Problems of command and control in slave revolts

Slavery, the ownership of a human being and their labor by another, is a near universal aspect of human history. It predates written records. There is hardly a single inhabited region of the world that has not, at some point, been tread by both slave and master. Just as inescapable as the desire of the masters to have someone else do their work for them is the will of the slaves to be free from bondage. When given the opportunity, they have often taken flight. More rare, more dangerous, and far more notable for it, they have taken up arms and fought for their freedom. Wherever slavery exists in the written record, so too do slave revolts. But due to the vastly different societies they found themselves in, those rebels have defined 'success' for their revolts differently. Ancient revolts generally do not aim to abolish slavery as a social form — instead their participants seek freedom for themselves by collaborating with other slaves in the same position. Meanwhile, early modern revolts tend to aim at the total abolition of slavery, like the Haitian Revolution.[1] Across two thousand years and tens of thousands of miles, a rough metric for success for a slave revolt can be the establishment of a permanent free community; the fundamental cause of the revolt necessarily being the unfreedom of its participants.

Regardless of the specific social aims of any particular slave revolt, sooner or later they all face the same basic opponent: an army tasked with crushing not just the revolt itself, but their symbolic challenge to the social order. To survive, much less to achieve all of their goals, the slaves must organize themselves into an army capable of defeating their masters on the battlefield. The key difference between an armed mob and an army is the presence of a command structure; a mutually acknowledged hierarchy of leaders and subordinates that can operate strategically and carry out specific operations. I have examined five slave revolts — the Chian revolt led by Drimakos, the Second Messenian War, the Spartacus War, the 1811 German Coast rebellion, and the Jamaican Maroon communities — in an attempt to break down some of the general principles and problems in commanding a slave rebellion. The first two serve more as conceptual guides than genuine historical episodes as contemporary historiography

[1] Despite its importance in the history of slave revolts, the Haitian Revolt is so complex, and has so many different stages, that properly addressing it in this paper would leave no room for other examples.

casts serious doubt on the accuracy of the few surviving records. The main reason for the gap of over a thousand years between the third and fourth examples is that historical accounts of slave revolts in Europe and the Mediterranean are much harder to come by after Spartacus' defeat. There was never another major uprising of this type recorded in the Roman Empire, partially due to the brutality with which the rebels were treated — 6,000 of the survivors were crucified along the road from Capua to Rome as a warning.[2] After a gap of over a millenia, the next historical concentration of slave revolts (or perhaps better said, *records* of slave revolts) is found in the colonial era.

Five main factors manifest repeatedly as challenges to the leaders of slave revolts across history. Oftentimes slave communities consist of various distinct ethnic groups, each conquered or purchased separately by the slave-owning class of a more powerful polity. Overcoming the cultural and linguistic barriers between these people to unite them into one cohesive military unit is difficult. Once united, they often lacked military discipline and experience, access to weapons to train with, social groups to train in, or free time to drill and forge loyalty to each other and to their leaders; all key elements to a well-disciplined fighting force. Technological inferiority also plagued rebellions, though this was mainly a problem in the early modern period, where firearms could make a small, well-trained force very effective against larger armies. Recruitment was difficult — despite many remarkable acts of heroic resistance, a sizable number of enslaved people throughout history have preferred to live in bondage than participate in a revolt, especially since failure typically meant certain death. Though it flies in the face of idealistic treatments of history, it is self-evident in the continued existence of slavery for long periods of time; if the opposite were true, and death were generally preferable to bondage, slavery would simply be impossible. It is an unfortunate but undeniable fact that for millenia, large populations have been forced to live and work as the property of others. Convincing them to risk their lives for a chance at freedom is no easy feat, even considering the hardships and indignity of servitude and the regime of brutality used to enforce it. In order to do so, the leadership had to be able to rally large numbers under their authority.

[2] Appian 1.14.120

With the help of divine inspiration and religious authorities, a Weberian charismatic leader was often necessary to consolidate the resistance. Finally, though mostly a matter of luck and not skill in command, the terrain in which the slaves found themselves was often decisive in determining their success or failure. The most successful slave revolts occur in mountainous regions, and often in jungles and swamps; in other words, where the movement, supply, and tactics of large armies are naturally hindered, and guerilla tactics allow a weaker force to shine.

Slave Revolts in Ancient Greece — Chios and the Second Messenian War

It is difficult to compare the Second Messenian War and the Chian slave revolt to the other conflicts addressed herein since they each survive only in a single Roman-era work, written several centuries after the events supposedly took place. The sole detailed account of Messenian resistance to Spartan rule (prior to the establishment of the Messenian state by Epimenondas) is found in Pausanias' Description of Greece[3]. A work of periegetic literature, the Description was intended to guide foreign visitors through famous Greek cultural sites, and historical digressions serve as background information for the author's personal observations.[4] As such, in the opinion of Habicht, Pausanias should be read as "only a *transmitter*" of history from other sources and explanations rather than a historian in his own right.[5] In fact, Nino Luraghi has positioned the story of Aristomenes as told by Pausanias — and the closely related notion of a perpetually rebellious Messenia (widely accepted as fact in antiquity) — as a conscious construction of Messenian history, part of the invention of a national identity which took place after Epimenondas granted Messenia independence in the 4th century B.C.[6] While Luraghi does not totally reject the existence of a conflict between the residents of the town of Messene and Spartan invaders in the time frame of the Messenian Wars, his work calls into question Pausanias' framing of the revolutionaries as self-identified Messenians reduced to collective slavery *as an existing nation* by an earlier conquest.[7]

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[3] Langerwerf, p 331
[4] Habicht, p2-4
[5] Ibid. p21
[6] Luraghi, p3
[7] Ibid, chapter 7

The other detailed example of a slave revolt in ancient Greece is the tale of Drimakos, which Athenaus includes in his only surviving work, the Deipnosophistae, as part of a long philosophical discussion on the ethics and practice of slavery[8]. Just like the Messenian conflict, Drimakos may well have been more of a folk hero than a real revolutionary. Athenaeus attributed the story to a now-lost 3rd century B.C. work by Nymphodorus of Syracuse. However, Sara Forsdyke states that

