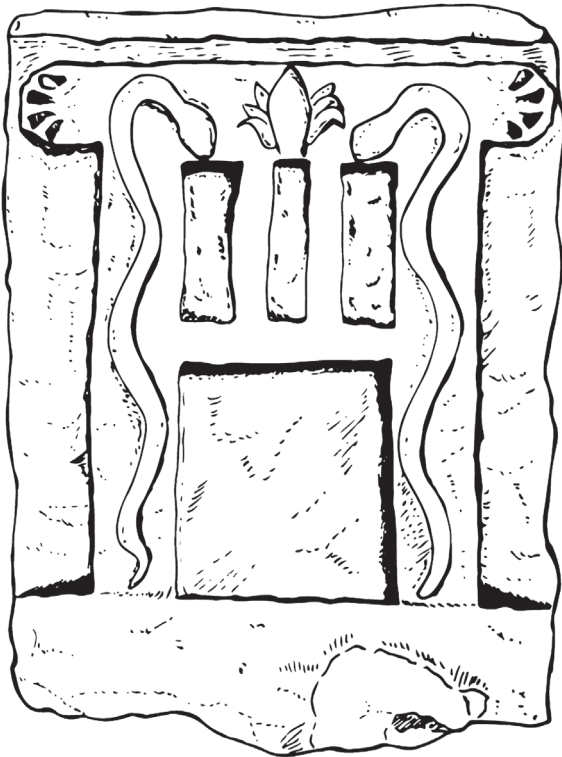




The
**HISTORICAL
REVIEW
OF SPARTA**



The

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF SPARTA

edited by
Giorgio Piras and Rita Sassu



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UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE

2024

The Historical Review of Sparta

2024

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List of abbreviations

APF = J.K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families 600-300 B.C.*, Oxford 1971.

Dilts = M.R. Dilts, *Scholia in Aeschinem*, Stuttgartiae 1992.

Dindorf = G. Dindorf, *Aristides*, III, Lipsiae 1829.

FGrHist = F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin-Leiden 1923-1958.

FHG = K.W.L. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, II-III, Parisiis 1848.

Gigon = O. Gigon, *Aristotelis Opera*, III. *Librorum Deperditorum Fragmenta*, Berolini 1987.

ICr = M. Guarducci, *Inscriptiones Creticae*, III, Roma 1942.

ID = F. Dürrbach, P. Roussel, M. Launey, A. Plassart, J. Coupry, *Inscriptions de Délos*, Paris 1926-.

IG I³ = D.M. Lewis, L.H. Jeffery, E. Erxleben, K. Hallof, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, I. *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores*. Editio tertia, Berolini 1981-1998.

IG II² = J. Kirchner, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, II-III. *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores*. Editio altera, Berolini 1913-1940.

IG V 1 = W. Kolbe, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, V, 1. *Inscriptiones Laconiae, Messeniae, Arcadiae*. Fasciculus prior, *Inscriptiones Laconiae et Messeniae*, Berolini 1913.

LGPN II = M.J. Osborne, S.G. Byrne, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, II. *Attica*, Oxford 1994.

LGPN III.A = P.M. Fraser, E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, IIIA. *The Peloponnese, Western Greece, Sicily and Magna Graecia*, Oxford 1997.

LSJ⁹ = H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996 (9th edition with a revised supplement by P.G.W. Glare and A.A. Thompson).

M-W = R. Merkelbach, M.L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica*, Oxonii 1967.

PA = I. Kirchner, *Prosopographia Attica*, Berolini 1901-1903.

Page, Davies = D.L. Page, M. Davies, *Poetarum melicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, I. Alcman, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Oxonii 1991.

PL = P. Poralla, A.S. Bradford, *A Prosopography of Lacedaemonians from the Earliest Times to the Death of Alexander the Great (X-323 B.C.)*. Second edition, Chicago 1985.

PLAA = A.S. Bradford, *A Prosopography of Lacedaemonians from the Death of Alexander the Great, 323 B.C., to the Sack of Sparta by Alaric, A.D. 396*, München 1977.

RE = A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, *Realencyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1839-.

Rose = V. Rose, *Aristoteles pseudepigraphus*, Lipsiae 1863.

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Lipsiae 1923-.

SGDI III = H. Collitz, *Sammlung der Griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften*, III, 2. *Die Inschriften von Lakonien, Tarent, Herakleia am Siris, Messenien, Thera und Melos, Sicilien und Abu-Simbel, die Ionischen Inschriften*, Göttingen 1905.

Suda = A. Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, 1-5, Lipsiae 1928-1938.

TrGF I = B. Snell, *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta*, I. *Didascaliae tragicae, catalogi tragicorum et tragoediarum, testimonia et fragmenta tragicorum minorum*, Göttingen 1971.

TrGF IV = S.L. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, IV. *Sophocles*, Göttingen 1999.

West = M.L. West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*, 2. *Callinus, Mimnermus, Semonides, Solon, Tyrtaeus. Minora adespota*, Oxonii 1972.

Introduction

Anastasia Kanellopoulou, Giorgio Piras, Rita Sassu

The present volume represents the third issue of “The Historical Review of Sparta”, an ambitious editorial project initiated in 2021 by Sapienza University of Rome together with the Institute of Sparta, with the final goal of both contributing to the scientific knowledge of ancient Sparta, whose extraordinary legacy still inspires modern cultural models, and raising the international profile of the coeval city and promoting its cultural heritage.

After the first edition devoted to Sparta’s international relations in antiquity and the second one regarding the battle of Sellasia and Hellenistic Sparta, this book deals with Spartan religion, presenting an array of new research from several specialist historians, classicists, archaeologists and various experts. It indeed includes a selection of speeches delivered on the occasion of the International Conference “Ancient Spartan Religion: Cults, Rites, Sanctuaries and their Socio-Economic, Political and Military Implications”, held in Rome, at the headquarters of Sapienza and Unitelma Sapienza University of Rome, on the 20th and 21st October 2023.

The Conference, jointly organised by the Institute of Sparta, the Department of Classics of Sapienza and the Department of Law and Digital Society of Unitelma Sapienza University of Rome, was dedicated to the study of the ancient religion of Sparta, with the aim of exploring the interconnections between the sacred sphere and the educational, societal, economic and political fields.

The Spartan gods, sanctuaries and rituals were in-depth investigated by many scholars who gathered together from different nations (Greece, Italy, China, United States of America) to reflect on and explore the culture, ethics and history of the Lacedaemonian *polis*.

The scientific debate resulted into a striking and, under many respects, novel scenario on ancient Greek polytheism and the ways Spartans expressed their faith and engaged in religious activities that met their societal needs and reflected their mentality as well as political aspirations.

Many of the contributions converged on shared positions, while others radically diverged in their interpretations and conclusions, thus giving rise to a stimulating discussion and, at the same time, acting as a tangible sign of the degree of complexity entailed in any research on ancient Sparta. As known, current scholarship on Sparta has not reached a unanimous consensus on many aspects and this Journal, with its inclusive approach aimed at attracting authors with different backgrounds and specialisations, intends to give space to contrasting, sometimes disagreeing, voices, with the view of reconstructing Spartan unique way of living and, in this case, of experiencing religion.

Therefore, the pages that follow deal with different yet interrelated aspects of ancient Spartan religion: from the relation between kingdom and gods to the study of strategic and propagandistic implications of divine worship, from the overview of artisanal and artistic productions connected to sanctuaries to the exam of religious economy, from the analysis of some of the most relevant sacred areas of the *polis* to the assessment of religion's impact over the management of the surrounding territory.

The multifaceted and difficult dialogue between religion and power is the core subject of several papers. Two of them provide an original insight into Spartan dual divine-right kingship. By focusing on the role of religion on decision-making processes, they illustrate how Spartan kings adeptly manipulated shrines and oracular consultations to pursue their political objectives (A. Grammenos, *Religion and Foreign Policy in Ancient Sparta: Metaphysics, Cults, and the National Interest*), but, on the other side, cause of diarchy itself (and the connected rivalry between the two royal houses), both the regents were more vulnerable than single monarchs elsewhere in Greece, till the point they could be easily deposed upon initiative and pressure of other civic bodies such as the ephors and the council of the elders (P. Rahe, *Sacral Kingship at Lacedaemon*).

Another paper offers an inedited perspective on Lacedaemonian politics, too. By underling Spartan tendency to isolate themselves and prioritise domestic affairs over international ones, the *vexata quaestio*

of Spartans' attitude towards the gods as inferable from Thucydides' work – alias whether they were extremely pious or just hypocrites – is re-examined under new lenses (J. Li, *The Lacedaemonian Isolationism: Rethinking Sparta and Religion in Thucydides*).

Spartan attitude towards religion is also addressed from a different standpoint. In fact, the alleged renowned Spartan piety is questioned by a detailed and documented reconstruction of the different occasions when Spartans perpetrated homicides of suppliants and heralds, notwithstanding the religious bans on this regard (D.D. Phillips, *Homicide, Sanctuary, and Expiation in Sparta*).

Several articles revolve around sanctuaries and the related findings. The sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos* and *Poliouchos* on the Acropolis is investigated on the basis of archaeological evidence, literary sources and epigraphic documentation, in the attempt of reconstructing its topographical and architectural organisation, the pantheon of gods venerated in conjunction to the polyadic deity as well as the nature and types of worshippers (R. Sassu, *The Acropolis of Sparta: the Cult Athena and Other Gods*).

As far as objects discovered in sacred spaces are concerned, the meticulous study and classification of artworks and daily usage objects turn out to be a chance to reflect on manufacturing techniques and stylistic aspects of Laconian art. The terracotta large statues from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* and the *Amyklaion* (G. Vannucci, *The Terracotta Large Figures from the Spartan Sanctuaries*) and the bronzes vessels from the shrines of Athena *Poliouchos*, of Artemis *Orthia*, the *Menelaion* and *Amyklaion* are carefully examined (C. Tarditi, *Wealth and Religiosity in Sparta: Production, Dedication and Diffusion of Laconic Bronze Vessels during the 6th cent. BC*), introducing a reflection on religion and wealth. Exactly the relation between cult and economy stands as the main topic of a further contribution dealing with Spartan sanctuaries, in this case observed in their role as productive centres and, at the same time, as places where expensive dedications were offered (S. Golino, *Cult and Economy in Ancient Sparta*).

Finally, some additional papers give us a glimpse into Roman Sparta, once again stressing the relation between religion and power, although in a different historical scenario. The political organization of the *Eleutherolakones*, recognized by Emperor Augustus, largely relied in the related network of sanctuaries that continued to operate and even flourished in the Imperial age. By acting as political spaces where

the cult of Emperors melted with the worship of ancient traditional gods, such sanctuaries provided the proper stage to manage political decisions (S. Giannopoulos, *Ancient Gods and Sanctuaries of the League of the Lacedaemonians/Eleutherolakones*).

The changes occurred during the late Roman period in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia are accurately illustrated and critically re-examined in another article, which focuses on the unique ring-shaped building built in the 3rd cent. AD. The rites herein performed are interpreted as a sign of re-enactment and manipulation of Archaic rituals, in the attempt of revitalising Spartan identity within the new geo-political framework (P. Storchi, *The sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta: the Difficult Architectural Interaction between Ritual and Spectacle, between Civilization and "Barbarism"*).

The several contributions collected in this volume contribute to deepen modern knowledge of ancient Sparta, by conveying its everlasting values to a wide audience. It is no accident that the Journal is published both in printed version and in an open access electronic form, freely downloadable by specialists, but also by anyone who wishes to learn more about the Lacedaemonian city.

The publication of the volumes is a piece of the wider mosaics of activities that Sapienza and Unitelma Sapienza University of Rome and the Institute of Sparta are carrying out to promote studies on Sparta. Hitherto, joint activities included four international conferences (the next two planned for 2025, on Spartan education, and 2026, on resonance of Sparta in today's world), two editions of an international Summer School (respectively dedicated to Spartan art and history and to sport and athletics in ancient Greece and Sparta), publications of books, workshops and exchanges. Many other project will be implemented in the next future.

We express our gratefulness to all the institutions and Universities, in particular the University of the Peloponnese, involved in this project, the Archaeological Museum of Sparta, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lakonia, the professors and the young researchers who actively participated in the organisation of the conferences and educational projects, the authors of the contributions, and the Sapienza University Publishing House, for their priceless work and constant support. Without their help, the publication of this volume and, above all, the implementation of the many scientific, cultural and educational activities in and on Sparta would have been impossible.



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— 1 —

The Acropolis of Sparta: the Cult of Athena and Other Gods

*Rita Sassu**

Keywords: Acropolis, sacred system, Athena, Sparta, polytheism.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: ακρόπολη, ιερό σύστημα, Αθηνά, Σπάρτη, πολυθεϊσμός.

Abstract

Sparta's sacred system closely reflects the social identity of the urban community, and, therefore, appears strongly marked by a peculiar local connotation, largely connected to the education of the youth and to the civic and military life of the *polis*. In order to contribute to the discussion on ancient Greek religion, the paper investigates the sanctuary of the Acropolis of Sparta on the basis of the available archaeological and literary evidence. Athena, owner of the sacred space, is here honoured mainly as the polyadic deity of the city, but also as the protector of artisans, metalworkers, possibly women and children, and the patron goddess of military affairs as well as public economy. Besides Athena, the *temenos* hosts additional cults of various kinds: gods, semi-gods, heroes and *pathemata* that meet the several needs and aspirations of the Spartan society. The paper illustrates the differences in the spheres of actions of venerated divine entities, by paying attention to the related groups of worshippers, consecrated spaces, offerings and rites.

