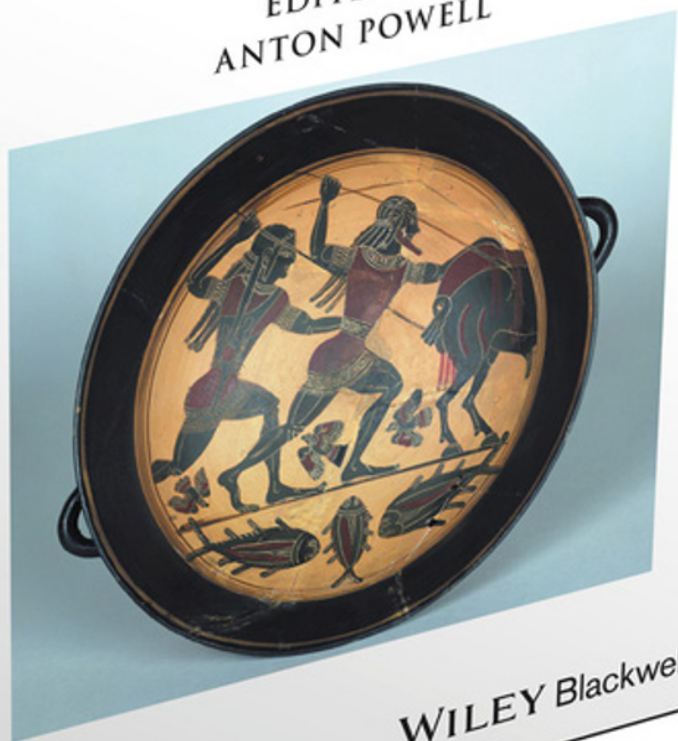


BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

A COMPANION TO
SPARTA
VOLUME I

EDITED BY
ANTON POWELL



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SPARTA
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A COMPANION TO SPARTA

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A COMPANION TO SPARTA

Volume I

Edited by

Anton Powell

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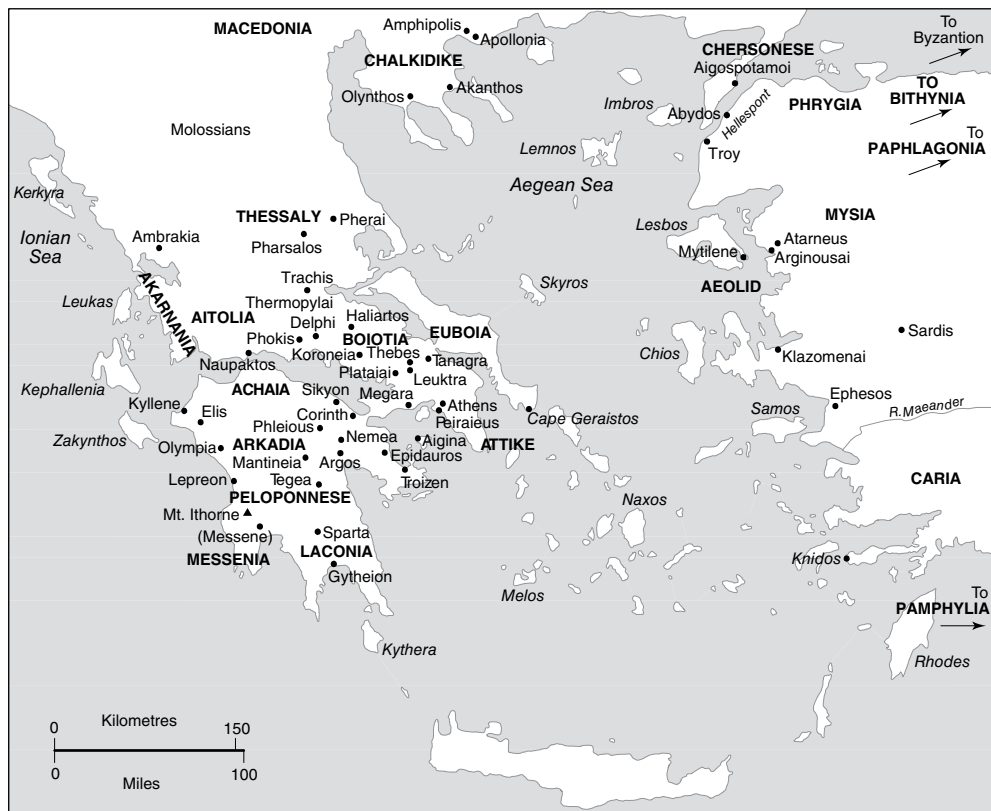
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Map 1 Mainland Greece and the Aegean world, at the time of Sparta's greatest power, *c.*400 BC

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Notes on Contributors

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Dates from the Excavations at Kouphovouno' (co-authored with C. Mee and J. Renard, *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 2014: 109). Publications on death include *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece* (co-authored with C. Mee, 1998), and on statistics in archaeology *The Bayesian Approach to the Interpretation of Archaeological Data* (co-authored with C. Buck, and C. Litton, 1996).

Stephen Hodkinson is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Nottingham and director of its centre for Spartan and Peloponnesian Studies. He is an internationally recognized authority on ancient Sparta and its modern reception. The author of numerous influential studies, his book *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (London and Swansea 2000) is the leading work in the field. Co-organizer of the International Sparta Seminar with Anton Powell, he has co-edited several collected volumes, including *Sparta: New Perspectives* (London 1999) and *Sparta and War* (Swansea 2006). As director of the research project, 'Sparta in Comparative Perspective, Ancient to Modern', he is editor of *Sparta: Comparative Approaches* (Swansea 2009) and *Sparta in Modern Thought* (Swansea 2012). He was historical

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Yves Lafond is Professor of Greek History at the University of Poitiers and a member of the research team HeRMA. His research interests are in the fields of cultural and social history, with particular emphasis on landscapes and spaces, religious practices in ancient cities and the relationship between memory and representation. He is the author of *Pausanias. Description de la Grèce. Livre VII. L'Achaïe* (translation and commentary, Paris 2000) and of *La mémoire des cités dans le Péloponnèse d'époque romaine (IIe siècle av. J.-C.-IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.)*, (Rennes 2006).

Marcello Lupi teaches Greek history at the Second University of Naples. His research interests focus mainly on the social and institutional history of Sparta and, more broadly, on archaic Greece, the Persian Wars and Greek classical historiography. He is the author of *L'ordine delle generazioni. Classi di età e costumi matrimoniali nell'antica Sparta* (Bari 2000) and co-editor with L. Breglia of *Da Elea a Samo. Filosofi e politici di fronte all'impero ateniese* (Naples 2005). An introductory book on Sparta, in Italian, is his *Sparta: Storia e rappresentazioni di una città greca* (Rome 2017). Professor Lupi is also working on a major monograph on villages, civic subdivisions and citizenship in archaic and classical Sparta.

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Maria Pipili is a Greek archaeologist, educated at the Universities of Athens and Oxford (DPhil, 1982). In 1985 she was appointed researcher at the Research Centre for Antiquity of the Academy of Athens where she also served as director from 1994 until her retirement in 2012. Her main research interests are Greek vase painting and iconography, particularly of Sparta. She is author of *Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century BC* (Oxford 1987), a volume of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* for the National Museum of Athens (1993), several contributions to the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* and many articles on Attic and Laconian pottery. She is currently preparing a *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* volume dedicated to vases from Athenian private collections.

Anton Powell founded the International Sparta Seminar, and was the editor of its first volume, *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind her Success* (London 1989). Since then, with Stephen Hodkinson, he has edited most of the Seminar's volumes, including *The Shadow of Sparta* (London and Swansea 1994) and *Sparta: The Body Politic* (Swansea 2010). His introduction to source criticism in Greek history, *Athens and Sparta*, is in its third edition (London 2016), and his monograph *Virgil the Partisan* (Swansea 2008) was awarded the prize of the American Vergilian Society for 'the book that makes the greatest contribution toward our understanding and appreciation of Vergil'. Powell is also the founder of the Celtic Conference in Classics, and of the Classical Press of Wales. He has twice been Invited Professor at the

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Francis Prost is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, and formerly member of the French School of Archaeology in Athens (1994–1998). A specialist in material culture and religious practices of archaic Greece, and in particular of Delos and the heroic sanctuary of the Archegetes Anios, Professor Prost is preparing publication of the corpus of archaic sculpture found on the island. His fieldwork involves excavation of the Delian sanctuary of Apollo, as well as of the Hellenistic city of Euromos in Caria.

James Roy held posts at the Universities of Sheffield (1963–1989) and Nottingham (1989–2004). He also enjoyed a year (1969–70) as a Humboldt-Stipendiat at the University of Heidelberg. Since retiring in 2004 he has been an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Classics in the University of Nottingham. He has published extensively. Main research interests have included the histories of classical Arkadia, Elis and Olympia, and the interaction between these regions and other parts of the Peloponnese.

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on Greek societies of the archaic and classical periods. Her books include *Délibération et pouvoir dans la cité grecque, de Nestor à Socrate* (Paris 1997); *Sparte: géographie, mythes et histoire* (with Jacqueline Christien; Paris 2007). Professor Ruzé is currently preparing a monograph on *Les législateurs du monde grec archaïque*.

Daniel Stewart is Lecturer in Ancient History in the School of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Leicester. He has published on the history and archaeology of the Hellenistic and Roman Peloponnese, and has contributed to, and co-directed, archaeological projects in Arcadia, Sikyonia and Crete. He is currently preparing a book on the relationship between archaeology and ancient history, and co-directing a landscape archaeology project on Roman Knossos.

Hans van Wees is currently Grote Professor of Ancient History at University College London. He is among the world's foremost experts on the warfare, ethics and economy of Greece, from the time of the Homeric poems onwards. His noted books include *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam 1992), *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London 2004) and *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute: A Fiscal History of Archaic Athens* (London 2013).

Foreword

Paul Cartledge

Clare College, Cambridge

‘Sparta Lives’

‘We think Sparta will be really popular across a wide range of territories ...’. This quotation is not actually taken from the blurb of an optimistic academic publisher, as one might have thought, but from a promotional statement (in 2016) by a Casino slot games developer, Habanero.

Ancient Sparta does still achieve massive resonance in the modern world, in other words, but not always in the places and through the media that a scholar might perhaps ideally wish. The movie *300* is another prize exhibit in that same category. Happily, the two volumes to which I have the privilege to be writing this Foreword will go a long way towards righting the balance.

I begin by declaring an interest – my own, in studying this peculiar (in at least one sense) ancient community. This interest started with an undergraduate essay on the hoplite ‘revolution’ (if such it was) of the seventh century BC. In its original form this was written in 1968 for my New College Oxford tutor, Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, whom the magnificent editor of this *Companion* boldly but not implausibly styles the modern founder of the scholarly study of ancient Sparta. A much later version was published in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1977 and republished in German translation and with addenda in a splendid 1986 *Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft* volume devoted to Sparta and edited by the eminent Karl Christ. At the back of that volume will be found a comprehensive, calibrated bibliography organized by topic; at its front, a remarkably comprehensive and insightful introduction to modern Spartan scholarship by the editor himself. The modern scholarly literature on Sparta going back to the work of J.C.F. Manso (1800–1805) is simply immense. It is beautifully if only partially placed in context by Elizabeth Rawson’s *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford 1969, 1991), though ‘European’ for her includes ‘North American’.

Ste. Croix was both a colleague and a sparring partner of George Forrest, one of the two examiners of my Oxford doctoral thesis on early Sparta c.950–650 BC, completed in 1975. (The other examiner, since this was a mainly archaeological thesis, was the distinguished Oxford art historian Professor Martin Robertson; my supervisor was John Boardman, then plain ‘Mr’, now Sir John.) In 1968 Forrest had published with Hutchinson a slim, streamlined volume entitled *A History of Sparta 950-192 BC*. It had been read for him in draft by an Oxonian Sparta expert of an earlier generation, H.T. Wade-Gery (one-time lover of historical novelist Naomi Mitchison, author of *Black Sparta*, 1928, and *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 1933). ‘This account’, its left-wing author confessed – or rather boasted, ‘has not shown much sympathy with Sparta; sympathy is killed by the narrow-minded jealousy she showed for so long to anyone whose power looked like becoming greater than her own and by the utter inhumanity of her behaviour when her own power was supreme.’ It is indeed hard to preserve a pose of objectivity when faced with the Spartan myth, mirage, legend or tradition.

Forrest’s little book was reprinted in 1980 in what the new publisher (Duckworth) was pleased to call a ‘second edition’. This actually came with only the addition of an intriguing new Preface in which the author was kind enough to refer to my 1979 monograph, the book of my DPhil thesis, as a ‘major’ work. But at the end of that Preface Forrest uttered a far more controversial – to me – opinion, that there existed some ‘overall agreement’ as to the ‘kind of society’ almost all students now believed Sparta to have been. Had he been writing that Preface after 1994 (and the second edition of the book was reprinted in 1995, by the Bristol Classical Press), I don’t believe he could possibly have been so blandly confident. For in that year the redoubtable editorial duo of ‘Powell & Hodkinson’ (or, by alternation, ‘Hodkinson & Powell’) published the first of their long-running series of superbly edited collections on themes or aspects of ancient Spartan history that have been crucial in helping to radically transform our scholarly perceptions and representations of this extraordinary community. The present *Companion* is their worthy successor, and indeed rightly contains essays by several of the editor’s previous contributors and collaborators.

By my reckoning eight of the twenty-five *Companion* authors are British or British-based, seven are from the USA, with six French, two Italians and one each German and Greek. Apart from anything else, this reminds us that there are distinct national traditions of Spartan scholarship: especially German (nicely recapitulated in the Christ volume); French (one thinks of the two foundational volumes of François Ollier on what he baptized ‘le mirage spartiate’); Italian (I am proud to own what was once Wade-Gery’s copy of Luigi Pareti’s 1917 *Storia di Sparta arcaica*, to which Massimo Nafisso’s *La nascita del kosmos*, also 1994, is a very worthy successor); and North American (Tom Figueira is a standout); but also Japanese (Mariko Sakurai), among others. It is of course invidious to single out any particular chapters of the present *Companion* for mention ... but I’m going to do so anyhow: those of Hodkinson, Cavanagh, Powell (Chapter 11), van Wees, Flower, Millender (Chapter 19), and Rebenich.

And I shall proceed homerically, *husteron proteron*, starting with **Stefan Rebenich**’s elegant and acute summation of ‘The Reception of Sparta in Germany and German-speaking Europe’ (Chapter 27). Reception studies are hot these days, but we Spartanists or Spartalogues were in on the act right from the very start. Hence all those books and articles on Sparta with ‘myth’ (Moses Finley), ‘mirage’ (Ollier), ‘legend’ (the Swede

Eugene Napoleon Tigerstedt) or ‘tradition’ (Rawson) in their titles. The underlying reasons and motivations for Spartan reception-fixation are fairly obvious: the available written evidence not only is overwhelmingly non-Spartan but also deeply bifurcated either pro or con, with few or no shades of grey in between. Epigraphy can do something to help us correct for this imbalance, archaeology of various kinds an awful lot more. But there remains the fundamental problem of (to borrow the editor’s eloquent formulation) ‘Reconstructing (Spartan) History from Secrecy, Lies and Myth’. One way of avoiding the dilemma is by embracing it head on, as does Rebenich: all history, it’s been claimed, is contemporary history – but there can be few more startling and unsettling illustrations of that useful nostrum than the reinvention of Sparta as the prototype of the new German National Socialist community of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, that reinvention has probably done more than anything else to ensure that at least for the foreseeable future Sparta is more likely to figure as a model or ideal of dystopia than of the (e)utopias of yesteryear.

One scholar who has never underestimated the potentially distorting power of the – predominantly, in this case, Athenocentric – Spartan tradition is the American **Ellen Millender** (Chapter 19). Building on research going back ultimately to her 1996 University of Pennsylvania doctoral dissertation, she brilliantly displays and explicates not only the fascination – and horror – the women of Sparta aroused in, say, Euripides and Aristotle but also the exceptional degree of economic independence and even political power that they were allowed or chose to enjoy and exploit. But before one rushes to feminist-inspired judgement, one must also factor in the overall conclusion she draws from her balanced and profound examination of the – often unsatisfactory – evidence: that ‘Spartan women’s lives did not significantly differ from those of their Athenian counterparts in terms of their fundamental roles and obligations as daughters, wives, and mothers’. Princesses, queens and priestesses were not, after all, ‘typical’ Spartan women.

Michael Flower (Chapter 16) too includes ‘Women’ as a special category in his chapter on Spartan religion. The ancient Greeks, notoriously, did not ‘have a word for’ religion: they spoke rather of ‘the things of the god(s)’ or of ‘the divine’. Herodotus, a particularly well informed and committed observer of all things religious, from a specifically cross-cultural comparativist perspective, twice remarked in his *Histories* that the Spartans treated the things of the gods as more significant and serious than the things of men. Well, almost all Greeks collectively and individually did that, so he must have been trying to make a special point about just how exceptional was the Spartans’ attitude to the religious factor in political, military, diplomatic and other public affairs. Flower takes that point to the full and produces a splendid synopsis of Spartan religiosity in all its peculiarity, showing beyond a peradventure that it ‘comprised a coherent, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing set of beliefs and practices that formed a system’.

Besides editing the *Companion* and contributing its opening and concluding chapters, **Anton Powell** also writes an incisive Chapter 11 on roughly the period of Thucydides’s history of the Atheno-Peloponnesian War, from 478 (the foundation of Athens’s Delian League, from which Sparta abstained or was excluded) to 403 (the year in which Sparta, then still hegemon of much of the Aegean Greek world, permitted the Athenians to restore their democracy). Powell takes as his leitmotif what the Greeks called *kairos*, or, to borrow the title of an article he published in 1980 that has more than just stood the test of time, ‘Athens’ difficulty, Sparta’s opportunity’. Again, as in his introductory

chapter, he recurs tellingly to Sparta's unusual 'capacity ... for organized deception on a grand scale' on the international stage, noting its coexistence with a paradoxical combination of austerity with great wealth at home. He concludes with a novel, internalist explanation for Sparta's 'extraordinary forbearance towards Athenian democrats': something which I myself have associated with the rather particular and unusual attitude towards democracy of King Pausanias, who died, from choice in one sense, in the democratic Arcadian city of Mantinea.

London-based Dutch scholar **Hans van Wees** has made immeasurable contributions to our better understanding of pre-classical, Archaic Greek history both in its totality and at the regional or local scale, for example the financing of the late Archaic Athenian navy. Here he is appropriately afforded the luxury of two consecutive chapters (Chapters 8 and 9); the first precisely on luxury, austerity and equality in archaic and early classical Sparta, the second specifically on the distinctively organized system of common messes. The Spartans themselves tended to want to believe, and want others to believe, that their basic political, military, social, economic and cultural institutions had all been invented, possibly simultaneously, at any rate in some dim and very distant past, after which they had changed if at all only minimally. Moses Finley in a game-changing article of 1968 had argued rather for the occurrence of a much later, that is much more recent 'sixth-century revolution'. Van Wees goes further, or rather later, by downdating the introduction of the classical messes to the very end of the sixth century. Plausibly, he sees this measure as aimed primarily to minimize internal class tension arising from extremes of economic inequality within the Spartiate group. Even more plausibly, to me, he argues that 'Sparta's specific solution was extreme'.

Among the archaeologists of several countries (Greece, France, the Netherlands, Britain) working within Lakonia during the past generation, few, if any, have equalled let alone exceeded the range of Nottingham University's **William (Bill) Cavanagh** (Chapter 3). From the continued re-excavation of Neolithic Kouphovouno (co-directed by him with the late Christopher Mee) to an intensive field survey of the extant ancient remains detectable today on the ground within an area just to the east and north-east of modern Sparta, by way of a scientific analysis of Laconian lead artefacts, he has blazed a trail in producing fresh material data and applying the latest techniques of analysis to elucidate them. He properly contextualizes, of course, the very recent discovery and ongoing excavation (led by Adamantia Vasilogamvrou) of what must unarguably be Mycenaean ('Homeric') Sparta, at Ay. Vasileios, and brings readers up to date with the latest archaeohistorical findings regarding the sociopolitically crucial Ortheia and Menelaion cult sites. But, in their way, at least as important for our understanding of archaic and classical Sparta and Lakonia is his summarizing of the results of intensive field survey and his identification of, and emphasis upon, the 'unique character of Spartan popular cult' as attested primarily by votives in terracotta and lead.

Finally, I cite *honoris causa* **Stephen Hodkinson's** typically thoughtful and carefully argued exploration (Chapter 2) of the supposed or alleged domination of Spartan state over Spartan society. The key word of his title is 'exceptional', since this recalls an absolutely key and fundamental disagreement, even dispute, between himself and Mogens Herman Hansen. Hansen and he agree that 'state' is a viable term of analysis, indeed probably more viable for Sparta than for the other thousand or so Greek *poleis* and *ethne* in which capital-S State institutions were typically relatively underdeveloped and

underpowered. (Others believe that even in Sparta the capital-S State was relatively evanescent, at least by comparison with anything that Thomas Hobbes would have recognized.) But they differ, strongly, over Sparta's exceptionality.

This is not the place for me to rehearse the arguments, so suffice it to say here that my interpretative sympathies lie wholly and emphatically on Hansen's side of the argument. (And not just as regards the relation between 'state' and 'society', but across the board – in respect of, among other things, communal educational practice, the status and treatment of women, the place and mode of religion, for example in the disposal of the dead, and so on and so forth.) But if Sparta does indeed still 'live', as my title (pro)claims, that is precisely because of the ongoing fertility of such contentious and yet cogently argued differences of opinion on some of the most important issues to be subjected to what we today – following our original master, Herodotus – call *historia*, critical enquiry.

Cambridge, July 2016

Preface

The Spartans, who for long opposed complex literacy on principle, would have disapproved of the present work for many reasons. Above all, perhaps, because our work is willing to highlight change within Sparta, whereas Spartans themselves preferred to think – or at least to tell outsiders – about a timeless Sparta, which had achieved near-perfection through following the rules of a certain Lykourgos (Lycurgus). It was partly to explore the idea of *change* within Sparta that the first of our two volumes has been structured chronologically, whereas the second volume is structured by theme. But even in this respect one cannot be clear cut: the second, thematic, volume also investigates change within ‘Lykourgan’ practice.

We have been fortunate to attract for this project contributions from most of the internationally recognized leaders of contemporary scholarship on Sparta. This has meant that numerous chapters have needed translation into English, a long process. The editor hopes that the long gestation of our project will be found justified by the quality of the resulting papers, in particular from eminent scholars in France, Italy and Switzerland.

Our two volumes are, in the Wiley-Blackwell tradition of ‘Companions’, in part a survey of existing scholarship. But, as happily is inevitable where there is a cast of experts, the work is also intended as an array of new research from our various specialist authors.

The nature of Sparta generated, for Greeks elsewhere, awe, speculation and sometimes incredulity. Ancient disagreement as to what the Spartans were, and what they did, has helped generate much diversity in modern scholarship. Where our own authors have diverged in interpretation we have of course not sought to impose a common position. Instead, we have sought to signal to readers the fact of divergence, and to give free rein to authors in advocating their own positions. Current scholarship on Sparta has, for example, reached no consensus as to the time, or even the century, when Sparta’s famous ‘austere’ constitution came into being, and whether it did so gradually over a long period or – largely – through a revolutionary ‘Big Bang’. There is even debate within these volumes as to how exceptional – or how typically Greek – Sparta’s way of life really was. The Spartans themselves insisted so emphatically, so often, on their society’s uniqueness that we should at least enquire whether in this they ‘protested too much’.