> *This wonderful tale cannot be accepted as an accurate account of historical events on Chios. Even if Nymphodorus had not introduced his narrative as "a story (muthos)" told by the Chians, its fictive character is evident in the numerous conventional and dramatic features of its style and plot.*[9]

Neither of the earliest accounts of slave revolts should be used as historical documents, but rather as literary or cultural artifacts. Yet the parallels to well-documented slave revolts, both in antiquity and the early modern period, are impossible to ignore. Aristomenes and Drimakos faced some of the same challenges in commanding their quasi-mythical rebellions as Spartacus in the Roman republic or Colonel Kojo in colonial Jamaica. Most likely, these two stories are partly real events and partly ideological constructions of those events, which makes them both dangerous and intriguing pieces of evidence in a search for general rules regarding the command of real slave revolts. Still, this pair of potentially fictitious rebellions will serve to highlight some of the key factors to commanding a successful slave revolt.

Luraghi's conception of the Second Messenian War as a construction of ethnic identity is a useful example of how the collective memory of resistance to slavery (real or constructed) has been used to forge novel ethnic identities. In Jamaica, the act of the revolt itself became an opportunity for the rebels to create a new nationality, the Kromanti, out of the cultural chaos of the uprooted West African diaspora.[10] In the case of Messenia, the process was reversed; in order for the disorganized peoples of the western Peloponnese to build a national identity for the state granted to them by Epimenondas, they invented a historical slave revolt to which they could tie themselves. This transhistorical phenomenon suggests that

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[8] Langerwerf, pp 341, par3; Athenaus 6.262b–270a. Interestingly, the infamous (but invented) rebelliousness of the Messenians is mentioned in Democritus' speech as an example of the dangers of mass slavery (265a).
[9] Forsdyke, pp 38
[10] Zips, pp 55-57

transcending the ethnic divisions between slave populations, often a melting pot of distinct populations whose only shared experience might be slavery itself, is the first step in launching a revolt. Unity among the would-be rebels must be achieved before they can pose a military challenge to their common enemy, the slave master.

Another aspect of the invention of traditions around slave revolts are the religious honors paid to the leaders by their followers. The Jamaican Maroon commanders depended on religious rituals to lead their troops into battle.[11] Like Spartacus to his prophetess wife, Colonel Kojo was rumored to be (but probably not actually) connected by blood or marriage to a spiritual leader named Nanny, who supposedly used her supernatural powers to turn British bullets back on the soldiers who fired them, and for whom the Maroon stronghold of Nanny Town was named.[12] Traditional religious leaders called obeah men played key roles in many Maroon revolts, performing rituals such as consecrating amulets which supposedly granted the wearer invincibility in combat.[13] Curiously, Athenaeus reports that Drimakos was worshiped after his death not just by the freed slaves, who dedicated to him their stolen rations, but also by their former masters, to whom he would appear in warning of future escapes.[14] This legend is called into question by Athenaeus, who found that often "the man was not referred to by name" in retellings.[15] Meanwhile, Aristomenes and Spartacus were both associated with snakes as a manifestation of destiny; according to Pausanias, many Messenians believed that their hero's mother was impregnated by a spirit or god in the form of a serpent, while Plutarch, ever fond of character-revealing anecdotes, recounts a story that "a serpent was seen coiled about [Spartacus'] face as he slept" when he was first brought to Rome.[16] His Thessalian wife was said to be struck by divine vision and interpreted this as a formidable omen.[17] It is notable that both authors frame this through the words of others. Like Luraghi, they recognize that the true value of these stories lies not in their veracity, but in the mythology they construct for the people who

[11] Zips, pp 46
[12] Robinson, pp 53
[13] Zips, 46
[14] Ath. 6.266d
[15] Ath. 6.266e
[16] Pausanias, 4.14.7
[17] Plutarch, *The Life of Crassus*, 8-11. Spartacus' wife, an unnamed Thessalian from the same tribe as her husband, is said to be afflicted by 'Dionysiac frenzy'.

tell them. Conscious admission in the ancient sources that the divine powers or heritage by the followers or worshippers of these commanders were imputed, rather than absolutely real, creates an undeniable link to Weber's conception of the charismatic leader, who is "*considered* extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities".[18] Paul Joosse has emphasized the sociological aspect of Weber's theory, in that the importance of the perception of a charismatic leader's divinity is the perception rather than the divinity, and a leader is of the charismatic type "regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed".[19]

The stories of both the Chian and Messenian rebellions center around their respective leaders, Drimakos and Aristomenes. They hold positions of immense authority; Aristomenes is awarded the Messenian kingship after achieving "more than it seemed that one man could", but refuses the title and instead accepts the position of *strategos autokrator*.[20] Drimakos unifies several gangs of runaway slaves and leads them "as if he were the commander of an army" to victory against multiple Chian expeditions.[21] In his speech Democritus does not mention how or why he was granted this authority. Both commanders take power during an ongoing uprising and attempt to impose strict discipline on their troops — Aristomenes executes soldiers who act against his orders and Greek norms, while Drimakos' punishment is so fearsome his subordinates are "far more frightened of him than they [are] of their proper masters".[22] Unfortunately for Aristomenes, despite his efforts to control his men, Pausanias indirectly attributes the Messenians' final defeat at the siege of Mount Eria to a lack of discipline; on a particularly rainy night, the watchmen desert their posts.[23] When the Spartans learn of this, they infiltrate the city, and eventually overwhelm the Messenians by sheer numbers, forcing them to flee.[24] In the absence of a codified

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[18] Weber pp 241, emphasis added
[19] Joosse, pp 271; Weber, pp 295. The charismatic leader is one of three leadership types; the others being traditional and rational-legal. Drimakos and Colonel Kojo both solidify their authority over their respective societies by systematizing their command into one or both of the other styles; they enter into legal treaties with their former masters and establish religious/cultural traditions. While a deeper analysis of how leadership styles change after a successful revolt would be rewarding, it is beyond the scope of this paper.
[20] Pausanias, 4.14.4-5
[21] Ath., 6.265d
[22] Paus. 4.16.10, Ath. 6.266a
[23] Paus. 4.20.8
[24] Paus. 4.21

command structure in the newly unified army, the crucial second step is the selection of a leader from among the rebels who possesses the tactical skill to defeat the inevitable expeditions sent by the slave owners, as well as the persona to maintain order in an inherently disorganized army. While the initial source of a leader's power can be completely imaginary, his skill in command and ability to instill discipline must be very real. If he lacks martial ability, like Charles Deslondes in the German Coast Uprising, or loses control of his men, like Aristomenes and Spartacus, the rebellion is doomed.

