) 174–5; Choiseul-Gouffier (1782) ix; see above for the entire quote.

²⁶ One of the reasons for the careful scrutiny of these historical accounts to determine the origin of the Mani-Spartan connection is because contemporary accounts can sometimes be misrepresented by modern authors, and a direct examination of the 18th century sources themselves is therefore necessary. For example, Constantine (1984) 138, summarizes Riedesel's

Writings from the final years of the 18th century demonstrate the ubiquity of this identification by this time. Letters written by J.B.S. Morritt of Rokeby from Exo Mani in 1795 reflect the perceived linkage to the Spartans. For example, in a letter from Tripoli on 26 March 1795 he wrote: “[Maina] is inhabited by the Greeks, the real descendants of the Lacedaimonians, and they have in this corner resisted all the efforts of the Turks, to whom they pay neither tribute nor obedience, and who dare not approach the country.”²⁷ And then in April, from Kitries: “We are in the territory of Sparta, and have found the descendants of the ancient Spartans, the terror of all their neighbours, and free in the midst of slavery [...] we are quite full of ancient and modern Lacedemon [...] The land is still parcelled out in districts on Lycurgus’ own plan.”²⁸ It is actually in a letter from Morritt, written in Kardamyle on 12 April, that we are told of insider—that is, Maniot—knowledge on antiquity (however brief and potentially projected): “[The old man] talked to us a vast deal about ancient Greece, of which he knew the whole history as well or better than us; he was particularly well acquainted with the different colonisation of the country, and his eyes sparkle with pleasure when he talked of the ancient Spartans.”²⁹ Likewise, after his visit to Mani in 1797, Castellán wrote of the true descendants of the Spartans. The 1800 publication of Dimo and Nico Stephanopoli’s 1797–98 travels to Mani is rife with comparisons between these ancient and modern peoples. Napoleon himself, in

1773 travel account thus: “And their [the Spartans’] supposed descendants, the Maniots, enjoying the same situation and being similarly virile and independent, confirmed the equation.” However, Riedesel does not say that the current inhabitants of Mani are the descendants of the Spartans; in contrast he says the landscape produces liberty-seeking people (“This same country always seems to have been the true homeland of freedom”, 10). In fact, Riedesel says specifically that this is the land of the ancient Eleutherolakones, the Free Lakonians who were not subject to the rule of Sparta (“from the time of the Republic of Sparta it was inhabited by the Eleutherolacons, Friends & Confederates of the Lacedemonians, but never subject to their severe Loix” 10; see Gardner (2018) 478–479). This distinction is important to note because Constantine’s scholarship on Riedesel’s accounts distorts this relationship, claiming that the latter called the Maniots the “modern descendants” of the Spartans, which he decisively does not.

27 Morritt (1914) 190.

28 Morritt (1914) 195, 198–200. Morritt wrote from the north of the Mani peninsula, and despite his desire to do so, he was never able to travel into Lower Mani due to the dangers of armed brigandage.

29 Morritt (1914) 203.

writing to the Maniots in 1797, calls them “the descendants of the Spartans” not once, but twice.³⁰ Clearly, by this time, the association was established, accepted, and unquestioned.

With the identity of the Maniots as the true descendants of the ancient Spartans firmly established in the minds of British, French, and German intellectuals, this connection with antiquity began to infiltrate into Greek national consciousness. As Clogg writes, the formation of a national identity at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century was aided and informed by increasing numbers of young Greeks who studied at western European universities, where they “came into contact not only with the heady ideas of the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution and of romantic nationalism but they were made aware of the extraordinary hold which the language and civilisation of ancient Greece had over the minds of their educated European contemporaries.”³¹ That the Maniot association with the ancient Spartans had infiltrated Greek thought at this time is apparent in the work of Nikitas Niphatis, whose 1798 poem on Mani begins:

The wretched Spartans fled to these mountains
 And they are those who today are called Maniots.
 To protect life and freedom
 They built towns and numerous villages in the mountains.
 It was not natural for them to become slaves or serfs,
 But to be free men, for they were not bastards,
 But they were the unfortunate true children of Sparta
 Free and well educated offspring.
 For this reason they built towns and villages in the mountains
 And live until today in freedom.³²

³⁰ Galt (1812) 418.