Since living scholarship must always be a work in progress, open to criticism and innovation not least from the young, brief speculation may be justified here as to future developments in Spartan studies. One trend already visible is the study of the special interests and biases of particular ancient sources which have helped to form our compound image of Sparta. How, for example, did classical Athenian mentalities, or Graeco-Roman views centuries later, shape the surviving picture of Sparta? How did particular authors, such as Herodotos, Thucydides, Plutarch and others, have access to, and shape for their own varied purposes, information about Spartans? And, especially with a society so productive of myth-making as Sparta was, there is a need for the anchor of archaeology. Even the Spartans, masters of secrecy and of manipulating the record of their own past, could not thoroughly efface what already lay buried in their own ground or further afield. The present work gives much attention to recent archaeology. But archaeology of the future will much enrich, and no doubt alter the course of, Spartan studies. Here a controversial note may be added. The archaeology of Sparta has sometimes been slow to confront certain sensitive matters. There is the enduring unavailability for study of most of the many thousands of lead figurines found at Sparta and portraying the dress, the ideals, the interests of Spartan men and women. Even the published photographs of these are few, old and often hard to read. The dark places of modern archaeology should be seen not as embarrassments to be avoided, but as sites unusually rich in potential for fresh scholarship.

The study of Sparta through particular non-Spartan authors, and through archaeology, involves the combining of scholarly methods which – as expert studies multiply – otherwise tend to develop in increasing isolation from each other. By insisting on the need to bridge our various specialisms, Spartan studies are well placed to make themselves a model for the study of the Ancient World.

Contributions to this work keep their authors' own choice of English spellings, as between American and British forms. We have, however, sought wherever possible to Hellenize spellings of Greek terms, thus 'Lykourgos' and 'Lysandros' not 'Lycurgus' and 'Lysander', and to reduce established Latinisms, such as 'Thucydides', to the conventional minimum.

The editor wishes to thank contributors for their extraordinary patience over the work's long time in preparation. And this Preface should end, as the work proper begins, with a reference to Paul Cartledge, widely acknowledged as foremost among today's students of Sparta. His contribution to the present work goes far beyond the writing of its Foreword. The influence of his decades of meticulous scholarship is to be found throughout our volumes. The fact that internationally harmonious work on Sparta can be attempted at all is in important part due to the generosity, diplomacy and inclusiveness of Cartledge's *oeuvre*, both written and oral. On this one point we may concur with the Spartans, believers in Lykourgos: the temperament of a single person can, sometimes, help generate an enduring culture.

Anton Powell
Swansea, September 2016

PART I

Reconstructing Sparta: General

CHAPTER 1

Sparta

Reconstructing History from Secrecy, Lies and Myth

Anton Powell

To understand Sparta involves one of the most fruitful, and difficult, challenges in the study of the ancient world. The techniques which are developed in the process are intensely relevant also to the modern world. They address the question ‘How to understand a secretive foreign state, or organization, an unfamiliar culture skilled in the orchestration of propaganda, visual images and lies?’ More than any other, Sparta was the state which other Greeks, of the classical period and later, admired. That Sparta had achieved something of unique importance is clear to us from two facts. Faced with an uncountably large invasion force led by Persia, in 480, those Greek states which resisted chose to do so under the leadership of Sparta, and of Sparta alone. Seventy-five years after that triumphant resistance, Sparta had crushed a new challenger. She had defeated the Athenian empire. Whether to obliterate Athens itself was, in 404, an administrative decision for Sparta’s leading men to take at their leisure. Sparta at that point held in her hand the future of Greek history. She had the power to abolish Athens, the capital of Greek literacy, of reflection – and of historical writing. From Sparta’s decision to spare the city flowed the survival of those written records which allowed posterity, us, to write the history of Greece, and of Sparta herself. Sparta, in short, was classical Greece’s superpower: the military patron – without knowing, or wishing, it – of what would become western civilization.

The superpower, even in its moments of victory, was not content. In the decade after her conquest of Athens, Sparta twice attempted to conquer the Persian Empire. Yet Sparta was – in citizen population – tiny, small even by the standards of a Greek *polis*. Its citizens, ‘Spartiates’, were the inhabitants of a few southern-Greek villages by the

River Eurotas in Laconia. These men, evidently of extraordinary morale, aimed to defeat an empire which stretched from the eastern Mediterranean coast (today's western Turkey) to Egypt, Afghanistan and the borders of India. Some thirty Spartan officers under king Agesilaos were considered sufficient to command the second, more formal, invasion of Persian territory, in 396. Sparta's confidence, and the culture which generated it, will be one of the themes of this book. Yet, less than thirty years later, Sparta's own hegemony suddenly ended. Beaten in 371 at Leuktra by another Greek army, that of Thebes, Sparta lost about half of her domestic territory, and thereafter her power was confined to the Peloponnese. For the rest of Antiquity, Sparta was never more than a scheming imitator of her former self.

1.1 Ancient – and Modern – Views of Sparta

These extremes of power and weakness have led to deeply diverse images of Sparta. In Sparta's imperious days of the fifth century, her power was taken for granted by other Greeks. Our two best sources for that period, Herodotos and Thucydides, nowhere explain at length to what Sparta owed her power. Both those writers make extraordinary, though brief, claims about the extreme stability of Sparta's form of government, and way of life. According to Thucydides (writing around 400 BC), Sparta had been a well-run, stable *polis* for 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately' (1.18.1; compare Hdt.1.65). This internal stability, with its avoidance of turbulent in-fighting, of the *stasis* which plagued so many Greek cities, was, Thucydides believed, the main reason why Sparta was free to direct its energies outwards, towards the control of others. Herodotos, and even sometimes the austere Thucydides, tell colourful anecdotes to Sparta's credit. It is from Herodotos, for example, that we have the story of Spartan warriors calmly combing their hair in the face of death at Thermopylai (7.208). Thucydides, an Athenian who campaigned as a general against Sparta, could make a sweeping negative judgement of Sparta's military qualities. He writes about the Peloponnesian War (431–404), that the Spartans 'proved to be in many ways the most convenient enemies that the Athenians could have had' (8.96.5). But to interpret such negativity we need to remember why writers write. They do not write in order to state only the obvious; they privilege paradox and novelty and, as is very plain in Thucydides' case, seek to correct public opinion. Thucydides was writing for an initial readership which knew that Sparta had defeated Athens (or was likely soon to do so). He wrote to *adjust* public opinion – and that opinion almost certainly was that Sparta had a superlative military machine, made possible by an extraordinary, if ruthless, political system at home.

Much of Spartan history is constructed from passing remarks and hints in Herodotos and Thucydides. Such comment was far easier for contemporary Greeks to interpret than it is for ourselves. Yet since 1970 Spartan studies have been refounded and have developed more rapidly, perhaps, than ever before. This has been made possible above all by the demonstration of how much information about Sparta could be extracted, ingeniously and convincingly, from the scattered remarks of Thucydides. The person who performed that demonstration was Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, in his book *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972). Following his work, scholars have looked with new and fruitful optimism for significant traces of Spartan reality not only in Thucydides but also in Herodotos,

Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and many other writers. Even where Sparta is not named, ancient ideas often turn out to be Sparta-shaped. When in 431/0 Perikles issued his enduring eulogy of Athens (as recorded, and no doubt reshaped, by his Athenian colleague Thucydides), Sparta is present as a defining shadow. Perikles boasts that Athens is an open city, unlike – he says – others (unnamed) who drive out foreigners to hide their military secrets: he means Sparta (Th.2.39.1). Athens is *an* education for Greece, says Perikles (Th.2.41.1). He admits, by implication, that *the* famous education was that of Sparta, where – most unusually – education for citizen boys was provided by the state, with famous and extraordinary results. At the height of Sparta's power, after her conquest of Athens, one question became too clear and important to be ignored. Two Athenians, Kritias and Xenophon, wrote short works to explain Sparta's unique success. The question, as Xenophon posed it in the first sentence of his *Constitution of the Spartans* (*Lak. Pol.* 1.1.), defined ideas about Sparta, both in Antiquity and often today: 'I reflected on the startling fact that the population of Sparta is among the smallest in Greece and yet it has become the most powerful and famous state of all Greece.' To explain that unique achievement, Xenophon's text dwells on, no doubt exaggerates, what was different, or unique, about life within Sparta: how did Sparta form its men and (Xenophon rightly insists) its women? For human character – the Spartans had understood – was plastic. Culture was artificial, ingrained not inborn: education mattered and especially childhood education, *paideia* (the word attributed to Perikles in the Funeral Speech). Analysts influenced by Xenophon have tended to seek to explain Spartan *success*.

The last years of Sparta's hegemony, the 380s and 370s, saw a sharp decline in the state's moral reputation. Spartan officers, employing their city's traditional sense of military opportunity (see this volume, Chapter 11), seized control of Thebes in peacetime (382), and attempted as much against Peiraieus, the port of Athens (378). Such unprovoked aggression severely disappointed even Xenophon, himself a friend and client of a Spartan king, Agesilaos. In a late chapter (14) of the *Lak. Pol.* Xenophon abruptly diverges from the eulogy in earlier chapters, and virtually rants against Spartan moral decadence in his own day. Plato in both of his long, theoretical texts describing imaginary, ideal city-states, gives polarized images of Sparta. Many aspects of Spartan life, such as state education and the limiting of personal wealth, are clearly a source of positive inspiration in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In other ways, these same texts criticize Sparta for falling short of her own ideals, for disobeying her own apparent logic – as, for example, in making girls do aggressive exercises but not letting women become soldiers. Plato lived through Sparta's widest hegemony, then through her loss of moral reputation, then her military humiliation. The deep structure of his political works is shaped by Sparta, in ways which his modern commentators, themselves often unfamiliar with Spartan history, have frequently missed. Clearer, and so more influential today, are the signs of his own disappointment, as Spartans, a community which *could* have done so much, morally, proved too interested in private wealth. On such matters, like Xenophon in the anomalous chapter 14 of the *Lak. Pol.*, Plato may even have been preaching to the Spartans of his own day.

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, lived all his adult life in the period following Sparta's fall. His attitude towards Sparta is less conflicted than Plato's. He argues explicitly in the *Politics* against using Sparta as an ideal. Intimately contradicting his former master, he dwells on what he sees as reasons for Sparta's failure. Rather than advocating more influence for

women, Aristotle argues that Spartan women in several ways were over-assertive and had been responsible for Sparta's decline. Women, for Aristotle, are implicated in Sparta's drift away from official egalitarianism and towards the concentration of wealth in dangerously few hands. Now, Aristotle is – deservedly – of immense influence in forming modern views of Sparta, even though few follow the spirit of his incriminatory remarks about women. His work has tended to encourage in modern scholars the opposite question to that posed by Xenophon: not 'Why did Sparta succeed?', but 'Why did she fail?' However, if we ask why Aristotle made his anti-Spartan arguments with such energy, we may suspect that he needed to counter a still-powerful view in the mid fourth century that Sparta had *not* failed, even that a military comeback by Sparta was possible.

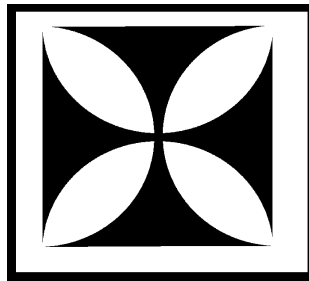
The view that Sparta in the classical period had been, overall, a success was held by sentimental, but still influential, writers of the post-classical period. For philosophers, who also tended to be professional teachers, Sparta fascinated by the example of what education could achieve, if applied widely, rigorously and from an early age. Also, as mainland Greece lost its power and self-confidence, first under Macedonian conquest from the age of Philip and Alexander, then under Roman rule, the idea of bygone Sparta – like that of bygone Athens – provided consolation and a prop to Greek morale.

Plutarch, whose *Life of Sparta's* mythical founder Lykourgos is now the easiest ancient text to use – and *abuse* – to gain a view of life within Sparta, wrote this 'biography' as part of a grand project of recounting the lives of eminent Greeks and Romans in pairs and in parallel. We sense his anxious desire to elevate the Greek past to the rank of the Roman present. In his *Perikles* (ch. 12) he writes that surviving Greek temples are, in his day (the early 2nd century AD), the *only* (obvious) proof that Greek achievement once matched that of Rome; indeed, he claims, Greek architectural splendour excelled that of Rome until the end of the Roman Republic (*Comparison of Perikles and Fabius Maximus*, 3). Bygone Sparta, for Plutarch, was a necessary part of Greece's moral heritage. The enthusiastically positive picture of Sparta given in the *Lykourgos* was profoundly influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, modern scholarship has reduced Plutarch's credit in matters Spartan. Respect for his intellect has, if anything, grown in recent years, but alongside that has developed an awareness not only of his patriotic concerns but also of how remote he was from the events he described, how susceptible he was to myth-making about the Spartan past. He visited Sparta, where an enthusiastically exaggerated re-enactment of past glories was in full swing. 'I saw boys whipped to death' (he writes, unambiguously: *Lykourgos*, 18), a proof of local heroism.

With ancient writers encouraging extreme attitudes towards Sparta, whether negative or positive, it is profoundly tempting for modern observers to tend themselves towards one or the other pole. Sometimes the poles subtly reinforce each other. Spartans themselves encouraged the view that they were simple soldiers, ignorant in many matters, relying more on noble practice than on complex thought (e.g. Hdt.3.46, Thuc.1.86.1, Xen.*Lak. Pol.*11.7). In a different spirit Thucydides, as we have seen, wrote of Spartan high military incompetence. Many scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries vigorously condemned Spartan 'folly', 'arrogant stupidity', disastrous ineptitude, 'characteristic ...lack of foresight'. One eminent historian (in 1981) even suggested that there may never have been such a thing as 'a very intelligent Spartan'. Such was, until recently, almost an orthodoxy (for a brief anthology, see Powell (2016, 102), leaving an unsolved puzzle: How could such people, so stupid and so few, dominate Greece for

some 150 years – and defeat the far more numerous and supposedly far more intelligent Athenians? A more modern and fruitful approach, useful whether in international politics or with a neighbour in the street, is to look for the logic even, and indeed especially, of people we may not like. And it is important to note that few modern scholars actually *like* the Spartans.

In other ways too, understanding Sparta involves combining thoughts and feelings which do not go easily together. In the fifth century *both* Sparta and Athens show patterns of aggressive expansion, against the interests of the other (see this volume, Chapter 11). Modern scholars, however, have tended to align morally, seeing *either* blameworthy Athenian expansion *or* blameworthy Spartan aggression. (The best-known representatives of these conflicting tendencies are, respectively, E. Badian (1993), and G.E.M. de Ste. Croix (1972).) Again, how typically Greek was Sparta? Was she – as Xenophon insisted – a unique exception to Greek norms? Stephen Hodkinson well shows ((2009b) and this volume, Chapter 2) that much about Sparta was remarkably normal by Greek standards. Should we then go further and completely normalize Sparta? That might leave Sparta's unique power inexplicable. Likewise, we may be tempted to see Sparta overall as a success or a failure, and in the process to privilege one set of information, one sort of explanation, to the detriment of another. In reality, Sparta – at least in her own terms – was *both* a unique success and a sad failure depending on the period studied, or the *aspect* studied within a single period. To accept such an overall view may seem simple in the abstract. But to apply it in detail to the study of Sparta may be far harder. Our psychology may resist such things, as when we see different patterns in a Maltese Cross. Faced with this (see image below),



at a single moment we focus either on the white segments or the black arms: our brains cannot easily manage both simultaneously. Yet however we focus predominantly, whether on the aggression Sparta suffered or committed, on her normality or her uniqueness as a Greek community, on her success or her failure, we should, as with the Maltese Cross, never forget that the other aspect exists.

1.2 Secrecy, Lies and Detailed Stories

Thucydides, the most astute historian of Antiquity, admitted his problem. It was impossible to know certain military details about the Spartans ‘because of the secrecy of their state’ (5.68.2). This recalls Perikles’ implication, reported by Thucydides, that Sparta used formal expulsions of other Greeks (*xenēlasiai*) to hide military secrets, and relied in

military matters on ‘training and acts of deception’ (2.39.1). But in the former passage Thucydides speaks in his own voice: he clearly suggests that the very structure of Spartan politics and community life was normally subject to concealment. Now, such concealment requires an effort, and is likely therefore to be done for a conscious and compelling reason. For Perikles, who was very likely right, that reason was military. Sparta was surrounded and greatly outnumbered by potential enemies. Even in her homeland, Sparta’s citizen population was dwarfed by that of the helots, Greek-speakers, natives of the region, whose status was akin to that of slaves. Sparta exceeded other Greek states, according to Thucydides, in the number (or, perhaps, proportion) formed by this unfree population (8.40.2 and see Figueira, this work, Chapter 22). Here was always the potential for internal war, between helot and master. Modern societies, including democratic ones, recognize the close relation between war and intense secrecy. In the Britain of World War II, military research was described as ‘hush, hush’. The population was instructed to ‘Be like dad. Keep mum!’ [i.e., Don’t talk]. Warning posters showed housewives tempted to talk about where their male relatives were serving as soldiers; behind them in the food queue was pictured, ears pricked, Adolf Hitler.

Modern studies of Sparta readily follow Thucydides in admitting that Spartan secrecy existed, and that it poses problems for the historian. Scholars have, however, been far less ready to confront another, kindred, form of behaviour attributed to Sparta on good, contemporary authority: organized lying. Thucydides recounts how the Spartan authorities in the 420s identified and removed the most spirited and impressive helots, those who might one day become formidable as leaders of a revolution. An official announcement was made. Those helots who had distinguished themselves on Sparta’s behalf in her recent wars should come forward, so that Sparta could reward them with freedom. Some 2000 were duly selected. They were allowed to celebrate conspicuously in public. And Sparta then secretly killed them all: ‘No one knew how each of them died’, writes Thucydides (4.80.2–4). But for lying by Spartans, Xenophon, Sparta’s ally and partisan, is our most telling source. He describes, without disapproval, how Spartan military commanders reacted to the news that the Spartan navy, elsewhere, had suffered a crushing defeat (*Hell.* 1.6.36–7, 4.3.13–14). In 406 (after the defeat at Arginousai), and in 394 (after that of Knidos), the bad tidings were deliberately inverted, and a Spartan commander in pretended triumph reported a great victory. In each case, the commander who arranged this, and the energetic celebrations which accompanied it, was almost certainly deceiving his own, Spartan, soldiers, as well as his allies from other cities. He would be sure that his deception would be discovered before long. He evidently assumed that his morale-boosting lies would be accepted by his fellow citizens, with retrospect. Xenophon states that after one of these charades, the troops fought better and won a victory as a result of having been deceived. When eulogizing his patron and friend king Agesilaos of Sparta, Xenophon describes him as more honourable and straightforward than his Persian enemy, Tissaphernes. But, once war was formally declared, ‘deception as a result became religiously permissible and just, he completely outclassed Tissaphernes in deceit’. Xenophon meant this as a compliment: deceit, he says here, was *stratēgikon*, the quality of a good general (*Agēs.* 1.10–13, 17). He approvingly records the trick enacted by another Spartan general, Pasimakhos. Enemies might be duly wary of Sparta’s hoplites, with the dreaded lambda (Λ, for ‘Lakedaimonioi’) painted on each shield. But Pasimakhos sought to lure the enemy into complacency, by disguising his men with the

shields of mediocre Sikyon bearing that city's initial, sigma (Σ). He reportedly said, 'these sigmas will deceive you, men of Argos, into coming to fight us' (*Hell.* 4.4.10; cf. Arist. *NE* 1117a). Here, for Xenophon, was good Spartan strategy.

Athens, Sparta's enduring rival and enemy, generated remarks about Spartan duplicity, such as the comic reference about Spartans being 'little foxes ...with treacherous souls, treacherous minds' (Aristophanes, *Peace* 1067–8). Of course an enemy will say such things, not least because an enemy is commonly a target for deceit, in diplomacy as in war. But Herodotos, a non-Athenian and not disrespectful of Sparta which he had personally visited (3.55), nevertheless writes that Athenians 'knew' that the Spartans tended 'to say one thing and think another' (9.54). Thucydides, in reporting the words of leading men in the Peloponnesian War, regularly depicts without comment their distortion of the truth, their spin. But only once does he say explicitly that someone was 'speaking untruth' – and that was of the Spartan Brasidas (4.108.5 with 85.7). In later times, lying became a quality in the stereotypical idea of Sparta. When Spartan culture was criticized as mendacious, a Spartan supposedly replied: 'That's right. We are free men. But if anyone else does not tell the truth, he will live to regret it' (Plut. *Mor.* 234f., cf. 229a).

Because lying is widespread in many cultures, and especially between rivals and enemies, we may hesitate to pay attention to the view of other Greeks that Spartans were especially given to uttering systematic untruth. In our own times, we have learned especially to beware of anything that looks like a negative ethnic stereotype. But our modern manners may disarm us in the face of Sparta. Efficient lying may not have been seen by Spartans as negative. It was apparently something that they prided themselves upon; witness Xenophon's approving remarks above. Thucydides' account of how the 2000 impressive helots were identified and massacred in secrecy may have reached him, highly sensitive information though it was, because some Spartans boasted of their efficient deception. As to ethnic stereotyping: Spartan society was structured to produce a stereotype – of themselves. Spartans were, they themselves insisted, the *homoioi*, the 'similars' (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.5, *Lak. Pol.* 10.7; 13.1). The young were educated in a single compulsory system, adults were aggregated away from their families, so as to be 'typed', stamped and moulded in a common culture. We have no reason to suppose that cultures will not differ sometimes as regards truth-telling. (In nineteenth-century England, an important motive in the reform of the elite Public Schools was a desire to eradicate a culture of lying to authority: see this work, Chapter 29). Modern scholars have disagreed as to how militarized Spartan culture was (see Hodkinson (2009a) and this volume, Chapter 2). But Sparta's special efficiency in military matters is the one aspect of her history about which we can be most certain.

It should be recognized that there need be nothing ethnic, in the sense of inborn, about a tendency to lie; it may be something generated by a culture of war. In English-speaking countries there is a commonplace saying that when war breaks out, truth is always the first casualty. There circulated in Germany, around the time of the First World War, a rhyme which may be especially useful in our own analysis of Sparta:

Kommt der Krieg ins Land,
Gibt's Lügen wie Sand.

When war enters the land,
Then lies are like sand.

The image of sand was chosen to suggest that lies were innumerable, but also, perhaps, that – like grains of sand – they could be scattered pervasively and be hard to get rid of. Lying, we should recall, is born of the same motive as secrecy: to withhold truth.

When Perikles, in Thucydides, describes Spartan secrecy, the term ‘acts of deception’ (*apatai*) is used of Sparta in the same sentence (2.39.1). Imitating the imagery of an early Greek poet (Hesiod), we might describe Mendacity as Secrecy’s more enterprising sister. The English language also suggests that active deceit is allowable in a military context. In describing without disapproval a deliberately deceptive arrangement, as of furniture or shop goods, we say that things are ‘strategically placed’. English, that is, uses the same word, with the same range of meaning, as did Xenophon in praising the deceitfulness of a Spartan king.

In approaching Spartan history, we may need to show a more suspicious caution than scholars have traditionally done. But that caution may liberate the historian, and make possible a sweeping new creativity. Knowing that we are likely to be offered lies of Spartan origin is not merely a recipe for scepticism. It may, surprisingly, lead us into new fields of reconstruction – by revealing areas where Spartans feared that the truth would damage them. There are, in two of our most important ancient sources for Sparta, Xenophon and Thucydides, certain internal tensions concerning access to the truth. Xenophon, as ally and client of Spartan authorities, tells enthusiastically of much that was unusually efficient about Spartan society. But for him one aspect of such efficiency, as we have seen, is Spartan deceptiveness. Should we not suspect that his eulogy of Spartan efficiency was itself in some ways issued to deceive? In the work of Thucydides, where active partisanship of this kind is not easily imaginable, a more subtle paradox may be detected. Sparta, in his view, was secretive and hard to know. And yet several of his statements about Sparta amount, when carefully analysed, to a wide-ranging claim to knowledge – sometimes in intimate and sensitive matters.