The Spartacus War

The War of Spartacus (also called the Gladiatorial War or the Third Slave War) began in 73 B.C. when a small band of gladiators, led by the legendary Spartacus, escaped from their barracks in Capua and raised a massive rebel army of slaves and poor Romans. They won several decisive victories in the field against multiple consuls, at one point threatening to march on Rome itself, until they were chased into southern Italy and ultimately defeated by Crassus.

The ethnicity of the rebellious gladiators is mentioned frequently in the ancient sources. Spartacus was a Thracian, while his co-commanders Crixus and Oenomaus were Gauls, all elected by the initial escapees — a group of around 70 gladiators of mostly the same two nationalities.[25] If we venture a guess that they were chosen based on proportional distribution between the two peoples (why else would they have picked three leaders out of less than a hundred men?), the Gauls probably outnumbered the Thracians two to one. However, most sources agree that the rebel army was roughly 90-100,000 strong at its peak, with 60,000 under Spartacus and 35,000 Gauls and Germans under different commanders.[26] As the army recruited slaves from plantations across Italy it would have become a melting pot of various ethnicities and occupations, even including a number of free Roman shepherds.[27] Part of the problem

[25] Plutarch, *Crassus* 8

[26] Appian says 120,000 foot marched towards Rome (*Civil Wars* 1.14.117), Livy says at the final battle the army consisted of 60,000 under Spartacus and a separate 35,000 Gauls and Germans for a total of 95,000 (*Periochae* 97), Velleius Paterculus reports a similar 90,000 (*Compendium* 2.30.5-6), while Paulus Orosius (writing in the 5th century A.D.) estimates the total number of slaves killed at over 100,000 (*History* 5.24). Plutarch only gives active numbers for the Roman army; his sole estimate of slave numbers is the "twelve thousand three hundred" killed bravely fighting Crassus in Chapter 11

[27] Plu. 9 for the shepherds, Appian 1.14.117 says it consisted of "slaves, deserters, and riff-raff"

likely stemmed from the different sources of manpower — many of the slaves were Germanic and Gallic warriors working on rural estates, who would have likely had established expectations for command systems from their common military experience, one of which was probably to be commanded by their countrymen instead of a foreigner.[28] Since no other single ethnicity was significant enough to be mentioned by the Roman authors, the mixed troops under Spartacus would probably have been more willing to put aside their differences and accept the leadership of a capable leader who could unify them into an effective fighting force.

Already the challenges of commanding such a large and diverse army are obvious; more than one third of the men were organized into a separate contingent based on ethnicity. The composition of the main force is never specified, an indication that it may have encompassed all the non-Germanic or Gaulish soldiers. This division was not merely administrative — the army under Crixus operated independently from Spartacus against the consuls Gellius and Lentulus respectively, essentially fighting two separate engagements, and the Germans and Gauls maintained separate leadership even in the final battle.[29] It seems counterintuitive for such a sizable number of men to venture out on their own instead of throwing in their lot with the main force, almost absurdly so. The most reasonable explanation is the iconic fighting style employed by the tribal peoples; rather than fighting in units as the Romans did, they would throw themselves at the enemy in successive human wave attacks.[30] This method of fighting would have been irreconcilable with the classical method of fighting in units, and nearly impossible to maneuver once the battle had begun. The drawbacks to these tactics are evident in the fact that the warriors had already been defeated once and captured by the Roman army, as well as their failure during the revolt. Whenever the Roman army faced a separate German detachment it was victorious: Gellius routed the Germans, but even after combining with Lentulus and his remaining men was unable to win against

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[28] Matyszak, pp 5, Hall, pp 80
[29] Plu. 9; Livy 97; Frontinus, *Strategies* 2.5.34
[30] Wilcox describes the German and Gallic tactics similarly. See pp 74 for Gallic army, “swordsmen rolled forward like an incoming wave and began a screaming run towards enemy lines”, and pp 26 for the Germans, who “attack at a headlong rush, in wedge formation”. Keeping any sort of unit cohesion in these kinds of assaults would have been nigh impossible.

Spartacus, while Crassus twice routed the detached force before going on to defeat Spartacus' main army.[31] It is impossible to know what difference (if any) those thousands of fighting men would have made had they stayed with the main army, but the opportunity to fight two separate armies in detail undeniably made Crassus' job easier. Considering how successful the army was when unified under Spartacus, it is not an overstatement that the ethnic split was one of the primary factors in the failure of the rebellion.