³¹ Clogg (2002) 25–27; he goes on to write “During the centuries of the Tourkokratia knowledge of the ancient Greek world had all but died out, but, under the stimulus of western classical scholarship, the budding intelligentsia developed an awareness that they were the heirs to an heritage that was universally revered throughout the civilised world. By the eve of the war of independence this *progonoplexia* (ancestor obsession) and *arkhaiolatrea* (worship of antiquity), to use the expressive Greek terms, had reached almost obsessive proportions.”

³² Clogg (1976) & Niphakis (1964) 35 ff.

At this time, the liberation of Greece became inextricably entwined with the revival of antiquity in the minds of foreigners and Greek nationals alike. An anonymous Italian document from 1806 proclaims that

The tyranny of the Ottomans has so increased that this in itself foretells its destruction. Freedom has approached her ancient abode. The echo of the trumpet of Ares has awakened the heroes of our ancestors from their tombs. Behold Demosthenes on the one hand considers the tyrant of Epirus [Ali Pasa] as a second Philip [of Macedon]. Behold Lycurgos looks on the Souliots and Maniots as other Spartans. The great Leonidas hears the drums of victory and rejoices.³³

More evidence for the Maniot self-identification as Spartan in the years leading up to the Greek revolution are apparent in the pages of Galt's 1812 memoir of his travels to Greece two years prior: "There was still, however, a strong party in the country, which never, in fact, submitted to the arrangement [this refers to the acknowledgement of the sultan's sovereignty]; the terms of which were broadly there: that the sultan should have the nomination of the governor, who was to be always a Spartan; *for they call themselves by that famous name* [my italics for emphasis]."

4. THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Today, Greek Independence is celebrated annually on 25 March; this day commemorates the iconic—yet legendary—raising of the standard of the cross as a symbol for revolt at the monastery of Agia Lavra near Kalavrita, on the same date in 1821.³⁴ For the residents of Mani, however, the Greek revolution began several days earlier and is commemorated accordingly in an annual celebration on 17 March. On this date, Petrobey Mavromichalis is said to have gathered the Maniot soldiers in the town formerly called Tsimova, which was renamed Areopolis ('the city of Ares'; Figure 1) as a revolutionary act—although Post, vis-

33 Anonymous (1806) 117. Excerpted text in Clogg (1976).

34 Stavrianos (1958) 283. This is according to the Julian calendar; the date is 6 April on the Orthodox calendar. As Gallant (2015) 70 puts it: "The only problem is that the event never happened".

iting the town in 1827, still refers to it exclusively as Tsimova.³⁵ Mavromichalis then led his soldiers north towards Kalamata, marking the beginning the revolution as far as the Maniots were concerned, although this event is not always documented in the history books.³⁶ Just over a week later, on 23 March or 25 March, Mavromichalis sent a manifesto requesting help from Europe in the Greek struggle; his text survives in the pages of contemporary sources and the final line states that the letter was written “from the Spartan Head Quarters, Calamata, 23rd March 1821”. The letter is signed by Petros Mavromichalis, “Commander in Chief of the Spartan and Messinian forces”—this is, presumably, a title imposed by Mavromichalis himself, which reaffirms that the Spartan identity is not only established and declared by the Maniot Greeks themselves at this time, but that it played a role in their military persona.³⁷

To offer further support to this latter claim, the Maniot revolutionary flag that was hoisted in Areopolis on 17 March made decisive connections to the ancient Spartans.³⁸ Boasting a blue cross at the centre (typical of contemporary

35 This historical accuracy of the details of this event in Areopolis are questionable, since Kolokotronis does not mention this event in his memoirs, nor does Mavromichalis include any details in his surviving letters. Κολοκοτρώνης (1901) 8–9; Post (1830) 93; Brewer (2001), Chapter 8.