Thucydides writes that Spartans had no experience in the matter of piracy and guerrilla warfare in their own territory (4.41.3). This amounts to a claim about many years of Spartan history, over many areas of the southern Peloponnese. He makes his claim at a point when such warfare did come to trouble the Spartans, and when Athens happened to know – because Athenian troops had landed in Spartan territory and were deliberately provoking such trouble. And at this point he also notes that two boats manned by Messenian pirates, runaway Spartan helots that is (or just possibly their exiled kin from Naupaktos in the Corinthian Gulf), ‘happened’ to be present to threaten Sparta’s territory (4.9.1, cf. 53.3). Of an earlier episode, the death of the Spartan regent Pausanias, Thucydides writes that the ‘established Spartan procedure [*tropos*, in Greek] was not to punish irreversibly [i.e., to put to death] one of their own citizens without absolute proof’ (1.132.5). How did he know about Spartan custom (that is, behaviour over a long period), in such an intimate and embarrassing matter? Similarly, Spartans later became infuriated (in 418) with their king Agis, threatening to punish him by demolishing his house and imposing a colossal fine. Thucydides states that this was ‘contrary to their normal way of proceeding [*tropos*, again]’ (5.63.2). Agis survived, but the Spartans imposed on him a council of ten ‘advisors’, ‘a practice they had never previously had’ (5.63.4). How did Thucydides think that the secretive nature, as he described it elsewhere, of Sparta’s political system, allowed him to know how Spartans normally – that

is, over a long period – reacted to a supposedly deviant king, and that ‘advisors’ to a king had during *all* previous periods been unknown? Where did he think he was getting his information, if not from Spartans? In the same year, Spartan troops became disorientated and scared on a battlefield. Thucydides’ account of this is especially revealing. He writes, ‘At this moment, the Spartans experienced a panic worse than any that they themselves could remember’ (5.66.1–2). Again, something lamentable for Spartans is described, and alongside the description of the particular case is given a general denial that such had ever happened before, over a long period. But this time, most helpfully, Thucydides reveals that his source for this grand denial was the Spartans.

These cases of allegedly exceptional Spartan behaviour have interesting things in common. They all concern areas of Spartan vulnerability, which an enemy such as Athens might find it helpful to know. Sparta had an intense awareness of the principle that one state’s weakness was an opponent’s opportunity. The timing of her military expeditions abroad reveals this; see Chapter 11 in this volume. (And Thucydides, even when in exile, would be known to the Spartans as a former Athenian general who had campaigned against them, might do so again, and certainly might talk to others who would.) Again, all of these cases of Spartan weakness were indeed unusual – but not, perhaps, in the way that the Spartans might claim. They were unusual because the Athenians obviously knew about them. Athenians witnessed guerrilla warfare within Spartan territory, as we have seen. Athenians would know about the sudden and permanent disappearance of regent Pausanias, earlier the victorious commander against the Persians at Plataia, and a familiar if disliked figure on Greek territory outside Sparta. Scandal about his death would predictably arise abroad. Similarly with the general Spartan outrage against king Agis (soon afterwards to be the personal enemy of the Athenian politician and general Alkibiades, who spent time in exile at Sparta). And Sparta’s disorientation on the battlefield in 418 would be witnessed by its opponents there, including Athenians (5.67.2). In such cases Spartans would know that mere secrecy, simply to say nothing, would not do. Nor would denial of the particular case. Rather, it may seem that Spartans reacted in a way familiar today when an individual is caught in an embarrassing situation: by claiming in effect, ‘We don’t *normally* do this kind of thing.’

Statements from Thucydides and others about Sparta’s norms may therefore help us to identify Sparta’s real sensitivities. Was helot insurrection a lot more common, and therefore exploitable by an outside enemy, than Spartans liked to admit? Was that why young Spartan males were themselves taught guerrilla tactics, to live hidden in a landscape in a way which has nothing obvious to do with the requirements of classic hoplite warfare? Were Spartan citizens put to death more readily and often than the Spartan authorities liked to admit? We hear – but not from the contemporary Xenophon – that even citizen women of Sparta were put to death for political reasons in the early fourth century (Athenaeus 609b). It might help an enemy to know that Spartan society was far from an unshakeably solid team of ‘similars’. Were kings, in particular, the source of deep political division? We shall see, in Chapter 11, that well over half of Sparta’s royal rulers in the period 500–371 were either put to death or exiled or threatened with such punishment. As for disorientation on the battlefield in 418, unique so far as Spartans ‘remembered’, we think of the despair and surrender of the entire Spartan force on the isle of Sphakteria

just seven years earlier, in 425. At that point, Sparta's soldiers surrendered, attacked by missiles arriving through smoke. Sparta's reputation for correct orientation and manoeuvring on the battlefield was a precious military and political asset, useful for demoralizing the opponent. Xenophon, in his way, would try to protect it when writing his *Constitution of the Spartans*. He there wrote that for hoplites, amid confusion on the battlefield, to create a successful formation with whichever comrades they found next to them was not easy 'except for those educated under the laws of Lykourgos' (*Lak. Pol.* 11.7). Sparta's opponents, perhaps, should not even try. We see why the Spartans themselves might wish to propagate a view of history in which Spartan troops (unlike others) almost never lost their formation or their morale.

Once we are sensitized to Spartan claims of the form 'We don't have a general problem in such-and-such area. What happened was ... quite untypical of us', we may set off to explore Spartan history in a new way. When, for example, Herodotos writes that Sparta prospered militarily during the reign of kings Leon and Agasikles except for a *single* defeat, against the Arkadian state of Tegea (1.65.1), we should be sceptical. What happened to Sparta and its political system in the archaic period is an important mystery. We should like to know much more of how Sparta had come to earn its position as the chosen military leader of the coalition against Persia in 480. Thucydides was to state, as we have seen, that Sparta owed its effectiveness in foreign affairs to its internal peace, its avoidance of faction and revolutionary pressure. His claim that this happy state of affairs had lasted 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately' has guided modern scholars. It has been common to assign the beginning of Sparta's famous 'austere' constitution to the seventh century BC (as did de Ste. Croix (1972) 89–91) or even earlier. If this is correct, Sparta's male citizens may have consisted for three or more centuries, from the early archaic period down to the late fourth century, of the 'similars': males inspired by laws ascribed to Lykourgos, educated in childhood under a severe and levelling discipline, feeding together as adults on unappetizing food and little wine, forbidden to make flashy displays of private wealth but instead 'wearing clothes that even a poor man could afford' (*Arist. Pol.* 1294b), and trained above all to offer their lives for Sparta in battle. This is a tempting picture. It may possibly be right: its credibility is examined below by Van Wees (Chapter 8). Certainly this picture would explain how Sparta by the end of the sixth century might be superior militarily to other, more physically relaxed, Greek states.

However, Thucydides' grand claim about Sparta's ancient, undisturbed internal polity is at odds with his own normal method. The discrepancy is even more marked than in the case of the other broad statements which he made about the Spartan past, statements themselves in tension with his own view that Sparta's internal arrangements were traditionally obscured by secrecy. For Thucydides, when explaining his choice of the Peloponnesian War as subject matter for his history, stated that Greek history generally of more than a few years earlier than 431 was 'impossible to discover with certainty because of the passage of so much time' (1.1.3). As one of the best modern commentators on Thucydides observed, reluctantly, this 'must mean, both in language and logic, "Greek history before the Peloponnesian War", the whole of it' (Gomme (1945) 91). How did Thucydides come to believe that, in the case of Sparta, whose internal history he thought to be *more* obscure than that of other states, he could go back 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately'? It seems that he was willing to trust what he respectfully

referred to elsewhere as ‘the memory of the Spartans’. For information about other states, Thucydides noted that his sources often contradicted each other (1.22.3); this evidently and rightly put him on his guard. We should speculate as to whether the Spartan ‘similars’, in contrast, had learned a ‘party line’ about the vast antiquity of their own political system, so that when faced with Spartan informants the historian was disarmed by their unanimity.

1.3 Spartan Storytelling

In the dark history of secretive Sparta, there are some isolated and surprising pools of intense light and detail. Herodotos, Thucydides, Xenophon and other writers tell circumstantial stories of certain events in Spartan history. These stories tend to be moralizing, with clearly defined heroes and villains. They also tend to focus on the manner of death. And they are extraordinarily memorable, with much use of visual detail. Herodotos, for example, describes the bad death of the disgraced king Kleomenes (c.490). After being exiled, and reportedly organizing anti-Spartan activity among Sparta’s neighbours, this king was recalled to Sparta. There – with suspicious promptness – he went mad, assaulted the faces of fellow Spartans with a rod, was confined, but managed to kill himself by long incisions into his own flesh (Hdt.6.74–5). Kleomenes’ successor, Leonidas, was deemed to have had a good death. We hear enough from Herodotos about the courageous deeds of him and his 300 Spartans, against the Persians at Thermopylai (480), to form the basis of modern films. Leonidas’ co-king, from the other – parallel – royal house, was Leotychidas. His bad end (though not his death, in exile) is similarly graphic. He was, according to Herodotos, bribed by Thessalians not to press home his campaign against their pro-Persian regime. He was caught red-handed in corruption, attempting to hide – by sitting on it – a sleeve of Persian style stuffed with silver (Hdt.6.72). At the same period, the regent Pausanias who represented the Agiad royal house after Leonidas, and who – like Leotychidas – commanded in a victorious battle against the Persians (Pausanias at Plataia in central Greece, Leotychidas at Mykale in the eastern Aegean) himself came to a picturesque bad end. Pausanias was convicted of the worst offences imaginable against his own city and against Greece generally: conspiring with his former opponent, Persia, to impose Persian rule on Greece, and plotting with the helots to overthrow the rule of the ‘similars’ at Sparta. We read of him convicting himself in a conversation he thought secret, but which was being overheard by other Spartan authorities, ephors, hidden behind a screen. When, a little later, the ephors duly came to arrest him, one of them through favour gave a barely visible nod of the head to Pausanias to warn him of what was about to happen. He escaped to sanctuary on holy ground, and was starved almost to death. But, when he was about to die, the authorities carried him out, still breathing (*emphnous*, in Greek). Thus he died, in a way (we are to infer) that avoided causing religious pollution to a shrine which might enduringly affect the whole community.

This tale about the end of Pausanias is told at remarkable length in the Greek. And it is told not by Herodotos, the ‘Father of History’ and a prince of storytelling. Pausanias’ end is narrated by the austere Thucydides (1.128–34). Again, this information about Sparta seems contrary to Thucydides’ normal method. Storytelling elements

(*to mythōdes*) would scarcely be found in his history, Thucydides had announced (1.22.4). But the picturesque is well represented in this story, with such details as the lurking ephors and the ‘barely visible’ nod; the text of a treasonable letter from Pausanias proposing to marry the king of Persia’s daughter; and Pausanias confronted by an outraged former boyfriend. For Thucydides to have trusted such a lively tale, concerning a period (c.470) eminently affected by ‘the passage of time’, he is likely to have been sure that its (ultimate) source was Spartan. In moralizing, visually, about the end of a royal ruler the story is part of a set. And there is one detail above all which suggests Spartan handiwork. The Spartan commander who fought with the most distinguished bravery in Thucydides’ own time was Brasidas, who was killed in battle in 422. Thucydides, as Athenian general, had earlier campaigned against Brasidas, and his respect for this Spartan opponent is obvious. Now, Brasidas died after planning a highly successful military engagement in northern Greece, one in which some 600 were killed on the Athenian side and only seven on the Spartan. That Brasidas himself was one of those few Spartan casualties told its own story; he had led bravely from the front. But Thucydides emphasizes the exact timing of his death. He died shortly after hearing that his men were victorious (5.10.11). The possible moralizing element is clear. Virtue had some reward; the story avoids the frustrating possibility that Brasidas died without realizing how gloriously he had succeeded. Spartans would be the ones to know exactly when the wounded Brasidas died, and what he knew before that point. And the word Thucydides uses to describe Brasidas when news of the victory was known is *emphnous*, the same word which had been used of regent Pausanias, in that case too to make the moral point that, through the timing of the death, the worst had been avoided.

Our other contemporary source for extensive detail about classical Sparta is Xenophon. He too has moralizing tales of soldierly deaths, at times with a certain – morally positive – reference to relations between Spartan soldiers and their boyfriends. Pasimakhos and his men took up their famous and deceptive Sikyonian shields to fight, heavily outnumbered, as hoplites; and in the process Pasimakhos died. Although cavalrymen up to that point, they deliberately left behind the horses which could have saved them (*Hell.* 4.4.10). A group of Spartan imperial officials, commanded by one Anaxibios, finding themselves in a fatal position on the battlefield, sent away their (non-Spartan) allies but preferred to stand their own ground and die – accompanied by Anaxibios’ boyfriend, himself faithful to the end (*Hell.* 4.8.38–9). Xenophon claims to report the noble words of Anaxibios, as he foresees his own death. Since Xenophon also strongly suggests that all present, both steadfast Spartans and the allies who were permitted to flee, were promptly killed, we wonder how Xenophon thought he knew Anaxibios’ words. The question recalls the Thermopylai narrative. Of Thermopylai, too, we are told that Leonidas sent away Greek allies as defeat became highly probable (*Hdt.* 7.220–2). It may even be that an idealizing, false tale about Leonidas was now, almost a century later, generating real suicidal bravery through imitation. If so, that may be exactly what the Spartans intended by their myth-making. The son of Xenophon’s revered patron, king Agesilaos, had a boyfriend of his own, who later died in battle in good Spartan fashion. That death, Xenophon notes approvingly, while paining Agesilaos’ son to the limit, brought on him an important reflected glory (*Hell.* 5.4.33): he had chosen – or formed – the boyfriend as a soldier of good character.

1.4 Constructing History from Spartan Propaganda

Patterns, even genres, of Spartan manipulative communication are becoming clear. We find moralizing anecdotes especially about death; staged visual events (such as the celebrations after falsified news of victories, and of helot liberation; the dressing to suggest poverty); sweeping claims of undisturbed political and military excellence over long periods. Propaganda such as this may, however, prove more revealing than its authors realize. It tends to make clear which *values* are most important to those issuing the propaganda. And the origin of values is – history. It is worth first summarizing Spartan values as revealed in the examples of propaganda mentioned above. Most obviously, in calling themselves the ‘similars’, Spartans displayed their preference for the conformist over the impressive eccentric. Private wealth was not to be advertised. The individual ‘similar’ had to be ready to die for the community, but only as carrying out collective activity as ordered. Warfare was best carried out calmly: combing hair was at the virtuous extreme, panic at the other. Disloyalty in leaders was to be punished with exceptional severity in life, and by enduringly ignominious anecdotes after it. Among the homosocial similars, homosexual liaisons had positive value.

Ideals, as often, are a key to history. In our personal lives, we understand reflexively what is likely to have happened when an ideal is expressed. If we hear ‘Big boys don’t cry!’, we commonly and rightly suppose that a boy has been crying, or threatening to do so. The American electoral slogan ‘Yes we can!’ reveals a widespread pre-existent fear that, in fact, No, we can’t. This cognitive habit should be applied more widely – in writing history. Modern Europe shows the principle clearly. In Britain, what may seem to be mindless gloating in patriotic song, ‘Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves’, is revealed as originally something very different in the song’s next line: ‘Britons never, never, never, shall be slaves’. There, plainly, is the fear of foreign invasion. The names of prominent concourses in capital cities are especially revealing. ‘Trafalgar Square’ in London refers again to the fear of foreign invasion. On the other hand, in modern Greece, where revolutions and civil war have made internal stability a lively aspiration, ‘The Constitution’ is an emotive ideal: whence the names of ‘Syntagma’ (‘Constitution Square’) at the heart of Athens, in front of the Parliament building (formerly the royal palace), and of ‘Omonoia’, ‘Harmony Square’, close by. Modern France likewise has its ‘Harmony Square’, La Place de la Concorde, similarly reflecting a terror of internal disharmony. Here had occurred the extreme of discord: the square was the site of the main guillotine, where Louis XVI and his court were decapitated amid public celebration. A citizen who prominently advertised the ideals of the French Revolution, by naming himself ‘Philippe Egalité’, ‘Equality Philip’, was in fact senior royalty, and one of the richest men in France: the Duke of Orleans. The Duke’s Equality may be logically quite close to Spartan Similarity. Sparta’s fears, too, and thus Sparta’s history, are there to be discovered in her own propaganda.

Sparta’s ideals of military courage and discipline: what may they reveal? Perhaps the likeliest time for the beginning of Sparta’s famous, austere regime and way of life was the second half of the sixth century; see especially Van Wees (in the present work, Chapters 8 and 9). And that period followed a Spartan defeat (by neighbouring Tegea), and a surrender so resounding that Spartan secrecy could not efface it (Hdt.1.66). In the fifth century, as we have seen, Spartan troops surrendered to the Athenians in 425, on the

island of Sphakteria. Shortly afterwards, the Spartan authorities are described by Thucydides as being in panic (4.55.3–4). They evidently had reason to fear that the highest military standards would *not* be maintained. And for Sparta the need for military efficiency was even more obvious than for other major Greek states. The matter is put graphically by Xenophon, describing another panic in Spartan ruling circles (in 399 or thereabouts). An insecure new Spartan king, Agesilaos, claimed to have uncovered a plot in which Sparta's domestic subjects and political inferiors – helots, free *perioikoi* ('Dwellers around', on whom see Ducat, this work, Chapter 23) and other out-groups – were reportedly conspiring, with their overwhelming numbers, to set upon the Spartan citizenry. Xenophon reports a Spartan soothsayer, working with Agesilaos, as saying that the omens 'suggest we are already surrounded by enemies', men who would be willing to 'eat the Spartans even raw' (*Hell.* 3.3.4, 6). Even in their homeland, Spartans could not take their military security for granted.

Sparta's claim to 'Similarity' is likewise rewarding to explore against the grain. If similarity is a prominent ideal, a major problem, as perceived, must be – variety. We can detect several forms of variety which particularly troubled the Spartans. The two royal houses apparently survived from a time before austere official levelling was imposed. Their privileges provoked discomfort amid a culture of similarity. Kings acted, unless too young (or in exile), as 'hereditary generals for life', in Aristotle's phrase (*Pol.* 1285b). Their domestic influence, like their wealth, could also be very large. Paul Cartledge's work *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (1987), now the great handbook of intimate detail about Spartan politics and society, analyses the leadership, military and political, of the king who dominated Spartan policy for some forty years (c.400–359). At the death of a king, all classes of the population of Spartan territory were represented at a clamorous funeral (*Hdt.* 6.58–60), which celebrated the dead man so effusively that even the usually loyal Xenophon seems to complain. He states that such reverence appears to be greater than any mortal deserved (*Hell.* 3.3.1). Mourners cried out that the dead king was the best king yet. But funerals are in many cultures a time of extreme idealization. The classic expression of this is in Latin: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* ('[Say] only good things about the [recent] dead'), though the original idea was attributed in Antiquity to a Spartan reformer of the sixth century BC, Chilon (Diog. Laert. 1.3.70). If excessive claims about a dead king were necessary, it was in part because so many royal rulers were, in their lifetimes, passionately contested at Sparta. Some were exiled under threat of a worse fate: Damaratos, Leotychidas and Pleistoanax in the fifth century, and Pausanias in the fourth. Others were killed at Sparta: regent Pausanias, and probably Kleomenes I before him. Classical Sparta was, in this limited respect, one of the most unstable Greek states of the classical period. (In Hellenistic Sparta, when the austere constitution survived mainly as an aspiration or a set of outward forms, not only was a king put to death – Agis IV in 241 – but his mother and grandmother were executed at the same time.)

'Similarity' was also a problematic ideal in respect of citizens' private wealth. Alone of Greek states, perhaps, Sparta abolished not only public drunkenness, as at festivals, but also the *symposion* ('drinking together'), the private – frequently aristocratic, exclusive and luxurious – drinking party around which so much of surviving Greek literary culture is constructed. To replace it, Sparta invented the *syssition* ('eating together'), where all male citizens were included, to eat and drink in moderation. The distinctive term 'syssition' signalled to Spartans an ideal of commonality. To us it signals also a problem

(of provocative inequality) which Sparta had to exert herself to avoid. The wearing of uniformly modest clothes was similarly a way of palliating an awkward fact: some were far wealthier than others. Indeed, while some Spartans were rich by any Greek standards, many other citizens of Sparta were threatened with demotion from citizen status, simply on grounds of insufficient wealth. If a man was unable to make the standard contribution towards the dining groups, the *syssitia*, he ceased to be a Spartiate and became an Inferior. Aristotle made an intense criticism of Sparta for allowing wealth to concentrate in a few families, and the citizen body to become so small. In his view, Sparta perished as a great power through shortage of (citizen) population, *oliganthrōpia* (*Pol.* 1270a). In addition to levelling dress, Spartans devised other ways of avoiding friction between rich and poor, such as the provision of extra food by the wealthy for sharing at their *syssitia*. Stephen Hodkinson's book *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (2000) illuminates the many ways in which inequalities of wealth were addressed by – or defeated – the Spartan system. The name 'Similar' not only reflected a grave problem of dissimilarity; it was also, like levelling *syssitia* and dress, a device to address the problem, to calm resentments by assuring less wealthy citizens that their status was comparable with that of the grandest.

The ideal of Similarity responded to other fears. In most Greek states, Xenophon makes clear, *symposia* reflected and promoted social division by age. The young had parties with the young, the old with the old (*Lak. Pol.* 5.5). Generation gaps tended to lead to political tensions and even revolution. The point was perhaps even clearer in ancient Greece than in the modern world: a standard Greek word for 'revolution', *neōterismos*, recalled, if indeed it did not reflect, the standard word for the young, *neoi*: revolution might be seen as a young man's affair. Sparta's *syssitia*, Xenophon suggests, involved men of all ages dining together. Families (as Plato complained, *Laws* 788a–b) were a particularly fertile source of variety in citizens. We find, in keeping with the ideal of similarity, that measures were taken at Sparta to restrict the time husbands and wives spent together; couples were not to develop their own cultures. Parental culture, in its diversity, was one reason why Sparta made schooling together compulsory for the children of citizens. Another source of diversity was even more to be feared. Spartan estates, in Laconia and Messenia, were scattered over huge distances. And in those territories Spartan citizens were outnumbered many times over by *perioikoi*, various Inferiors, and above all by helots. Unless compelled to come together to school, many Spartiate children would have tended to find playmates of inferior status and thereby to assimilate with them. That was decidedly not the kind of Similarity which Spartiate parents wished for (see this work, Chapter 29). The word 'Similar' hid a presupposition ('Similar to whom?'), rather like the British term for elite speech, 'Received Pronunciation' (Received by whom?). At Sparta, as elsewhere, the important thing was to be similar to the right people.

We have already noted several ancient references – chiefly from Xenophon – to homosexual couples among Spartan men. Xenophon suggests approval in particular cases, but also is explicit in commending the social value for Spartans of youthful couples, in which a young man might effectively educate a youth for whom he had strong feelings. Sparta's lawgiver Lykourgos, we are told, approved – provided there was no copulation or obvious lust (*Lak. Pol.* 2.13). This form of Spartan sociability has been well explored by modern scholars, and especially by Paul Cartledge ((1981) and (1987)). Modern values

may, however, tend to obscure the full significance of same-sex relationships in Sparta. In western liberal discourse of recent times, the tendency has been to *defend* (against conservative pressures within our own societies) the rights of adult homosexual couples, but not usually to advocate homosexuality as an ideal for all or most. In Sparta, things may have been different, with a certain form of male homosexuality positively promoted as of general utility. Now, if we miss this difference, we may miss also the need to ask: if more homosexuality was seen as an ideal at Sparta, what was felt to be the problem to which the ideal responded?