Still, this was a failure at the highest level of command, an inability to integrate the different ethnic units into a single force, and should not be interpreted as evidence of any inherent disadvantage that the slave army faced in combat due to its diversity. While the fighting style of the Germans and Gauls was so different it caused a split with the main army, ethnic diversity in classical armies could be a source of strength and cohesion. Hall and Rawlings' study of the multi-ethnic Carthaginian army shows that

> *despite the army being ethnically heterogenous, individual units seem to have been organised based on existing relationships. …these performed well under pressure. By keeping these groups together in mono-ethnic units, the army benefitted from the strength of social cohesion without having to spend lengthy periods of time training and drilling. These groups of mercenaries already have a common language, approach to warfare and value system, as well as other cultural traits. It is probable that the soldiers which made up these units also had a common fighting style and sets of equipment, making them recognisable on the battlefield and able to fight side by side effectively*.[32]

The most crucial aspect of this approach to commanding a diverse army is that it (partially, at least) made up for a lack of regular training and drilling, which would have been impossible for a slave army perpetually on the move. Similarly, horizontal cohesion between ethnic units in Roman auxiliaries is evident in postmortem dedications made by foreign soldiers to their fallen comrades in Iberia — in each of three inscriptions of this type analyzed by López Casado, both the memorialized and the memorializer were from the same unit *and* the same village or tribe, from as far away as Thrace and North Africa.[33] While it does not prove that auxiliary units were *exclusively* composed of a single ethnicity, it is strong

[31] Appian 1.14.118; Livy 97; Frontinus 2.5.34
[32] Hall, pp 80
[33] López Casado, pp 288-289

evidence that foreign auxiliaries in Roman armies usually fought in units alongside their countrymen. Since Spartacus himself is reported to have served with the Roman army, he almost certainly would have seen how these units were organized and could have applied that principle to his rag-tag army in order to turn it into the capable force that it was.[34] Plutarch drops a clue to this effect when describing the enlistment of Roman herdsmen, "some of whom they armed fully, and employed others as scouts and light infantry."[35] Here some of the free Romans were organized into separate light infantry units rather than simply replenishing or expanding units of slaves, and their unique ethnic traits (knowledge of the Italian mountains) fully exploited by making them scouts.

This passage gives a rare glimpse into the organization of the rebel army; instead of an amorphous mass of infantry, the army has units with specialized roles, while the phrase 'armed fully' used in contrast to light troops suggests a main corps of heavy infantry with some level of equipment standardization. Starting with kitchen implements, they were able to accomplish this level of sophistication by two means.[36] First, they seized the weapons and baggage of the armies they defeated, a standard practice for insurrections and guerilla armies throughout history.[37] Second, somewhat more impressively, the rebels seized the town of Thurii and there manufactured their own weapons, trading to acquire more iron and bronze for their makeshift forges.[38] This was enough to arm tens of thousands of men. Unlike rebellions in the early modern period, however, the technological gap was never so large at the outset of the rebellion as to make victory without standard weapons impossible.

The other main cause for Spartacus' eventual defeat was a frequent breakdown in command. Plutarch attributes this to over-confidence — after a victory over veteran legions, the slave army refused to follow Spartacus' marching orders.[39] Ironically, he says, it was Spartacus' success in commanding them

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[34] Appian 1.14.116; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8 (3.20)
[35] Plu. 9
[36] Plu. 8
[37] Plu. 9
[38] Appian 1.14.116-117
[39] Plu. 9, 11; this happens twice, first (almost inexplicably) the army turns back from the home stretch before the Alps, and again at the end of the war when they are surrounded on all sides by the armies of Pompey, Lucullus and Crassus. This may be based on Book 3 of Sallust's *Histories* (of which only fragments survive) from only a few decades after the uprising, which states that "Crixus and his tribes,

that led to their mutiny, when the infantry took up arms against their leaders and "forced them to lead back through Lucania against the Romans".[40] If this confirms the existence of a vague vertical hierarchy — they do not surround Spartacus himself, instead the "leaders" in their own ranks — it also reveals how weak that hierarchy was. While Crassus drew on ancient legal authority to decimate the units that had fled in battle, perhaps even the entire force, and instill vertical discipline, Spartacus had no such methods at his disposal to bend his troops to his will.[41] Sallust claims that Spartacus "was powerless to prevent" the army from committing "inexpressibly horrible" crimes, including raping civilians.[42] Neither Plutarch nor Appian corroborate these specific accusations; the extent of Plutarch's comments is a vague remark that the army "went ravaging over Italy", though this could easily be intended to describe them plundering supplies from the countryside.[43] Either way, the lack of discipline in the rebel army is attested by all the main sources, especially when compared to the absolute authority Crassus exercised over the legions.

Slave Revolts in the Early Modern Era

From the perpetual struggle for freedom carried out by African and indigenous slaves, from Brazil, to Haiti, to the United States, two episodes stand out for their similarities to the ancient accounts. The largest slave revolt in the history of the United States, the 1811 German Coast uprising, bears a curious resemblance to the Spartacus War, albeit on a smaller scale; an initial breakout which ballooned into a menacing army by moving from plantation to plantation gathering recruits, ending with brutal retribution from the victorious slave owners. Further south, the Maroon communities of Jamaica managed to retain their autonomy by striking a deal with British colonists similar to the one between Drimakos and the Chians. Though these parallels are worth examining, the fundamental differences between ancient and modern slavery should not be forgotten. According to the sources that survive, ancient rebellions did not

Gauls and Germans, wanted to meet the enemy head on and voluntarily offer battle; on the other hand, Spartacus…"

[40] Plu. 11

[41] Appian 1.14.118, Plu. 10. Plutarch says that it was here that Crassus revived the practice of decimation, which had not been used for many years. Here is an example of the contrast between charismatic and legal-rational authority according to Weber.

[42] Sallust 3.98 (Maurenbrecher)/3.66 (McGushin)

[43] Plu. 9

aim to abolish slavery as a social relation like the Haitian Revolution or the German Coast uprising.[44] While Spartacus' army of Thracians and Gauls had the option to escape over the Alps, and the Messenians fled to Sicily, the enslaved Africans in the New World had no way of crossing the Atlantic to return to their homes. Victory to the ancient slaves meant a return to a homeland, to their ancestral people; while a shared African identity was (and is) central to the construction of new identities, geographical realities prevented colonial slaves from returning to their homes, and the fight for freedom manifested itself in the preservation of free, multi-ethnic communities on the periphery of the European colonies, or else the fight for total abolition within them.