36 Dakin (1973) 58–59. Kassis (1979) 39. The Maniot revolution on 17 March is left out of Stavrianos (1976) and Gallant (2015), for example. In Paroulakis (1984) 56, the date of the Maniot revolution is 22 March.

37 Comstock (1828) 160; Alternative spelling and date of 28 March/9 April can be found in Gordon (1832) 183, reprinted in Gallant (2015) 72–3, and “Philhellenism” (1821) 365, which also mentions the “Spartan” army. Laurent (1821), who never actually travels to Mani, calls the troops “Spartan”. Moreover, in his 1877 work, Finlay calls the troops under the command of Antonios Psaros during the Orlov revolt the “eastern or Spartan legion” and the “Messenian legion” but it is unclear whether this was the nomenclature actually given to the soldiers at the time or if it was retroactively applied to the soldiers in the area based on Mavromichalis’ military forces. Pappas (1982, 74 and note 40) likewise refers to the troops as the Eastern and Western Spartan legions, but none of the primary documentation in support of this claim was obtainable. Kolokotronis (1969) 130 refers to the troops separately as Maniotes, Western Sparta, and Eastern Sparta.

38 Skartsis (2017) 42. However, I have not found any contemporary sources that describe or depict this flag, and the only revolutionary flag on display at the National Historical Museum at Athens that bears the ‘ΤΑΝ Ή ΕΙΠΙ ΤΑΣ’ motto is from the island of Hydra and not from Mani (many thanks to Justin Dwyer for confirming this). If the website *Flags of the World* can be trusted, this was also the motto for the 2nd Army Corps, 2nd Support Brigade in the Greek army.



Figure 2 Drawing of the Maniot Flag. Image Source: Wikipedia ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mani_Flag_\(Greece\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mani_Flag_(Greece).svg)) Attribution: Yaddah/Public Domain, 2005.

Greek revolutionary flags from the 18th century onward),³⁹ the Maniot flag differed starkly from other revolutionary flags at the time in the words printed above and below the cross: above, “ΝΙΚΗ Ή ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ” (“Victory or Death”; in contrast to the “Freedom or Death” motto proclaimed elsewhere, since Mani was already considered free) and below, “ΤΑΝ Ή ΕΠΙ ΤΑΣ” (Figure 2). As mentioned above, the latter motto is a quote from Plutarch (*Moralia* 241 f), and is usually understood to mean that retreat from battle was simply not an option. Rather, both ancient Spartan men and the modern Maniots—in contrast to the other Greeks—were expected to return home from war either victorious or not at all.⁴⁰ By plac-

³⁹ Skartsis (2017) 39.

⁴⁰ Translation from Babbitt (1961) 465: “Another, as she handed her son his shield, exhorted him, saying, ‘Either this or upon this.’” Babbitt (1961) 464–465n23: “Referred to Gorgo as the author by Aristotle in his *Aphorisms*, as quoted by Stobaeus, *Florilegium*, VII.31, but it is often spoken of as a regular Spartan custom.”

ing this motto on the flag, the Maniot fighters were aligning themselves with their imagined Spartan ancestors, and it was this incarnation that Petrobey and his Maniot soldiers chose to proudly embody as they began the revolution.