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Περίληψη

Το ιερό σύστημα της Σπάρτης αντανακλά στενά την κοινωνική ταυτότητα της αστικής κοινότητας και, ως εκ τούτου, εμφανίζεται έντονα σημαδεμένο από μια ιδιότυπη τοπική χροιά, που συνδέεται σε μεγάλο βαθμό με την εκπαίδευση της νεολαίας και με την πολιτική και στρατιωτική ζωή της πόλης. Προκειμένου να συμβάλει στη συζήτηση για τον ελληνικό πολυθεϊσμό, η εργασία διερευνά το ιερό της Ακρόπολης της Σπάρτης βάσει των διαθέσιμων αρχαιολογικών και λογοτεχνικών μαρτυριών. Η Αθηνά, ιδιοκτήτρια του ιερού χώρου, τιμάται εδώ κυρίως ως η πολυαδική θεότητα της πόλης, αλλά και ως προστάτιδα των τεχνιτών, των μεταλλουργών, ενδεχομένως των γυναικών και των παιδιών, και ως προστάτιδα θεά των στρατιωτικών υποθέσεων καθώς και της δημόσιας οικονομίας. Εκτός από την Αθηνά, ο τέμενος φιλοξενεί επιπλέον λατρείες διαφόρων ειδών: Θεούς, ημίθεους, ήρωες και πατέρες που ανταποκρίνονται στις διάφορες ανάγκες και επιδιώξεις της σπαρτιατικής κοινωνίας. Η εργασία καταδεικνύει τις διαφορές στις σφαίρες δράσης των λατρευόμενων θεϊκών οντοτήτων, δίνοντας προσοχή στις σχετικές ομάδες πιστών, στους αφιερωμένους χώρους, στις προσφορές και στις τελετές.

The Spartan pantheon and the cult of Athena

Because of its heterogeneous and multifaceted, yet unitary, nature, the pantheon of gods worshipped in Sparta acts as a privileged case study to explore and appreciate a complex, and at the same time internally coherent, sacred system – although, until now, the Lacedaemonian religious cosmos has received lesser attention in scholarship than that of extensively investigated *poleis* such as Athens¹.

From a religious standpoint, Sparta offers an exhaustive picture of all types of superhuman agents honoured in ancient Greece. Besides the central position held by canonical Olympic gods (notably Zeus, Athena, Apollo and Artemis, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Demeter and Kore, Poseidon, Hestia, Hermes, Enyalios/Ares²), further deities honoured in

¹ Parker 1989; Richer 2012; Sassu 2022.

² The differentiation between Enylaios and Ares (which is sometimes connoted by the epithet *Enylaios*) dates back to the post-Homeric period (Davidson 1983, pp. 192-198).

Sparta are the Dioscuri³, Asclepius, Tyche, Ge, Eileithyia, the Charites, the Nymphs, the Muses and the Moirai⁴.

In addition to the traditional gods, semi-divine beings, including Heracles and *pathemata*⁵, are also recipients of ritual actions. Moreover, Sparta is also renowned for the cult paid to a number of heroic cults connected to the mythological or historical past of the city⁶.

So, Sparta was home to a plethora of divine beings, who owned their sacred precincts inside the urban space, or in a peri-urban location aimed at defining its boundaries, or even outside its borders, in an extra-urban setting, to express the *polis*' domination over the surrounding territory.

Some *temene* showed an articulated architectural arrangement and a certain level of monumentalization, while others were simple cult areas, deprived of outstanding buildings and mainly focused on celebrations and ritual practices that did not necessarily entail the erection of permanent constructions.

Among the sanctuaries situated inside the city, the *Athenaion* located on the Acropolis played a key-role. The sanctuary was consecrated to the polyadic goddess Athena, who was in charge, first of all, of the protection of the Spartan settlement and its social community as a whole, but also of a wide range of specific groups, such as warriors, civic officers, manual workers, women, young people.

Before focusing our attention on the Acropolis, it is worth noting that the cult of Athena was a particularly widespread phenomenon in ancient Sparta⁷, where the goddess was worshipped in a dozen sanctuaries under many epithets reflecting her several roles. She was referred to as *Skylania* or *Syllania* (an epithet maybe referring to her military role or to her role as guardian and protector urban community)⁸

³ Sanders 1992; Sanders 1993; Shapiro 2002, pp. 99-107; Lippolis 2009, pp. 117-159.

⁴ Nafissi 2016.

⁵ Shapiro 1993; Richer 1999, pp. 91-93; Richer 2012, pp. 48-51; Sassu 2022, p. 51.

⁶ Pavlides 2023; Golino 2022.

⁷ Villing 2009, pp. 81-89.

⁸ The text mentioning the epicleris, doubtfully dated to the age of Lycurgus, is transmitted by Plutarch (Plu. *Lyc.* 6.2 and 8). The epithet is also handed down in a gloss by Hesychius: Σκυλλανίς: ἡ πολεμική, ἴσως ἀπὸ τοῦ σκυλεύειν (*Skillanis*, the warrior goddess, maybe deriving from *skyleuein*/despoil a defeated enemy) that connects the meaning to the military field. Considered the presence of the term in the Great Rhetra, it could concern the formation and preservation of the structure of the *polis* (Villing 2009, p. 87). Alternatively, the epithet is connected to the Dorian

in an ancient unidentified ancestral sanctuary of the *polis* allegedly founded by Lycurgus; *Agoraia*⁹ ("patron goddess of the agora") and *Xenia* ("protector of the foreigners") inside the agora¹⁰; *Axiopoinos* ("of deserved revenge") next to the *dromos*¹¹; *Amboulia* ("counsellor") in a colonnaded square marketplace¹²; *Poliouchos* ("patroness of the city"), *Chalkioikos* ("of the bronze house"), *Ergane* ("patron of the artisans")¹³, and *Ophthalmitis* ("of the eye")¹⁴ on the Acropolis; *Keleuthea* ("lady of the road") near the government chamber of the *Bidiaioi*¹⁵; *Pareia* (perhaps "whose image is of Parian marble") on the way towards Arcadia¹⁶; *Alea* on the way to Therapne, near a bridge over the Eurotas¹⁷.

The sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis of Sparta: functions and rites

The main shrine of Athena in Sparta, as just mentioned, was located on the Acropolis, namely the Palaiokastro hill¹⁸ (fig. 1).

Besides addressing the religious, social and identitarian needs of the Spartan community, the sacred area answered a plurality of fundamental functions linked to the social, politic, economic and military life of the *polis* in different ways.

Athena held a considerable importance in Sparta, and noticeably on the citadel, where she was first of all worshipped as protector of

tribe of the Hylleis (Ziehen 1929, col. 1489). See also Manfredini, Piccirilli 1980, p. 234, for an overview of the different meanings attributed to the epithet.

⁹ Paus. 3.11.9.

¹⁰ Paus. 3.11.11.

¹¹ Paus. 3.15.6.

¹² Paus. 3.13.6.

¹³ Paus. 3.17.4.

¹⁴ Paus. 3.18.2.

¹⁵ Paus. 3.12.4. According to the travel writer, Odysseus established three sanctuaries of Athena *Keleutha* in Sparta.

¹⁶ Paus. 3.20.8. Pausanias notices a statue of Athena *Pareia* in the open air on the road towards Arcadia (see also Pritchett 1965, pp. 4-6). For other interpretations and emendations of the epithet (*Areia*, *Patrias* etc.) see O. Höfer in Roscher 1902.

¹⁷ X. *HG* 6.5.27; Paus. 3.19.7.

¹⁸ Dickins 1906, pp. 431-439; Dickins 1907, pp. 137-154; Dickins 1908, pp. 142-146; Woodward 1925, pp. 253-276; Woodward, Hobling 1925, pp. 240-252; Woodward 1927, pp. 37-48; Woodward 1928, pp. 75-107; Lamb 1927, pp. 82-95; Woodward 1930, pp. 241-254; Piccirilli 1984, pp. 3-19; Spallino 2016, pp. 695-710; Gagliano 2017, pp. 81-114; Sassu 2022, pp. 56-72.



Fig.1. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, actual remains (photo by the Author).

the *polis*. In addition to the polyadic significance associated to her cult, an extended set of fields of competence were included in her domain, ranging from the military sector to the economic realm, from the rites of passage of young girls and boys who were about to enter adulthood to the tutelage of productive activities, craftsmen and metalworkers, from the protection of warriors, women and children to the definition and periodical corroboration of social identity and political institutions of Sparta, starting with kingship and ephorate.

The goddess of the Acropolis was in fact invoked through a series of epicleses, among which *Poliouchos*, guardian of the city¹⁹, and *Chalkioikos*, stand out. The latter epiclesis has been variously interpreted²⁰: usually referred to the bronze panels affixed to the interior walls of the temple, it is alternatively ascribed to her “stability” or to the supposed foundation of the shrine by refugees coming from the Chalcidian peninsula²¹.

¹⁹ Christesen 2019, p. 9. In addition to literary sources (Paus. 3.17.2), the epithet *Poliouchos* is also attested at epigraphic level (cf. the well-known stele of Damonon, IG V 1, 213).

²⁰ Paus. 3.17.2. The Athena *Chalkioikos* is also mentioned in two fragments by Alcman (fr. 43 Page, Davies = 43 Calame e fr. 87 (c) Page, Davies = 112 Calame; see also Calame 1983, pp. 506-508) and in Thucydides (Th. 1.134).

²¹ Suda, s.v. *Chalkioikos*, explains as follows: «The Athena of Sparta; either because she has a bronze house; or because of her stability; or because she was founded by Chalcidian exiles from Euboea». The first writer to use this epithet is Thucydides (Th. 1.134). In the inscription of Damonon, on the other hand, which must be dated before 430 BC, the Athena of the Acropolis is referred to as *Poliouchos*.

Actually, it is possible that the allusion to the *chalkia* intrinsic in the epithet is not circumscribed to these factors but is connected to the role of Athena as patron of those dealing with metals, from workers engaged in metalworking to warriors using weapons. Furthermore, it would stress the goddess' function as patron of *ta chalkia*, a term originally indicating metals (not solely bronzes) marked by an economic connotation and possibly hoarded inside the sanctuary in order to compose a State-Treasure. In other words, she could be regarded as the "goddess of the State-Treasure", in charge of safeguarding the collective assets.

In addition to Athena, the citadel and its slopes hosted a wide and composite range of divine and semi-divine beings with complementary spheres of action, including Zeus, the Muses, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Artemis, the Dioscuri, Heracles, Tyndareus, Thanatos and Hypnos, as we shall observe.

The sanctuary served many functions. First, it was a famous place of asylum. Lycurgus himself took refuge in the precinct after having caused the rage of the rich, due to the introduction of his reforms²², and Leonidas did likewise²³. Again, Pausanias the regent, accused of alleged correspondence with the king of Persia²⁴, sought refuge inside the sanctuary as a suppliant around 470 BC and was walled up there, before being dragged out just before death²⁵. Later on, also Agesilaos claimed asylum in the *Athenaion*, albeit to no avail.

Honorary acts, starting from *proxenia* decrees, were displayed in the sanctuary, as testified, for instance, by inscription containing a *proxenia* decree for Carneades of Cyrene²⁶.

Military victories were exhibited and exalted in the sacred precinct. Lysander celebrated the victory over the Athenians in the Peloponnesian war through the dedication of eagles surmounted by

²² Plu. *Lyc.* 11.1-2; Plu. *Moralia* 227a.

²³ Plu. *Agis* 11.8.

²⁴ Th. 1.128-129 and 132-133.

²⁵ Later, the figure of King Pausanias was rehabilitated as the avenger of his uncle Leonidas. Consequently, his remains were moved to the spot where he had died and two bronze statues were erected in his honor in the sanctuary, in deference to the instructions of the Delphic oracle (Powell 2018, p. 285).

²⁶ *IG* V 1, 5, l. 15 ([...] εἰς τ[ὸ] / [ἰ]ερὸν τᾶς Ἀθάνας τᾶς Χαλκιοίκου [...]). Cf. Lo Monaco 2009, pp. 673-674.

Nikai in the *stoa*, and two statues of king Pausanias²⁷, one of the main actors of the victory of Plateia (479 BC), were erected beside the altar of Athena upon order of the oracle of Delphi²⁸.

In addition to military achievements, also agonistic victories were publicly flaunted in the *temenos*, as documented, for instance, by the renowned Damonon stele²⁹. The latter records the victories that the Spartan Damonon and his son Enymakratidas achieved in various equestrian contests and footraces of various lengths in the 5th cent. BC.

The sanctuary staged periodical celebrations to worship Athena and to strengthen the social ties among their participants through communal rites. Epigraphic documentation and ancient authors mention at least two (possibly three) festivals aimed to honour the goddess in her role of military deity and patron of the youth.

It is probable that some of the competitions won by the above-mentioned Damonon were actually held in the sanctuary of the Acropolis of Sparta itself, if the interpretation of the *Athanaia* as local festivals envisaging a combination of agons and rituals (along the lines of the Panathenaic celebrations taking place in Athens) is correct.

Exactly the *Athanaia* are mentioned by another inscribed marble stele³⁰ discovered south of the Acropolis, near the so-called tomb of Leonidas. The commemorative monument, dedicated by the athlete Aiglatas, mentions a series of victories obtained in long footraces in Sparta, including the *Athanaia*.