If we do ask the above question, we can at last give proper value to a striking but undervalued passage of Aristotle on the sexuality of Spartans (*Pol.* 1269b). He wrote, in the second half of the fourth century, that Spartan male citizens were excessively influenced by females. Using a term of which the power can be sensed even by those who do not read Greek, Aristotle described the men of Sparta as *gynaikokratoumenoi*: ‘under the rule of women’. And the reason, Aristotle suggests, is lust in men, of the heterosexual kind. As he graphically puts it: Homer was right to portray Ares, the god of war, as passionately and adulterously attached to Aphrodite, goddess of sex. Soldierly Spartans were correspondingly, excessively, drawn to their own women, for sexual reasons. Aristotle makes a wide-ranging and seemingly passionate argument for the idea that women had a destructive effect on imperial Sparta. We should be a little cautious of possible over-enthusiasm on his part, as he (in his own phrase, used elsewhere) *defends a thesis*. But as a profoundly intelligent – and near-contemporary – commentator on the last decades of Spartan hegemony, his evidence cannot be dismissed. If we see male homosexual passion at Sparta as *normative* (that is, the ideal, commonly practised) rather than as the *normal* (that is, the numerically predominant) form of sexuality, we may again identify an influential form of Spartan fear: fear of female influence over what was meant to be a soldierly, homosocial, society of men, in harmony with each other rather more than with their women.

By understanding Sparta’s ideals as the reaction to her fears, the grandest ideal of all may be illuminated. This is the claim that the Spartan political system had been stable for ‘slightly more than 400 years, approximately’. We have already seen reason to think it probable that Thucydides accepted this claim from the Spartans themselves. There is a further, more direct, indication that the Spartans thought in this way. Early in the Peloponnesian War (c.427), Pleistoanax, a Spartan king long exiled in disgrace, was allowed to return. His return was marked by ceremonies, employing ‘the same choruses and sacrifices as when they first established the kings at the foundation of Lakedaimon’ (5.16.3). Now, Spartans and Greeks generally would have understood by this a period far more remote even than the start of the ‘slightly more than 400 years, approximately’, which Thucydides wrote of in describing Sparta’s enduring constitution. A period, that of the foundation of Sparta, which for us is the darkest of dark ages, was one which Sparta told a detailed story about. What was to be gained by exaggerating continuity? Plato in the *Laws* (798a–c), almost certainly with Sparta in mind, is clear and convincing. This, he says, is a matter of such political importance that the citizens of his ideal state must be firmly guided away from the truth: they must have no idea that, in their city, any political system other than the present, correct one has ever existed. Faced with a system of vast longevity, they will assume all revolution to be impractical. Conversely, knowledge of an *ancien régime* successfully overthrown encourages (as in modern France) thoughts

of new constitutions for the future. We have already seen signs that the Spartans were, in reality, nervous about the stability of their regime. Regent Pausanias was accused of plotting subversion with the helots. King Agesilaos played on fears of insurrection concerning an alleged plot among out-groups willing to 'eat' the Spartans. But the most telling single act, in this respect, is the decision of the Spartan authorities to exclude from all official posts those citizens who had surrendered to Athens on Sphakteria and who, in 421, had been allowed to return to Sparta (Thuc. 5.34.2). The authorities, Thucydides states, acted from fear that this group, some 120 men, would become revolutionaries.

Of what revolutionary tendency, more precisely, were the Spartan authorities afraid? The returned prisoners-of-war from Sphakteria included a notable proportion of 'the first' Spartans, by which Thucydides (5.15.1) probably meant those with most prestige, wealth – and influential relatives. Here is evidence of significant *dis*similarity among the citizen body. Sparta's ruling royalty, of whom in the period 500–395 a majority (seven out of eleven) were either killed, exiled or threatened with exile, were, of course, from the first of the first families. The fear most likely to have activated defenders of the regime was of a move towards restored aristocracy on familiar Greek lines, of a return to an easier and more privileged life for the very few, and of an end to the rigorous Similarity which aided the majority of citizens. The role of helots or *perioikoi* in such a move to aristocracy might be this: they would be offered liberation in return for acting as allies of the revolutionaries, against the conservative authorities of Sparta. In the fourth century, as Aristotle insisted, and no doubt earlier, the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer Spartan hands was already tending in that direction. Hellenistic Sparta would take the process further, in spite of occasional attempts to restore the 'laws of Lykourgos'. The killing, in the third century, of king Agis IV and his female relatives was carried out at the instigation of the wealthy, successfully resisting a royal attempt to bring back the austere constitution and the culture of Similarity. When, only a few years after Agis' death, another revolutionary king, Kleomenes III, himself tried to recreate a 'Lykourgan' regime, he made enormous grants of Spartan citizenship to *perioikoi* (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 11.3), thus supplying himself with thousands of partisans to help overcome conservative resistance from powerful citizen opponents. By that period, the later part of the third century, conservatism at Sparta meant resistance to – rather than defence of – a 'Lykourgan' system: that much was the reverse of the pattern known in the classical period. But what may have remained constant was the principle whereby revolutionary citizens appealed to the helots or *perioikoi* for help against their own conservative fellow-citizens. The presence, in Sparta's home territories of Laconia and Messenia, of a vast reservoir of disaffected Greeks, the helots and some *perioikoi*, was surely a standing temptation to politically discontented Spartans looking for allies. All would know this. So long as these out-groups greatly outnumbered Spartan citizens, any Spartan regime had a great deal to be afraid of.

It is reasonable to suspect that the idea, in Thucydides' day, of a Spartan constitution more than 400 years old was a grand falsehood, propagated to foreign enemies, to helots, and quite likely to Spartans themselves to reduce the prospect of regime change engineered from without, or aristocratic revolution inspired from within. We have seen, in the case of military defeats, that Spartans were not averse to being lied to, in what they considered a good cause. Along with this ideal of a political system stable for centuries, the associated fear which we should infer, is in fact displayed with remarkable clarity.

Both Herodotos and Thucydides write of Sparta's long-lived stability. And each of them, in the very passage where he does so, makes a dramatic comment about how *bad* had been the political instability before the revolutionary change to stability occurred. Both write of extreme *stasis* in this early Sparta. Herodotos writes that the Spartans in their internal affairs had been 'almost the most unruly of all Greeks' (1.65.2). Thucydides says that Sparta's internal conflicts had been 'the most enduring of any state he knew' (1.18.1). Once more, how would Thucydides think he knew of these remote horrors, from *much* more than the 'four centuries' earlier, unless the Spartans had told him of how dreadful things were before the coming of their famous austere constitution?

Scepticism about the longevity of Sparta's system should, therefore, arise from analysis of literary texts. But there is other, picturesque, evidence of a Sparta in the sixth century living in a style very different from that associated with Lykourgos. For some fifty years in that century, vase painters in Laconia – Sparta's heartland – produced figurative scenes showing wealthy men indulging themselves in a traditional Greek style, albeit with some distinctive local features (Pipili (1987), Powell (1998)). This remarkable Laconian pottery is analysed in this volume (Chapter 5) by Maria Pipili and, it should be admitted, her expert interpretation of the vases is, in important respects, not supportive of the political interpretation suggested here. In the vase paintings, elegantly dressed men are depicted reclining, not at austere *syssitia* but at relaxed *symposia*. One vase shows a large mixing bowl of wine, promising intoxication to the symposiasts. On another vase, lavishly dressed female musicians accompany the drinkers (Chapter 5, Figure 5.3). No doubt it was understood that by the end of the drinking, these young women might be in a rather different state of dress. (Athenian vases showing scenes of consummated debauchery at symposia are collected in Kilmer (1993).) Elsewhere a privileged young man poses on a fine horse (Chapter 5, Figure 5.9). On a small Laconian cup, other, less composed, young people (probably men rather than women) are shown naked, pursued, whipped and penetrated by what seem to be older citizens stylishly dressed. (For sketches of this indelicate scene, Pipili (1987) 66, fig. 95; Powell (1998) 131.) These vases, even now, survive in considerable numbers. In the sixth century there was evidently a conspicuous industry in Laconia producing them, even though on a scale much smaller than for Attic vase painting. There is little doubt about the period to which these Laconian vases belong. One vase depicts – and names – a Greek king of Cyrene, Arkesilas, as he supervises the shipping of exports. Whether this is Arkesilas I or (as usually thought) Arkesilas II, the date of the vase is not far from the 570s. The culture implied by these vases is utterly unlike the iron puritanism attributed to Lykourgos. Here is extreme display of wealth and physical self-indulgence. These vases are still somewhat undervalued by historians – perhaps because they confuse the traditional narrative of a Lykourgan regime going back for centuries. How should we interpret them?

To protect traditional chronology, scholars have sometimes suggested that these vases had nothing, or nothing much, to do with the Spartiates. The strongest point in favour of this idea is that relatively few of these Laconian vases are found in Laconia; most of the finds are from abroad, notably from the territory of Samos, in the eastern Aegean. May they not have been produced in Laconia by non-Spartiate craftsmen, distributed by business people also of non-Spartiate status and, as Pipili argues in this volume, designed to appeal to the tastes and *mores* of Greeks far from Sparta? Attention has turned to the *perioikoi*, citizens of neighbouring communities, outside Sparta. Were they responsible

for this artistic portrayal of opulent living? The idea cannot be disproved. But much seems to tell against it. The *perioikoi*, when we have a little detailed information about them, in the fifth century and later, mostly behave as loyal allies of Sparta. Few of them revolted, even when given a good opportunity, as during the 460s when Sparta itself was laid low by a major earthquake and helots in large numbers defected. *Perioikoi*, indeed, would be integrated en masse into the ranks of the Spartan army in the fifth century; they were, at least from that period onwards, intimate if not trusted allies. Would the *perioikoi* have systematically propagated images celebrating precisely the aristocratic life-style that the Lykourgan culture was constructed to resist? We do not know that the *perioikoi* themselves had the wealth to sustain an elite with the sort of lavish tastes reflected on the vases. The Spartans, the ultimate masters of Laconia and Messenia, presumably had most of the best land. If Sparta in the mid-sixth century had been run on Lykourgan lines, with the *perioikoi* mostly loyal to Sparta, living on marginal land and far from wealthy, it is difficult – though not impossible – to think of *perioikoi* drawing their images of aristocratic fun-and-games from far away, and then selling a version of those images back to remote Greek communities which appreciated such things. A successful export trade commonly needs a local market to sustain it, and indeed initially to generate it. Also, how would the Spartans, if they were already under an austere regime, have felt about their *perioikoi* spreading images of extreme aristocratic indulgence around the Greek world? It was a characteristic of classical Sparta to project abroad an austere picture of itself: images of inflexible, indomitable Sparta were an important instrument of war.

The important fact that only a minority of the Laconian vases have so far been found in Laconia may have other explanations. The site of ancient Sparta now lies largely under the modern town of Sparti, and is not easy to excavate. In Antiquity, Spartans of the austere period, if that began (say) in the late sixth century, may have contributed to purging the politically incorrect images from earlier times. One particular detail may be telling. Some Laconian vases of non-Lykourgan inspiration *have* been found at Sparta. Among them is (for us, at least) the most provocative of all: the one showing whipping and penetration of young people by a relaxed elite. The vase (now displayed, with some reluctance, in the Museum of Sparti), was found at the shrine of (Artemis) Orthia, a principal site of Spartan cult. That same site would become the venue for public whipping of the young of a very different sort: the ordeals displaying persistence-amid-pain described by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9) in the classical period and by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 18) some five centuries later. Scholars agree that these whipping ordeals had changed in purpose between the times of Xenophon and Plutarch. What had been a militaristic lesson in physical courage was, in Plutarch's day, part of a touristic attraction, designed to impress visitors in an age when Sparta was part of the Roman Empire and had no wars of its own to fight. Should we posit a further change, at an earlier period? Had there perhaps been a previous way of whipping the young, for sexual pleasure, which had itself been associated with the shrine of Orthia in the Archaic Period (whence the vase deposited at the shrine)? This too could have changed its form as part of a changing political culture, rather as austere Sparta had converted indulgent *symposia* into disciplined *syssitia*. Public whipping of the young may have evolved as spectacular religious festivals often do, with changing times: converted, in this case, from a display of predatory aristocratic fun into a scene of rigorous, Lykourgan, morality.

These illustrated, and frequently elegant, vases with their scenes of aristocratic life may be of central importance for Spartan history. They strongly suggest, though do not quite prove, that Sparta, until about half a century before the Persian invasion and the defining moment of Thermopylai, was not 'Spartan' in the modern sense. It quite probably was a relaxed, possibly over-relaxed, aristocratic *polis* of a familiar Greek kind. But whereas other Greek *poleis* of the archaic period reacted against their aristocracy by installing a dictator, a *tyrannos* who repressed aristocracy in the name of the wider citizen population, Sparta instead empowered that population directly in a way designed to restrict aristocratic excess. The aristocratic Laconian vases may help us understand how the grand Spartan falsehood took hold, of an austere system stretching back undisturbed for hundreds of years. That story was told, insistently and consistently, because Spartans sensed and feared the opposite. In reality, the old regime with its exceptionally bad *stasis*, was alarmingly close. What had ceased only a few generations back, might well return.

Spartans have been repeatedly criticized for stupidity – in modern times. Even de Ste. Croix may have suggested irrationality in the Spartans when he (famously) compared them to a dragon of Germanic myth, living a 'nasty' life in a cave in order to protect its possessions ((1972) 91). An understanding of Spartan fears, and of how systematically Sparta reacted to them, may refute that idea. The Spartans from the late archaic period (or perhaps earlier) did indeed devise and adhere to a system which involved suffering, deprivation and effort for themselves, a combination which other Greeks called *ponos*. But that system was intelligently conceived to respond to their particular fears, the fear of things much worse than *ponos*, of humiliation by their own aristocracy, of being conquered and destroyed by their own helots. There remained, of course, much normal pleasure at Sparta, pleasures of company, sex, occasional good food and some wine, and especially of long and elaborate festivals, festivals so important that even soldiering had to take second place to them. But the distinctive pleasure which the Spartan system delivered to its members was less physical than moral. That itself may reflect intelligence, since much pleasure in other societies which is assumed to be sought for physical, 'materialist', reasons is in fact sought mainly for reasons of status.¹

The moral pleasure of Spartans involved being recognized, with some security, as people of important status. Intelligent Spartans may indeed have understood, as their critics have not, how fear – correctly and lucidly dealt with – had helped them to their revered standing. There was, we hear, in third-century Sparta, a temple dedicated to an unusual deity: Phobos, 'Fear'. The reference, in Plutarch (*Kleomenes* 8), is incidental. There is no reason to suppose that the cult was first created at that period; it may well be older and from the classical period. Why worship Fear? How was Fear supposed to contribute to Sparta? There may be a clue in a speech attributed by Thucydides to Brasidas, the most respected embodiment of Spartan physical courage (and strategic intelligence) from the late fifth century. Brasidas writes that soldierly efficiency – to repeat, his own quality, on which he spoke with authority – derived in part from *aiskhynē*, meaning the fear of incurring others' bad opinions (Thuc. 5.9.9). Fear of a kind, moral fear, may have been recognized by Spartans as a reason for their own success. The Sparta which created an austere life for itself, whether in the late sixth century or earlier, was not yet master even of the Peloponnese. Its members had no reason to suppose that their stressful arrangements, inspired by the fear of disaster, would one day lead to their supremacy in the Greek world. But Spartans would not be the last people in history to

realize slowly, perhaps too gradually to feel much surprise, that defensive measures contrived to avoid utter disaster could lead to extreme success. Aristotle says that it was a commonplace among writers in the classical period, that ‘the Spartans governed a large empire because they had been trained to face dangers’: *Pol.* 1333b.

1.5 Sparta Abroad – and Exposed

The mysteries of Sparta’s inner life can be *partly* penetrated by thinking hard about the propaganda she issued. But there are some things about Sparta which other Greeks could perceive for themselves, direct information for them – and good information for us. These were the things that Spartans did away from home, in the territory of other Greeks (or, sometimes, at sea), and thus were far harder to hide. How far does this relatively direct information confirm the picture we construct of Spartan culture and mentality?

Something which poses special problems for secretive and deceptive regimes is the death of their leaders. For such cannot be hidden for long. Because Sparta’s kings were hereditary generals, very much on view when the main Spartan army took the field, accompanied by a host of Greek allies from other states, their disappearance from campaigns was significant, and would be quickly noticed. This may be part of the reason why we are informed of the fact – subversive though it was – that so many of Sparta’s royal rulers came to a bad end, or came close to such. Sparta *had* to issue its own account of their disappearance from command, or of obvious limitations put on their command (like regent Pausanias, abruptly recalled to Sparta in the 470s, and king Agis II, hedged about with commissars in 418), or, of course, of their exile. On important subjects, human nature abhors a vacuum of information; rumour and propaganda occupy the void. A Spartan official version would be contrived, to restrict the field for enemies abroad to impose interesting explanations of their own.

The death rate of Spartan commanders on campaign was similarly impossible to hide, even if Sparta had wished to. That death rate is impressively higher than for commanders of Athens, the other state for which we have most information. Athenian commanders may be put to death *after* a campaign, by a victorious enemy (as Nikias and Demosthenes at Syracuse in 413), or even by their own city (after Arginousai in 406). But they do not die fighting to the same extent as Spartans: Kleon, Brasidas’ last Athenian opponent, is a rarity. Both of Sparta’s most successful commanders of the late fifth century, Brasidas and Lysandros (Lysander), died fighting. So did the admirals Mindaros (in 410) and Kallikratidas at Arginousai. Likewise king Kleombrotos at the decisive battle of Leuktra (371). And we have already alluded to the occasion when a number of Spartan governors of the early fourth century reportedly chose to die fighting rather than to run away. Here, it seems, is confirmation that there was a special Spartan ethos, generated within Sparta, and imposing physical courage.

And Thermopylai? Is not that a textbook case of Spartan bravery unto death? Thermopylai, we should admit, is rather special. King Leonidas, there is no doubt, knowingly and thus bravely led his army into a situation of exceptional danger, and died there. But details of his last days are obscure. Thermopylai in modern times has indeed been used, and abused, in textbooks: see Stefan Rebenich’s Chapter 27 in this work, on the

reception of Sparta in Germany. And the best textbook information, as of Spartans combing their hair before battle, or talking manfully of appreciating the 'shade' from a dark cloud of Persian arrows, seems to come from Spartans, through Herodotos. But the Spartans of this period did not issue textbooks. Or indeed any books. They issued propaganda. And after Thermopylai, especially immediately afterwards when the Persians were through the pass and attacking Athens, the need for reassuring propaganda was acute. The main public fact, available to all and undeniable, was that a small but significant Spartan force, its royal commander, and other allies under Spartan command, had been annihilated, with little obvious gain. A victorious Persian army was at hand, and Sparta's leadership of fractious Greek states was in need of argument in its support. The victories of Salamis, Plataia and Mykale were in the future, not yet predictable. Sparta had every reason to look for, and if necessary to create, a silver lining for the desperate information concerning Thermopylai. The most that could be extracted was, a claim that the resistance to Xerxes' uncountable host was long (lasting for more than two days, we are told) and thus intensely competent; maintained until death and thus supremely brave; and as focused as possible on Spartans (Herodotos tells that Leonidas sent away many of his Greek allies before the end). We sadly ask: Did, for example, these brave Spartans really stay fighting for days? The question is not simply one of bravery. The reason why the most physical among the modern contact sports are programmed for minutes and not days – rugby for eighty minutes, Australian Rules for eighty and American football for sixty, and all with intervals for rest – is that after those minutes even the fittest of athletes tend to collapse.

It is of the essence of battles in which one side perishes to the last man that no one from that side lives to tell their side of the story. Two Spartans, however, did survive, sent away – it was said – by Leonidas near the end, one as a messenger the other because of an eye problem. Their subsequent treatment at Sparta was so harsh as to be suspicious. Both were abused and humiliated, publicly identified as cowards. We should suspect, given Sparta's skill at deception and myth-making, that this treatment was not performed mainly to create a moral example. Neither man had run away; both had obeyed orders. Was Sparta's reaction meant rather, by disgracing the two survivors, to destroy their *credit* as sources? Did they, in short, know too much, things reflecting normal humanity in Leonidas and his men which would have complicated and thus weakened the moral tale which Sparta needed? Herodotos says of one of them, Aristodamos, that no Spartan would *converse* (*dielegeto*) with him (7.231). We naturally understand that no one would *speak* to him; but was the main point rather that no Spartan should be *spoken to* by him? It may be that Sparta's most unusual achievement involving Thermopylai was to create a myth which would propel her own men to generally successful, if often fatal, bravery in the future.²

Thucydides' report that Sparta was secretive about its internal arrangements again seems to be confirmed by secrecy outside Spartan territory, detectable – in outline – by other Greeks. In enemy territory, Spartan commanders execute a striking number of their manoeuvres by night. This was Brasidas' method of surprising Athenian possessions in the north, such as the town of Amphipolis (424). Gylippos, Spartan general in charge of Syracuse's defence against Athens during 414–13, likewise carried out several attacks by night (most notably against Plemmyrion). In 390, after a Spartan force had suffered heavy losses near Corinth, its commander led it back to Sparta in such a way as to pass the towns which lay en route during, or close to, the times of darkness (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18), almost certainly so that other Greeks of the Peloponnese should not see, and draw

lessons from, Sparta's new weakness. Herodotos reports that Sparta's army, when it left home in exceptional numbers to fight the Persians (479), passed through *its own* territory by night (9.10). Was this inconvenient practice chosen solely as training for night manoeuvres later, in enemy territory? Or was it in part to prevent the helots from understanding how large a proportion of Sparta's defenders was being withdrawn? Aristotle would later write of the helots, again in general, that 'they continually lie in wait, as it were, to exploit Sparta's misfortunes' (*Pol.* 1269a).

Sparta's secretive ways were revealed unforgettably by another device: the use of a simple code to encrypt military messages. No other Greek state of the period is recorded as routinely using written code. The wording of a Spartan message was written across successive loops of a long band of material wrapped round a stick of a certain width (perhaps even irregular?), a *skytalē* of which only the Spartans authorities had a duplicate. If enemies intercepted the material, once detached from its original stick, it would – even if they recognized it for what it was – take a little while using trial and error before the cloth could be aligned correctly and the message read. Naive though the procedure sounds, Sparta would at least gain some time thereby – and timing in the field was something of which Sparta had an advanced appreciation. The *skytalē* system also made it less easy for a message to be falsified, as for example by the messenger or by someone with access to him. After a Spartan fleet, under admiral Mindaros, had suffered a defeat by Athens in 410, a despairing *skytalē* message home was intercepted and read gleefully at Athens. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.1.23), it ran as follows: 'The ships are lost. Mindaros is dead. The men are starving. We don't know what to do.' The sensational impression which this revelation would have made, no doubt far beyond Athens, would have helped to spread a lively interest in Sparta's secretive methods.

Sparta's nocturnal manoeuvres were designed to deny the enemy *sight* of what Sparta was doing (exactly as Perikles reportedly said, about the Spartans denying sight, *theama*, of what was militarily sensitive: Thuc. 2.39.1). Manipulating what the enemy – and others – saw was something which could also be done positively, by the deliberate creation of suggestive spectacles. These might be meant to invert the truth, as with the Spartans who deceived their enemy by carrying shields with the sign of Sikyon, or to accentuate the truth. Sparta's troops, marching with their long hair and in scarlet cloaks, were surely meant to draw the enemy's gaze and to let Sparta's intimidating military reputation do its work. A Spartan force, at its best, 'gave the impression of consisting entirely of bronze and scarlet' (Xen. *Ages.* 2.7). Xenophon, who campaigned alongside Spartan officers, insists on the emphasis they put on what others, and they themselves, could *see*. The Spartan Cheirisophos, Xenophon's fellow commander on an expedition in unfamiliar Persian territory (401–00), is quoted as arguing repeatedly from what 'you can see'. The Spartan king Agesilaos is described, again by Xenophon, as contriving an impressive military spectacle before his own planned assault on the Persian empire:

you could see the gymnasia full of men exercising, the hippodrome full of horsemen riding, the javelin throwers and the archers at target practice. He made the whole city something worth *seeing*. The market-place was full of armaments and horses for sale, while the bronze-smiths and [list of other craftsmen] were all preparing military equipment. As a result, you would truly have thought the city a workshop of war. *One would also have been fortified to see ...* (*Ages.* I 26f.; *Hell.* 3.4.16–18).