5. AN INDEPENDENT GREECE AND MODERN IDEAS OF RACIAL PURITY

In the years following the Greek revolution, the idea of a free Greece had not resulted in the idyllic return to the imagined glory of classical antiquity that the European philhellenes dreamt of. Instead, following the treaties of Adrianople in 1829 and Constantinople in 1832, Russia and the so-called “Great Powers” provided security and protection to the new nation-state of Greece.⁴¹ Some European intellectuals perceived this as a strengthening of Russian power and argued variously for or against Greek involvement and alliance with their Russian custodians. It was in this political climate that racialized theories emerged as a means of proving or disproving Greek ethnic ties to the Slavic nations. In a markedly early example, and despite the fact that he didn’t actually travel into Mani, Laurent describes the inhabitants as

[...] a people who, notwithstanding the high character for courage which they have obtained, seem in reality nothing more than an band of barbarous pirates and robbers; like the wandering Morlaques, deriving their origin from the irruptions of the Slavonians, and, doubtless, not as it has been pretended, from the Eleutheroi Lacones.⁴²

In contrast, the controversial yet remarkably impactful work of J.P. Fallmerayer served to reinforce the “true Greek” identity of the Maniots. Fallmerayer’s 1830 publication claimed that all traces of ancient Greek blood had been wiped out by Slavic settlers throughout Greece during the medieval period, yet Mani was listed by Fallmerayer as one of only two contemporary populations with the

⁴¹ Curta (2011) 1.

⁴² Laurent (1821); Likewise, Swan (1826) 203 criticizes Pouqueville’s description of the Maniot chieftain as “monarque de l’Eleuthero-Laconie.” (*monarque de l’Eleuthero-Laconie*’).

“purest” Greek descent.⁴³ Such explicitly racialized constructions of identity were not present in contemporary Greek thought and, as such, these assertions had a major impact on subsequent formation of Greek national identity as ethnically Greek (i.e. unbroken since Classical antiquity) and not Slavic.⁴⁴ For the Maniots, however, because Fallmerayer had already done the work of reinforcing their true Greek identity for them, this ethnic association simply grew stronger in the decades following the war and the remainder of the 19th century, albeit imbued more prominently with notions of purity of race, lineage, and bloodline than before. For example, Post’s 1830 account of post-revolution Mani included racialized language absent from the pages of earlier travellers to the region:

It is peopled by a primitive race, distinct in their manners and mode of living from the other inhabitants of Greece, and who boast that the pure blood of the ancient Spartans still flows in their veins. A difference of opinion exists as to the purity of their origin, but it is pretty generally admitted that they have been preserved freer [sic] from foreign mixture than most of their Romaic brethren.⁴⁵

43 Fallmerayer (1830) 295–297. See also *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, v. 11.djvu/96; Fallmerayer (1835) 78–81. The other population is that of the Tsakones, also inhabitants of mountainous regions in the Peloponnese.

44 Mackridge (2009) 159–160; this fervent desire to disprove Fallmerayer’s racist theories have reached obsessive proportions and led to subsequent publications that are themselves extraordinarily racist in their attempts to disassociate Slavic ancestry, particularly in the years surrounding the Greek Civil War when anti-Slavic animosity was at an all-time high. One recent study has even attempted to prove the purity of Greek rural communities through selective genetic testing (Stamatoyannopoulos et al. ‘Genetics of the peloponnesean populations and the theory of extinction of the medieval peloponnesean Greeks’, *European Journal of Human Genetics* 25 (2017) 637–645. For reactions to that study, see Rebecca Futo Kennedy’s blog post ‘Ancient Identities/Modern Politics’: <https://rfkclassics.blogspot.com/2019/08/ancient-identitiesmodern-politics.html>. See Curta (2011) 1–2 for a summary of the scholarship since Fallmerayer’s publication and the notion that “no Greek scholar writing in Greece has ever acknowledged that the Slavs settled in Greece during the sixth century” (Charanis 1970, 26).

45 Post (1830) 70; On page 73, the author doubles down on this sentiment: “Proud of their Spartan blood, they look down with contempt upon all other Greeks, regarding them as a mongrel race of vile barbarians, possessing no common ties of kindred or country with the brave and legitimate descendants of Lycurgus and Leonidas.”