The festivals of the *Promacheia* are documented by Sosibios, who states that: «In this festival the boys from the countryside [i.e. boys who were *perioikoi*] are crowned with wreaths of reeds or with a tiara, but the boys from the *agoge* [i.e., who are participating in the system of education for Spartan youths] follow without wreaths»³¹. The rites, celebrating Athena in her warrior aspect, possibly addressed the male young population and maybe were framed in the context of rites of passage.

The connection between the sacred hill of Athena and the military field is further testified by the narration, handed down by Polybios,

²⁷ Paus. 3.17.4.

²⁸ Paus. 3.17.7; Th. 1.134.4.

²⁹ Christesen 2019, p. 1; Kyle 2014, p. 183.

³⁰ IG V 777. See Nenci 2018.

³¹ Sosibios *FGrHist* 595 F 4, quoted in Ath. 674 A-B.

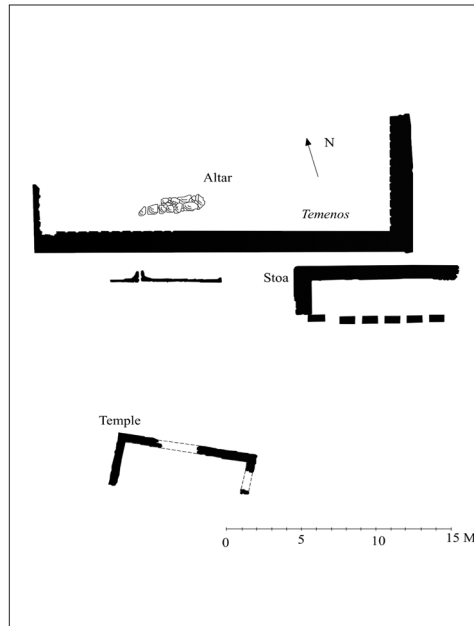


Fig. 2. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, general plan (graphic elaboration by G. Vannucci, based on the plans available in Spallino 2016 and Woodward 1927).

about the murder of the ephors occurred in 220 BC while they were engaged in performing a “traditional sacrifice” on the altar in front of the Bronze House³². The tale of the slaughter indirectly indicates the existence of a festival – maybe to be identified with the *Athanaia*³³ or maybe to be considered a further different celebration – which involved the ephors as primary actors, foresaw an armed procession, and the implementation of a solemn ancestral sacrifice of animal victims (*thysia*) over the sacred *bomos*.

Therefore, the sanctuary of the Acropolis of Sparta emerges as a composite spatial universe, where social identity melt with political, military and personal propaganda through monuments and dedications, and where community affairs, possibly related to the establishment and management of a State-Treasure, and, above all, the corroboration of the society’s structure and the management of its external relations, are codified through rituals.

³² Plb. 4.35.

³³ Richer 2012, pp. 39, n. 117, 267, n. 133, and 558.

The spatial organisation of the sanctuary: the architectural remains

An introductory analysis of the spatial organization of the sanctuary³⁴ (fig. 2), as inferable from the architectural remains and archaeological documentation, is a necessary preliminary step before approaching the discussion about the nature of the cult of Athena, the reciprocal relations between the goddess and other superhuman entities here honored, and the definition of the identity of the worshippers.

Despite the renowned statement by Thucydides concerning the modesty of temples and buildings erected by the Spartans³⁵, the sanctuary of the Acropolis exhibited a relatively high level of monumentalization.

Although the *hieron* is still not fully excavated and much of its remains lay under the unexcavated layers of earth on the top of the hill, the literary evidence and the information deriving from the dug portion of site³⁶ suggest it included the presence of both compulsory and complementary structures.

Besides the main altar, the *temenos* included at least two temples consecrated to Athena (that are in fact archaeologically documented) and additional temples dedicated to secondary deities (such as the temple of Aphrodite and that of the Muses, literally attested), further spaces for ritual practices revolving around divine statues and memorials, a *heroon*, two *stoai*, terraces and a *peribolos* wall. Although the temples may have not been made of costly marble, the architectural ensemble makes the sanctuary of the Spartan Acropolis everything except modest.

The first traces of devotional practice on the Acropolis date back to the post-Dark Age period, as suggested by the archaeological findings recording the most ancient ritual activities.

At least one sector of the sanctuary was bordered by a rectangular retaining wall³⁷, preserved as far as the southern side (length c. 25.5 m) is concerned and some portions of its eastern and western sides (fig. 3). The

³⁴ A comprehensive and exhaustive study of the sanctuary of the Acropolis is still lacking and the considerations here exposed mainly derive from archaeological excavations' reports and subsequent interpretative articles.

³⁵ Th. 1.10.2.

³⁶ A limited portion of the top and of the southern slope of the cliff.

³⁷ Dickins 1907, pp. 142-144.



Fig.3. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, *peribolos* wall, actual remains (photo by the Author).



Fig.4. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, *peribolos* wall (from Dickins 1907).

peribolos wall defines a terrace and consists of roughly hewn stones assembled without mortar³⁸ (fig. 4) and apparently dates to the Archaic age (the dating is based on the observation of the construction techniques, similar to those attested in the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* in the 6th cent. BC, although the foundations lay on the Geometric layer

³⁸ Dickins 1907, p. 144.

identified by G. Dickins³⁹, maybe indicating the existence of more than one phase of construction).

The conceptual and ritual core of the sanctuary consists of the main altar and temple of Athena.

The construction of the *bomos*, explicitly mentioned by Polybius⁴⁰, Plutarch⁴¹ and Pausanias⁴², dates back to the Geometric period⁴³, as coherently testified by traces of sacrificial actions recognized in the Geometric stratigraphic layer⁴⁴. The burnt remains containing animal bones' ashes thicken in the proximity of the ruins of a simple structure located inside the terrace defined by the already mentioned retaining wall. Such a structure (length c. 5 m) is made of roughly hewn stones assembled without mortar⁴⁵. An ivory handle of ritual *machaira* and fragments of an iron double axe, connected to sacrificial practices, have been discovered during the excavations⁴⁶.

The construction of the first temple of Athena is attributed to the mythical Spartan king Tyndareus, who left it unfinished – and who was the dedicatee of a *heroon* located on the Acropolis⁴⁷. The work was resumed by the sons of Tyndareus, who used the war booty of Aphidna for this purpose. So, since its mythological establishment, the sanctuary is framed within a specifically Spartan horizon, referring to the first mythical kings, the Dioscuri and Helen⁴⁸.

In the last quarter of 6th cent. BC, a temple was built, maybe on the same spot of the previous one with the scope of replacing it. Nevertheless, the pre-Achaic temple is not architecturally documented, and its material existence can only be supposed, but not proved, on the basis of the archaeological items recovered from the Geometric layer indicating ritual activity⁴⁹. As far as the Archaic temple is concerned, it

³⁹ Dickins 1907, p. 144.

⁴⁰ Plb. 4. 35.

⁴¹ Plu. *Apophthegmata Laconica* 2.8.

⁴² Paus. 3.17.7.

⁴³ Dickins 1908, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Dickins 1907, p. 145.

⁴⁵ Dickins 1907, p. 146.

⁴⁶ Dickins 1907, pp. 153-154.

⁴⁷ Paus. 3.17.2.

⁴⁸ Hdt. 9.73.2; Plu. *Thes.* 32.3-5.

⁴⁹ Dickins 1907; Dickins 1908.

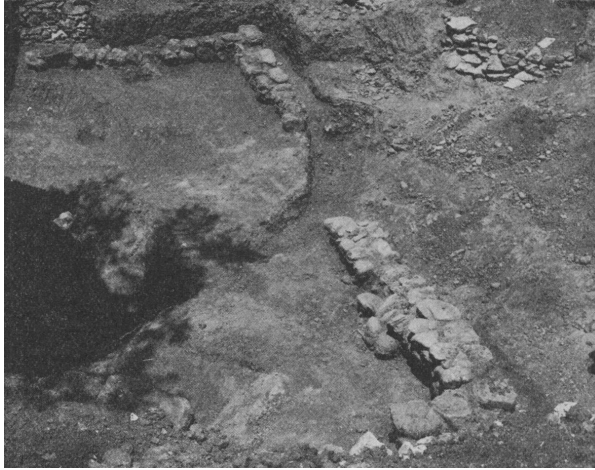


Fig. 5. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, foundations of the secondary temple (from Woodward 1927).

was perhaps made out of limestone⁵⁰, covered with clay roof tiles and provided with a Doric peristasis. In fact, during the British excavations some fragments of tiles bearing the incised name of Athena *Chalkioikos* were recovered⁵¹, together with a Doric capital⁵² and scanty elements reused in the Roman houses that were subsequently erected on the Acropolis. These items have been hypothetically attributed to the Archaic temple. Anyway, the foundations of the temple in question have not been identified with certainty, and A.M. Woodward, while excavating the Acropolis, keenly assumed that the construction of the main *naos* of the sanctuary may have stood on the upper, still unexcavated, sector of the citadel⁵³. Therefore, only future excavations can shed light on the actual position and appearance of the key temple of Athena on the Acropolis of Sparta.

Traces of another temple, which was later obliterated by the Augustan age theatre, have been brought to light too (fig. 5)⁵⁴. This

⁵⁰ See M. Flower: «the temple of Athena *Chalkioikos* (Athena of the Bronze House), built in the sixth century BC and so named because of the engraved bronze panels that lined its inner walls, was constructed of limestone and its foundations reveal a structure of paltry dimensions» (Flower 2018, p. 431).

⁵¹ Dickins 1907, p. 145.

⁵² Dickins 1907, p. 154; Dickins 1908, p. 142.

⁵³ *Alias* «the sanctuary above» (Woodward, Hobling 1925, p. 241; see also. Gagliano 2017, p. 84).

⁵⁴ Woodward 1927, pp. 39-43; Spallino 2016, pp. 488-489.



Fig. 6. Terracotta disk *acroterion* from the secondary temple found in the sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, (from Woodward 1927).

edifice, also dedicated to Athena and located c. 13 m south of the above mentioned *peribolos* wall, was erected, according to the excavators, no earlier than the 7th cent. BC on an artificial terrace on the southern slopes of the Acropolis and was destroyed by a fire during the 5th or 4th cent. BC⁵⁵. The foundations are made of cobbles and small unworked stones bedded in clay; the walls which stood on these cobbled foundations must have been of sun-dried bricks and a disk acroterion may have been part of the structure (fig. 6)⁵⁶. All the objects recovered on the spot bear no dedication to any deity but Athena⁵⁷ and therefore A.M. Woodward concluded that the construction was «a subsidiary temple of the goddess»⁵⁸. Maybe, the temple is the *oikema* mentioned by Thucydides' narration of the tragic death of the regent Pausanias, who sought refuge in the edifice⁵⁹. It is noteworthy that, not by chance, the structure is referred to as *oikema* and not *naos* – the first term describing a sacred structure (not compulsorily the main temple) and the second one identifying the highest religious temple of a sanctuary⁶⁰. The *oikema*

⁵⁵ Woodward 1927, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁶ Woodward 1927, pp. 40-42.

⁵⁷ Woodward 1927, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Woodward 1927, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Th. 1.134.

⁶⁰ For an overview of the differences between *oikema* and *naos* with reference to the Athenian Acropolis see Sassu 2010.

of the Spartan Acropolis should be interpreted as a temple building performing complementary tasks: While the main temple of Athena was the kingpin of ritual actions, remarkably sacrifices, this additional construction, similarly consecrated to the goddess, would have played a possibly economic or even representative role – like the Parthenon of the Athenian Acropolis in relation to the *naos* of Athena *Polias*.

Should this hypothesis turn out to be correct, then the Spartan Acropolis would show an architectural arrangement analogous to several sacred areas marked by the presence of two (or in some cases even more) temples dedicated to the deity who owns the sanctuary, a situation where each temple fulfills a different task, typically religious and representative and/or economic⁶¹. The most emblematic case study in this regard is the Athenian Acropolis. Here, the temple of Athena *Polias* located in the northern area of the Athenian citadel, referred to as *naos* in the ancient written sources, served as the outmost sacred shrine of the polyadic goddess, acting as the main edifice for the implementation of sacrifices and ritual practices. Its “duplicate”, alias the southern temple known as Pre-Parthenon and subsequently Parthenon, defined by the inscriptions as a *hekatompedon* composed of *oikemata*, mainly played a political and, above all, an economic role. Meaningfully, the first inscription illustrating the tasks of the treasurers of Athena⁶², dating to 550 BC, specifies that the *tamiai* must collect *ta chalkia* and dedicate them to the goddess; after few decades, another epigraph states that the treasurers must inspect the *oikemata* of the *hekatompedon* and list their pertaining *chalkia* (and in fact, during the Classical age, the treasurers annually published inventory lists recording all the precious objects kept in the Parthenon for their financial value). So, on the Athenian Acropolis, there was a temple for Athena *Polias*, and another temple, i.e., the predecessor of the Parthenon (which in fact served a similar function), organized in *oikemata* containing *chalkia*, being a construction marked by a main economic purpose.

It is possible that, also on the Spartan Acropolis, two temples dedicated to Athena were built in order to fulfil different tasks. The temple connected to the cult of the polyadic Athena, worshipped with

⁶¹ On the presence of several temple buildings consecrated to the same deity, yet playing different roles, see: Sassu 2010; Sassu 2014; Sassu 2015; Lippolis, Sassu 2016.

⁶² IG I³ 4.