The city where this display was mounted was Ephesos, in Asia Minor. But it was at Sparta that Agesilaos had learned to use the visual to work on men's minds.

Xenophon, for so long Sparta's partisan, insists often on Sparta's difference in military matters. Here it is a Spartan spectacle of a 'workshop of war'. Elsewhere, as we have seen, he talks of battlefield manoeuvres which were not easy to learn 'unless one had been brought up under the laws of Lykourgos'. In another context he describes the military use of divination by Sparta: Spartans in this respect could be 'seen as the only true craftsmen of war'. Compared with them, all other armies would seem to be mere 'improvisers', making things up as they went along (*Lak. Pol.* 13.5). Xenophon insists so much – too much? This theme of Sparta's military superiority was perhaps itself part of Sparta's military superiority: effective propaganda as an instrument of war. We ourselves should insist on remembering that there was a lot more to Spartan life than preparation for war (Hodkinson, this volume, Chapter 2). But it is not only the pro-Spartan Xenophon who insists on Sparta's difference. Aristotle, who vigorously insisted that Sparta was not an ideal to be imitated, points out that after 370, after the loss of its hegemony and even of Messenia, Sparta was not a happy community (*Pol.* 1333b). Now, he writes, the Spartans no longer rule over others, and they lose battles (*Pol.* 1338b) because now they have rivals in the matter of (militaristic) training. For long the Spartans had no such rivals in education, and it was this singularity which gave them their rule over others.

The military (and political) principle of waiting for special opportunity was widely familiar in Greek culture. The Greek word for opportunity, *kairos*, occurs often in military narrative. There was also a term meaning 'to be on the look-out for an opportunity': *kairophylakein*. Helots employed such a mentality against the Spartans, as Aristotle shows. And the Spartans themselves were alert to it. In arranging with their enemy Argos (in 420) to settle a dispute by a battle at some future date, by appointment, Sparta agreed explicitly with Argos not to have that battle at a time when either side was distracted by war elsewhere, or by epidemic disease (Thuc. 5.41.2). Each thus predicted and guarded against the other's enduring sense of *kairos*. We shall see later (Chapter 11) that Sparta observed the need for strategic timing to a most remarkable extent. Over most of the fifth century she usually opened a war, or a campaign in a new area, against Athens when the Athenians were distracted by some special weakness. And, which is not the same thing, Sparta never began such a war or campaigned in a new area unless there was such a *kairos*. These correlations between Spartan initiatives and her opponent's times of weakness, are extensive and go far beyond coincidence. They emerge from Thucydides' narrative. But they do not emerge from any explicit generalization of his. Aristotle's generalization, about the helots' use of opportunity *against* Sparta, is a rarity. That Thucydides does not generalize here may be in part because his Spartan sources refused to talk in such general terms. As well they might. For an awareness of how Sparta's actions were systematically governed by *kairos* would present enemies with opportunities of their own: opportunities to predict Spartan strategy, the timing and direction of campaigns, the periods and regions in which Sparta would *not* campaign. A strict policy of observing *kairos* logically imposed a desire to obscure the existence of that policy.

This enduring pattern of Spartan strategy suggests virtually a formula. And that the formula was employed for so long suggests a consistency of Spartan mentality over a long period. There was a lasting economy to Sparta's movement, a collective self-control

which prevented Sparta's giving way to annoyance and to wishful thinking. There was, for example, no Spartan attack on Athens when Athens herself had cheated and defied Sparta by rebuilding her city wall in the 470s; that was not a time of *kairos*. Spartans knew how to wait. Sparta's consistent respect for opportunity is a case of her external acts, her foreign campaigns visible to Greeks generally, allowing us to reconstruct collective mentality within Sparta. Here was indeed a society of much (though far from total) similarity, over time as well as between individuals at each moment. Other cases of Sparta reacting somewhat formulaically will be seen elsewhere in this volume. The tendency already noticed, for Spartans to turn on their own kings, may be an example.

Another pattern observable in Sparta's behaviour away from home is the unwillingness to try to export the Spartan system. Athens, in contrast, in her empire vigorously exported copies of her own *dēmokratia*, with popular assemblies and democratically appointed officials encouraged to exist, or indeed imposed, in states under Athenian control. Sparta never acted correspondingly, but usually chose rather to impose oligarchies of traditional types, without promoting any general reform on 'Lykourgan' lines within subject states. Even when Sparta's hegemony was widest and most potent, in the years after the defeat of Athens in 404, there was no attempt to 'Lykourgize' Greece. Indeed, Sparta clearly had no settled policy in the matter of what regimes to impose – except in one respect: that other states were *not* to be reformed on Spartan lines. On defeated Athens, Sparta first imposed a government, 'The Thirty', which was inspired to a degree by Spartan models. But there is no evidence of Spartan pressure to reform Athens enduringly and structurally on 'Lykourgan' lines, and most significantly no trace of an attempt to introduce a rigorous Spartan style of education for the Athenian young. By 403 Sparta settled, remarkably, for an Athens ruled once again by insubordinate democrats, the very form of constitution which had generated so many decades of Athenian expansion, resistance and threat to Sparta. Clearly, almost any form of government at Athens was better, in Spartan eyes, than one which mimicked Sparta. This may well be another case of Spartan secrecy: Spartans, as Thucydides concluded, did not want others to *know* what the Spartan system amounted to. Other states, whose citizen populations far outnumbered Sparta's, were not to be given what Sparta considered the formulae behind her own success.

We began by noting that there was something very modern about the Spartans: their manipulation of news, secrecy – in short state propaganda. The modernity may now be seen to go much wider. What Sparta achieved was to be a forerunner of modern industrial society, which since the eighteenth century has consciously and increasingly depended on *specialization*. Sparta's citizens were mostly forbidden to practise manual crafts – except that of the soldier. In soldierly qualities they were trained from childhood, and they had a lifelong training in loyal cohesion with their fellow citizens. This distinguished them, perhaps until the rise of Thebes in the fourth century, from every other Greek state which we know.³ It did not make them soldiers-and-nothing-else. Aristocratic fun and games lived on. Drunken dancing, as shown on the Laconian vases of the sixth century, was replaced by sober, sometimes warlike, dancing. Drunken *symposia* were replaced by sober *syssitia*. Erotic whipping turned into tests of manly endurance. But Sparta's overarching specialism consisted of systematically avoiding oppression by aristocrats, or conquest by helots and foreigners. The military aspect of Spartan life, necessary as *part* of that specialism, did not become obsessive militarism. But it gave Sparta enough of a military edge for almost two centuries to be *the* great land power of Greece.

NOTES

- 1 Compare holiday trips to remote parts of the earth, involving days of confinement in austere if not fearful airports and planes. On a calculus of physical pleasure, such behaviour may not be easily explained. But as a search for high status, going to the Seychelles or the Bahamas is less problematic.
- 2 Nancy Boudighaghen (2017) argues convincingly that in the decades preceding Thermopylai there was no special disgrace for a Spartan force in retreating from a bad military situation.
- 3 Argos in 418, very likely in a half-hearted imitation of Sparta, had 1000 picked men who had been ‘trained as soldiers over a long period at the state’s expense’: Thuc. 5.67.2.

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CHAPTER 2

Sparta

An Exceptional Domination of State over Society?

Stephen Hodgkinson

In their own way they were a great people; but their greatness sprang from qualities violently and astonishingly different from those that the world regards as typically Greek. ... The Spartan way of life, the discipline to which its adherents were subjected, was a strange one, unequalled in severity in any other time or place.

(Michell (1952) 1)

2.1 Changing and Contested Modern Views

The quotation above from the political economist Humfrey Michell expresses, in dramatic form, the usual view of Sparta in twentieth-century thought. Classical Sparta was typically depicted as an exceptional, even a unique, Greek *polis*: a city-state whose institutions and customs differed significantly from those elsewhere in the ancient Greek world – and from the norms of other civilized societies in human history. A key aspect of Sparta's exceptional character, according to this view, was the extraordinary domination which the Spartan state exercised over the everyday lives of Spartiate citizens: in Michell's words, the unparalleled discipline to which they were subjected as part of the Spartan way of life. This perspective remains common in the early twenty-first century.¹ Scholars who hold that Sparta was an exceptional *polis* continue to point to idiosyncratic aspects involving an unusually high level of state control: the testing of whether infants were physically fit to be reared, the publicly organized male upbringing, the compulsory common lifestyle of adult male citizens, the systematic organization of the army, the harnessing of women's roles in service of the *polis*, the imposition of set burial customs, and the strong degree of collective interference in the operation of the system of helotage.

Nevertheless, opinions regarding several of Sparta's supposedly exceptional features have altered significantly over the last half-century. Fifty years ago classical Sparta was normally portrayed as a conservative society which had shunned the socio-political changes experienced by other Greek city-states, retaining ancient institutions comparable to those of so-called 'primitive' modern tribal societies such as the Zulu or the Masai.² Few scholars nowadays would subscribe to that interpretation. It has become evident that Sparta's classical institutions were as much the product of ongoing adaptation and change as those of other Greek *poleis* (Hodkinson (1997a) 88–92). In particular, the idea that Sparta underwent a 'sixth-century revolution',³ involving a radical transformation of earlier customs and practices, has become the new orthodoxy, especially in Anglophone scholarship.

Various alleged instances of exceptional state intervention have also come under challenge in recent years. Until the 1980s the standard view argued that Spartiate land-ownership was public in character: the *polis* controlled a pool of equal plots, which were allocated to Spartan citizens as a life tenancy and reverted to the *polis* on their death. Nowadays, in contrast, many scholars think that Sparta operated an essentially normal Greek system of private land tenure. Spartan citizens owned private estates of variable size, which they usually transmitted to their heirs through partible inheritance, but could also legally alienate to other citizens through lifetime gifts or testamentary bequests (Ducat (1983); Hodkinson (2000) 63–112).⁴

Similar challenges have also been posed to some of the supposedly idiosyncratic examples of state control listed in my opening paragraph. One recent study views helotage as a response to the same conditions that led to the growth of chattel slavery elsewhere in the Greek world (Scheidel (2008) 118); another maintains that Sparta's subjugation of the helots of Messenia was 'merely the most spectacular and best attested example of a form of imperialism characteristic of archaic Greece' (Van Wees (2003) 72). Several scholars have argued that, though subject as a community to various forms of public intervention, individual helots and their families were essentially the private property of particular Spartiate masters (Ducat (1990); Lewis (2018) ch. 6). Yet other studies have noted cross-cultural similarities between helotage and other systems of unfree agrarian servitude, such as slavery in medieval Korea and serfdom in modern Russia (Hodkinson (2003); Luraghi (2009)).

Likewise, it is now argued that the upbringing of Spartiate boys exhibited several features fundamentally similar to those of educational systems in other *poleis*, including an elementary education – in the 'three Rs', in oral expression, and in *mousikē* – of the usual Greek kind, privately funded by, and left to the initiative of, Spartiate families (Kennell (1995) 115–48; Ducat (2006) 119–78). This revisionist interpretation links with re-evaluations of the role of literacy in Spartiate life. Older accounts depicted the Spartan *polis* as antipathetic towards the written word: hence the education system gave Spartiate boys only a rudimentary training in reading and writing, leading to an unusually low level of literacy among adult citizens. The latest studies have concluded, on the contrary, that the written word was central to the conduct of *polis* affairs and that adult Spartiates, trained in reading and writing at the private initiative and cost of their families, were far more literate than previously supposed.⁵ Recent reinterpretations of the Spartan upbringing have also questioned whether it was primarily geared towards systematic military training. This connects with other arguments that, despite her effectiveness in war, Sparta was far more

than a military society: that martial organization and values did not dominate over other, more private, aspects of citizen life (Ducat (1999); Hodkinson (2006)).

These attempts to revise older understandings, however, have not gone unchallenged. A recent comparative study of Spartan and Greek religion, while acknowledging that occasional parallels can be found elsewhere for most of Sparta's unusual religious features, insists that Sparta was idiosyncratic in her systematic combination or aggregate of those features (Flower (2009)). In particular, Spartiate religious practice was exceptional in its 'key symbols', in its distinctive set of religious personnel, in the singular nature of its festivals, and in its worship of different gods and heroes from other Greeks. These singularities, it is argued, indicate more than merely the uniqueness of one facet of Spartan culture, since the significance of religion in Spartiate life made it in effect coterminous with the Spartan *polis*.

In sum, whether classical Sparta was an exceptional Greek *polis* is currently fiercely contested.⁶ As one commentator has observed, 'In recent years ... the traditional view of Sparta has come under increasingly intense scrutiny. ... In its place, intense debate has arisen over each and every facet of what we thought we knew about Sparta and the Spartans' (Kennell (2010) 2). The full range of disputed topics is too numerous for adequate coverage in a single chapter – many of them will be covered in subsequent specialist chapters in this volume. In this chapter, therefore, I will limit myself to two main issues. In section 2.2, I will highlight the fundamental problems of evidence which bedevil debates over Sparta's alleged exceptionality. Then, in sections 2.3–2.6, I will examine the central aspect of these debates already mentioned above: the question whether classical Sparta was marked by an exceptional domination of state over society.

My broad answer to this question will be that, although the state's direction of certain aspects of Spartiate life was unusual, overall its degree of control was not such as to constitute an exceptional domination of state over society. The qualified nature of this conclusion is important. The argument that classical Sparta did not embody an exceptional domination of state over society does not imply that there were no respects at all in which the role of the state was unusual. Moreover, this chapter purposely addresses just one issue, albeit one of the most central, in the wider debate over Sparta's exceptionality. My argument on this issue does not imply that in other spheres the Spartan *polis* did not display certain exceptional features – some of which will be noted in my discussion. Like most Greek *poleis* – and especially as one of the most successful and admired *poleis* in the Greek world – classical Sparta exhibited a complex mixture of common features shared with other contemporary polities and distinctive features not precisely paralleled elsewhere. The challenge for modern students of Sparta is to identify both her elements of exceptionality and her elements of normality, without the one blinding us to the existence of the other.

2.2 Problems with the Ancient Sources

One important reason for the intensity of current controversies about the character of classical Spartan society, and about the relation of her institutions and practices to customs elsewhere in the Greek world, is a growing awareness of the difficulties posed by the surviving literary sources. Despite the existence of a gradually increasing body of

archaeological data and inscriptions, the bulk of the surviving evidence for classical Sparta's political and socio-economic institutions comes from literary texts.

The primary difficulties can be stated simply. Almost all the contemporary literary accounts of classical Sparta emanate from outside Sparta itself; and the majority were authored by citizens from Sparta's political rival, democratic Athens. The images of Sparta presented by these authors are highly contingent upon the external – sometimes idealizing, but often hostile – perspectives from which their works were composed. Ever since the French classicist François Ollier's pioneering study, *Le mirage spartiate* (1933–43), scholars have been aware, in principle, of the challenges posed by the so-called 'Spartan mirage': that is, 'the ways in which ideal images of Sparta were propagated, sometimes by Spartans but more importantly by non-Spartans, to represent what they wanted Sparta to be' (Whitby (2002) 11). Only in recent years, however, has this fundamental insight been systematically applied in historical analyses of Spartan society.⁷ Current challenges to traditional views of Sparta stem to a large extent from recent efforts to re-evaluate the evidence of ancient literary texts influenced by the 'Spartan mirage'.

Classical writers in fact present quite divergent images of Spartan society; and they differ in particular over the extent to which Sparta was a typical or an exceptional *polis*. The poet Pindar, writing victory odes for the ruling and aristocratic lineages of early fifth-century Greece, depicts Sparta in similar terms to other well-ordered *poleis* whose citizens gave willing obedience to their lawful rulers.⁸ Later in the fifth century, the 'Old Oligarch', criticizing the licence accorded to slaves in Athens, asserts that 'it is no longer profitable for my slave to fear you; but in Lakedaimon my slave would fear you'.⁹ Writing for his oligarchic acquaintances outside Athens, the Athenian author takes it as read that his upper-class audience would identify with the Spartans' treatment of their servile population.

The *Histories* of Herodotus, written for a more diverse audience, present a more nuanced approach. The work includes an 'ethnographic' account of Sparta's dual kingship which differs markedly from his treatment of other *poleis* (6.51–9); though in several other respects Sparta is presented as little different from elsewhere. There are the usual inequalities of wealth and elite exchange of precious gifts (6.61–2; 7.134). Sparta's soldiers receive war booty alongside other Greek troops (9.81). Her citizens are accused, as typical Greeks, of cheating in the marketplace; and austere Spartan meals are treated as characteristic of general Greek poverty (1.153; 9.82). Overall, the Spartans are portrayed as oscillating between actions representative of the freedom of Hellas and 'behaviour antithetical to standard Greek *mores* and more akin to barbarian conduct' (Millender (2002a) 29).

Herodotus was influenced in this latter perspective by the aggressively polarizing ideology of Athenian democracy, which portrayed its enemy and imperial rival in consistently alien terms, including representing the Spartiates' ethos of obedience as being dependent on an external discipline imposed by a repressive oligarchy.¹⁰ Images of Spartan difference are highlighted even more directly by Thucydides, who asserts the existence of a specific Spartiate character type: fearful, over-cautious and vacillating, lacking confidence or initiative; in contrast to the self-confident, enterprising, fast-acting and straightforward Athenians.¹¹ A speech by King Archidamos ascribes these distinctive characteristics to the nature of the Spartiates' upbringing and way of life (1.83), whose peculiarity is also emphasized in speeches by Athenian protagonists. Perikles' Funeral

Oration sharply contrasts the Spartiates' training and social *mores* with Athenian practices (2.37–8); and Athenian ambassadors to Sparta claim that their hosts' life at home is governed by customs incompatible with those of other *poleis* (1.77). A further alien character type in Thucydides' account, the duplicitous Spartan who says one thing while thinking another, appears in works by the contemporary Athenian playwrights Euripides and Aristophanes (Bradford (1994)). These authors also portray Sparta as a topsy-turvy world in which the women live free from normal constraints and dominate their husbands and fathers, thereby implicitly questioning the masculinity of Spartan men and bolstering Athens' ideological claims to imperial hegemony (Millender 1999; Poole 1994).

This tendency to view Sparta as an unusual society was given further life by two additional factors generated by Athenian democratic culture: the search for an alternative model of the *polis* by members of the Athenian upper classes alarmed by the alleged excesses of democracy and its erosion of their power and privilege; and the intensified enquiry into the theory of society which developed as part of the Sophistic movement patronized by disgruntled members of the elite.¹² These factors prompted a series of treatises on *polis* forms in which Sparta was placed centre stage as the most prominent counter-model to Athens' democratic system.

Some of these treatises were specialized accounts of the Lakedaimonian *politeia*, such as those by Kritias (leader of the Spartan-backed Athenian junta in 404–403 BC, the 'Thirty Tyrants') and by the Athenian exile Xenophon. Their overt agenda was to demonstrate Sparta's superiority to other *poleis*. The full tenor of Kritias' account of Sparta is obscured by the survival of only fragments of his work; but two extant passages highlight the difference between Spartan drinking practices and those elsewhere.¹³ Xenophon's *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* explicitly sets out to argue that Sparta's lawgiver Lykourgos succeeded in making her the most powerful and celebrated *polis* in Greece, 'not by imitating the other *poleis*, but by adopting customs quite different from most' (1.2).

Another group of treatises comprised more wide-ranging analytical works, products of the philosophical schools in fourth-century Athens: works such as the *Republic* and *Laws* by the upper-class citizen Plato and the *Politics* of the resident alien (metic) Aristotle. In the *Republic* Sparta is linked with the so-called Cretan *politeia*, an invented constitution purportedly shared by the fifty or so separate *poleis* in that island (Perlman (2005)). Plato treats the Spartan and Cretan *politeia* as a distinct type of constitution, so different from the usual forms that it had no current name (544c–545b); hence Plato invents his own term: timarchy or timocracy (547c). Similarly, in the *Laws* – which takes the form of a conversation between three citizens, respectively, from Athens, Sparta and Crete – the Spartan and Cretan speakers remark that they are perplexed how to categorize their respective constitutions in terms of the recognized forms of tyranny, democracy, aristocracy and kingship (712d–713a). Their Athenian interlocutor agrees, asserting that Sparta and Crete alone possess real *politeiai*, since the recognized forms were merely partial constitutions named after the ruling element (Nippel (1980) 131; Hodkinson (2005) 229–31). Aristotle's *Politics* follows his teacher Plato in distinguishing Sparta as the prime example, followed by Crete and Carthage, of those *poleis* 'reputed to be well governed' (II, 1260b30–1; 1269a29–1271b19). Indeed, he goes even further by singling Sparta out as the exemplar of the newly emerging concept of the 'mixed constitution'.¹⁴

The opinions of major thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle regarding Sparta's exceptional character have exercised a significant influence on modern views. Yet their opinions were

far from universally shared in fourth-century Athens. From the 350s onwards, pamphlet-eers and speakers in the Athenian assembly and law courts frequently assimilated aspects of Sparta's institutions and values to Athenian democratic institutions and practices. In his *Against Leptines* (355 BC) Demosthenes warns the judges against his opponents' intended use of Spartan precedent (20.105). In his *Against Timarchos* (346 BC) Aeschines does precisely that, invoking the example of a Spartan Elder, who had prevented the Lakedaimonians from voting on a proposal from a shameful citizen, as a role model comparable to the Athenians' own ancestors (180–2).¹⁵ Sparta's Council of Elders (Gerousia) functions here as a parallel to the traditional Athenian council, the Areopagos, which is lauded earlier in Aeschines' speech (81–5; 92–3; cf. Fisher (1994) 373–4). In his *Panathenaikos* (339 BC) Isokrates develops this parallel, asserting that in founding Sparta's institutions her lawgiver Lykourgos had imitated Athens' ancestral government by establishing a democracy mixed with aristocracy, in which the Gerousia was given the same powers as the Areopagos (153–4). In his *Against Leokrates* (330 BC), the Athenian politician Lykourgos cites, alongside Athenian ancestral practice, a Spartan 'law' condemning those guilty of treason and cowardice to death, in support of his argument that the court should inflict on Leokrates a similar exemplary punishment for such crimes (128–30). Citing the exploits of the Athenians at Marathon and the Spartans at Thermopylai as parallel exemplars of bravery, he quotes inspiring martial verses by the Spartan poet Tyrtaios, invoking the invented tradition that the poet who 'had established their system of training for the young' was originally an Athenian by birth (105–9).

This 'Athenianizing' of Tyrtaios, apparently invented at the time of Athens' rapprochement with Sparta in the late 370s or early 360s, appears in several writers of the mid-late fourth century (Fisher (1994) 362–4). It symbolizes a renewed tendency to identify similarities between ancestral Athenian and Spartan customs, as Athens' imperial ambitions suffered increasing checks and her previously polarizing ideology gave way to a less self-confident democratic mindset, linked to a new backward-looking, conservative political programme which sought strength from parallels with other well-established political systems. The consequent change of perspective away from viewing Sparta as an abnormal *polis* is clearly reflected in the writings of Isokrates. His early works depict Sparta in alien terms. In the *Busiris* (c.390 BC), Sparta is portrayed as a regimented military society which had imitated certain Egyptian customs (17–18). In the *Nikokles* (c.368 BC) she is likened to non-Greek Carthage as an oligarchic constitution with a royal element. In the *Archidamos* (c.366 BC) Sparta's superiority to all the Hellenes is still attributed to her *politeia* being like a military camp (81); but the work also includes a veiled reference – the earliest surviving – to Athens' assistance to Sparta in sending the services of Tyrtaios (31). By the time of the *Areopagitikos* (c.354 BC) the Spartans are now said to be 'the best governed of peoples because they are the most democratic'. Sparta's particular form of democracy, involving equality in the selection of officials and a common citizen way of life, is assimilated to Athens' ancestral constitution, in support of the argument that Athenian officials should be chosen by election and the power of the Areopagos strengthened (61; Tigerstedt (1965–78) i.201). In the *Panathenaikos* (339 BC), as we have seen, Isokrates develops this assimilation to its furthest level in his claim that Sparta's institutions were actually imitations of Athens' ancestral government.