Declarations of racial purity also appear in the pages of Gordon's *History of the Greek Revolution* (1832):

In their appearance there is not the least trace of Slavonic blood, and their language is thought to come nearer the ancient Greek than the dialect of any other canton. We may assert with confidence that they are the lineal descendants of the Eleuthero Lacones, who, pent up among the crags of the snowy Taygetus, had little commixture with any foreign race, while their barren country did not tempt invasion.⁴⁶

Later, "The Mainots, in one of the most Slavonized districts of Greece, divide with the Tzakonians (word for word, Lakonians) the credit of being the best representatives of the old Greek blood as it ran on the Spartan and Argive frontier."⁴⁷

6. THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE SPARTAN 'IDEAL'

Despite the centuries-long reinforcement of Spartan lineage by foreign travellers to Mani, and the eventual adoption of this identity by prominent Greeks including Mavromichalis and Niphakis, we cannot ascertain whether this identity was overtly or regularly asserted or reinforced by the Maniots themselves. Due to a lack of primary sources written by inhabitants of Mani from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is impossible to know to what degree any individual believed, expressed, or actively identified with the ancient Spartans. In general, it seems that the proclaimed Spartan heritage of the Maniots was something to be proud of but was directly related to their freedom, independence, and their related martial activities; as such, this identity was primarily actively evoked when politically strategic or nostalgic, as was seen during the Greek Revolution or the commemoration ceremonies thereof (Figure 3).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Gordon (1832) 150.

⁴⁷ Latham (1863) 49.

⁴⁸ For the organization of Maniot society, see Andromedas (1962); Karakatsianis (2010). In contrast to the actively expressed identity of the northern Greeks with the ancient Macedonians, for example.

Clues for the self-expression of Maniot identity appear in the pages of Patrick Leigh Fermor's travel memoir, *Mani*, specifically when he relates the words of a schoolmaster in Kardamyli: "It is the belief of the Maniots [...] that the Maniots descend in part from the ancient Spartans and in part from the Byzantines of the Peloponnese."⁴⁹ Fermor, however, is still decidedly an outsider, and a product of philhellenic British education remarking upon this identity, and includes references to the Maniots as the descendants of the Spartans several times throughout his work for poetic license.⁵⁰

In his 1979 work, Kassis, a Maniot, reinforces the identification of Maniots as the true Greeks and generally champions ancient Spartan society, but a shared ancestry is not overtly claimed; this is perhaps because such an identity was understood, and therefore unnecessary to state outright, or perhaps because other identities—such as being the true descendants of the ancient Greeks in general—were more important to the contemporary inhabitants.⁵¹

This all changed in the final decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century, when the expressed Spartan identity of (at least a few) Maniots garnered public attention. Spartan identity was at the forefront of the ideology of the far-right neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party (Χρυσή Αυγή), which was founded by an individual of Maniot descent, and this identity is regularly expressed in the group's fascist policies of racism, eugenics, and terrorism. The history of the rise of Golden Dawn requires some contextualization, and although a full exploration of the military and political history of 20th-century Greece and Mani is beyond the scope of this present work, a few key events must be addressed in order to understand the political climate in which this radicalized party rose to prominence, and how the reverence for and identification with ancient Sparta—partially through its connection to Mani—became a primary factor in the party's identity. I summarize these here based on Karakatsianis' 2010 work.

The communities and inhabitants of Mani were highly militarized throughout the majority of the 20th century, a practice which actively began in the late 1800s. As a largely royalist people, many Maniots were actively and strategically recruited into the armies of King Otto both as soldiers and as administrative assistants to senior officers. As Karakatsianis notes, "[...] such recruitment was locally interpreted as a recognition and vindication of the Maniot character

⁴⁹ Fermor (1958) 27.

⁵⁰ For examples, see Fermor (1958) 47, 87, 108, 146, 152.