Fig. 7. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, *stoa*, actual remains (photo by the Author).

the epithet *Poliouchos*, acted as the main religious structure, while the other one, an *oikema* connected to *ta chalkia*, was marked by an economic function instead, being dedicated to Athena *Chalkioikos*. In this way, the double epiclesis of the Spartan Athena, *Poliouchos* and *Chalkioikos* would find a possible reasonable explanation and would reflect the duality of the temple constructions.

Nor is it possible that the southern, secondary temple of Athena was the temple of Athena *Ergane* or *Ophthalmitis* mentioned by Pausanias, as A.M. Woodward hypothesized. In fact, the temple was obliterated by the Augustan construction of the theatre and, therefore, could not be seen by Pausanias in the 2nd cent. AD.

As already stated, the “Bronze House”, whether it coincides with the temple south of the *peribolos* wall or with another (the northern?) one, probably owes its name to the bronze plaques embellishing its wall. According to Pausanias’ description⁶³, besides the birth of Athena, the panels depicted gorgons, Amphitrite and Poseidon, the abduction of the Leukippides, Hephaestus releasing his mother from the fetters, the Nymphs with Perseus and the labours of Heracles, mirroring the plurality of cults attested on the Acropolis. The images of the panels allude to rites of passages and wedding rituals and, at the same time, praise manual work and celebrate the supremacy of the organised

⁶³ Paus. 3.17.3.



Fig. 8. Sparta, sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis, *stoa* (from Woodward, Hobling 1925).

polis over barbaric forces by exalting the civilizing hero Heracles, often associated with Athena in Greek polytheism, as well as Perseus.

The bronze plaques are preserved in fragments, together with heavy bronze nails. Some of these nails were found still in position through the holes of the plaques themselves, a circumstance that seems to confirm that the plaques were attached to the walls of the temple as the ancient authors state⁶⁴.

In addition to the temples of Athena, the *temenos* was provided with a plethora of additional structures.

Two porches are documented by literary sources, i.e. a southern *stoa* and a western one, the latter one being decorated with eagles surmounted by Nikai offered by Lysander.

The British excavations confirmed the existence of at least one 6th cent. BC *stoa*, situated immediately south of, and parallel to, the southern side of the *peribolos* wall⁶⁵ (fig. 7). It is documented by a rear wall (length c. 11 m) with sides (length c. 3.5 m) built of irregular and mostly unworked stones, without mortar, and six limestone blocks that possibly supported wooden pillars (fig. 8). The presence of a

⁶⁴ Dickins 1907, pp. 139-140.

⁶⁵ Woodward, Hobling 1925, pp. 241-249.

shallow pit containing a large quantity of iron⁶⁶, weapons, spearheads and numerous spits (*obeloi*), signs of burning, and perhaps melting and casting activity, indicated that metalworking activities took place inside the structure, which likely served also as a productive workshop⁶⁷.

Athena Poliouchos, Chalkioikos, Promachos, Ergane, Ophthalmitis

On the Acropolis, the patron goddess is first of all concerned with her polyadic role of guardian of the city, but, on the whole, her cult is distinguished by a polysemantic significance. In fact, Athena emerges also as the protector of productive activities, specifically of artisans and metalworkers, and as patron of women and children. At the same time, she is engaged with the military sphere – this last aspect is here partially shared with Aphrodite – and she is involved in the establishment of a public economic system, which finds in the sanctuary a proper place where to hoard common assets in the form of metallic objects. Finally, she is honoured as saviour of the eye in a secondary shrine erected by Lycurgus himself⁶⁸.

In Sparta, as elsewhere in the Hellenic world starting with Athens, the *Poliouchos* epithet referred to Athena often goes together with that of *Promachos*.

The Bronze House hosted a cult statue depicting a warrior Athena with spear and shield, as it can be inferred, *inter alia*, from its reproduction on imperial coins issued during the 3rd cent. AD⁶⁹. The *agalma* was authored by the famous sculptor Gitiades⁷⁰, an all-around artist from Sparta who also engaged in poetry.

⁶⁶ Woodward, Hobling 1925, p. 245: «[...] a shallow pit was found dug into the undisturbed clay and contained a large quantity of iron; this had been worked on the spot, for much slag and clear signs of burning accompanied the finished pieces – a spear-head, and numerous spits (*obeloi*) – which lay in and around the pit. There was also some bronze slag, and a curved piece of plain bronze plate (a shoulder – piece from a cuirass ?)».

⁶⁷ Gagliano 2017, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Paus. 3.18.2: «The temple was erected by Lycurgus when one of his eyes had been struck out by Alcander, who rebelled against the laws he introduced. Having fled to this place he was saved by the Spartans from losing his remaining eye, and so he built this temple of Athena *Ophthalmitis*».

⁶⁹ Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann 1978, LVI R 6; LVII R 1-6; LX R 5.

⁷⁰ Paus. 3.17.2.



Fig. 9. Sparta, fragments of the marble statue of Athena Promachos from the Acropolis (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).



Fig. 10. Sparta, bronze bells from the Acropolis (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).

The goddess Athena was worshipped as *Promachos*, too, and, as shown before, *Promacheia* festivals were performed on a periodical basis. Furthermore, an archaic marble statue of Athena *Promachos*, with an Amazonomachy depicted on her shield, is documented by several fragments found on the Acropolis⁷¹ (fig. 9). Moreover, among the findings, several bronze statuettes of Athena *Promachos* have been found⁷².

In addition to her military and political role as protector of the *polis*, its civic identity and social order, the Spartan Athena is also the patron of productive activities, as correspondingly testified by her epicleris *Ergane*.

Information on the relevance of the Spartan Athena's patronage over manual productive activities can be convincingly inferred from the available archaeological evidence.

Among the discovered items, it is noteworthy to mention the unusual abundance of votive clay and especially bronze bells⁷³ (fig. 10), dedicated from the 7th cent. BC onward and remarkably during the 5th cent. Their impressive amount in the *temenos* – thirty-four bronze

⁷¹ Palagia 1993, pp. 167-175.

⁷² Dickins 1907, pp. 147-149; Lamb 1927, pp. 85-86.

⁷³ Villing 2002, pp. 223-295.

bells, seven of which bearing dedicatory inscriptions to Athena, and more than one hundred analogous clay specimens – almost represents a *unicum* in the panorama of ancient votive offerings, exception made for the Samian *Heraion*, where thirty bells are documented⁷⁴.

The bronze bells have been variously interpreted. Among the possible explanations, their connection with the sound caused by weapons clashing in the battlefield and therefore with the military field has been assumed⁷⁵.

Alternatively, their relationship with metalworking activities has been underlined⁷⁶, taking into account the exceptional amount of bronze items attested in the *temenos*. The Athena “of the Bronze House” would thus rise to the role of patron of manual workers and especially of metalsmiths, whose working sounds are echoed by the rings of the bells.

Finally, an apotropaic significance of the bells, aimed at ensuring protection to women and children has been theorized, given that names of female offerors are inscribed over some items⁷⁷. Moreover, the presence of women as offerors and as active participants in the religious life of the sanctuary is further testified by object typically connected to feminine activities, such as whorls⁷⁸, hairpins, a mirror⁷⁹, rings, bracelets, necklaces⁸⁰. The Athena of the Acropolis would in this case play a role of protector of the feminine population, who appear to be a large portion of the visitors and offerors of the sanctuary.

It is highly likely that the meaning of the votive bells should not be interpreted unambiguously, as they purposely meant to be open to many significances. They indeed fulfilled many functions that could indeed vary according to the worshippers who dedicated them.

The analysis of bronze bells take us back to the subject of the relevance (and accumulation of bronze) inside the sanctuary. The cult statue and the panels over the internal walls of the Bronze House were made of bronze. Other divine bronze images were scattered

⁷⁴ Cartledge 1982, pp. 243-265; Villing 2002, pp. 261-266.

⁷⁵ Villing 2002, p. 282.

⁷⁶ Gagliano 2017, p. 105.

⁷⁷ Villing 2002.

⁷⁸ Dickins 1907, p. 154.

⁷⁹ Woodward, Hobling 1925, pp. 271-272.

⁸⁰ Woodward, Hobling 1925, p. 247.

throughout the sacred space and a consistent number of public and private bronze dedications, starting from the two bronze statues of the king Pausanias, are mentioned by ancient authors.

In addition to the bells, we just observed how jewels, mirrors, pins and hairpins were offered by female worshippers⁸¹. Furthermore, during the archaeological campaigns, besides anthropomorphic figurines of gods and humans made of bronze, also bronze statuettes of animals – deer, lions, bulls, rams, frogs, horses – have been recovered, although their exegesis and the identity of the donors are still unclear. A consistent number of bronze and iron weapons and bronze vessels has been uncovered as well.

The special connection of Athena *Chalkioikos* with bronze could imply a connection with the economic sphere – with the production of metallic objects and weapons from one side, and the accumulation of uncoined metals, having a financial significance, from another side. Although only future investigations of the Acropolis can confirm this hypothesis, the latter could provide an explanation for both the divine epiclesis and the name of the temple as “Bronze House”⁸².

The latter could be interpreted as a temple where collective assets were hoarded, after being collected in the form of metallic objects, according to a procedure documented in several Greek sanctuaries, such as the Athenian Acropolis, the *Heraion* of Samos, the *Heraion* of Argos etc⁸³. If proved correct, this theory would be consistent with the existence of two main temples of Athena on the Spartan Acropolis and, furthermore, it would provide a possible explanation for the huge accumulation of bronzes in various shapes in the *temenos*, making the sanctuary a place where metallic items were collected and kept, albeit in an uncoined form, and possibly produced at times. Although Sparta did not initiate a massive coinage until the Hellenistic period, its capacity of engaging in sophisticated economic strategies should not be underestimated. The sanctuary of Athena would therefore turn to be a sort of State-Treasure, where communal wealth was accumulated and safeguarded.

⁸¹ Woodward 1925, pp. 271-272; Lamb 1927.

⁸² Gagliano 2017, p. 91.

⁸³ Sassu 2014.

The Other Gods of the Acropolis

Many spaces (either built or unbuilt) located in the sanctuary were dedicated to different gods. Thus, the sacred area depicts a composite network distinguished by a remarkable plurality of cults and can be regarded as a sort of laboratory for the study and analysis of the mutual relations among them.

In this respect, the written sources can efficiently integrate the already examined archaeological data and turn out to be crucial to reconstruct the overall organization of the *temenos* and of the several shrines where the various recipients of cult were venerated.

Pausanias states that the temple of the goddess was flanked by a shrine of the Muses⁸⁴ to the left and a bronze image of Zeus *Hypatos* (“the highest”) to the right⁸⁵.

Moreover, the altar was surrounded by statues, including that of Aphrodite *Ambologera* (“who delays the old age”) and of the *pathemata* Thanatos and Hypnos⁸⁶.

In addition, on the Hill, its slopes and close surroundings, also the following divine and semi-divine entities were the addressees of ritual performances and in some cases owners of specific edifices or anyway cult spaces: Aphrodite *Areia*⁸⁷, who owned a temple behind that of Athena; Poseidon, whose cult place was next to the later Roman theatre on the southern side of the cliff⁸⁸; Zeus *Cosmetas* (“the orderer”), owner of a temple located close to the *heroon* with the tomb of Tyndareus⁸⁹; the Dioscuri, should the proposal to refer to the Acropolis two reliefs depicting Castor and Pollux flanking Athena proved to be correct⁹⁰.

Several clues may additionally suggest the possible presence of the cult of Artemis in a secondary position, maybe limited to the ritual realm. Among the findings, in fact, statuettes of Artemis, clad in a skin with a dog by her side (that have also been found near the *Orthia* Sanctuary) have been discovered⁹¹.

⁸⁴ Paus. 3.17.5: ἐν ἀριστερᾷ δὲ τῆς Χαλκιοῖκου Μουσῶν ἰδρύσαντο ἱερόν.

⁸⁵ Paus. 3.17.6.

⁸⁶ Paus. 3.18.1.

⁸⁷ Paus. 3.17.5: ὀπισθεν δὲ τῆς Χαλκιοῖκου ναός ἐστιν Ἀφροδίτης Ἀρείας.

⁸⁸ Paus. 3.15.10.

⁸⁹ Paus. 3.17.4.

⁹⁰ Gagliano 2017.

⁹¹ Dickins 1907, p. 145.

Question arises on how this plurality of gods, semi-gods, heroes and *pathemata* interacted, what were the pertaining target audiences and ritual actions. The connections between the goddess owner of the sacred district and the other gods and heroes here worshipped is not always easily comprehensible – or, rather, becomes understandable only if the peculiar Spartan mindset is duly considered.

For instance, if the link between the polyadic Athena and his father Zeus is a well-known phenomenon in the ancient Hellenic religion (see for example the Athenian Acropolis), the roots of the association of the warrior goddess with the military Aphrodite are apparently more obscure instead. A closer examination of her cult is needed to decipher the reasons of such an association.

With regard to the military affairs, the goddess Aphrodite *Areia*, who is the owner of a temple containing an “ancient *xoanon*” on the Acropolis⁹², is complementary to Athena. Furthermore, again on the Acropolis, the goddess is also worshipped as *Basilis* (“Queen”) as indicated by the epigraphs on eight fragmentary vases dating back to the Archaic age⁹³, and as *Ambologera* through the already mentioned statue placed next to the *bomos*⁹⁴.

In addition to the literary sources, the cult of the goddess is correspondingly testified by the archaeological evidence. For instance, a bronze statuette of the armed Aphrodite, dressed in Doric peplos, was recovered during the excavations⁹⁵. Another bronze statuette reproduces the standing goddess while carrying spherical objects⁹⁶. Moreover, an iron blade, with a flat bronze mid-rib, bears an incised a dedication from a certain Lykeios to *Areia*⁹⁷.