The contingent character of these contemporary accounts regarding whether she was typical or abnormal – which frequently depended on judgements about her similarity to

or difference from Athens – means that the question whether Sparta really was an exceptional *polis* cannot be resolved through the opinions of classical writers, which tell us more about non-Spartan political and cultural ideology than about the historical Sparta. Whilst taking due account of these writers' perceptions, we need to move beyond their explicit opinions by viewing their comments in context and retrieving other, more implicit messages embedded in their texts. We should also seek to draw, where possible, upon a wider range of evidence – archaeological, epigraphic, geographical, statistical, as well as comparative evidence from other Greek *poleis* – to achieve a more detached and holistic interpretation.

2.3 An Exceptional Domination of State over Society?

As was noted in section 2.1, one of the central aspects of current debates about whether classical Sparta was typical or unusual is the question whether the Spartan *polis* constituted an exceptional domination of state over society. This question involves fundamental issues regarding the nature of ancient Greek *poleis*.

Since the early nineteenth century, a common approach to understanding the nature of ancient Greek *poleis* has been to view them as political communities which shaped every aspect of human society and life; or (to phrase it another way) in which the 'State', in the sense of the 'rule-making authority', moulded all the private activities of its citizens.¹⁶ As John Stuart Mill expressed it over a hundred and fifty years ago, 'The ancient commonwealths thought themselves entitled to practise ... the regulation of every part of private conduct by public authority, on the ground that the State had a deep interest in the whole bodily and mental discipline of every one of its citizens' ((1859) 16). This view still exercises considerable influence. During the later twentieth century, however, several scholars – impressed by the interpenetration of public and private spheres within the *polis*, but dubious about the concept of the 'State' as an entity distinct from the community of citizens – developed a different approach which depicted Greek *poleis* in terms of an indistinguishable fusion of state and society. In the words of one of its earlier proponents, Ernest Barker ((1951) 5), the *polis* 'was State and Society in one, without distinction or differentiation; it was a single system of order, or fused "society-state ..."'.¹⁷

Both these interpretations were intended as depictions of ancient Greek *poleis* in general. In recent years they have been challenged by alternative conceptions which emphasize Sparta's exceptional character compared with other *poleis*. One important challenge has come from the work of Mogens Hansen and the Copenhagen Polis Centre. In their view, the depictions above constitute only a partial picture of the generality of Greek *poleis*. They fit Sparta, where the state permeated society and exerted an overwhelming influence over its citizens' lives by means of 'public education, public regulation of marriage and family life, public restrictions on production and trade, and an enforced system of commensality on all male citizens'. However, they do not fit democratic Athens, which distinguished between the public and private spheres; and in which, provided he complied with the laws, a citizen could otherwise live as he pleased. The situation in other *poleis* (at least in democratically governed ones), Hansen argues, was closer to the Athenian separation of state and society than to their fusion in classical

Sparta ((1998) 85, 98–106). A different challenge has come from historians who argue that Greek *poleis* were state-less political communities, which governed themselves with only a rudimentary official coercive apparatus and no organized militia or internal police force. Proponents of this interpretation also tend to view Sparta as an exception, characterizing it as a coercive community of professional warriors.¹⁸

Discussion of the theoretical issues of statehood underlying these divergent depictions lies beyond the scope of this chapter. A recent analysis has plausibly argued that Athens and many other *poleis*, including Sparta, did possess one of the essential conceptual requirements of statehood: a shared perception that members of the *polis* formed a corporate person, responsible for present and past business transacted in its name, but different from the aggregate of individual citizens living at any given time (Anderson (2009)). ‘State’ and ‘society’ hence formed analytically distinct but mutually constitutive entities. Hence Athenian or Spartan ‘society’ was partly the product of state intervention, partly of other influences. Conversely, the nature and extent of state interventions were influenced by the interests and agency of citizens acting in their personal capacities, individually or in groups.

From this perspective, the issue whether the Spartan *polis* was marked by an exceptional domination of state over society can be examined through two questions: first, whether the Spartan state determined the nature of Spartiate society and the lives of its citizens to an unusual degree compared with other *poleis*; second, whether Spartiate citizens had less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal control over their private and household affairs. In sections 2.4 and 2.5, I will examine each of these questions in turn. In section 2.6, I will address a further issue raised by the foregoing discussion – to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state – as part of a broader analysis of the character of the Spartan *polis*.

2.4 Did the State Determine Spartiate Society and Citizen Life?

At first glance, the answer to this question may appear to be an unequivocal ‘yes’. According to a number of sources, especially Xenophon’s *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* (henceforth, *Polity*) and Plutarch’s *Life of Lykourgos* (henceforth, *Lykourgos*), the lives of adult male Spartiates were dominated by a series of public institutions in which every citizen was compelled to participate. This mandatory citizen life-course began with the only compulsory public system of male education attested in a classical Greek *polis*.¹⁹ From age seven to age twenty-nine every Spartiate boy, barring the two immediate heirs to the dual kingship, was reared within a public upbringing – often, but erroneously, called the *agōgē* by modern scholars²⁰ – comprising three fixed age grades: the *paidēs* (‘boys’, aged 7–c.14/15), the *paidiskoi* (‘youths’, aged c.14/15–19 years old) and the *hēbōntes* (‘young men’, aged 20–29).²¹ From age twenty, as a condition of his citizenship, each young Spartiate then joined a common mess, the *syssition*, where, according to Plutarch (*Lykourgos* 22.2–3), he had to dine with his messmates (barring occasional exceptions) every evening of his adult life. At age twenty he also became liable for military service for the following forty years until he reached age sixty.

The state's control over this citizen life-course was reinforced by specific regulations governing the operation of these public institutions. The male upbringing was managed by a *polis* official, the *paidonomos*, who possessed full authority over the younger two age grades, including the power of physical discipline administered by a staff of *hēbōntes*. The boys in these two age grades were organized into horizontal sets each under the control of a twenty-year-old *eirēn* (Ducat (2006) 77–100). According to Xenophon (*Polity* 2.10–11), the underlying principle was that they should never be left alone without a ruler. The *paidiskoi*, in particular, were subjected to an intensive regime of exercises and testing, an officially prescribed pattern of modest behaviour and increased levels of surveillance. The penalty for serious or repeated lapses was exclusion from future adult citizenship (*Polity* 3.2–4).

The operation of the common messes, too, was governed by the official requirements that they mix citizens of different ages and that all messmates must contribute a fixed monthly quantity of a limited, austere range of foodstuffs, again on pain of exclusion from citizen rights.²² The messes themselves were physically located along the public space of the Hyakinthian Way. Finally, the army was organized according to a uniquely hierarchical command structure, attested in no other Greek hoplite force: the king at the top, with the *polemarchoi* under him, then the *lochagoi*, the *pentēkontēres* and, lastly, the *enōmotarchoi*, who led the smallest army units, the *enōmotiai*. In Thucydides' words, 'almost the entire army of the Lakedaimonians ... consists of officers commanding subordinate officers' (5.66). In addition, rank-and-file Spartan soldiers were required to swear a special oath of obedience to their officers: 'I shall not desert my *taxiarchos* or my *enōmotarchēs* whether he is alive or dead, and I shall not leave unless the *hēgemones* lead us away.'²³

However, these elements of state control form only a partial picture of these institutions. To start with the education of Spartiate boys, their early, most formative years lay primarily in the hands of their families, since the public upbringing began only at age seven and the boys probably continued to sleep overnight at home until age twelve (Ducat (2006) 125). Moreover, to judge from contemporary ancient descriptions (especially Xenophon, *Polity* 2–4), the public upbringing focused only on the boys' physical development. It apparently did not cover their core elementary education (*paideia*), focused on 'the 3Rs' (*grammata*), oral expression and *mousikē*. By inference, these were taught by teachers privately paid by Spartiate families (Ducat (2006) 119–35; 333–4; Hansen and Hodkinson (2009) 485–8).

Even the public aspects of the boys' upbringing depended on significant inputs from the boys' families or from 'society' in general. When the *paidonomos* was absent, the control or disciplining of the boys fell to any citizen present; and any punishment thus administered was reinforced by the boy's own father (Xenophon, *Polity* 2.10; 6.2). When he left home fully at age twelve, each boy then came under the guidance of an older male lover (*erastēs*), typically one of the *hēbōntes* in his early twenties. Although a normative element in the boys' socialization, this pederastic relationship was a personal affair instigated or supported by family and friends.²⁴ During their subsequent period of testing, the teenage *paidiskoi* were closely monitored not only by the public officials, but also by their lovers and kin.²⁵ This personal support network continued to assist the twenty to twenty-nine-year-old *hēbōntes*, supplying their household necessities before they were allowed to enter the *agora* at age thirty (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 25.1). Indeed, the entire

public upbringing was viable only because of private economic support. Throughout his long years from age seven to age nineteen, the ability of each boy to participate in the upbringing rested on his family's capacity to provide the required food contributions to the children's *syssitia* (Kennell (1995) 133–4; Ducat (2006) 134–5). A significant number of boys from impoverished backgrounds, known as *mothakes*, were able to participate only as the 'foster-brothers' (*syntrophoi*) of boys from wealthier Spartiate families willing to provide private financial patronage.²⁶

Similar points can be made about the adults' common messes. Just as the public upbringing formed only part of the boys' overall education, so too the *syssitia* did not monopolize occasions of commensality. Plutarch's claim that attendance was a daily requirement for all Spartiates, including the kings, is qualified by classical evidence referring to the kings' eating at home or at private dinners hosted by other citizens (Herodotus 6.57.3). The *syssitia* themselves were largely self-regulating entities whose detailed operation, although conforming to *polis* norms, lay outside the direct control of state officials. The selection of new members of each *syssition* lay in the hands of its existing messmates (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.5). In practice, most young candidates put forward for selection were probably the beloved youths (*erōmenoi*) of existing members. Discussions and conversations within the messes were secret, immune from outside scrutiny: as members were reminded, 'Through these [doors] not a word goes outside' (ibid.). Although there was a standard set of rations for the main part of the meal, individual messmates were able to donate additional foodstuffs from their personal hunting activities or their private estates.²⁷ Finally, as in the upbringing, each messmate's continuing participation rested on his economic capacity to provide the required food contributions from his household's resources. During the classical period an increasing number of poor Spartiates dropped out of the *syssitia*, and hence lost their citizen rights, through their private incapacity to meet these compulsory dues.²⁸

The self-regulating nature of the messes also produced a degree of self-regulation in the organization of the army, since the messmates in each *syssition* also fought together in the smallest army unit, the *enōmotia*.²⁹ Consequently, the recruitment of young Spartiate soldiers to particular *enōmotiai* was determined, not by the state or its generals, but by the rank-and-file members of each *enōmotia*, as the *hēbōntes* made their personal choices of twelve-year-old *erōmenoi* and, eight years later, their fellow messmates elected these *erōmenoi* as members of their *syssition*.³⁰ A similar dispersal of responsibility even extended to military decision-making. On campaign it was normal practice for the king to consult widely among both his senior and junior officers, right down to the *pentēkontēres*, three command levels below (Xenophon, *Polity* 13.4; *Hellenika* 3.5.22; 4.5.7). When one king, exceptionally, abandoned a campaign after minimal consultation, his decision – though reluctantly accepted in obedience to the law – aroused such bitter complaints that, on return to Sparta, he only narrowly escaped punishment and his authority was specially limited by the imposition of ten advisers without whose agreement he was unable to act (Thucydides 5.60, 63). In Thucydides' view, the result of the army's hierarchical command structure was that 'the responsibility for what is to be done falls upon a great many people' (5.66). On occasions this dispersed responsibility produced the remarkably disciplined behaviour for which Lakedaimonian troops were famous (e.g. Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.2.6); orders made in consultation with junior officers had more traction among the ordinary soldiers under those officers' command. But it also

developed a culture in which initiatives from below often modified and even counter-manded decisions by the king or other commanders. On several attested occasions lower-ranking officers purposely disobeyed orders or individual rank-and-file soldiers spontaneously shouted out alternative tactics which their commanders immediately implemented.³¹ The Spartan army on campaign frequently operated more like a society of citizen soldiers than an institution under top-down control by the state.

In sum, we have seen that the state's influence over the overall Spartiate life-course was stronger than in other *poleis*. The reason, however, was not so much that Sparta's public institutions in the classical period involved radically different cultural practices from those elsewhere, but rather that they were transformed versions of practices common to most *poleis* – including early Sparta itself before the 'sixth-century revolution'. The *syssitia*, for example, represented a public transformation of Greek *symposia*, extended to embrace the entire citizen body and with a more formalized linkage to membership of the community (Hodkinson (1997) 90–1; Rabinowitz (2009) 161–7). The Lakedaimonian army was a more systematized version of normal Greek military forces (Herodotus 1.65). In classical Sparta these transformed institutions were combined under state direction into a coherent and compulsory overall life structure. As transformations of long-standing practices rather than new creations, however, the public institutions retained many aspects of former Spartan practice still present in other *poleis*. So, for example, Sparta's public upbringing continued to share several features – its commencement at age seven, its broad stages of development, and the liminal status of young men in their twenties – with the private upbringing of boys in other *poleis* (Kennell (1995), 115–48). One important feature retained from former practice was the considerable role which non-state elements continued to play within Sparta's public institutions: hence, as we have seen, the state's control over their operation was by no means all-encompassing.

Likewise, although it specified a mandatory overall life-course for all Spartiates, the state did not attempt to micro-manage the details of its citizens' daily lives. This is strikingly illustrated by comparison with Plato's directions in the *Laws* for the citizens of his imaginary, state-controlled *polis* of Magnesia. According to Plato's Athenian spokesman, 'a programme must be framed for all the free men, prescribing how they shall pass their time continuously from dawn to dawn and sunrise on each successive day' (807d–e). No contemporary classical source even so much as hints that Spartiate daily life was anything like this, not even Xenophon's *Polity of the Lakedaimonians*, which is at pains to highlight Sparta's distinctive aspects.³² The most that Xenophon says about the daily lives of adult Spartiates is that to enable them to remain fit for warfare, 'Lykourgos established the principle that ... hunting was the noblest occupation, except when some public duty (τι δημόσιον) prevented' (*Polity* 4.7). Later, when discussing the sharing of hunting dogs, he states that 'those who need them invite [the owner] to the hunt and, if he himself is engaged, he gladly sends them' (6.3) The implication is that, although a citizen's public duties took priority over private pursuits, only occasionally were they so time-consuming or ill-timed as to interfere with a hunting expedition. Even a spontaneous invitation might find a wealthy owner of hunting dogs otherwise unoccupied and free to join the hunt.

This picture of a relatively unencumbered Spartiate daily life is confirmed by incidental details mentioned in Xenophon's narration of two specific episodes in Spartan history. In one episode – concerning the errant Spartiate commander Sphodrias – he depicts

King Agesilaos II going down shortly after dawn to the River Eurotas (presumably to bathe) and engaging in personal conversation with other Spartiates, foreigners and servants, before returning to his home (*Hellenika* 5.4.28). In the other episode, he portrays the leader of a planned conspiracy, a certain Kinadon, taking a potential recruit on a tour of Sparta and its environs, to demonstrate how outnumbered the Spartiates were by other subordinate groups (3.3.5). In the *agora* they found the king, ephors and *gerontes* (members of the Gerousia) and about forty other citizens, along with over 4000 non-Spartiates. Walking around the streets, they came across Spartiates in ones and twos, among a number of non-citizens. Finally, on each of the Spartiates' country estates they observed a single master amidst a mass of other persons (presumably, helot labourers). Far from the uniform regime of state-prescribed collective daily activities in Plato's Magnesia, Xenophon depicts ordinary Spartan citizens independently going about their daily lives, following personal schedules focused on a range of private affairs – as in any other *polis*.³³

Of course, a Spartiate's daily life also included some supervised group activities undertaken separately from the non-citizen populations: elsewhere Xenophon mentions sessions in the *gymnasia* controlled by the most senior man present (*Polity* 5.8). However, there is no foundation for the common assumption that a Spartiate's daily life was dominated by military training. There is no evidence for dedicated weapons practice or mock combat, only for training in collective drill (*Polity* 11.5–10). For the most part, the Spartiates' preparations for war relied less on specialized military training, than on maintaining their physical fitness through the *gymnasion* and the hunt: in other words, through the standard pursuits of leisured elites throughout the Greek world (Hodkinson (2006) 133–8). Overall, therefore, an ordinary day in the life of an adult Spartiate was not excessively dominated by compulsory civic duties, at least until his expected attendance at his *sysition* in the evening – and it was permissible to miss even the *sysition* if delayed by sacrifice or the hunt (Xenophon, *Polity* 6.4; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.3). Spartiate daily life was far from the state-controlled life of the citizens of Magnesia in Plato's *Laws*.

2.5 Spartiate Citizens and their Household Affairs

What about the converse issue, whether Spartiate citizens had significantly less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal control over their household affairs? Is it true that – in contrast to Athens, which distinguished between the public and private spheres and in which a citizen could live as he pleased within the laws – a Spartiate's private activities in areas such as marriage and family life, property ownership, production and trade were closely constrained by public regulation? The situation is complex; but, in my view, the answer is closer to 'no'.

Contrary to common belief, Spartan ideology and practice accepted the legitimate existence of a private sphere outside state control. The clearest evidence is provided by Dionysios of Halikarnassos (20, excerpt 13.2). Contrasting Spartan practice with the intrusive scrutiny of private behaviour undertaken by the Roman censors, Dionysios argues that:

the Lakedaimonians [gained repute] because they permitted their oldest men to beat with their canes such of the citizens as were disorderly in any public place whatever; but for what

took place inside their homes they neither worried about it nor kept watch over it, holding that each man's house door marked the boundary within which he was free to live as he pleased (τὴν αὐλειον θύραν ἐκάστου ὅρον εἶναι τῆς ἐλευθερίας τοῦ βίου νομίζοντες).

Dionysios is a relative late source, from the first century BC; but the existence of a domestic domain exempt from official control is already mentioned by contemporary fourth-century writers. The citizens in Plato's timocratic *polis*, modelled on Sparta, 'entrench themselves within the walls of their homes', where 'they can spend lavishly on their wives and anything else they choose' (*Republic* 8.548a). Aristotle's explanation (*Politics* II, 1271b11–15) for the emptiness of the Spartan public treasury – 'as most of the land is the property of the Spartiates themselves, they do not enquire too closely into one another's war taxes (*eisphorai*)' – indicates a general consensus that personal tax affairs should be beyond external scrutiny.³⁴ This is not to say that Spartiate domestic or financial space was always absolutely inviolable. Xenophon (*Polity* 7.6) claims that in the early fourth century citizen homes could be searched for illegal gold and silver. This, however, was merely a short-lived measure covering an exceptional period when private possession of precious metal currency was briefly prohibited (Hodkinson (2000) 166; Lipka (2002) 168).³⁵ The accounts of Plato, Aristotle and Dionysios indicate the more usual state of affairs. They suggest that, as in Athens, the Spartiates normally distinguished between the public and private spheres and were even open to the principle of a citizen living as he pleased – though, in contrast to Athens, the operation of this principle was restricted to the household domain.

In keeping with the principle of non-interference in the household, Spartiate families had considerable leeway to devise their own marriage and inheritance arrangements: more leeway, in fact, than their counterparts at Athens or Gortyn on Crete (the only other *poleis* for which we possess detailed evidence).³⁶ In the late archaic and early classical periods many Greek *poleis* were faced with the challenge of unfettered competitive generosity between citizen families in giving their daughters increasingly large marriage dowries, a practice which threatened to erode male property-holding and the inheritances of male heirs (Van Wees (2005) 5–9). *Poleis* had two options for restricting this practice: to limit female property ownership or to downgrade women's property rights. Athens intervened strongly on both counts, entirely excluding women from direct inheritance and giving their husbands control of the dowry. In contrast, Sparta and Gortyn merely capped female property ownership by incorporating the dowry as the daughter's *pre-mortem* share of the inheritance and limiting it to half a son's share.³⁷ In consequence, wealthy Spartiate families retained their capacity to give large dowries and male property-holding dropped as low as 60 per cent of the land (Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a23–5).

Spartiate families also had the greatest latitude as regards the marriage of heiresses (Patterson (1998) 93–103). Under both Athenian and Gortynian law, when a man died without sons, his male next-of-kin had the right to marry any surviving daughter, regardless of any arrangements her father had made for her, unless she was married and already had a son (in Athens) or child of either sex (in Gortyn).³⁸ In Sparta a father's marriage arrangements had greater force. An heiress who was already married (whether or not she had children) or even merely betrothed by her father (either during his lifetime or even in his will) retained her existing or intended spouse (Herodotus 6.57.4;

Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a26–9). Only in the case of an unmarried and unbetrothed heiress did the father's next-of-kin acquire the right to marry her.³⁹ Spartiate families were also less constrained by the rules stipulating whom such heiresses should marry. In both Gortyn and Athens there was a fixed order of precedence within the kin (*Gortyn Code* cols. VII–VIII; Harrison (1968–71) i.11–12). In Gortyn the pool of legally eligible males was especially restricted: relatives outside the patriline were excluded; and, if there was no eligible kinsman, the husband had to come from the same civic subdivision as the heiress's father. In Sparta there were no such restrictions: if the next-of-kin did not wish to marry the heiress himself, he could marry her to any citizen he chose. Unlike in Athens and Gortyn, therefore, there were no official measures to compel families to keep the marriage of the heiress and the devolution of her father's property within the kin group, or to ensure the survival of the *oikos* as an independent unit. These matters were left entirely up to Spartiate families themselves.

This greater than normal latitude in marriage arrangements is also shown by the diversity of marriage practices – besides the standard monogamous marriage – available to Spartiate families, including several unusual practices unattested in (most) other *poleis*. One was the practice of polyandry, whereby several brothers shared the same wife (Polybius 12.6b.8). Another was the practice of wife-sharing, in which a man could request another citizen's wife to sire children of his own (Xenophon, *Polity* 1.8–9). This practice was connected to a third unusual practice: marriage between uterine half-siblings (children of the same mother but different fathers), which enabled the woman's sons and daughters by her different partners to intermarry.⁴⁰

Together these practices gave Spartiate families an unrivalled capacity to concentrate their property and to limit the number of children. They thereby made a significant economic and demographic contribution to the problem of *oliganthrōpia* (lack of citizen manpower) which Aristotle viewed as the key internal cause behind Sparta's loss of external power in the mid-fourth century: a cause rooted in severe inequalities of wealth among her citizen body and the impoverishment of increasing numbers of Spartiates (*Politics* II, 1270a15–b6). On this issue too Spartan policies eschewed any significant degree of state intervention. There was no attempt to raise citizen numbers by naturalizing Inferiors or *perioikoi*, no attempt to sever the link between *syssitia* membership and citizen rights, no public subsidies towards the mess dues of poor Spartiates, no redistribution of land to restore their fortunes. Instead, the state resorted to largely cosmetic measures aimed at increasing the birth rate through modifying individual behaviour. Penalties were imposed on men who failed to marry; and exemptions from military service and from taxation were offered, respectively, to fathers of three and four children.⁴¹ Otherwise, wealthy Spartiate families were left largely unchecked to pursue their marriage and inheritance strategies aimed at maximizing their private wealth, to the detriment of their poorer fellow citizens. At Gortyn, in contrast, surviving legal texts attest multiple official interventions aimed at sustaining the maximum number of citizen households above the level of economic viability (Davies (2005) 168–9). The difference from Sparta's laissez-faire approach could hardly be greater.