⁵¹ Kassis (1979) 9–10, 20–21.

of strength, virility and fierce personal loyalty based upon kinship or pseudo-kinship ties which Maniot society had evolved.⁵² During the First World War, these characteristics led to the development of internal networks of officers specifically designed to protect Maniot families; these officers were divided in terms of their loyalties, with one side favouring Eleftherios Venizelos while the other supported King Constantine and the Metaxas dictatorship.⁵³ Members of the first group later became prominent leaders of the regional—and notoriously violent—Security Battalions and, following the Second World War, were accused of collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.⁵⁴ It is this group of military officers who are credited with spreading violence throughout Mani during the Greek Civil War (1944–1949) through the exploitation of features of Maniot society, notably its militarization and clan-based kinship ties:

The [military officers] had the contacts, the guns, the experience, and the local prestige to articulate, organize and pursue the conflict to the bitter end [...] The feuding character of the Maniots emphasized personal relations and the value of individual bravery, features that were effectively harnessed by the right.⁵⁵

In the period directly following the Greek Civil War, an official state ideology of anticommunism emerged, which eventually led to the military dictatorship (1967–1974). In the aftermath of the dictatorship and the subsequent admission of Greece to the European Economic Community (EEC), and later to the European Union (EU), minor neofascist groups began to take root—including Golden Dawn, which was founded in 1983 by Nichos Michaloliakos (a Maniot) and which would rise to prominence on the Greek political stage under his leadership in the 2000s and early 2010s.⁵⁶ Spartan identity comes to play in the Golden Dawn party in a twofold manner: first, through the appropriation of ancient Spartan ideology that is entrenched in the neo-Nazi ideologies espoused

52 Karakatsianis (2010) 130.

53 Karakatsianis (2010) 131–132.

54 Karakatsianis (2010) 132–133.

55 Karakatsianis (2010) 134.

56 Petrou and Kandylis (2016) 593. For a much more detailed discussion of the rise of the right after 1974, see Ellinas (2013) 545–547. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out the role that admission to the EEC played at this time.

by Golden Dawn; and, second, through the identification of Maniots as the descendants of the ancient Spartans. This paper has already examined the history of the identification of the Maniots as descendants of the ancient Spartans in depth, so now it is worth exploring the connection between Golden Dawn and the Nazi appropriation of Spartan ideology, while keeping in mind the connection between Golden Dawn and Mani—notably through its leadership and prominent members, specifically Nichos Michaloliakos and Ilias Kasidiaris, who both lay claim to Maniot (and therefore Spartan) heritage and ancestry.

The anti-immigrant, nationalist, eugenic policies of the Nazi party first elevated Spartan ideologies into the sphere of fascism.⁵⁷ To provide examples of the Nazi reverence for ancient Spartan ideals, we need look no further than the words of the leader of NSDAP, Adolf Hitler himself. Hitler admired the ancient Spartans greatly and even invoked action loosely based on interpretations of their policies. One example is his proclamation that the Russians be treated like helots (the Peloponnesians who were enslaved and controlled by the Spartans): “They [the Spartans] came as conquerers, and they took everything”, and the Germans were encouraged to “assume the position of the Spartiates while [...] the Russians were the Helots.”⁵⁸ Notably, Hitler deeply respected the perceived racial superiority of the Spartans and desired to emulate the racialist state they had created.

Despite the openly nationalistic, violent, anti-Semitic, anti-system, anti-Communist, extremist and racist behaviours, rhetoric, and ideologies of Golden Dawn—and the swastika that is their symbol—the party repeatedly denies that it is a Nazi organization.⁵⁹ However, Golden Dawn in no way denies their reverence for and emulation of the same militaristic and eugenic ancient Spartan qualities that were admired by the Nazi party; as mentioned above, the party’s leaders are connected to Sparta through their Maniot ancestry, and this Spartan relationship provides a convenient way for Golden Dawn to tie itself to Nazism without the former explicitly identifying with the latter. Would the Golden Dawn party still embody Spartan ideologies if the party didn’t have direct ties

⁵⁷ For an extensive treatment of this subject, see Roche (2012); Roche (2013).