The patronage of the sanctuary over war activities, jointly protected by Athena and Aphrodite, is finally corroborated by the recovery of weapons, miniaturistic replicas of weapons, and a relief bearing images of hoplites⁹⁸.

⁹² Paus. 3.17.5.

⁹³ Some inscriptions on vascular fragments (*SEG* 2, 133-136, 151; 11, 670) mention the epithet *Basilis*, referring to Aphrodite (Osanna 1990, pp. 86-87).

⁹⁴ Paus. 3.18.1.

⁹⁵ Dickins 1908.

⁹⁶ Dickins 1907, pp. 149-150.

⁹⁷ Woodward 1930, p. 252.

⁹⁸ Woodward 1928, pp. 99-100.

Therefore, the meaning of the cult of the goddess of love is here declined in a peculiar local horizon, where military service is central to the running of the society. Aphrodite's martial role as *Areia*, warlike deity and wife of Ares, the god of war, overshadows her traditional features and gains so much relevance that she is entitled to own a temple next to that of Athena.

The military connotation of the Spartan pantheon in general, and of the warrior goddess of the sanctuary in particular, justifies the presence of a temple of the Muses located to the left of the Bronze House. In Sparta, in fact, the Muses are specifically connected with the battlefield, because, as Pausanias states: «the Spartans used to go out to fight, not to the sound of the trumpet, but to the music of the flute and the accompaniment of lyre and harp»⁹⁹. Moreover, the Spartan Muses were the dedicatees of a sacrifice to be performed before the battle, proofing their involvement in the military affairs¹⁰⁰.

It is not by chance that on the Acropolis a singular bronze statuette of a musician in the act of blowing into a wind instrument¹⁰¹, maybe a trumpet or rather a flute, whose interpretation should be traced back to the military horizon, has been discovered.

Zeus's presence on the Spartan Acropolis, as already mentioned, is recorded by ancient authors, both as *Hypatos* aside the Bronze House and as *Cosmetas* towards the southern portico, in front of the tomb of the mythical king Tyndareus, who is also a recipient of cult actions with strong identitarian significance¹⁰².

The association of the shrine of Zeus with the *heroon* of the mythical Spartan king Tyndareus it is not random and aims to safeguard the institution of Spartan monarchy, given that Zeus is the protector of the Spartan kings, who were in turn his priests in Sparta.

Again, another semi-divine agent worshipped on the Acropolis is Heracles¹⁰³, whose association with Athena is extensively attested in the Hellenic world, starting from Athens. The Athena/Heracles couple is documented in Sparta both on the Acropolis, on the bronze plaques exalting the civilizing role of the hero performing the twelve labours,

⁹⁹ Paus. 3.17.5.

¹⁰⁰ Plu. *Moralia* 458e, Plu. *Lyc.* 21.7.

¹⁰¹ Whibley 1909, pp. 60-62.

¹⁰² Paus. 3.17.4.

¹⁰³ Belli Pasqua, Sassu 2019, pp. 423-452.



Fig. 11. Sparta, stone relief depicting the Dioscuri flanking Athena holding bells in her hands (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).



Fig. 12. Sparta, stone relief depicting the Dioscuri flanking Athena holding bells in her hands (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).

and next to the *dromos*, where a shrine of Athena *Axiopoinos* was erected by Heracles.

Finally, also the cult of the Dioscuri can be referred to the Acropolis, on the basis of a relief dating back to 1st cent. BC but probably reiterating a previous model, found in Sparta in an unknown spot, showing the two brothers flanking the image of Athena holding a series of bells (fig. 11). Since exactly these bells, as we have observed, appear to be a typical object of dedication for the goddess of the Acropolis, it is highly probable that the relief was originally dedicated on the citadel¹⁰⁴, praising Athena together with Castor and Pollux, whose relevance in the education system of young Spartans is widely known. This is not the only relief depicting the twins framing the goddess holding bells, given that a coeval Spartan artefact offers the same representation (fig. 12). This could be an indication that the association of the two brothers

¹⁰⁴ Gagliano 2017, pp. 103-104.

with Athena in Sparta was a far much more incisive that what has been up to now assumed.

The cult of the Dioscuri is also echoed in the bronze reliefs of the “Bronze House” depicting the abduction of the Leukippides and correctly referred in the most recent interpretations to the rituals connected to the passage to adulthood for boys and girls and to local wedding practices and rituals. The presence of such a rite of passage, aimed at ensuring a proper initiation to marriage life, is also suggested by the relief representing the wedding of Poseidon and Amphitrite. The duality between Athena and Aphrodite can also be read in this light, stressing the passage from *kore* to *gyne*, from daughter to wife, from an asexual to a sexual sphere: the virgin goddess symbolizes the life of the girl before marriage, while, after the wedding, the girl enters the domain of Aphrodite, goddess of love and fertility.

Conclusive remarks

The sanctuary of the Acropolis is inhabited by a composite array of gods, semi-gods, heroes and *pathemata*, who address all the needs of the Spartan *polis*, from those intrinsically connected to the common identity, political organisation and social order (Athena *Poliouchos*, Heracles, Zeus *Hypatos* and *Cosmetas*, Tyndareus), to the military field (Athena *Promachos*, Aphrodite *Areia* and the Muses), from the protection of children to the education of the youth as well their passage to adulthood (Artemis, the Dioscuri, Aphrodite and Athena, the Leukippides, Poseidon and Amphitrite). The sanctuary probably also featured a primary economic function, granting protection to economic productive activities, including the metalworking ones (Athena *Chalkioikos* and *Ergane*), and possibly being the place where financial activities and hoarding processes meant to provide the *polis* with a financial permanent deposit took place.

The Athena of the Acropolis was worshipped by the Spartans at different levels: by the entire community, by its internal partitions (the boys engaged in the *agoge*, the ephors, the girls about to marry, the army), and by individuals (metalworkers, women, warriors, common worshippers). Coherently, she was provided with at least two main temples, perhaps one being the most sacred one, where she was worshipped as *Poliouchos* as well as *Promachos* and exercised her power as guardian and tutelary goddess of the city, and the other one

playing a representative and economic role, where she was honoured as *Chalikiokos*, protector of those producing and dealing with bronze (metalworkers, soldiers) and of metal reserves serving a public purpose. Other female deities here worshipped who were likewise connected to the military field, namely the Muses and Aphrodite, were also owners of temples, although they have not been unearthed up to now. The other gods, heroes and *pathemata* were the possessors of specific cult spaces, that could be monumentalised through edifices (as with Zeus) or revolve around statues (see the *pathemata*) or even be the centre of ritual practices testified just by the related dedications (as for Artemis and the Dioscuri).

In the end, the sanctuary of the Acropolis, with its articulated and organised structure, emerged as an imposing, complex and multi-layered sacred stage. It focused on the altar and the two main temples of Athena and included several additional edifices, minor shrines, porticos, altars, statues, subsidiary constructions and ritual spaces of other gods. Although only future excavations can shed further light on its overall layout, the sanctuary celebrated Athena and the other gods in an architecturally monumentalised space, worth of representing the Spartan community.

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— 2 —

Sacral Kingship at Lacedaemon

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Keywords: Civil religion, Sparta, Heraclid dyarchs, Sacral kingship, Divine right.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: πολιτική θρησκεία, Σπάρτη, διάρχοι του Ηρακλείδη, ιερή βασιλεία, θεϊκό δικαίωμα.

Abstract

This essay begins with a brief and abbreviated analysis of the role played within the ancient Greek *polis* by religion. It contends that the gods and heroes of the land were central to civic life in every Greek *polis*; that every Greek city was, in effect, a religious sect; and that this as most emphatically true in Lacedaemon. Then, it turns to the Spartan dyarchy, examining the special status accorded the two Lacedaemonian kings; arguing that the authority exercised by the two derived from their status as putative descendants of the man-turned-god Heracles, the rightful ruler of the Peloponnesus; and demonstrating that, in the eyes of the Spartans, their own claim to Laconia was due solely to their being followers of these two Heraclid families. Then, it explores the manner in which the constitution of Lacedaemon proved to be a bulwark against tyrannical rule on the part of either of these two divine-right kings¹.

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¹ In what follows, I draw on material that appeared in Rahe 1992 (copyright © 1992 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher: www.

Περίληψη

Το δοκίμιο αυτό αρχίζει με μια σύντομη και συνοπτική ανάλυση του ρόλου που έπαιξε η θρησκεία στην αρχαία ελληνική κοινωνία. Υποστηρίζει ότι οι θεοί και οι ήρωες του τόπου είχαν κεντρικό ρόλο στην πολιτική ζωή σε κάθε ελληνική πόλη-ότι κάθε ελληνική πόλη ήταν, στην πραγματικότητα, μια θρησκευτική αίρεση- και ότι αυτό ίσχυε με τον πιο εμφατικό τρόπο στη Λακεδαίμονα. Στη συνέχεια, στρέφεται προς τη σπαρτιατική δυναρχία, εξετάζοντας το ειδικό καθεστώς που αποδόθηκε στους δύο Λακεδαιμόνιους βασιλείς- υποστηρίζοντας ότι η εξουσία που ασκούσαν οι δύο προερχόταν από την ιδιότητά τους ως υποτιθέμενων απογόνων του ανθρώπου-θεού Ηρακλή, του νόμιμου ηγεμόνα της Πελοποννήσου- και αποδεικνύοντας ότι, στα μάτια των Σπαρτιατών, η δική τους διεκδίκηση της Λακωνίας οφειλόταν αποκλειστικά στο ότι ήταν οπαδοί αυτών των δύο οικογενειών Ηρακλειδών. Στη συνέχεια, διερευνά τον τρόπο με τον οποίο το σύνταγμα της Λακεδαίμονος αποδείχθηκε προπύργιο κατά της τυραννικής διακυβέρνησης εκ μέρους οποιουδήποτε από τους δύο αυτούς θεοδίκαιους βασιλείς.

In Critias' satyr play *The Sisyphus*, the protagonist has occasion to discuss the origins of that cooperative capacity which makes political life possible:

ἦν χρόνος, ὅτ' ἦν ἄτακτος ἀνθρώπων βίος
καὶ θηριώδης ἰσχύος θ' ὑπέρτης,
ὅτ' οὐδὲν ἄθλον οὔτε τοῖς ἐσθλοῖσιν ἦν
οὔτ' αὖ κόλασμα τοῖς κακοῖς ἐγένετο.
κάπειτά μοι δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι νόμους
θέσθαι κολαστάς, ἵνα δίκη τύραννος ἦι
ὁμῶς ἀπάντων τήν θ' ὕβριν δούλην ἔχη·
ἐζημιούτο δ' εἰ τις ἐξαμαρτάνοι.
ἔπειτ' ἐπειδὴ τὰμφανῇ μὲν οἱ νόμοι
ἀπειργον αὐτοὺς ἔργα μὴ πράσσειν βίαι,
λάθραι δ' ἔπρασσον, τηνικαῦτά μοι δοκεῖ
πρῶτον πυκνὸς τις καὶ σοφὸς γνώμην ἀνὴρ [γινῶναι]

θεῶν δέος θνητοῖσιν ἐξευρεῖν, ὅπως
 εἴη τι δεῖμα τοῖς κακοῖσι, κἄν λάθραι
 πράσσωσιν ἢ λέγωσιν ἢ φρονῶσί τι.
 ἐντεῦθεν οὖν τὸ θεῖον εἰσηγήσατο,
 ὥς ἔστι δαίμων ἀφθίτῳ θάλλων βίῳ,
 νόμι τ' ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων, φρονῶν τ' ἄγαν
 προσέχων τε ταῦτα, καὶ φύσιν θεῖαν φορῶν,

ὅς πᾶν τὸ λεχθὲν ἐν βροτοῖς ἀκούσεται,
 τὸ δρῶμενον δὲ πᾶν ἰδεῖν δυνήσεται.
 ἐὰν δὲ σὺν σιγῇ τι βουλευῆς κακόν,
 τοῦτ' οὐχὶ λήσει τοὺς θεοὺς· τὸ γὰρ φρονοῦν
 ἄγαν ἔνεστι. τοῦσδε τοὺς λόγους λέγων
 διδαγμάτων ἥδιστον εἰσηγήσατο
 ψευδεῖ καλύψας τὴν ἀλήθειαν λόγῳ.
 ναίειν δ' ἔφασκε τοὺς θεοὺς ἐνταῦθ', ἵνα
 μάλιστ' ἂν ἐξέπληξεν ἀνθρώπους λέγων,
 ὅθεν περ ἔγνω τοὺς φόβους ὄντας βροτοῖς
 καὶ τὰς ὀνήσεις τῷ ταλαιπώρῳ βίῳ,
 ἐκ τῆς ὑπερθε περιφορᾶς, ἵν' ἀστραπὰς
 κατείδεν οὐσας, δεινὰ δὲ κτυπήματα
 βροντῆς, τό τ' ἀστερωπὸν οὐρανοῦ δέμας,
 χρόνου καλὸν ποίκιλμα τέκτονος σοφοῦ,
 ὅθεν τε λαμπρὸς ἀστέρος στεῖχει μύδρος,
 ὃ θ' ὑγρὸς εἰς γῆν ὄμβρος ἐκπορεύεται.
 τοίους δὲ περιέσεισεν ἀνθρώποις φόβους,
 δι' οὓς καλῶς τε τῷ λόγῳ κατώικισεν
 τὸν δαίμον(α) οὗτος κἄν πρέποντι χωρίῳ,
 τὴν ἀνομίαν τε τοῖς νόμοις κατέσβεσεν.
 καὶ ὀλίγα προσδιελθὼν ἐπιφέρει
 οὕτω δὲ πρῶτον οἶμαι πείσαι τινα
 θνητοὺς νομίζειν δαιμόνων εἶναι γένος.