The 'hands-off' approach of the Spartan state to marriage and inheritance is readily intelligible, since property-holding in classical Sparta was fundamentally private in character (Hodkinson (2000) 65–186). Both men and women owned personal landholdings, which they had nearly full rights to dispose of as they pleased. Spartiate landowners

could transmit their estates to their children on their death by means of partible inheritance – though daughters, as we have seen, often received their share on marriage. If he lacked a male child, a man could adopt a son from another household to become his heir. Landowners could also disinherit their natural heirs, wholly or partially, by passing on their landed property to a third party through lifetime gifts or testamentary bequests. The only restriction on their rights of alienation was that sale of one's land was dishonourable, though not strictly illegal. In Aristotle's judgement, the restriction on sale, but not on gift and bequest, was woefully inadequate, since 'this inevitably leads to the same result' (*Politics* II, 1270a19–22). The high degree of personal control available to Spartiate landowners is again highlighted by comparison with Athenian and Gortynian law, which both imposed much tighter restrictions on testamentary bequests. At Athens they were available only to men without legitimate sons; at Gortyn the only permissible way of changing the succession to one's property was through adoption, which – unlike in Sparta – was closely controlled by detailed legal specifications (Schaps (1979) 21; Davies (2005) 168–9).

Besides their landed estates, Spartiates also privately owned a range of items of movable wealth: livestock, various kinds of valuables and precious metals, and even (apart from the brief period already mentioned) foreign coinage. The private character of property ownership was moderated by certain communal rights of use – under certain conditions a Spartiate could make use of another citizen's helots, hunting dogs or horses (Xenophon, *Polity* 6.3–4; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1263a30–9) – and by the compulsory levies of produce for the common mess dues; but none of these had a significant redistributive effect (Hodkinson (2000) 187–208). Instead, the state tried to reduce the impact of economic inequalities by limiting the ways in which Spartiates could use and display their wealth. Sometimes this was implemented through measures singular to Sparta, such as a unique marriage ritual, in which the bride was placed alone in an unlit room, where she was secretly visited by the bridegroom in the short interval between dining in his mess and returning to sleep in his barracks (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.3–4); this clandestine sexual intercourse, performed with minimal interruption to each partner's daily routine, was maintained throughout their early marriage. The whole procedure contrasted sharply with the lavish preparations, expenditures and public display involved in marriage rituals in contemporary Athens and elsewhere (Hodkinson (2000) 230). More often, the state limited its citizens' expenditures through measures similar to, if occasionally more extreme than, sumptuary legislation attested elsewhere: for example, limitations on feasting in the common messes, uniformity of dress, and restrictions on burial goods and funerary display (ibid. 216–26; 24–56).

Despite these restrictions, however, there remained important spheres of private activity in which citizens could legitimately employ their surplus wealth, especially religious dedications, the deployment of personal patronage, and horse-breeding for chariot racing followed by the monumental commemoration of equestrian victories (ibid. 271–368). In this last sphere, in particular, wealthy Spartiates spent enormous sums comparable to, or even exceeding, private expenditures in other *poleis*.

What about the remaining area of close public regulation, production and trade? It seems that in the classical period Spartiate citizens were prohibited from engaging personally in non-agricultural money-making activities (Hodkinson (2000) 177–9). However, these prohibitions did not prevent them, like leisured elites in other *poleis*,

from profiting from the surplus produce of their landed estates or engaging in productive and commercial activities through the agency of third parties. Sparta's officially sanctioned iron currency, with its bulky size in relation to its artificially assigned low value, formed a practical barrier between the stored treasure held by elite households and the sphere of market transactions (Figueira (2002)). However, the very need for this *practical* barrier was that there was no *legal* separation of civic from market activity: no equivalent of Thessaly's 'free *agora*', from which market activity was excluded (Aristotle, *Politics* VII, 1331a30–b4). Xenophon's account of the conspirators' tour mentioned earlier depicts the Spartan *agora* as a bustling market, so commercially active that stalls selling different kinds of products were grouped into separate zones: a place where state officials conducted civic business cheek-by-jowl with other Spartiates and non-Spartiates engaged in market transactions (*Polity* 3.3.5–7). The right to buy and sell and to enter the *agora* for market exchange was a central privilege of Spartiate citizenship (Thucydides 5.34; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 25.1). Once again, Spartiates were able to exercise personal control over their household economies, entering the market to sell surplus produce, to acquire household needs, or to remedy shortfalls in the foodstuffs required for their mess contributions.

2.6 Totalitarian State, Multiplicity of *Koinōniai*, Plutocratic Society?

It is clear from the variety of evidence discussed in the previous two sections that the Spartan state exercised a more limited degree of direct control over Spartan society and the daily lives of Spartiate citizens than is usually thought; and, conversely, that Spartiate families had considerable scope, often more than citizens in other *poleis*, to exercise private control over their household affairs. Why then has the notion that Sparta embodied an exceptionally close domination of state over society exercised such an influence over modern academic thinking? One powerful reason is Sparta's association in recent western thought with two major twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Nazi association has had an especially significant impact because National Socialist politicians and theorists, along with many German classical scholars, themselves identified Sparta as an important model for the Third Reich (Losemann (2007, 2012); Roche (2012, 2013)). This identification was readily taken up by academics opposed to Nazism (Hodkinson (2010)). Already in 1934, in the early years of Nazi rule, the eminent ancient historian Victor Ehrenberg, Professor of Ancient History at the German University in Prague, titled a talk about Sparta on Czechoslovak radio 'Ein totalitärer Staat' ('A totalitarian state'). The talk concluded with a prescient warning linking Sparta to the rising Nazi threat: 'Sparta set up, not an example to be imitated, but a danger-signal to be avoided.' Its subsequent publication in English, following Ehrenberg's enforced emigration to Britain as a Jewish refugee scholar, gave his interpretation particular prominence. The notion of Sparta's totalitarian character has remained strong ever since, embedded in scholarly assumptions linking her to the Nazi or Soviet systems.⁴²

In reality, however, Sparta was nothing like a modern totalitarian regime. Sparta exhibited practically none of the features which characterize totalitarian systems: a totalist

ideology; a single mass party; the concentration of power in an unaccountable individual or small group irremovable by peaceful institutionalized means; a fully-developed secret police; and a monopolistic control over operational weapons, mass communications and economic institutions with the capacity to create a centrally planned economy (Friedrich (1969) 126; Linz (2000) 67). As we have seen, Spartiate ideology was far from totalist, acknowledging that state intervention should not extend within the household space.⁴³ There were no mass party or enduring formal political organizations: Spartiate politics was characterized by a diversity of individuals and shifting groups engaged in fierce competition. Power was not concentrated or unaccountable, but dispersed among a range of offices, such as the dual kingship, the ephorate and the Gerousia, whose holders could legally be put on trial or removed from office (Xenophon, *Polity* 8.3–4). There were peaceful institutionalized mechanisms for the selection or rotation of office holders. There was no secret police exercising surveillance over Spartiate citizens.⁴⁴ Finally, the Spartan state did not exercise a monopolistic control over weapons, communications or economic institutions. Spartiate citizens possessed their own arms. The ephors might make public pronouncements representing official views, but there were no all-pervasive state media to dominate citizen opinion. Spartiate society contained multiple, and often competing, channels of communication through different office holders and institutional groups. Many gatherings of citizens, especially the daily *syssitia*, took place with no high state officials present.⁴⁵ Above all, as we have seen, the Spartan state conspicuously refrained from intervening in the economy. There was no equivalent of Nazi Germany's *Reichserbhofgesetz* (*State Law of Hereditary Entailment*) or of the Soviet Union's collectivization of agriculture and Five Year Plans.

Instead of domination by a totalitarian state, the key feature of the Spartan *polis* was, rather, the active participation of the whole citizen body in community affairs. The upbringing of Spartiate boys, for example, was achieved not just by the *paidonomos* with his staff of *hēbōntes* and *eirēnes*, but by the material support provided by their families or patrons, the admonitions of their mothers, the mentoring from their *erastai*, the right of any citizen to discipline any boy, the informal scrutiny by the elderly men (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 16.5, 17.1, 25.2), and the judgements chanted by the girls in their choral songs (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 14.3). It was this widespread community involvement that gave Sparta the all-encompassing atmosphere often misinterpreted by modern commentators as totalitarian control. The *homonoia* ('unanimity') for which the Spartiates were famed was not an oppressive mass conformity imposed by the state, but the communal and participative (though also competitive) sociability recognized by Pindar when he listed 'dances and the Muse and joyousness' among the key features of Spartiate life.⁴⁶

Some of this communal participation and sociability took place in occasional mass gatherings, such as the adult male decision-making assembly (the *ekklēsia*) or religious festivals attended by the entire Spartiate population; but most daily citizen activities took place within a multiplicity of much smaller groups. When Xenophon describes the everyday occasions from which a coward would be excluded, he highlights a range of activities conducted in modest-sized groups: the *syssitia* – comprising fifteen or so men (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.2) – exercise in the gymnasium, team ballgames, and the chorus (*Polity* 9.4–5). To these we should add other everyday small-group activities, such as the regular hunting parties or modest-scale religious activities such as guild, clan and hero

cults.⁴⁷ On campaign too, much of a Spartiate's time was spent with the thirty-odd comrades in his *enōmotia*. We should also remember small-scale private groupings of citizens, such as the intimate comrades (*hetairoi*) and friends (*philoî*) who play a key role in Xenophon's account of the episode of Sphodrias: standing by the accused commander, engaging in dialogue with his enemies, watching for visitors to his son, and giving the son news of his father's imminent acquittal (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.4.25–33). Nor should we forget a citizen's one-to-one, extra-familial relationships: the pederastic relationship that every citizen had with his *erastēs* and subsequently with his *erōmenos*, and the individual relationships that some citizens had with their patrons or their foreign guest-friends (*xenoi*).⁴⁸

These one-to-one, small or medium-sized groupings are examples (by no means exhaustive) of what Aristotle termed *koinōniai*: associations or partnerships of varying types and duration, both long- and short-term. For Aristotle, one way of viewing the *polis* was as an overarching *koinōnia* comprising the diverse multiplicity of smaller *koinōniai* in which its inhabitants participated (*Politics* I, 1252b28–32; *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 1160a8–29; *Eudemian Ethics* VII, 1241b25–7). Recent research has suggested that this perspective provides a particularly fruitful way of analysing ancient Greek communities (Vlassopoulos (2007), 68–99, 143–55). One advantage is that, in place of the top-down, state-centred perspective whose limitations have been analysed above, it enables us to view Spartiate life from the bottom up, from the standpoint of the citizens themselves. It presents a Spartiate citizen's life as a more variegated affair than we might otherwise imagine, as he participated in a range of different *koinōniai*, involving a changing group of persons, during the course of his private and public activities. Furthermore, it reinforces our appreciation of the agency that citizens retained to shape, not only their family affairs, but also the character of the various public institutions in which they participated, as the operation of those institutions through small-group *koinōniai* created greater scope for individual and collective choices and decisions.

This perspective also helps us to address the final issue posed at the end of section 2.3: to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state. We have already seen how the private decisions of Spartiate families, especially those from wealthy lineages, about their property, marriage and inheritance arrangements made a significant contribution to the decline of Sparta's citizen numbers and the consequent erosion of her external power. This private influence of wealthy Spartiates on the public realm, however, was more than simply a by-product of their family concerns; it was fundamental to the functioning of the Spartan *polis*. Throughout Sparta's history her citizen body had always been marked by inequalities of wealth. Seventh-century Sparta had the reputation as a *polis* in which only the wealthy counted and in which the acquisitive behaviour of the rich and the impoverishment of poor citizens provoked a civil war focused on demands for a redistribution of land.⁴⁹ The remodelling of Spartan society and creation of the common citizen way of life in the 'sixth-century revolution' probably provided poorer Spartiates with sufficient land and helot workforce to free them temporarily from agricultural labour and enable them to meet their *sysitia* dues; but there was no fundamental redistribution of land or alteration to the system of private property ownership. The uneven distribution of property remained and became increasingly severe from the fifth century onwards. By the later fourth century the private riches of wealthy Spartiates had become notorious ([Plato], *Alkibiades* I, 122d).

The influence of this private wealth penetrated into many of Sparta's central public institutions and activities. As has already been noted, personal wealth played a key role in funding the private elements of the upbringing and the education of *mothakes*. Richer members of the *syssitia* gave their messmates special donations of wheaten bread and meat dishes from their private estates (Xenophon, *Polity* 5.3; Hodkinson (2000) 356–8). Poorer Spartiates were reliant on dogs borrowed from their wealthier fellow-citizens for a proper hunting party. Even the horses in Sparta's early-fourth-century cavalry were supplied by the 'very rich' (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 6.4.10–11). These deployments of private wealth necessarily affected citizen relationships. Many former *mothakes* surely lived their adult lives with a lasting obligation to their patron foster-brothers; poorer members of the *syssitia* and hunting parties surely felt indebted to their wealthier messmates or hunting companions. Many of the small-group public *koinōniai* of Spartiate life will hence have embodied unequal social relationships.

Similar inequalities also operated within more private friendship groupings. The *betairoi* of Sphodrias mentioned by Xenophon appear to be men of comparable standing to the commander: as members of the court about to try him, they were presumably ephors or *gerontes*. However, these men were also the *philoï* of King Kleombrotos, who had appointed Sphodrias to his command, and the implication of Xenophon's account is that their intention to vote for his acquittal was influenced by the king's wishes. This implication is even clearer regarding the *philoï* of the other king, Agesilaos: once Agesilaos gives his opinion that Sphodrias should not be punished, his acquittal by the king's *philoï* is taken for granted (*Hellenika* 5.4.25, 32–3). In his encomium in honour of Agesilaos, Xenophon gives a fuller account of the range of the king's clients and the social and economic favours through which he put them in his debt (*Agesilaos* 4.5, 8.1, 9.1–2, 11.8).

In the episode of Sphodrias, Sparta's kings, Agesilaos and Kleombrotos, cooperated in mobilizing their *philoï* to secure the acquittal of a guilty client of Kleombrotos. According to Xenophon, the trigger for Agesilaos' willingness to cooperate was a personal request from his son, who was the lover of Sphodrias' son, Kleonymos. The contrast with Athenian courts, governed by rigorous procedures for the selection of jurors designed to ensure the exclusion of private influence, could hardly be greater. The episode provides the clearest example of the exercise of private influence over the affairs of state, but it is by no means alone.⁵⁰

Indeed, the ability of leading Spartiates to influence state affairs was powerfully enhanced through another type of *koinōnia* mentioned above: their ties of guest-friendship (*xeniai*, sing. *xenia*) with their foreign guest-friends (*xenoi*, sing. *xenos*). Such *xeniai* were possible only for wealthy citizens, since their maintenance required substantial amounts of wealth. Their importance in Sparta is illustrated by the fact that almost a quarter of known *xeniai* in the archaic and classical Greek world involved a Spartiate *xenos*, more than for any other *polis*.⁵¹ The relationship entailed an obligation to assist one's foreign *xenos* in several ways, including politically. The Spartan *polis* made particular use of *xeniai* contracted by Spartiates with oligarchic friends in allied *poleis* within the Peloponnesian league: these foreign *xenoi* were expected to influence their *poleis* to support Sparta's control over league affairs. In return, if one of these foreign *xenoi* appealed to Sparta for help, that invoked an obligation on the Spartan *polis* which his Spartiate guest-friend could turn to his own advantage. The appearance in Sparta of a suppliant *xenos* – doubtless often pre-planned with his Spartiate guest-friend – gave the

Spartiate partner a legitimate reason, indeed an obligation, to intervene to try to influence Spartan policy on his behalf: an obligation which would be acknowledged, and even applauded, by other citizens. Unsurprisingly, King Agesilaos, the past-master of manipulating Spartan policy in favour of his private interests, maintained a wide range of personal *xeniai* with foreign *xenoi*, whose collaboration helped him to dominate foreign policy-making for over a generation (Cartledge (1987) 242–73; Hodkinson (2000) 348–52).

To summarize the preceding paragraphs: far from the Spartan state exercising a totalitarian control over the citizen body, Spartiate citizen life operated through a multiplicity of smaller public and private *koinōniai* which, practising varying degrees of self-regulation, provided particular scope for wealthier citizens to deploy their private influence throughout the public domain, right up to the level of state policy.

The results of this private influence can be detected through prosopographical analysis of named office holders and other prominent Spartiates from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC. Despite major gaps in the evidence, there are sufficient indications that a restricted group of wealthy lineages successfully perpetuated their wealth and elite status over several generations (Hodkinson (2000) 409–16). Likewise, a snapshot of the best-documented period of Spartan history, the Peloponnesian War and early-fourth-century Spartan empire, reveals both a considerable number of Spartiate military commanders who hailed from elite social backgrounds and several cases in which both father and son(s) gained major political, diplomatic or military posts (Hodkinson (1983) 261–3; (1993) 157–9). The grip of elite families over high offices of state is also attested for the ultimate honour of all, membership of the Gerousia, limited to a select group of men over age sixty. According to Aristotle (*Politics* V, 1306a18–19), the choice of members was *dynasteutikē*, ‘dynastic’, limited to a narrow range of families.

The stranglehold over leadership positions exercised by the wealthy few is perfectly explicable in terms of the non-totalitarian perspectives advocated above. An all-controlling state would have tended to appoint Sparta’s leaders from a wide cross-section of the citizen body, irrespective of wealth or birth, in order to ensure the priority of state interests. Instead, leaders emerged through a combination of competitive processes and private influence. As Thomas Figueira puts it, the outcomes of personal competition in the public upbringing ‘imposed themselves on the governmental area’, as ‘adolescent competition conditioned the choice of the Hippeis, which conditioned the selection of the Agathoergoi, Hippagretai, and other military offices, which conditioned the choice of the magistrates’ ((2007) 302).

In principle, such personal competition could have produced a spread of leaders from a wide range of families. Perhaps some Spartiate boys from humble backgrounds did achieve leadership positions on their personal merits. However, they have left no trace in the historical record. In the few attested cases in which boys rose to high office from a disadvantaged start in life, close inspection reveals that high birth or personal connections were probably at work. Three of Sparta’s prominent commanders in the Peloponnesian war – Kallikratidas, Gylippos and Lysander – are said to have begun life as *mothakes* (Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.43). Kallikratidas’ personal circumstances are unknown, but Gylippos was the son of an exile condemned to death for treason (Plutarch, *Perikles* 22.2; cf. Thucydides 6.104) and Lysander was brought up in poverty (Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.1). None of them could have passed through the boys’ upbringing without private

sponsorship from a wealthy Spartiate family; and both Gylippos and Lysander were further supported in their rise to prominence by inherited and personal advantages. Gylippos' father Kleandridas had been adviser to the Agiad king Pleistoanax: the two men had been condemned and fled into exile together; but Pleistoanax had been restored to the throne in 426, twelve years before Gylippos' appointment to his command in Sicily in 414. Lysander was from a family of noble lineage which possessed a relationship of *xenia* with a Libyan king; furthermore, while a *hēbōn*, Lysander himself had acquired a personal connection with Sparta's Eurypontid royal house, as *erastēs* of the future King Agesilaos (Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.1; 22.3; *Agesilaos* 2.1; Diodorus 14.13.5–6).

Indeed, participation in the upbringing was far from equal. As in the cases just considered, disadvantaged boys could participate only as sponsored foster-brothers of richer boys; and all boys were mentored throughout by their families, their families' *philoi* and their *erastai*. As in modern educational systems, wealthier boys with well-connected mentors doubtless had far better chances of success. Moreover, 'success' and progressive promotion through the select positions listed by Figueira were not determined by objective performance. There was no equivalent of the US Olympic track-and-field trials, in which (with minor exceptions) the top three competitors on the day automatically qualify for the Olympic team regardless of past history. Instead, apart from the Agathoergoi, promotion to the positions listed above was decided by selection processes conducted by individuals or small groups already in positions of leadership.⁵² In these circumstances it is hardly surprising if each generation of leaders tended to replicate itself when choosing Sparta's future leaders. Moreover, once the sons of wealthier families were embedded in such leadership positions, they also inevitably monopolized access to positions chosen by more popular methods. The 'dynastic' selection of members of the Gerousia was conducted in a publicly competitive process decided by popular acclamation in the citizen assembly (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 26.1–3); but the only elders with realistic chances of success were surely those who had already gained prominence through holding previous leadership positions decided by top-down selection.

In consequence, throughout the classical period Sparta operated effectively as a plutocracy in which Spartiate state and society were dominated by the private interests of the wealthiest families. For much of the time the impact of this plutocracy was masked by the superficially levelling effect of the common citizen way of life and the restrictions imposed on certain means of everyday expenditures. As Thucydides (1.6) commented, 'in general those who had great possessions adopted a lifestyle that was as much as possible like that of the many'. Increasingly, however, rich Spartiates found ways of using their wealth to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens, even in opposition to state policies.

The most notable example is the dominating string of victories in the Olympic four-horse chariot race achieved by wealthy Spartiates from the 440s to the 380s: a phenomenon made possible by the increasing size of their landed estates and involving massive expenditures on horse breeding and on commissioning victory monuments (Hodkinson (2000) 307–33). The kudos of Olympic success gave chariot owners international prestige and advanced some of them into prominent political and military positions. It posed such a threat that King Agesilaos II attempted to discredit the sport as a womanly activity by persuading his sister Kyniska to enter her own chariot team. But to no avail: Kyniska's double Olympic victories in the 390s simply prompted other

wealthy women to enter the sport. Sparta's wealthy families were still expending their private resources on 'feeding teams of ravenous horses' as late as the 360s, when the *polis* itself was starved of public resources (Isokrates, *Archidamos* 6.55).

Around the same time, rich Spartiates also demonstrated their ability to resist attempted restrictions on their use of precious metal currency. Although Sparta itself minted only an iron currency, Spartiate citizens had long been able to possess precious metal currency minted elsewhere or circulating as bullion. In 404, however, the *polis* suddenly prohibited private possession, owing to the influx of unprecedented amounts of foreign currency from Athens' defeated empire. Despite official efforts to ensure compliance, the prohibition was soon flouted, with some Spartiates even boasting of their possession of gold. By the late 360s the ban had totally lapsed: wealthy Spartiates had successfully re-asserted their long-standing rights.⁵³ As we saw earlier, they were equally successful in resisting state attempts at taxation. In 432 King Archidamos II reportedly told the Spartan assembly: 'we neither have public funds nor do we readily contribute from our private resources' (Thucydides 1.80). A century later Aristotle confirmed the Spartiates' systematic underpayment of their *eisphorai* and the consequent emptiness of the public treasury (*Politics* II, 1271b11–15).

The determination of wealthy Spartiates to resist state impositions on their property was matched by their relentless acquisition of additional landholdings from their poorer fellow citizens. Aristotle cited 'Sparta, where properties keep coming into the hands of a few' as his prime example of an aristocratic constitution with oligarchic tendencies in which the notables were particularly grasping (*Politics* VI, 1307a34–6). The impoverishment of poorer citizens that led to the decline in Spartiate numbers and undermined the foundations of Sparta's early-fourth-century empire was a direct result of this private property accumulation. The external power of the Spartan *polis* and, indeed, the future course of Spartan history were fundamentally determined by private influences.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the changed political and social environment of late-fourth- and early-third-century Sparta witnessed erosions of the public domain and its control over the private activities of leading citizens. One indication is the number of prominent Spartiates who absented themselves from Sparta for long periods on private ventures as mercenary commanders (Hodkinson (2000) 434). Another is the transformation of the *syssitia* from compulsory, frugal daily gatherings to voluntary *symposia* marked by luxurious dining and exotic foods and wines (Phylarchos, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 81 F144, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 141f–142b). The public upbringing appears to have continued, but was in serious need of restoration (Ducat (2006) x). By the middle of the third century Sparta had become a sharply stratified *polis* dominated by a mere one hundred wealthy Spartiates, whilst the remainder were without resources or civic rights (Plutarch, *Agis* 5.4: ἄπορος καὶ ἄτιμος ἐν τῇ πόλει).