⁵⁸ Kiernan (n.d.); Hitler (1925) 423, 612, 668. Hitler (2013) xxi, 21; Kiernan (2007) 420–421. Note that placing the Russians in the role of helot would be particularly satisfying for those opposed to Fallmerayer’s theory of Greek extinction and subsequent replacement by Slavic populations.

⁵⁹ For an excellent summary, see Ellinas (2013) 549–552; Clapp (2014).

to Mani? Almost certainly, although the Nazi appropriation of Spartan ideology that is espoused by the fascist group is facilitated through the connections between Golden Dawn and Mani (and the latter's pre-existing identification with ancient Sparta): the claimed Spartan ancestry of the Maniots provides a justification of the party's brazen actions, symbols, and behaviours as simply emulation of Spartan ideals.

In fact, through this association with Mani, Golden Dawn becomes almost ur-Nazi: after all, it was the Spartans and their ideals that the Nazis admired, and while the Nazis modelled their actions on the ancient Spartans, the Maniot leaders of the Golden Dawn party actually *are* the true descendants of these ancient heroized people. As Clapp notes: "The party's 'Nazism'—the Hitler salute, the youth columns, the translated SS chants, the swastika—is just an attempt to reclaim what Germany's fascist intellectuals lifted from the classical Greeks: ancient Dorian gestures, Spartan training camps, pagan hymns, vase decorations."⁶⁰ Maniot Golden Dawn leaders reinstated the *krypteia*, they commemorate the fallen 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, they elected a member of parliament named Kaiadas (the gorge into which ancient Spartans are said to have thrown unfit infants) and, perhaps most tellingly, they chant "We are the New Spartans!" not only at political rallies, but at membership meetings.⁶¹

Ultimately, the self-proclaimed identity of Golden Dawn members as the New Spartans does not solely rely on the connection between Sparta and Nazi ideology; rather, it is amplified and strengthened through identification of Maniots as the descendants of the ancient Spartans, since the party's founder and leader, Nichos Michaloliakos, and Ilias Kasidiaris, prominent member of parliament and spokesperson, both hailed from Mani. In a nostalgic account written from prison on 17 March 2015, Kasidiaris, clearly a proud Maniot, immortalized the connection between Mani and Golden Dawn:

The atmosphere on the morning of March 17 in Areopolis is magical. It is not only the students' traditional costumes, the military contingents and the children walk-

⁶⁰ Clapp (2014).

⁶¹ Clapp (2014); Angelos (2015) 261; Tziovas (2017) 42–43. For some images and an excellent discussion, see Konstantinos Poulis' article 'Golden Dawn and the Classics', Political Critique: <http://politicalcritique.org/world/2017/golden-dawn-and-the-classics/>. For the Kaiadas gorge see Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 4.18.4–7, for the ancient *krypteia* see Jean Ducat, *Spartan Education: Youth and Society in the Classical Period* (Swansea 2006).



Figure 3 17 March celebration in Areopolis. Image courtesy of Rebecca M. Seifried, © 2014.

ing belted with pistols and knives reminiscent of the warlike spirit of the time, from which was named the capital of Mani. It is simultaneously the feeling that we are in our birthplace and base. That we return to the hard core of the Golden Dawn, which is not simply a political Movement, but the voice of the racial soul in times when Greece risks of being lost. During the placing of wreaths, the moment the vocalizer announces the representative of the Popular Association, a wave of applause begins from the main square, covers the paved streets, displays awash in the trackless mountains and then is lost in the blue sky. Completely spontaneously, thousands of Greeks united raise their loud voice, surpassing the limits of our time and echoes forever in the historical time. This voice is not produced by the pulse of the vocal cords [sic], but is produced by the imperceptible pulse of the racial soul that in a tragic tone cries out again the eternal motto of Mani: “Victory or Death”.⁶²