«There was a time,» he notes, «when the life of human beings was without order and like that of a hunted animal: the servant of force. At that time, there was neither prize for the noble nor punishment for the wicked. And then human beings, so it seems to me, established laws in order that justice might be a tyrant and hold arrogance as a slave, exacting punishment if anyone stepped out of line.» This stratagem

worked well in most regards, but it was of limited effectiveness in one decisive respect – for «though the laws prevented human beings from committing acts of violence in the full light of day, men did so in secret.»

It required, Sisyphus adds, «a real man, sharp and clever in judgment,» to overcome this deficiency; and when he finally appeared, he «invented for mortals dread of the gods, so that there would be something to terrify the wicked even when they acted, spoke, or thought entirely in secret.» To this end, the man

brought in the divine, saying that there is a divinity thriving with immortal life, hearing and seeing all with its mind, thinking and reflecting much on these things, and possessing the nature of a god – who hears all that is said among mortals and is able to see all that is done. Even if you plot evil in silence, this will not escape the gods – for much intelligence is in them. In speaking these words, the man introduced the most pleasant of teachings, concealing the truth with false argument. And he claimed that the gods dwelt there where, by suggesting the place, he could most strike panic into human beings. Whence, he knew, there would be terrors for mortals and compensation for the hard life: all this from the heavens, where he knew there was lightning, the dread crashing of thunder, and the starry frame of heaven [the beautiful embroidery of the clever workman Time] whence comes forth the shining, starry hot mass and the damp thunderstorm to the earth. Round about human beings, he placed terrors of this sort. By these, nobly and with speech, he established the divinity in a fitting place, and quenched lawlessness [...] And in this fashion, so I think, someone persuaded mortals to believe in the race of divinities².

Critias' Sisyphus was by no means alone in making this assertion. In *The Metaphysics*, Aristotle sketched out a similar analysis, suggesting that human beings had invented gods "human in form" in order that these deities might be «a means for persuading the multitude and a support for the laws and the public advantage³.» In one fashion or another, Isocrates, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Quintus Mucius

² Critias *Vorsokr.*⁶ 88 B25=TrGF 43 F19 (Snell) with Sutton 1981. The fragment quoted is sometimes (wrongly, I think) attributed to Euripides: cf. Dihle 1977.

³ Consider Arist. *Metaph.* 1074a38-b14 in light of *Pol.* 1252b15-30, and see Lindsay 1991.

Scaevola, Marcus Terentius Varro, and Marcus Tullius Cicero all echo his claim⁴.

The skepticism voiced by Critias's Sisyphus, Aristotle, and Isocrates; by Polybius, Diodorus, and Strabo; and by Scaevola, Varro, and Cicero was foreign to the ordinary Greek, but the political importance which these men ascribed to religion was not. Well before Critias was even born, Theognis had stressed the dependence of lawful order on piety⁵. When asked what would please the gods, the Delphic oracle reportedly replied, «[Obedience] to the city's law»; and Plato claimed that «enslavement to the laws» was «really enslavement to the gods⁶.» Demosthenes agreed. When he found himself called upon to explain the chief reasons why «it is proper that all obey the law,» he not only told his fellow citizens that they should do so «because every law is a discovery and gift of the gods»; he mentioned that consideration before any other. Demosthenes did go on to stipulate that the law reflects «the settled opinion of prudent men»; he did specify that the law is «a corrective for transgressions both voluntary and involuntary»; and he did emphasize that the law is «a covenant shared in common by the city.» These concerns were important, even vital. But in Demosthenes' estimation the gods always came first⁷.

In establishing this hierarchy, the great Athenian orator was in no way peculiar; he was, in fact, merely following the dictates of convention⁸. The spheres defined today by what we call church and state were in antiquity neither separate nor distinct. The ancient city was, in fact, a sect of sorts. The *polis* had a civil religion, and that religion was one of the chief sources of its unity and morale. For the Greeks, the gods were a constant presence. The Olympians might be thought to

⁴ Isoc. 11.24-25; Plb. 6.56.11-12, 10.2.10-12, 16.12.9; D.S. 34/35.2.47; Str. 1.2.8. Compare Cic. *Rep.* 1.36.56, Plu. *Mor.* 763b-f, 879f-880a, D.Chr. 12.39-41, 44, Eus. *PE* 3.17.1-2, 4.1.2-4, and Aëtius *Placita* 1.6-9 with Tert. *Ad Nat.* 2.1.8-11, 2.1, 14 (Borleffs 1929) and with what Augustine has to say about the Pontifex Maximus Scaevola (*De civitate Dei* 4.27), about Varro (3.4, 9, 12, 18, 4.1, 9, 22, 27, 31-32, 6.2-10, 7.1, 3, 5-6, 9, 17, 22-28, 30, 33-35, 8.1, 5, 19.1-4), and about the distinction between mythical, civil, and natural theology which they espoused.

⁵ Thgn. *Trag.* 1135-1150 (West) – which I would emend in light of the suggestion of van Herwerden.

⁶ X. *Mem.* 4.3.16, Pl. *Lg.* 6.762e.

⁷ D. 25.16 with *Ep.* 1.1.

⁸ See Mikalson 1983, pp. 13-17.

stand above the fray, but the gods and heroes of the land were taken to be the city's protectors, sharing in its glory and suffering its reverses⁹. In Greece as well as in Rome, it was commonly believed that no town could be captured prior to the departure of its patron deities¹⁰. For this reason, some cities chained their gods down¹¹, and it was an event of profound political importance when a citizen managed to discover abroad and remove to a final resting place within the territory of his own *polis* the bones of a hero¹². Securing and maintaining divine favor was vital. As a consequence, propitiation of the gods could never be simply a private matter; piety was a public duty. In an ode celebrating the election of a Tenedian to the city's council, Pindar invokes Hestia, the goddess of the public hearth. «In honoring you, by propitiating the first of the goddesses with many libations and again often with the savor of burnt offering,» he writes, the new councillor and his companions «guard Tenedos and hold her upright¹³.»

Just as the piety of the citizens was thought to protect the city, so also their misdeeds could threaten her survival. Indeed, the whole

⁹ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.68, 8.11 with X. *Cyn.* 1.15, and see E. *Heracl.* 347-352. In keeping with this conviction, the Spartans (Hdt. 5.75.2) carried the Tyndaridae into battle. Note the willingness of the Aeginetans (5.79-81) to lend the Aeacidæ to their Theban allies. Every city had its own divine guardian: Ar. *Av.* 826-827. The importance accorded the city's divine patrons is particularly evident in Aeschylus: see *Th.* 69, 91-95, 104-186, 211-229, 234-236, 251-287, 301-320, 582, 702-704, *Supp.* 704-709, 724-725, 732-733, 893-894, 1018-1021. For an overview, see Brackertz 1976.

¹⁰ A. *Th.* 217-222, 251-258, 304-320, 702-704; TrGF IV F452; E. *Tr.* 23-27; Hdt. 8.41. It is with this in mind that one should read Hdt. 5.82-89, Thu. 2.74.2, and Plu. *Sol.* 9. The Romans carried this notion one step further with their ritual of evocatio: Livy 5.15.1-12, 21.3-22.8, 30.1-3; Verg. *Aen.* 2.351-354 (with Servius ad loc.); Pliny *HN* 28.4.18; Macrob. *Sat.* 3.9.7. See, in this connection, Arnobius *Adversus Nationes* 3.38 with Basanoff 1947.

¹¹ This practice was common in Greece and known in Phoenicia as well: Hdt. 1.26 (with Polyæn. 6.50), 5.83-84; Schol. Pi. *Ol.* 7.95; Pl. *Men.* 96d-97d; D.S. 17.41.7-8 (with Curtius 4.3.22; Plu. *Alex.* 24.3-4); Paus. 3.15.7, 8.41.6. See also Cratinus F74, Ar. F194, and Pl. *Com.* F188 (Edmonds 1957-1961), as well as Menodotus *FGrHist* 541 F1. For another view of this practice, see Meuli 1975.

¹² In stealing the bones of heroes and securing their patronage, the Spartans were particularly adept: see Hdt. 1.66-68; Paus. 7.1.8; Plu. *Moralia* 302c with Bowra 1934, Leahy 1955, Huxley 1979, and Phillips 2002. Note also Paus. 3.14.1 with Connor 1979, and see Plu. *Arat.* 53. In this pursuit, the Spartans were by no means alone: Plu. *Thes.* 36.1, *Cim.* 8.3-6; Paus. 8.9.3. In this connection, one should also read Hdt. 5.89.2 and Paus. 2.29.8.

¹³ Pi. *N.* 11.1-10.

community might be made to suffer for the sins of a single man¹⁴. As Hesiod puts it,

πολλάκι καὶ ξύμπασα πόλις κακοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀπηύρα,
ὅς κεν ἀλιτράϊνῃ καὶ ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάται.
τοῖσιν δ' οὐρανόθεν μέγ' ἐπήγαγε πῆμα Κρονίων
λιμόν ὁμοῦ καὶ λοιμόν· ἀποφθινύθουσι δὲ λαοί.
οὐδὲ γυναῖκες τίκτουςιν, μινύθουσι δὲ οἶκοι
Ζηνὸς φραδμοσύνησιν Ὀλυμπίου· ἄλλοτε δ' αὐτὲ
ἢ τῶν γε στρατὸν εὐρὺν ἀπώλεσεν ἢ ὃ γε τεῖχος
ἢ νέας ἐν πόντῳ Κρονίδης ἀποαίνυται αὐτῶν.

Oftentimes it has happened that an entire city
Shares in the fate of a bad man who commits transgressions
And contrives reckless and presumptuous deeds.
On the citizens of this man's *pólis*,
The son of Kronos inflicts from heaven
A great calamity – famine together with plague.
The commoners waste away, suffer, and die.
The women bear no children.
The number of households dwindles –
All because of the shrewdness of Olympian Zeus.
Elsewhere, the son of Kronos
Exacts the penalty by destroying
The wide army of a people,
Their walls,
Or their ships floating at sea¹⁵.

In a similar context, Pindar compares divine vengeance to «a fire on a mountainside: though begotten of a single seed, it removes a great forest entirely from sight¹⁶.» As a consequence, men were unwilling to take ship with an individual deemed guilty of offending the gods¹⁷,

¹⁴ See Hom. *Il.* 1.8-101, 408-474, 16.384-392; Hes. F30.16-23 (M-W); A. *Th.* 597-614; S. *OT* 1-147; Antiphon 3.1.1-2, 3.11-12; Pl. *Lg.* 10.910b; Philostr. *VA* 8.5.

¹⁵ Hes. *Op.* 240-247 (West).

¹⁶ Pi. *P.* 3.24-37.

¹⁷ Cf. A. *Th.* 602-604; E. *El.* 1349-1356, F852 (Nauck 1901); Antiphon 5.81-83; And. 1.137-139; X. *Cyr.* 8.1.25; [Lys.] 6.19; Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.26-32 with Jon. 1:1-16. For further evidence and discussion, see the dissertation of Wachsmuth 1967. This deepseated

and cities found it necessary to expel or even execute the impious and those who had incurred pollution by murder, manslaughter, or some other infraction¹⁸.

It is correct, but not sufficient, to observe that in antiquity patriotism required piety, for the converse was likewise true. Treason was more than a political act – at least as politics is narrowly defined in modern times. The man who turned coat or simply abandoned his city in time of crisis betrayed not just his fellow citizens; he betrayed the gods as well. This explains why one peripatetic writer chose to list «offenses against the fatherland» under the category of «impiety¹⁹.» It also explains why the law of Athens equated treason with the robbing of temples. The Athenians dealt with the two crimes in a single statute that called not just for the guilty party's execution but also for the confiscation of his property and a denial to him of burial in his native soil²⁰. As one Athenian orator put it, traitors «commit acts of impiety in depriving the gods of the ancestral cults stipulated by custom and law». The citizen who brings to trial a man who has abandoned the city in its time of need can therefore justly tell his fellow citizens that he is prosecuting «a man who has betrayed the temples of the gods, their shrines and precincts, the honors ordained by the laws, and the sacrifices handed down from your forefathers²¹.» There was nothing novel in his contention. As the battle of Salamis began, Aeschylus tells us, a great shout could be heard from the Greek ranks «Go on, sons of Hellas! Liberate the fatherland! Liberate your children and wives! Liberate the seats of your ancestral gods and the tombs of your forefathers! For the contest at hand is over these things²².» In classical

reluctance is the unstated premise underlying the suspicions which some Athenians reportedly directed at the Corinthians on the eve of the Sicilian expedition in 416 at the time of the defacing of the Herms: Cratippus *FGrHist* 64 F3, Philochorus *FGrHist* 328 F133. They simply took it for granted that the sacrilege had been committed by enemies of Athens eager to prevent the sailing of the expedition.