The German Coast

The German Coast uprising was of the latter kind, inspired by the success of the Haitian Revolution in 1804.[45] After their defeat on the island, many French planters fled to Louisiana, bringing along both their slaves and their project of sugar cultivation. This instigated rebellion in two ways; on the one hand, the local slaves were radicalized by firsthand accounts of African slaves winning their freedom on the battlefield, and on the other, as slaves accustomed to growing rice and cotton were forced to grow the lucrative but labor-intensive sugar crop, their work days became longer and much more demanding.[46] In response to these stimuli, on January 8, 1811, a Black slave driver named Charles Deslondes led fifteen to twenty-five enslaved workers to storm the plantation of Manuel Andry and began an eastward march along the north bank of the Mississippi River towards New Orleans.[47] Stopping at each plantation along the way, they recruited a force of 180-500 fighters and armed them with seized hunting rifles and plantation tools.[48] The first and only battle was fought at the Destrehan plantation just two days later, ending in a disastrous defeat for the insurrectionists. Charles Perret, along with a wounded Andry, led a planter militia of roughly 80 men against the rebel force, killing 40-60 of them in battle and scattering the

[44] Rasmussen, pp 39-49
[45] Ibid. pp 39-49
[46] Thrasher, pp 32-33
[47] Rasmussen, pp 97
[48] Rasmussen, pp 128; Rodriguez 70

rest.[49] The survivors were hunted down over the next few days, some of whom were taken to New Orleans to stand trial. The largest slave uprising in U.S. history lasted just three days.

Like the Roman slaves, the forces martialled under Deslondes were a mix of various ethnicities and nationalities. In the march to New Orleans, Rasmussen claims that "Eleven separate leaders rode on horseback, each representing a different ethnic faction: the Muslim Senegambians, the Akans, the Sierra Leonians, the French Louisianans, and the Anglo-Americans were all involved."[50] While Thrasher was the first to explore the slaves' continued identification with their unique nationalities, and other sources attest to their well-organized march led by mounted officers, no other source mentions the explicit division into companies based on ethnicity.[51] Rodriguez describes how "With officers, flagmen, and drummers, the rebel force assumed a martial spirit… they recalled specific warlike remembrances that had survived the transfer from Africa."[52] Though some reports describe the battle as a massacre of disorganized rebels, Rasmussen cites a Spanish agent in New Orleans, who claimed "The blacks were not intimidated by [the] army and formed themselves in a line."[53,54] Either way, the army fled into the surrounding forest after running out of ammunition, without killing a single militiaman.[55] Despite their best efforts, the rebels were also hopelessly outgunned; they were armed with "cane knives, axes, hoes, other tools, and a few small arms," and they had only birdshot for the few firearms they managed to seize.[56] The rebels made genuine attempts to organize themselves into a real, battle-ready army, but welding together a diverse group of slaves and runaways from multiple plantations with little to no

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[49] Rasmussen, pp 140; Rodriguez, pp 75
[50] Rasmussen 107
[51] Thrasher draws on work by Michael Gomez in *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1998.) to reliably extrapolate the rebels' connections to Africa.
[52] Rodriguez, pp 70
[53] "In moments more like a massacre than a battle," Rodriguez, pp 75, "What followed was hardly a battle at all; it was more in the form of a mass execution", Dormon, pp 396.
[54] Rasmussen, pp 138
[55] Only two whites were killed in the entire rebellion, Gilbert Andry (son of Manuel) and the planter Jean-Francois Trepagnier.
[56] Dormon, pp 396;

fighting experience would have been a massive challenge.[57] Spartacus had years to recruit, arm, and train his band of gladiators, slaves, and herdsmen into a real army; Deslondes and his lieutenants had two days.

The nail in the coffin of the 1811 revolt was a lack of enthusiastic collaboration of local slaves with the rebel army, including those who chose not to fight. Rodriguez estimates that a maximum of "'13 percent of the slave population of the entire German Coast region" participated in the revolt.[58] Two newspapers, the *Raleigh Star* and the *Richmond Enquirer*, reported that torture was used to impress those who initially refused into the nascent army, and while the firsthand account in the *Star* contained invaluable information on troop movements, both were based on the lone accounts of white militiamen.[59] The evidence supporting the claims is weak outside of these two publications, but regardless of whether torture was used or not, the rebellion undoubtedly suffered from the betrayal of slaves on plantations upriver from the Landry house. More than one planter was warned of the approaching army by their own slaves, some of whom fled to New Orleans with their masters.[60] Though Rasmussen claims that fleeing whites left their most reliable slaves in charge of their property, there is no evidence that any slaves were granted freedom for choosing their masters over the rebels.[61] Unlike Spartacus' army composed of slaves, gladiators and free Romans, there were virtually no other immediate sources of manpower or weapons for the fledgling leadership to draw on.

Without the full collaboration of the German Coast slaves, the rebellion never managed to reach the critical numerical mass necessary to overcome its immense technological disadvantage. The 500 who did join (not all of whom were necessarily fighting men) were routed by a mere 80 planters organized in an impromptu militia, with hundreds more militiamen and regular army reinforcements, including cavalry

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[57] Dormon (pp 394) says a support force of Maroons and slaves from other plantations joined the army immediately after the uprising at the Andry plantation

[58] Rodriguez, pp 71

[59] Buman's historiography praises the troop movements, but only one major historical account other than Thompson's mentions forced impressment and torture; the blatantly racist and white supremacist Kendall. According to Kendall, some slaves later testified that they were forced to join the army by torture, but Buman identifies "racist social agendas that clouded [his] works with glaring inaccuracies" (pp 319). As such, the record is far from clear on the question of recruitment through torture.

[60] Rasmussen, pp 104, Rodriguez, pp 71

[61] Rasmussen, pp 105

and light artillery, just a day's march away. Deslondes and his lieutenants made the best of what was available to them, but were ultimately doomed by an insurmountable lack of weapons, time, and local support.