62 Kasidiaris (2015).

Today, the popularity of Golden Dawn is in steady decline, and the party currently holds no seats in the Greek Parliament;⁶³ the far-right obsession with ancient Sparta has since made a trans-Atlantic leap to North America,⁶⁴ and the support for the party in Maniot villages and towns of Mani has waned.⁶⁵ Maniot identification with the ancient Spartans seems to linger, if the flag's motto and the annual celebrations on 17 March are any indication, but at present there is no overt, public assertion of this identity on a regular basis.⁶⁶ As mentioned above, this Spartan identity was often ascribed to or expressed by the Maniots in relation to military or martial activities, as the fierce independence of Mani was especially lauded in periods associated with brutality and warfare. The settlements of Mani are peaceful for the first time in a long, tumultuous history of protracted violence, from intergenerational feuding, to centuries-long claims of freedom from the Ottomans, to the World Wars and Civil Wars of the 20th century; perhaps we are now in the season of the Karneia, and all of the soldiers are finally at home—with their shields, not on them.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In antiquity, the Mani peninsula belonged to the territory of Lakonia, but the inhabitants themselves were never considered Spartans. A careful examination of travellers to Mani from the 15th century onward indicate that this identification of Maniots as the descendants of the ancient Spartans is not present until the middle of the 18th century. This Spartan identity, when first ascribed to the

⁶³ Souliotis and Papadopoulos (2019). As of writing, the most recent post (June 2019) on the News section of the Golden Dawn website is entitled “They are rejoicing in vain [...] Golden Dawn is not over!” by N.G. Michaloliakos: <http://www.xrisiavgi.com/en/view/they-are-rejoicing-in-vain-golden-dawn-is-not-over-article-by-n.-g.-michalo>.

⁶⁴ See for example two recent articles by Myke Cole, ‘The Sparta Fetish is a Cultural Cancer’, *The New Republic*: <https://newrepublic.com/article/154563/sparta-myth-rise-fascism-trumpism> and ‘How the Far Right Perverts Ancient History-And Why It Matters’, *Daily Beast*: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-the-far-right-perverts-ancient-historyand-why-it-matters>; see also Sarah Bond’s ‘This is Not Sparta’, *Eidolon*: <https://eidolon.pub/this-is-not-sparta-392a9ccddf26>.

⁶⁵ Souliotis and Papadopoulos (2019).

⁶⁶ Although see above, note 1, for this claimed identity in popular media.

Maniots from the 18th century onwards, was initially rooted in an external admiration for the toughness of Maniot society and the individuals therein, whose fierce independence and freedom was compared to that of classical Sparta. As presented above, the association of the inhabitants of Mani with the ancient Spartans arose over several decades of foreign involvement and was cemented in the role Mani played in various military struggles, from the Orlov revolt to the Greek revolution.

Despite the fact that the designation of the Maniot people as the descendants of the ancient Spartans was a modern notion, externally imposed, and one that arose largely due to philhellenic propaganda in the mid-18th century, this identity quickly became self-ascribed by the final decades of the 1700s. That is to say, the strengthening of this identity throughout the 19th century can be attributed to the Greeks themselves and formation of post-war national and localized identities. At the same time, throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century, the Spartan identity of the Maniots began to be emphasized through terminology related to race and eugenics: first through external appraisals of the genetic composition of the Maniots by western European travellers and writers, and then through a re-appropriation of Spartan ideals by the Nazi regime, and the absorption thereof by the Golden Dawn party. This case study was included to highlight the way in which this identity transformed from one which was externally imposed to one that was internally expressed for the purposes of furthering political agendas. Ultimately, by tracing the history of Spartan identity in the Mani peninsula from its origins to its current manifestations, the progression and evolution of ancient identity and present-day uses of the classical past in this small region of Greece is better understood and contributes to complex notions of identity and identification in the modern Greek world.

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