¹⁸ See Pl. *Lg.* 10.910b. See also Antiphon 2.1.10-11, 3.9-11, 3.1.1-2, 3.11-12, 4.3.7; Andoc. 1.137-139; X. *An.* 4.8.25; D. 23.43. This concern explains the eagerness of the Athenians in 416 to identify and prosecute those guilty of defacing the Herms and of making a mockery of the Eleusinian Mysteries: Thu. 6.27-29, 60-61. In general, see Parker 1983. In this connection, see also Gernet 1955.

¹⁹ [Arist.] *VV* 1251a30-33. See also 1250b16-24. Note Stob. *Flor.* 4.2.19 (Hense).

²⁰ X. *HG* 1.7.22, Lycurg. 1.113, 127.

²¹ Lycurg. 1.1, 129. Note Din. 1.98, 3.14.

²² Consider A. *Pers.* 402-5 in light of 805-812, and see Hdt. 8.109.3.

Greece, patriotism and piety overlapped a great deal, and their near-identity had consequences that go far toward explaining the roots of public-spiritedness among the Hellenes²³.

Nowhere – as far as we can ascertain, given the paucity of evidence for many Greek *poleis* – was religion a greater force than at Lacedaemon. From an early age, the Spartans were imbued with a fear of the gods so powerful that it distinguished them from their fellow Greeks²⁴. In one passage, Herodotus tells us that the Lacedaemonians «made the things of the god take precedence over those of men». In another, he claims that «attending to the affairs of the god was something that the Spartans took with the greatest seriousness²⁵». Thucydides is more reticent. He makes no such general claim. He simply shows his readers without fanfare, in passage after passage, that the Lacedaemonians were punctilious in everything pertinent to the divine²⁶. He also draws attention to a fact of no mean importance for political developments: that, when they did not fare well in the Archidamian War, the Spartans fell prey to a gnawing suspicion that their travails were due to a grave religious infraction on their part. In refusing Pericles' offer of arbitration on the eve of that war, they had broken the oaths to the gods they had taken in 446 when they agreed to the Thirty Years Peace²⁷. Of this they were painfully aware. Had they not at the time been promised victory by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi²⁸, one must suspect that the Lacedaemonians would have felt compelled to accept Pericles' offer.

Thucydides has considerably less to say about the religious scruples of the Athenians. But, in their regard, he is also alert. The Spartans who appear in his narrative – Pausanias the Regent, Sthenelaidas,

²³ Where we would expect to find reference to “the public and the private,” the Greeks could speak of “the sacred and the private”: Hdt. 6.9.3, 13.2.

²⁴ Paus. 3.5.8. The evidence for Spartan piety is ubiquitous: see Hdt. 1.65-70, 5.42-46, 62-75, 90-93, 6.52-86, 105-107, 120 (cf. Pl. *Lg.* 3.698c-e; Paus. 4.15.2; Str. 8.4.9), 7.133-137, 204-206, 220-121, 239, 8.141, 9.7-11, 19, 33-38, 61-62, 64-65, 73, 78-81, 85; Thu. 1.103, 112, 118, 126-134, 2.74, 3.14-15, 92, 4.5, 118, 5.16-18, 23, 30, 49-50, 54, 75-76, 82, 116, 6.95, 7.18, 8.6; X. *HG* 3.1.17-19, 23-24, 2.21-31, 3.1-5, 4.3-4, 6, 11, 15, 18, 23, 5.5, 23-25, 4.2.20, 3.14, 21, 5.1-2, 11, 6.10, 7.2-5, 7, 5.1.29, 33, 3.14, 19, 27, 4.37, 41, 47, 49, 6.4.2-3 (cf. 7-8), 15-16, 5.12, 17-18, 7.1.31, 34, *Lac.* 8.5, 13.2-5, 8-9, 15.2-5, 9, *Ages.* 1.2, 10-13, 27, 31, 2.13-15, 17, 3.2-5, 8.7, 11.1-2, 8, 16. See also Plu. *Pel.* 21.3.

²⁵ Hdt. 5.63.2, 9.7.

²⁶ Th. 1.103, 112, 118, 126-134, 2.74, 3.14-15, 92, 4.5, 118, 5.16-18, 23, 30, 49-50, 54, 75-76, 82, 116, 6.95, 7.18, 8.6.

²⁷ Cf. Th. 7.18.2 with 1.78.4, 85.2, 140.2, 141.1, 144.2, 145.

²⁸ Th. 1.118.3, 123.1, 2.54.4.

Archidamus, and Brasidas – invoke the gods and sacrifice to them²⁹. Their Athenian counterparts – Pericles, Phormio, Paches, Demosthenes, Lamachus, Hippocrates, Eurymedon, Cleon, Diodotus, and Alcibiades – do nothing of the sort. Among the latter, the only exception to the rule is Nicias³⁰.

Plato had a fuller appreciation of this than anyone since. With the promotion of civic virtue in mind, he wrote, «One of the finest of [Sparta's] laws is the law that does not allow any of the young to inquire which of the laws are finely made and which are not, but that commands all to say in harmony, with one voice from one mouth, that all the [city's] laws are finely made by gods³¹.» Sophocles' Menelaus speaks for Sparta when he asserts,

οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὐτ' ἂν ἐν πόλει νόμοι καλῶς
 φέροιντ' ἂν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκη δέος,
 οὐτ' ἂν στρατός γε σωφρόνως ἄρχοιτ' ἔτι,
 μηδὲν φόβου πρόβλημα μηδ' αἰδοῦς ἔχων.
 ἀλλ' ἄνδρα χρή, κὰν σῶμα γεννήσῃ μέγα,
 δοκεῖν πεσεῖν ἂν κὰν ἀπὸ μικροῦ κακοῦ.
 δέος γὰρ ὧ πρόσεστιν αἰσχύνῃ θ' ὁμοῦ,
 σωτηρίαν ἔχοντα τόνδ' ἐπίστασο·
 ὅπου δ' ὑβρίζειν δρᾶν θ' ἂ βούλεται παρῇ,
 ταύτην νόμιζε τὴν πόλιν χρόνῳ ποτὲ
 ἐξ οὐρίων δραμοῦσαν εἰς βυθὸν πεσεῖν.
 ἀλλ' ἐστάτω μοι καὶ δέος τι καίριον,

Not in a city would the laws ever succeed
 unless dread was there established;
 nor would an army ever show restraint and be ruled
 unless it had a protective screen of fear and of awe.
 And even if a man develops great strength,
 he should be of the view that he can be felled by an evil quite small.
 For, where there is dread together with shame, know that you have safety.

²⁹ Thu. 1.86.5, 2.71.2, 74.2, 4.87.3, 116.2, 5.10.2.

³⁰ Thu. 6.69.2, 7.50.2, 69.2, 72.2-3, 77.2-3.

³¹ Pl. *Lg.* 1.634d-e. See D. 20.106. For the divine origins of Spartan law, see Tyrtaeus F4 (West); Hdt. 1.65.2-3; X. *Lac.* 8.5; Pl. *Lg.* 1.624a, 632d, 2.662c-d, 3.691d-692a, 696b; Plb. 10.2.9-13; Cic. *Div.* 1.43.96; Str. 10.4.19; Plu. *Lyc.* 5.4, 6.1-6; Justin 3.3.10; August. *De civitate Dei* 2.16. See also Pl. *Lg.* 6.762e. Note also Justin 3.3.11-12.

But where it is permitted to be arrogant and to do whatever one wishes,
be aware that such a city will run before favorable winds and finally into
the deep.

For me let there be a seasonable dread³².

Reverence and dread came easily to a people living in fear; and, thanks to the danger of helot revolt, the Lacedaemonians lived in fear. More effectively than any other Greek city, Sparta used superstition to reinforce that total obedience to the law which constituted civic virtue³³.

It was less hard for the Lacedaemonians to sustain such an ethos than it was for the other *poleis* in Hellas. One could not say of the Spartans what Plato's Socrates says of the Greeks in general: «We dwell in a small part of the world between the Pillars of Heracles» at Gibraltar «and Phasis» near the Black Sea in Georgia, «living about the sea like ants or frogs around a pond³⁴.» The Spartans were landlubbers. They resided in the interior and kept their distance from the Mediterranean.

Nor could one describe Lacedaemon in the way that Cicero depicted the other Greek cities. Because of her location, Sparta was relatively immune to the «corruption and degeneration of morals» the Roman found elsewhere. In maritime cities, there was, he said, «a mingling of strange tongues and practices». Moreover, «with foreign merchandise, they import foreign ways – so that nothing in their ancestral institutions remains intact. Those who reside now in these cities do not cling to their dwelling places, but are always being seized and carried off by winged hope and flying thought – and even when they remain bodily at home, they wander in an exile of the mind». This was, he thought, doubly true for the Greek islands. «Girdled as they are by the flood, they seem almost to swim – and the institutions and the mores of their cities swim with them³⁵». It was far more difficult for the citizens of communities in flux of this sort to hold to the same opinions than it was for the Lacedaemonians. Patriotism thrives on

³² S. *Aj.* 1073-1084.

³³ For overviews, see Parker 1989, Richer 2012, Flower 2018. For an intriguing attempt partially to explain why the Spartans were so exceptionally pious, see Cartledge 1976.

³⁴ Pl. *Phd.* 109a-b.

³⁵ Cic. *Rep.* 2.4.7-9.

isolation; trade imperils like-mindedness; and, if they were to survive, the Spartans needed to be both patriotic and likeminded.

The Kingship

In this sphere, Lacedaemon's dyarchy played a special role³⁶. There were two men at Sparta who were not among "the equals". There were two who held office for life³⁷. These two escaped the *agoge*³⁸, they took their meals outside the barracks³⁹. Others at Lacedaemon served in the city's *gerousia*, but only a king or his regent could serve in that venerable body before his sixtieth year⁴⁰. Others sacrificed to the gods, but only a king or regent could do so year after year on the city's behalf⁴¹. Others could perhaps consult the oracle at Delphi, but only the *Pythioi* chosen by the two kings could do so on behalf of the city and they were charged with the preservation of the oracles⁴². Others commanded troops, but only a king or his regent could normally lead out the Lacedaemonian army and the forces of the Peloponnesian League⁴³. Prior to the last few years of the 6th cent., the two *basileis* ordinarily shared the command; and when acting in concert, they could reportedly wage war against any territory they wished. It was apparently a sacrilege for a Spartiate

³⁶ See Millender 2018. For overviews, see Cloché 1949; Thomas 1974; Sergent 1976; Carlier 1984, pp. 240-324, and Carlier 2007. Note also Millender 2002 and Millender 2009.

³⁷ Plb. 6.45.5.

³⁸ Plu. *Ages.* 1.

³⁹ X. *HG* 5.3.20.

⁴⁰ See Hdt. 6.57.5, Thu. 1.20.3, Arist. *Pol.* 1270b35-1271a6, Plu. *Lyc.* 5, 26. Herodotus appears to claim that each king had two votes, but Thucydides denies that this was the case. While the king was a minor, a regent (*prodikos*) – usually the nearest agnatic male relative – exercised his prerogatives: see X. *HG* 4.2.9, Paus. 3.4.9, Plu. *Lyc.* 3, Aesch. s.v. *prodikein*. One should probably interpret Paus. 3.6.2-3 in this light. There is reason to suspect that Herodotus's discussion (6.56-58) of the kings' powers draws on a Spartan document listing their prerogatives: see Carlier 1984, pp. 250-252.

⁴¹ X. *Lac.* 15.2. See also Hdt. 6.56.

⁴² Royal selection of *Pythioi*: Hdt. 6.57, X. *Lac.* 15.5, Cic. *Div.* 1.43.95, Suda s.v. *Pythioi*. In this connection, see also Plu. *Pel.* 21.3. Royal manipulation of religion for political purposes: Plb. 10.2.9-13, August. *De civitate Dei* 2.16. Note also Thu. 5.16.2.

⁴³ Hdt. 5.74-75, 6.48-50, 9.10.2; X. *Lac.* 15.2. In an emergency, of course, another man could stand in for a king: Herodotus (7.137.2, 8.42.2) mentions two such occasions during the Persian Wars and alludes to their exceptional character by drawing attention to the fact that the commanders were not members of either royal house.

to resist their authority to do so⁴⁴. As hereditary generals and priests with life tenure, the Agiad and Eurypontid kings stood out from the ranks⁴⁵.

Indeed, in the strict sense, the two kings were not Spartiates at all. Envoys sent on missions abroad could claim to represent two entities at the same time: «the Lacedaemonians and the Heraclids from Sparta⁴⁶». Tradition taught that the Spartiates were Lacedaemonians solely because they were adherents of men who traced their ancestry back to Heracles, the son of Zeus. The Athenians and the Arcadians might think of themselves as autochthonous: «always possessed of the same land,» and even «born from the earth⁴⁷». But the Spartans were acutely aware that they were interlopers in the Peloponnesus, that they had invaded and seized Laconia by force, and that their servants – the “old helots” of the province – were descended from the original Achaean stock. As Dorians, the Spartans had no legitimate place in a Lacedaemon that was, in fact, an alien land. The righteousness of their cause and its continued success were founded on the quasi-feudal relationship binding the citizens to their two kings: for the first Dorians to call themselves Spartans and to assert their rights as Lacedaemonians had purportedly been among the followers of the sons of Heracles, and the latter had, it was said, inherited from their illustrious father and had passed on to their descendants the right to rule the Peloponnesus. As long as their *basileis* were Heraclids, the Spartans of later times could rest confident in the legitimacy of their tenure in Laconia and in the support of the gods. But if they expelled their charismatic kings or countenanced an illegitimate succession, they could expect to suffer

⁴⁴ One should interpret Hdt. 5.70-75 and perhaps 6.49-51, 61-74 in light of 6.56.