The Jamaican Maroons

When compared to the failure of the German Coast rebellion, the relative success of the Jamaican Maroons in the 18th century can be at least partially attributed to their enjoying more time to organize, better weapons, and closer relationships with the slaves on Jamaican plantations. While Deslondes' revolt lasted less than a week, the Maroons engaged in a protracted struggle against British planter society for over a century, beginning with the English invasion in 1655 of what, at the time, was a Spanish colony. Most of the Spaniards surrendered quickly and fled the island, but "elements of the hard core remained" led by Cristobal Arnaldo de Ysassi, along with hundreds of slaves who established their own resistance under Juan Lubolo.[62] Safe in the hilly interior, the two forces fought parallel guerilla wars against the invaders, but it was the independent slaves that eventually evolved into the Maroon communities after the defection of Lubolo's town forced the battered Spaniards (and their allies) to flee once and for all.[63] In exchange, the defectors were granted land and freedom by the English, and Lubolo himself received the rank of colonel as well as magistracy over all the Africans still in Jamaica.[64] But despite the leadership Lubolo had shown in the struggle, his betrayal put him at odds with the Maroon army — by serving the slave-owning colonists, he was no longer a liberator in the eyes of his former subordinates. In 1663 Lubolo marched into the interior at the head of an English punitive force, and was massacred in a brutal ambush.[65] The Jamaican Maroons won their freedom during the chaos of the inter-imperial war, and their task for the next century was to defend it from English encroachments.

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[62] Robinson, pp 17
[63] Ibid., pp 25
[64] Ibid., pp 27
[65] Ibid., pp 29

Over the next decades, two communities of Maroons with distinct military and civilian structures emerged on the island; the Windward Maroons in the northeast appeared first, a decentralized federation centered around Nanny Town, followed by the Leeward Maroons who founded Trelawny Town in the western Cockpit Country.[66] Contemporary historians divide the conflict into the First and Second Maroon Wars of 1728-1740 and 1795-1796 respectively. However, closer examination reveals constant low-intensity fighting and an ever-shifting network of alliances between multiple parties, making any clear delineation between peace- and wartime nearly impossible. The Maroons of Jamaica fought nearly constantly, either with the English or against new rebellions and runaways. Robinson describes "decades of guerilla activity" in central Jamaica leading up to the first war, and while the English succeeded militarily by destroying Trelawny Town in the second, in the long term slave resistance only increased following the Second Maroon War.[67] On top of that, the loyalties of secondary actors such as the breakaway Maroon town of Accompong, an all-slave unit known as the Black Shot, and the plantation slaves themselves were incredibly complex and subject to radical change. While members of the Black Shot fought loyally with the English in general, large numbers deserted to the Maroons at different times.[68] Accompong Town generally sided with the English but was unable to put a stop to any serious resistance after the second war.[69] Both communities of Maroons were forced to hunt down runaways and rebels by the treaties of 1739 and 1740, which put them in conflict with some slave forces, but they did not always fulfill their commitments to the English, and hundreds of runaways joined forces with Trelawny Town in 1795.[70]

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[66] Robinson refers to the western group as the Trelawny Maroons, after their main town. The northeast was home to several different towns that collaborated in military matters.
[67] Sivapragasam succinctly describes how the execution and deportation of the Trelawny community "completely changed the picture of slave resistance in western Jamaica from one of minimal runaway resistance to a situation where large numbers of escaped slaves flourished in communities in the Cockpit Country", (pp 575). This is remarkably similar to the story of Drimakos, who signed a similar treaty with the Chians. After his death, the fragile peace between the runaways and the Chians shattered, and looting and violence increased dramatically.
[68] Sivapragasam, pp 574; Zips, pp 98
[69] Ibid., pp 575-576
[70] Ibid., pp 569

The system of warfare that emerged from this unstable society was contradictory, even paradoxical at times. The Maroons waffled between aiding and resisting the colonists, alternatively fighting for and against slavery at different times. They were led by a series of skilled commanders who, by choice or out of necessity, repeatedly betrayed their own cause.[71] Like the fractures in Spartacus' army, it can be partially explained by ethnic divisions between the slaves and the Maroons. Due to the unique circumstances of colonial slavery, the Maroons developed a "flexible sense of ethnic identity", a new African-Jamaican ethnicity heavily influenced by the Kromanti identity, but including a blend of various African cultures as well as the shared experience of bondage.[72] Because of its fluid nature, new members could be adopted into the ethnicity even in adulthood with a series of initiation rituals. However, this process did not always succeed in integrating new members, who occasionally ran away back to English towns, and eventually the treaties forcing the Maroons to stop taking in runaways turned their towns into closed communities, ethnically distinct from the slave population.[73] The descendants of the Maroons still distinguish themselves from the rest of Jamaica today, existing as a collection of self-governing "states within a state".[74] Runaways still frequently fought alongside the Maroons after the treaties, though they increasingly formed their own independent communities rather than joining existing Maroon towns.

In spite of their limited numbers, the Maroons made a fearsome army — groups totaling only a few hundred managed to hold off the full might of the British Empire for over a century. They used truly ingenious tactics to overcome their numerical and technological disadvantage; in a process called "bushing up", warriors would disguise themselves as foliage so perfectly that they could effectively use their machetes against the gun-toting redcoats.[75] Scouts knew how to disguise their body odor even from tracking dogs with fragrant trees, and skilled signallers could use a variety of calls on a cow-horn, called an *abeng*, to summon individual fighters by name.[76] Beyond the highest levels of command, like Colonel

[71] Juan Lubolo seems to have chosen to switch sides in hopes of personal enrichment, while Kojo was forced to sue for peace by the dire situation of the Maroons in the First Maroon War.
[72] Zips, pp 64-65
[73] Ibid., pp 64-66
[74] Ibid., pp 130
[75] Ibid., pp 80
[76] See Zips (pp 78) for information on ecological knowledge, and Robinson (pp 36) for descriptions of Maroon tactics and strategy.