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out to examine one of the central aspects of the debate about whether Sparta was an exceptional *polis*: namely, whether the Spartan *polis* constituted an exceptional domination of state over society. I posed three key questions: first, whether the state determined the nature of Spartan society and the lives of its citizens to an unusual degree

compared with other *poleis*; second, whether Spartiate citizens had significantly less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal agency in their household affairs; and, finally, to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state.

On the first question, we have seen some respects in which Sparta was unusual, especially the state's imposition of a common citizen life-course, including institutions such as the boys' public upbringing and the daily evening *syssitia*. However, the degree of direct control exercised by the state over these institutions and, in general, over the daily lives of Spartiate citizens was more limited than usually portrayed in modern scholarship. On the second question, we have seen that Spartiate families had considerable scope, often more than citizens in other *poleis*, to exercise private control over their household affairs. On the final question, we have seen that Sparta was not a totalitarian state. On the contrary, the private influence of wealthy citizens conditioned all levels of public activity, from the operation of the small-group *koinōniai* in which Spartiates led their everyday lives through to the highest levels of official policy-making. By the fourth and early third centuries the private activities of wealthy Spartiates had become so free from state restraints that they undermined the very economic basis of the common citizen way of life and, with it, the foundations of Spartan power.

Was the classical Spartan *polis*, then, marked by an exceptionally close *fusion* of state and society, as some scholars have claimed? In the usual meaning of that phrase, the permeation of society by the state, the answer must be 'no'. One might argue, indeed, that over the course of the classical period Sparta came increasingly close to exemplifying the phrase in the opposite sense, the permeation of the state by society. On a long-term perspective, Sparta in the fourth and early third centuries had become a type of *polis* similar in key respects to archaic Sparta of the seventh century: a plutocratic society marked by severe inequalities of wealth and dominated by private interests and acquisitive behaviour of the rich. In between, for a couple of centuries or so following the sixth-century revolution, a partially effective compromise was reached, in which the lifestyles and interests of rich and poor were brought together to some degree through Sparta's distinctive state institutions and citizen way of life. Over time, however, both public institutions and affairs of state became thoroughly penetrated by societal influences stemming from the private resources and activities of wealthy Spartiates.

The stage was thus set for a further swing of the pendulum in the later third century and early second centuries, when a series of kings and personal rulers attempted to rein in those private resources and activities, under the claim of reimposing Sparta's traditional 'Lykourgan' public institutions (Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 38–79). In contrast to the sixth-century compromises, however, the outcome was internecine internal conflict which, in combination with outside interventions by major foreign powers, culminated in the removal of the last vestiges of the classical Spartan state.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Thomas R. Martin's well-regarded *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times* (Yale, 2000) records no fewer than six examples of Spartan exceptional practice within five pages of discussion (pp. 66–70).
- 2 Jones (1967) 34; Forrest (1968) 53–4; Jeffery (1976) 111, 114.

- 3 The phrase was originated by Moses Finley (1968) 144–6 = (1975) 162–4 = (1981) 25–7.
- 4 For a different account, closer to older views, see Thomas Figueira's Chapter 22 in this volume.
- 5 Cartledge (1978); Boring (1979); Millender (2001); Ducat (2006) 119–21.
- 6 See the recent debate between Mogens Herman Hansen and myself: Hansen (2009); Hodkinson (2009); Hansen and Hodkinson (2009).
- 7 E.g. Ducat (1990); (2006); Hodkinson (2000); (2006).
- 8 *Pythian I*, ll. 61–70; fr. 199 Maehler, ap. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 21.4; cf. Will (1956) 59; Finley (1968) 156 = (1975) 173–4 = (1981) 36–7.
- 9 Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.11. On the interpretation of this passage and its application to the Spartan helots, Ducat (1990) 27–8.
- 10 Millender (1999); (2001); (2002a); (2002b).
- 11 Thucydides 1.68–71; 2.93–4; 5.13; 8.96; Westlake (1968); Hodkinson (1983) 263–4; Bradford (1994) 66–78.
- 12 Ollier (1933–43) i.164–8, 206–14; Tigerstedt (1965–78) i.153–6, 233–41.
- 13 Frs. B 6 & 33 Diels-Kranz, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* X, 432d; XI, 463e.
- 14 *Politics* II, 1265b33–6a1; IV, 1294b13–34; cf. II, 1270b7–26; IV, 1293b14–18; Hodkinson (2005) 227–37.
- 15 According to Aeschines, the Athenians' ancestors would, like the Spartan Elder, have excluded his disgraceful opponents, Timarchos and Demosthenes, from public affairs.
- 16 I borrow the phrase 'rule-making authority' from Anderson (2009), esp. 2 n. 2.
- 17 For brief outlines of various versions of this view, Hansen (1998), 84–5; Anderson (2009) 5–6. On the broader historiographical developments underpinning the emergence and establishment of these views, Vlassopoulos (2007) 28–63, esp. 36–8, 45–7, 52–63.
- 18 E.g. Berent (2000) 260, 264, 266, 273, and esp. 261 n. 33, 269; (2004) 367, 371, 382 n. 6. Cf. Cartledge (1996) 182 n. 12 = (2001) 203 n. 11.
- 19 I purposely omit consideration of the physical training of Spartiate girls, the paucity of evidence for which makes it uncertain whether it was state organized: Ducat (2006) 243.
- 20 On the erroneous use of the term *agōgē*, Kennell (1995) 115–16; Ducat (2006) xi–xiv, 69–71.
- 21 On the age grades and the years each covered, see briefly Hodkinson (2007) 55; and in detail, Ducat (2006) 81–112.
- 22 Xenophon, *Polity* 7.3; Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1271a26–37; Dikaiarchos, *Tripolitikos*, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 141c; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.2; discussion in Hodkinson (2000) 190–9.
- 23 Van Wees (2004) 98, 243–4. Strictly speaking, this oath – deduced from a mid-fourth-century inscription (Rhodes and Osborne (2003) no. 88, lines 25–8) – relates only to the battle of Plataia in 479 BC, but it was almost certainly long-standing Spartan practice.
- 24 Ducat (2006) 164–8; Link (2009) 96–101. Note Xenophon's account (*Hellenika* 5.4.20–34) of the relationship between Archidamos and Kleonymos, with its depiction of emotional personal engagement and initiative, family manipulation and the supportive roles of friends (Hodkinson (2007)). I purposely avoid the intractable problem of whether pederasty was institutionalized or legally imposed: as Fisher (1989) 46 n. 37 notes, 'this is not necessary for it to be the norm'. In this publication aimed at a general readership, like Cartledge (1981), I use the general Greek terms for lover and beloved, *erastēs* and *erōmenos*, rather than the local terms *eisphēlas* and *aitas*.
- 25 This is the obvious implication of τοὺς κηδομένους ἑκάστων: 'those who look after each of them' (Xenophon, *Polity* 3.3).
- 26 Phylarchos, *FGrH* 81 F43, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 271e–f; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.43; Hodkinson (1997b) 55–62; Ducat (2006) 151–5.
- 27 On the workings of the *sysitia*, Hodkinson (1983) 251–4; Fisher (1989); Hodkinson (2000) 190–9, 216–18, 356–8.
- 28 Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a15–b6; 1271a26–37; 1272a12–16.

- 29 An *enōmotia* typically contained upwards of thirty men. The number of *syssitia* to an *enōmotia* is uncertain and disputed: see the discussions cited in Hodkinson (2006) 153 n. 110.
- 30 Some *erōmenoi* were doubtless judged unsuitable and ‘blackballed’ in the election process: we know nothing of the fate of such young men.
- 31 Disobedience: Herodotus 9.53–7; Thucydides 5.71–2; spontaneous rank-and-file tactics: Thucydides 5.65; Xenophon, *Hellenika* 4.2.22; cf. 7.4.24–5.
- 32 Plutarch does claim that Spartiates ‘always had a prescribed regimen and employment in public service’ (*Lykourgos* 24.1; 25.3); but he was writing 500 years or so later, reflecting the full development of the Spartan mirage.
- 33 Whether Xenophon’s scenes of daily life in these episodes are strictly historical or largely imaginary, based on his close knowledge of Spartiate life, is irrelevant for our purposes.
- 34 We should not be misled by Plato’s and Aristotle’s negative depictions of these Spartiate behaviours, with their associated implications of illegality, which is explicable by the focus of their work on the best arrangements for the *polis* as a community.
- 35 At *Polity* 14.3 Xenophon himself reveals that the prohibition was overtly flouted.
- 36 For a more detailed version of the following account, Hodkinson (2009) 438–42.
- 37 Patterson (1998) 73–83, esp. 82; Hodkinson (2000) 98–103; (2004) 104–6; Link (2005) 13.
- 38 Harrison (1968–71) i.11–12 and Appendix I; Schaps (1979) 28; *Gortyn Code* 8.20ff. At Gortyn a childless heiress could avoid the obligation only by ceding half her inheritance to the next-of-kin (7.52ff.).
- 39 A similar process of adjudication between rival claimants to this position applied in both Sparta and Athens. In Athens such cases fell under the *dikastērion* of the eponymous *archōn* (Harrison (1968–71) i.10–11); in Sparta under the jurisdiction of the kings (Herodotus 6.57.4). There is no evidence for the commonly held view that Spartan kings would allocate heiresses to landless citizens: Hodkinson (2000) 95.
- 40 Philo, *On Special Laws* 3.4.22, who also states that marriage between non-uterine half-siblings was possible in Athens.
- 41 Xenophon, *Polity* 9.5; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.1–2; Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a39–b6.
- 42 Ehrenberg (1946), quotation from p. 104; Finley (1962); Lazenby (1985) vii; Connor (1984) 3; Kagan (1995) 25, with 76 n. 10, 444–5; Hansen (2009) 398; cf. Cartledge (2001) 84–5; Hodkinson (2012).
- 43 It is important to distinguish here between state measures which limited a Spartiate’s time within the household or intervened in domestic relationships (the public upbringing, daily attendance at the *syssitia*, restrictions on contacts between newly-weds) and the acknowledgement that behaviour within the physical space of the household was exempt from public interference.
- 44 The infamous *krypteia* – in which selected young men lived a temporary period of privation hiding in the remote countryside, among other things targeting helots for murder – was not aimed at supervising other Spartiates and did not provide systematic surveillance even of the helots: Ducat (2006) 281–331.
- 45 Xenophon, *Polity* 15.4; Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 8.1, 9.4; Aelian, *NA* 11.19. The kings and the ephors dined separately from ordinary Spartiates: the ephors in their own mess; the kings in a joint royal mess together with certain of their entourage.
- 46 Fr. 199 Maehler, ap. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 21.4; Hodkinson (2005) 258–63.
- 47 For these cults, see the references listed in Hodkinson (2000) 232 n. 13.
- 48 Cartledge (1981); (1987) 139–59; Hodkinson (2000) 335–68.
- 49 Alkaïos fr. 360, Campbell, ap. Schol. Pindar, *Isthmian* 2.17; Tyrtaïos fr. 1 (West), ap. Aristotle, *Politics* VI, 1306b36–1307a2; cf. van Wees (1999) 3–4; Hodkinson (2000) 2, 76.
- 50 Cf. Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.3.24, where Agesilaos, away on campaign, gets his friends back in Sparta to arrange things on his behalf.

- 51 Hodkinson (2000) 337–8, drawing on the data in Herman (1987) 166–75, 180–4.
- 52 Selection processes for the *hippagretai* and *hippeis*: Xenophon, *Polity* 4.3; *agathoergoi*: Herodotus 1.67; overseas military offices: Hodkinson (1993) 159–61. We have no specific information about how the regular army officers were selected.
- 53 Hodkinson (2000) 170–6; Plutarch, *Lysander* 17.1–6; Xenophon, *Polity* 7.5–6; 14.3.

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PART II

**Origins: From Pre-Classical to
Classical Culture**

CHAPTER 3

An Archaeology of Ancient Sparta with Reference to Laconia and Messenia

William Cavanagh

There are many possible approaches to the archaeology of Sparta. Here there will be an emphasis on urban and rural settlement, sanctuary sites, burials, communications and fortifications; accounts of glyptic and vase painting and Laconian art more generally can be found in Chapters 5 and 6.¹

3.1 Dark Age Laconia and Messenia c.1200–700 BC

A critical period for the formation of the Spartan state, the so-called Dark Age, is shrouded in obscurity. If we depended on archaeology alone we would certainly not know that by the end of this era Sparta was well on the way to establishing its power over most of the southern half of the Peloponnese. The evidence of myth and later tradition provides a shaky foundation for the period's history, but simple extrapolation backwards from our more secure knowledge of the archaic period confirms the fact. Archaeology can, at least, provide the setting for this process.

Mycenaean power in Laconia and Messenia was brought low at the end of Late Helladic IIIB, roughly 1200 BC. The clearest excavated evidence comes from the palace at Pylos (in Western Messenia) and the great mansion at the Menelaion, but we can be confident that other centres in Laconia, such as that at Pellana, were also devastated; the palace at Ayios Vasilios, Laconia, was destroyed a century earlier (Vasilogamvrou 2014).

¹Because of the constraints of space, references have been kept to a minimum, and generally to recent discussions from which readers can then trace back a fuller bibliography.

In this they were part of a much larger catastrophe which engulfed the rest of Greece and the Near East; but the effects seem to have been even more severe in our regions than, for example, in the Argolid or Attike (Eder 1998; Deger-Jalkotzy 2008).

The consequence was a reordering of the region's political geography. To judge from what we know of Pylos, Knossos and Thebes, the Mycenaean palaces controlled kingdoms covering hundreds of square kilometres, much larger than the territories of most of the city-states which eventually succeeded them (though not Sparta's); the Mycenaean kings administered their realms through a network of second- and third-order towns. The fall of the palaces, the decline of the towns and the great drop in population left not only a power vacuum, but also areas where much of the land was unoccupied.

After a twilight period in the twelfth century, a new order slowly emerged in the eleventh to tenth centuries BC. Conventionally the arrival of the West Greek, proto-Geometric pottery style has been seen as a sign of the invasion of Laconia by Dorian tribes (Cartledge (2002) 65–87; Eder 1998; for more sceptical views Nafissi (2009) 118–19; Luraghi (2008) 46–67). Archaeology, with its own limitations, suggests rather a period of anarchy and disruption, by the end of which (say 800 BC) a network of more settled communities was established in Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Achaia, Acarnania and the Ionian islands (Coulson 1985; 1986). These used similar types of vase decorated in similar ways. The vases are found at sacred sites for serving food and drink, in settlement sites and accompanying burials where they evidently symbolized the feasting and celebrations the deceased enjoyed in life. The cultural community here is one of shared festivities, religious celebrations, perhaps weddings, funerals and other rites of passage.

Our clearest picture of village life comes from the excavations at Nichoria in Messenia, an open village of simple houses: rough stone foundations, clay walls, and posts supporting a thatched roof (McDonald et al. 1983, 9–60). Similar houses are found over much of mainland Greece, though in Sparta we can point only to a couple of postholes (Steinhauer (1972) 242–3). The largest at Nichoria (122 m²) was probably the home of the village leader (Figure 3.1). Once established, this community was settled and lasted some 300 years into the eighth century BC.

In Laconia by the tenth century BC the seeds of what was to come were already sown; not only were Sparta and Amyklai settled, but also centres which were to become important perioikic cities (Geronthrai, Pellana, Kardamyle, Kyparissia (Boza) and possibly Gytheion) as well as rural sites such as Anthochori, Apidea, Asteri-Karaousi, Daimonia, Peristeria and Pavlopetri. Some (though not, for example, Geronthrai) had been Mycenaean towns, but others have a gap in the pottery sequence taken to mean the sites had been deserted for a century or two. Recent excavations, however, have begun to turn up the critical 'missing link', sub-Mycenaean pottery, as at Sparta (*Archaiologikon Deltion* 52 (1997) 1679), Epidauros Limera, Pellana, perhaps Amyklai and Peristeria (Themis (2007) 460–1; Demakopoulou 2009). Moreover, earlier traditions continued (Mycenaean Poseidon continued to be worshipped and a memory of the office of 'wanax', the Mycenaean king, persisted). More contentiously, the vocabulary which was core to the archaic Spartan constitution developed from a terminology which is found in Linear B (basileus, damos and gerousia, [king, people and council of elders]). Symbolic of such distorted memories is the cult at Amyklai: the sanctity of the site was remembered, but the deity changed sex from a Bronze Age Potnia to Apollo/Hyakinthos (Eder (1998) 98).

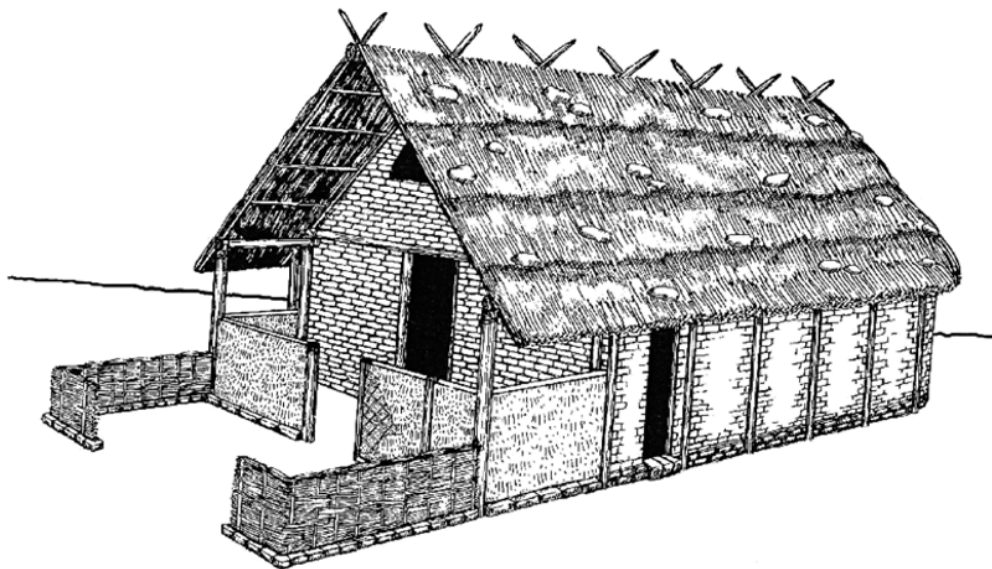


Figure 3.1 Reconstruction of unit TV-1 at Nichoria. (From McDonald et al. 1983, 37 fig. 2–3).
Source: Author.

Sparta in the tenth to ninth centuries BC may have looked something like Nichoria, but note first the wide distribution of the finds and second the indications that cult was already carried out at major sanctuaries, marking Sparta's proto-urban status. The distribution is recognized either through clusters of single graves, in pits or cists, possibly each serving a kin group, or deposits of pottery, indicating settlement. They are known from all over Sparta itself (Zavvou and Themis (2009) 112 fig. 11.10) and from Amyklai (Zavvou 1996). Offerings are not very common, but some of the graves include drinking vessels (skyphoi, oinochoai), gold beads and pins with bronze globes. Burials are also reported from Laconia more widely: a warrior grave, with an iron weapon, found near Gytheion (Hope Simpson and Waterhouse (1961) 115–17), the whole vases from Kardamyle (probably from a grave), and a pithos (storage jar) burial from Pellana (Spyropoulos 2002.) The single graves mark a new beginning, as up to the very end of the Mycenaean Age collective tombs were the norm. Similar graves with similar finds are known from the NE Peloponnese, particularly from the Argolid. Interestingly, in Messenia various forms of collective tomb prevailed, in this respect at least, serving to distinguish the customs in the two regions, though they both shared a tradition of pithos burial, perhaps also to be linked with the Argolid.

Vases dating from c.950 BC onwards have been found at sanctuaries: of Apollo and Hyakinthos at Amyklai, at Artemis Orthia and the 'Heroön', some 500m to the north, both by the Eurotas at Sparta and at Athena Chalkioikos on its acropolis (Coulson 1985). Whilst we must beware of extrapolating back to early times the conditions of a later age, the roots of that cycle of festivals, which were fundamental to the Spartan way of life, evidently were built on these foundations. In the NE Peloponnese, an early phase of rural sanctuaries serving independent villages is seen to have been transformed only in the eighth century when they were taken over by the emergent powers of Argos or

Corinth. Sparta was different, with a link between sanctuary and village encompassed by a broader territory already united, if we can trust tradition, under the dual kingship.

Similar early pottery has been found at the cult site at Sela ('the Saddle'; Pikoulas (1986) 444) high on Taygetos and at Volimnos, the sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis on the border between Laconia and Messenia. These cult sites confirm the early Spartan interest over the mountain to the west, also borne out by the close ceramic links between Sparta and Nichoria.

As we move towards the end of the eighth century BC there is that trend of increasing lavishness in cult offerings that has been registered in contemporary sanctuaries elsewhere in Greece. Bronze figurines, dress pins, fibulae (brooches) and jewellery are among those that survive intact – larger, more prestigious offerings included a variety of bronze vessels, notably monumental tripod cauldrons. Large pottery kraters and out-size jugs were specially made (Coldstream (2008) 216) to serve the feasts, perhaps they accompanied gifts of wine contributed by the richer aristocrats of the time. Sanctuary sites are founded or revived, notably a number in the countryside: Helen and Menelaos at the Menelaion, Zeus at Tzakona, Apollo at Phoiniki, shrines at Pellana and Kokkinia. It is quite probable that the sacred cult images such as the massive statue of Apollo at Amyklai (roughly 15m high), sheathed in metal in the geometric *sphyrrelaton* (hammered) technique, or the mythical wooden image of Orthia, held by her priestess at the trial by whipping, were made at this time. Fragments of slightly later beaten bronze statues from Olympia have been ascribed to a Laconian workshop (Kyrieleis 2008). Early temples at Artemis Orthia and Pellana (Spyropoulos (2002) 24–5) are also part of this same fashion for investment in the sacred; if anything Sparta may have been rather late in building temples to house its cult images. On the other hand, Spartan participation in the early Olympic games is borne out by material offerings, figurines and bronzes, as well as by the early victor lists (Hodkinson 1999; Christesen, this volume, Chapter 21).

The Spartan impact on Messenia is recognizable through the style of pottery, through metal finds, notably a series of bronze horse figurines, and a number of well-appointed pithos burials including some warriors (at Sparta three: Raftopoulou 1995; Steinhauer (1972) 244–5 and fig. 1; at Nichoria, and Pera Kalamitsi in eastern Messenia, Pyla and Viglitsa in the west: Coldstream (2003) 162). The pottery, the pithos burials, the warrior graves and some of the grave offerings find contemporary parallels at, and might reflect influence from, Argos (Coldstream (2003) 145–9; such burials are also widespread in Achaia, *ibid.* 377), but more importantly the finds suggest a common culture shared by the people of Laconia and Messenia.

Given the ancient tradition that the first Messenian war happened before 700 BC, it has been suggested by modern scholars that the abandonment of sites such as Nichoria in the middle of the eighth century was the result of aggression (Morgan (1990) 100). As in much of western Greece (Achaia, Elis, Triphyllia), and in contrast to much of the rest, no single city-state emerged to dominate any extensive part of Messenia and this may have helped Sparta to subjugate the region – unless the as yet only sketchily known Geometric site at Mavromati below Mt Ithome was such an embryonic city, known to Tyrtaios (and Homer) as Messene and crushed untimely by the Spartans (Luraghi (2008) 70–5, 112–13). Though there are sceptics, archaeology gives some support to the tradition of eighth century BC refugees from Asine in the Argolid invited by the Spartans to found the town in Messenia, to which they gave the same name. The earliest Spartan