Kojo of Trelawny Town, who made his brothers into co-commanders, or Lieutenant Davy of the Scott's Hall Maroons, there is scant record of the Maroon command structure. Because of the fluid nature of guerilla warfare and the tiny number of combatants (numbering less than a thousand), operations were likely organized on an ad-hoc basis, and most fighters might not have had a permanent rank or unit. Still, they were able to execute complex hit-and-run tactics; their marksmen would open a rapid crossfire, and rather than fire in a line like European armies, they crouched low to the ground to fire, then quickly rolled and dodged around to avoid counter volleys.[77] While the English were reloading, men with machetes could charge in and finish them off.[78] If the redcoats fought on after the initial ambush, the entire Maroon force would melt away in a false retreat and set another ambush.[79] The Maroons were also incredibly mobile; after the English established a forward base in the Clarendon mountains during the First Maroon War, Kojo relocated the entire resistance north to Trelawny Town.[80] Similarly, after a bloody defeat in 1734, the entire population of Nanny Town, the largest settlement of the Windward Maroons, was evacuated to neighboring Guy Town.[81] Despite their inability to manufacture firearms, the Maroons were generally able to stay supplied by seizing the guns of fallen redcoats, or by purchasing them at market through intermediaries or by going in disguise.[82] Kojo managed to arm "almost every man" with firearms in the First Maroon War, and the need to preserve ammunition made their accuracy legendary.[83]

The complexities of colonial Jamaica's social fabric make an analysis of the success of the Maroon resistance difficult. On the one hand, two distinct groups of former slaves managed to retain their freedom and political independence from a major imperial power for decades. But in order to preserve those rights, they became enforcers of the same system of slavery they had fought to escape. Multiple promising slave revolts were put down with help from the Maroons; the eponymous leader of Tacky's Revolt in 1760 was killed in combat by Lieutenant Davy and his resistance ended, and in 1834 Maroon

[77] Robinson cites a description given by Governor Long of a peaceful demonstration of tactics in 1764, a period of relative peace.
[78] Zips, pp 85-89
[79] Robinson, pp 35
[80] The Maroon War, pp 2
[81] Zips, pp 91
[82] Robinson, pp 34
[83] Maroon War, pp 2

forces tipped the scales against the largest slave rebellion in Jamaican history.[84] Even after emancipation, Maroon commandos assisted in crushing an 1865 peasant revolt led by Paul Bogle, who was captured and executed by the Maroons themselves. Zips notes that

> *... all Maroon communities in the "New World" who were offered peace treaties agreed to similar sets of provisions. The free black communities had long since acquired an identity that emphasized their divergence from the rest of the black population rather than any unifying elements. This very identity was destabilized by the constant admission of new members.*[85]

In other words, the success of the Maroons in establishing free communities outside the bounds of colonial society led them to develop their own ethnic identity; one built on a fundamental distinction between those who remained enslaved. Combined with the perpetual pressure emanating from the powerful imperial slave society, the Maroon identity itself compelled them to cooperate with their former masters against future rebellions.

Terrain

Though terrain itself is not a factor that can be influenced by commanders, of slave revolts or otherwise, a brief analysis of the influence it has on the command of said revolts is necessary.[86] Of the five revolts examined here, four of them took place in mountainous terrain — Italy, Messenia, Chios, and Jamaica, the latter two of which are also islands.[87] Both of these situations can give rebels with superior knowledge of the terrain an advantage over a stronger opponent. Moving large numbers of men through mountains takes time and strains supplies, and fighting battles in formation becomes a challenge to even the best armies, while islands make resupplying and reinforcing defeated armies and evacuating civilians far more difficult. Islands also tend to limit the movement options of both parties, which could help explain why the Chians signed a Maroon-style treaty with Drimakos; neither the Chian nor the Jamaican

[84] Zips, pp 122
[85] Ibid., pp 120
[86] Throughout history a select few armies have managed to manipulate the natural environment in order to defeat an opponent, such as diverting the path of a river to deprive a besieged city of water, but these cases are few and far between, and required massive amounts of labor and engineering. While theoretically possible, armies on the march can hardly move mountains or create a swamp where there was desert.
[87] See end for maps

slaves had any other landmass to escape to, nor did they have the power to completely subjugate their former masters, and as such both parties were forced to accept the continued existence of the other in unavoidable proximity to one another. The Haitian Revolution provides a parallel view into the consequences of a total slave victory on a Caribbean island — the revolutionaries famously massacred over 100,000 white colonists and soldiers after defeating the British and French armies.[88]

Previous analyses of each of the five revolts have recognized the pivotal role of favorable terrain in the success or failure of their respective revolts. According to Nymphodorus' story, the slaves on Chios "set off for the mountains, where they formed large gangs and damaged the Chian countryside; because the island is rough and heavily wooded."[89] Aristomenes reportedly retreated into the mountains of Messenia following a crushing defeat, where the poet Rhianus claimed they held out against a siege by a much larger Spartan force for 11 years.[90] The first of Spartacus' victories against a serious Roman force was accomplished with an ingenious maneuver — pinned atop a sheer cliff, the rebel army fashioned makeshift ladders out of branches and vines, scaled the cliff face, and attacked the forces of Clodius from behind with tactics reminiscent of the Jamaican Maroons.[91] The settlements of the Windward Maroons overlap almost precisely with the highest mountains in Jamaica, while the characteristic landscape of the western Cockpit Country, described as "a bewildering jumble of hummocky hills and intervening depressions" and its dense foliage allowed the Leeward Maroons to practice their unique hit-and-run tactics.[92] While advantageous geography played a key role in the success, however short-lived, of each of these rebellions, the flat coastal land of the Mississippi Delta doomed the men under Deslondes. Guerilla war was not an option on that narrow stretch of land, and while Maroons could hide themselves and caches of weapons for years in the rugged Cockpit Country, the Louisiana slaves had no such luck. A slave on a plantation near the battle on the German Coast described the hopeless situation of the survivors of the disastrous battle — "In their flight they can go in no direction but a little way without coming to a

[88] Scheina, pp 1772
[89] Ath. 6.265d
[90] Paus. 4.10
[91] Plu. 9
[92] Robinson, pp 43

bayou, when the inevitable alternative is presented, of being drowned or overtaken by the dogs."[93] Reinforcements quickly joined the search, marching easily across flat roads, and instead of being hindered by steep slopes, cavalrymen had the upper hand in the marsh and quickly flushed out any remaining resistance.[94]

Conclusions

Undertaking a slave revolt is always a risky business. Those who choose to incite one, often the same people who go on to lead them, are already putting their lives in the hands of their co-conspirators simply by stating their intention to rebel — by informing their master, two slaves foiled Gabriel Prosser's massive conspiracy in 1800.[95] Should an army manage to assemble, there is no guarantee that enough slaves will join it or provide support, as Charles Deslondes learned in 1811. Even under the most capable commanders, the nature of his authority does not lend itself to establishing strict military discipline by any means necessary. Masters will likely want to keep weapons as far away from their slaves as possible, and as military technology becomes increasingly complex, the possibility of a slave army procuring its own up-to-date weapons becomes more and more difficult; it is much easier to forge a sword or a spear than to assemble a musket. Similarly, there is little opportunity to train or drill before the revolt starts, after which it will come under immediate attack from state forces. Slaves are almost always taken to far-off lands and separated from their peoples, and while the suffering of bondage can tie its victims together, those born free will have their own identities that may cause conflict or disagreement within the army. If they are lucky enough to be taken to a mountainous, wooded region, rebellion becomes more feasible, but the type of agriculture best suited to mass slavery rarely thrives in such an environment, and a more likely destination is the stereotypical plantation farm of the American South. Though the leaders of slave rebellions often have immense personal authority over their subordinates, they take the reins in a situation usually explicitly designed to make their task as difficult as possible. Even putting together an army of

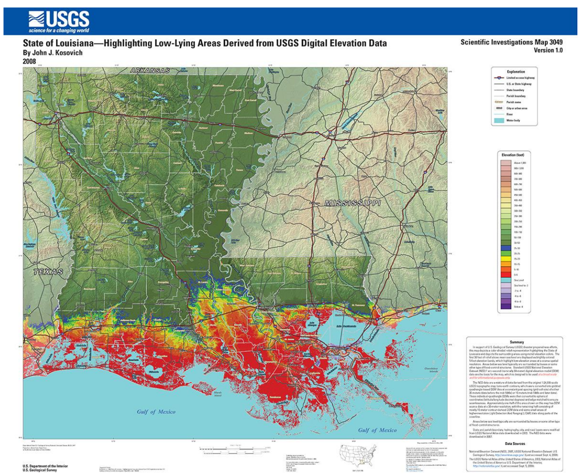
[93] Rasmussen, pp 141
[94] Ibid., pp 143
[95] Nicholls

slaves is a huge accomplishment and successfully carrying out warfare is an uphill battle. Slave commanders have the dual task of constructing a functioning army out of nothing and fighting a state army in its own territory; two exceedingly difficult problems that compound each other. If, however, a system of command can emerge from a fractured, disorganized population, if it can seize contemporary weapons and teach its soldiers how to use them, and if there is a place for it to set up a base of operations, only then does it have a chance to deliver itself to freedom. Self-liberation by military means is no easy task; but that does not make it impossible.

Maps


38°45'
25°30'
26°
Psara
Prassonissi
531 m
Antipsara
Psara
Katonissi
38°30'
GREECE
Aegean Sea
Agiasmata
Kampia
Prophitis Elias
1297 m
Cape Vamvakas
Melanios
Keramos
Marmaro
Kardamyla
Inousses
Inousses
Passas
Volissos
Pitious
Lagkada
Gaidouroniso
Pontikonissos
Vatos
Skala Volissou
Marathovounos
796 m
Kara
Sidirouda
Anavatos
Vrontados
Chios
Nea Moni
Chios
Chios Strait
Pelagonissi Islands
Aghios Stephanos
Lithi
Chalkeio
Karfas
Thimiana
Chesme
Vessa
Tholopotami
Passa Limani
Kallimasia
Mesta
Armolia
Bogazadasi
38°15'
Pyrgi
Nenita
Kalamoti
Emporio
Komi
Cape Mastichο
Venetikos
1 300 m
1 200 m
1 000 m
800 m
600 m
400 m
200 m
100 m
50 m
0
50 m
200 m
500 m
750 m
1 000 m
City, Village
Monastery
Mountain peak
International border
Highway
Main road
Secondary road
Minor road
Narrow road or track
UTM projection – WGS84 datum
estimated topography scale:
1:400 000
(km)
(mi)
25°30'
26°


9°
12°
15°
18°
45°
42°
39°
36°
0
(km)
300


USGS
science for a changing world
State of Louisiana—Highlighting Low-Lying Areas Derived from USGS Digital Elevation Data
By John J. Kosovich
2008
Scientific Investigations Map 3049
Version 1.0
ARKANSAS
MISSISSIPPI
TEXAS
Gulf of Mexico
Gulf of Mexico
U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey


Stymphalos
ARCADIA
Argos
Epidaurus
Mantineia
Olympia
Tegea
Megalopolis
Phigalia
Thyrea
PARNON
Tyros
Aulon
Belemina
Prasiae
Sellasia
Kyparissia
MESSENIA
Pellana
Sparta
Mt. Ithome
Therapne
Geronthrae
Messene
Thuria
TAYGETUS
Kyphanta
Amyklae
Pharae
Zarax
Pylos
Corone
Kardamyli
Helos
Epidaurus Limera
Thalamae
Akriae
Gytheion
Las
Asopos
Mothone
Asine
Oitylos
Territory of Lacedaemon
Sovereign cities
Perioeci cities
Border of state Lacedaemon
Hypothetical limits of the territory of Sparta
CAPE ACRITAS
Teuthrone
Boeae
CAPE MALEA
Tenarus
CAPE TENARO

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