⁴⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1271a18-26, 39-40, 1285a3-10, 14-15, 1285b26-35. See also Justin 3.3.2.

⁴⁶ Hdt. 8.114.2. Note also the connection with the Dioscuri: 5.75.2. Since the kings were not, strictly speaking, Lacedaemonians at all, it is a mistake to draw general conclusions concerning the Spartiates as a whole from stories told about the two *basileis*, as Hodkinson 2000, pp. 209-368, is wont to do.

⁴⁷ For the Arcadians, see Hdt. 8.73.1 (which should be read with 2.171.3 and Thu. 1.2.3), Hellanicus *FGrHist* 4 F161, X. *HG* 7.1.23, D. 19.261, Paus. 5.1.1, Cic. *Rep.* 3.15.25, Schol. Aristid. *Panathenaic* 103.16 (Dindorf) with Pretzler 2009, esp. pp. 87-91. For the Athenians, see Hdt. 7.161.3 (with 8.55); E. *Ion* 29-30, 589-592 (with 20-21, 265-270, 999-1000), F360 (Nauck 1901); Ar. *Vesp.* 1075-1080; Th. 1.2.5-6, 2.36.1; Lys. 2.17; Pl. *Mx.* 237d, 239a, 245d-e, *Ti.* 23d-e, *Criti.* 109c-e; Isoc. 4.23-25, 12.124-125; D. 19.261, 60.4; Lycurg. 1.41 (with 21, 47-48, 85); Hyp. 6.7 (Jensen); Paus. 2.14.4; Cic. *Rep.* 3.15.25; Ael. Aristid. *Panathenaic* 30 (Lenz, Behr); Schol. Aristid. *Panathenaic* 103.14 and 16 (Dindorf); Harp. s.v. *autochthones*.

the fate which the gods had reserved for their Dorian neighbors in Messenia. The Spartans justified their status as Lacedaemonians, their conquest of that province, and their reduction of its inhabitants to a servile condition on the grounds that the Dorians of Messenia had extinguished their own claim to the land when they drove out their Heraclid king. The Spartan conquerors had merely reasserted Heraclid control⁴⁸.

At the start of each generation, the conquest community experienced a rebirth. While a *basileus* lived, he was sacrosanct⁴⁹. And when he died, there were elaborate burial rites – «more majestic,» Xenophon tells us, «than properly accords with the human condition⁵⁰.» The market was closed; assembly meetings and elections were temporarily suspended; and the entire community – the Spartans, the *perioikoi*, and even the helots – went into mourning for a period of ten days⁵¹. «In this fashion,» Xenophon observes, «the laws of Lycurgus wish to show that they give the kings of the Lacedaemonians preference in honor not as human beings, but as demigods⁵².» The renaissance came with the choice of a new *basileus* – normally the eldest surviving son of the deceased⁵³. When this man assumed the royal office, there was a cancellation of all debts owed his predecessor or the public treasury, and the citizens purportedly celebrated the man's accession with the same choral dances and sacrifices which they had employed in instituting their founders [*archagetai*] as kings of Lacedaemon at the time of the original conquest⁵⁴. At Lacedaemon, history was an eternal return of the same. The king's death brought one cycle to an end; ritual alone could

⁴⁸ Isocrates' *Archidamus* (6.16-33) elegantly summarizes the legend. See also Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 2.8.2-4, and note especially Hdt. 5.43. For further allusions to the import of descent from Heracles and Zeus, see 1.7, 13-14, 91, 7.208, 8.137, 9.26-27, 33; Thu. 5.16.2; X. *Lac.* 15.2. In this connection, see Burkert 1965, and Huttner 1997, pp. 48-58.

⁴⁹ Plu. *Agis* 19.9.

⁵⁰ X. *HG* 3.3.1. For the import of these rites, see Schaefer 1957, and Cartledge 1987, pp. 331-343.

⁵¹ X. *Lac.* 15.9. According to Aristotle (F611.10 [Rose]), nothing was sold for three days and the market was strewn with chaff.

⁵² See X. *Lac.* 15.9 with Tyrtaeus F7 (West), Hdt. 6.58-59, Heraclid. *Pol.* 2.5 (FHG II 210), Paus. 4.14.4-5.

⁵³ Hdt. 5.39.1-42.2, X. *HG* 3.3.2, Nep. *Ag.* 1.2-5, Paus. 3.6.2-3. The royal title descended, as directly as possible, down the male line. Where the legitimacy of an heir was in dispute, Delphi might be consulted, but the decision lay in principle with the *pólis* and with its magistrates: Hdt. 6.61-66, X. *HG* 3.3.1-4, Paus. 3.6.2-3, 8.8-10.

⁵⁴ Hdt. 6.59, Thu. 5.16.3.

guarantee its repetition. It is not fortuitous that the Spartans sometimes referred to their current kings as *archagetai*⁵⁵: the Heraclid *basileis* of each new generation refounded the *polis* by renewing its claim to the land. If the magistrates exhibited an almost obsessive concern to insure a legitimate succession, they had good reason⁵⁶. The same concerns dictated the law barring the Heraclids from having children by any woman from abroad⁵⁷.

Political Consequences

Had Lacedaemon been a divine-right monarchy, rather than a divine-right dyarchy, the odds are good that, given the extent of the king's authority, his power would have been absolute and that – like the tyrants who ruled in Corinth, Megara, Athens, and Miletus at one time or another in the 7th and 6th cent. – he would eventually have been overthrown. Of course, at Sparta, there were kings who wielded something approaching absolute power. Cleomenes in the late sixth and early 5th cent. was one such. Agesilaus in the 4th cent. was another. But they were exceptional.

⁵⁵ Plu. *Lyc.* 6.2. For the meaning, see Tyrtaeus's paraphrase of the oracle: F4 (West). For the term *archagetes*, see Pi. *O.* 7.79 (with 30); Meiggs, Lewis 1989, 1.5.11, 26; E. *Or.* 555; Thu. 6.3.1; Pl. *Lys.* 205d; X. *HG* 6.3.6, 7.3.12; Ephorus *FGrHist* 70 F118; Arist. *Ath.* 21.5-6; Plb. 34.1.3 (*ap.* Str. 10.3.5); *ICr* III iii A; *ID* 30, 35 (with Robert 1953 and with Daux 1963, esp. pp. 959-962; and 1963, esp. 862-869; Str. 14.1.46; Paus. 10.4.10; Plu. *Arist.* 11.3, *Demetr.* 53, *Mor.* 163b-c. See also Malkin 1987, pp. 241-250.

⁵⁶ Hdt. 5.39-41, 6.61-70; X. *HG* 3.3.1-4.

⁵⁷ Plu. *Agis* 11.2. I see no reason to accept the view, advanced by Cartledge 1987, p. 96, that the prohibition against a Heraclid's having children *ek gunaikos allodape**s is a prohibition against marrying anyone not of Heraclid stock. There is no evidence suggesting that the descendants of Heracles were a separate caste; in ordinary circumstances, the pertinent adjective refers to those from foreign parts; and, in the passage cited, the prohibition under discussion here is linked with another barring settlement abroad on pain of death. Moreover, it is most unlikely that the Spartans were worried that a son born to a non-Heraclid woman would somehow not be a Heraclid. In general, the Greeks were inclined to suppose that mothers contributed little, if anything to the biological make-up of their own progeny: see Lloyd 1983, pp. 66, 86-111. What the Spartans did, of course, fear was the corrupting influence of foreigners. And, believing, as they did, that their own right to Laconia and Messenia rested on a divinely sanctioned Heraclid claim, they were terrified at the prospect that a legitimate claimant to either throne might be born abroad to a foreign woman, reared among an alien people, and groomed as a champion against Lacedaemon. In this connection, consider Hdt. 6.74.1-75.1 in conjunction with Wallace 1954.

For the most part, the two royal houses were at odds⁵⁸. Their rivalry served as a check on the royal power. Thereby, it opened up space for the Spartiates, who managed – with, one suspects, the assistance of one king or the other – to establish an aristocratic council of elders and a revolving executive chosen from the populace at large by a procedure that guarantee the participation of ordinary citizens⁵⁹. In tandem, these two bodies were capable of reining in and even deposing a rogue monarch⁶⁰. The oath exchanged each month by the two kings and the five ephors who made up the executive board tells the tale: the dyarchs swore to uphold the laws and the ephors swore in turn to uphold the authority of the two if they obeyed the laws⁶¹. It speaks volumes about the rivalry between the two houses, the tumultuous character of Lacedaemonian politics, and the real power exercised by the ephors and the *gerontes* who served on the council that, in the 5th cent., there were only three kings who were not known to have been tried on a capital charge⁶².

⁵⁸ Consider D.H. *Antiquitates Romanae* 4.73.4 in light of Hdt. 6.52.8 and Arist. *Pol.* 1271a25-26.

⁵⁹ See Rahe 2016, pp. 98-106.

⁶⁰ See Rahe 1992, I.vi.3-4, and Rahe, 2016, pp. 48-60.

⁶¹ Royal oath to maintain *nomos*: Nicholas of Damascus F114.16 (*FHG* Müller III 459). Monthly exchange of oaths with kings: X. *Lac.* 15.7.

⁶² See de Ste. Croix 1972, pp. 350-353, and Powell 1999.

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— 3 —

Homicide, Sanctuary, and Expiation in Sparta

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Keywords: homicide, sanctuary, supplication, expiation, Sparta.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: ανθρωποκτονία, άσυλο, ικεσία, εξιλέωση, Σπάρτη.

Abstract

This article examines a series of cases in which the ancient Spartans belied their reputation for piety by abusing or violating religious law. The cases involve the killing of suppliants and heralds and include the exploitation of the Cylonian curse, the execution of Persian heralds in 491, the slaughter of helot suppliants at Taenarum, the death of Pausanias the regent, and the assassinations of ephors in the sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos* in 221/220 and 220/219.

Περίληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο εξετάζει μια σειρά περιπτώσεων στις οποίες οι αρχαίοι

* University of California, Los Angeles; phillips@history.ucla.edu. I thank the Organizing Committee of the conference on “Ancient Spartan Religion: Cults, Rites, Sanctuaries and Their Socio-Economic, Political and Military Implications” (October 2023) for inviting me to present, my fellow conference participants for their comments and collegiality, Professor Ifigeneia Giannadaki for proofreading the Greek versions of my key words and abstract, and Professor Rita Sassu and her editorial team for their assistance in the publication of this article.

Σπαρτιάτες διέψευσαν τη φήμη τους ως ευσεβείς διά της κατάχρησης ή παραβίασης του θρησκευτικού δικαίου. Οι περιπτώσεις σχετίζονται με τον φόνο ικετών και κηρύκων και περιλαμβάνουν την εκμετάλλευση της Κυλώνειας κατάρας, την εκτέλεση των Περσών κηρύκων το 491, τη σφαγή ειλώντων ικετών στο Ταίναρο, το θάνατο του αντιβασιλέα Πausανίου, και τις δολοφονίες εφόρων στο ιερό της Χαλκιοίκου Αθηνάς το 221/20 και το 220/19.

Among the distinguishing characteristics of the ancient Spartans was an exceptional degree of piety¹. A few famous examples will suffice. Defeated in their first war with Tegea after disastrously misinterpreting a response of the Pythia, the Spartans nonetheless returned twice to Delphi for advice about a second (and eventually successful) war (Hdt. 1.65-68)². Repeated Delphic injunctions to liberate Athens impelled the Spartans to depose Hippas and expel the Peisistratids (Hdt. 5.63-65; Th. 6.53.3, 6.59.4; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 19)³; despite their close ties of *xenia*, the Spartans complied with the directive, «for they deemed the affairs of the god more important than the affairs of men» (τὰ γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ πρεσβύτερα ἐποιεῦντο ἢ τὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν, Hdt. 5.63.1-2). When Philippides requested Spartan aid against the Persians at Marathon, the Spartan authorities decided in favor but refused to violate religious law by dispatching troops before the festival of the Carneia concluded at the full moon (Hdt. 6.106-107.1; cf. 7.206). As soon as they could, two thousand Spartans marched out in great haste, arriving in Athens just two days after their departure and one or two days after the battle (Hdt. 6.120; Pl. *Mx.* 240c4-d1, *Lg.* 698d5-e5; Isoc. 4.86-87)⁴. At the battle of Plataea, the Spartans and Tegeates took heavy casualties before they even engaged the enemy, because Pausanias the regent (*PL* 595;

¹ See, e.g., Parker 1989, pp. 154-163; Flower 2009, p. 193; Flower 2018, pp. 428-430.

² Parke, Wormell 1956, vol. 1, pp. 94-97; vol. 2, pp. 15-16 (nrs. 31-33). The chronological *termini* of the First Tegeate War, which took place during the reign of the Spartan kings Leon and Agasicles, are c. 575 and c. 560; those of the Second Tegeate War, which occurred under their successors, Anaxandridas and Ariston, are c. 560 and 546. Phillips 2003, pp. 301-306.

³ Parke, Wormell 1956, vol. 1, pp. 144-147; vol. 2, pp. 35-36 (nr. 79).

⁴ «The speed of the Spartan march seems to show that their desire to help Athens was genuine, and that the battle took place on the first day it was lawful for them to march» (How, Wells 1928, vol. 2, p. 109). Cf. Macan 1895, vol. 1, p. 362; vol. 2, p. 101. For the chronology, see Burn 1962, pp. 253 with n. 41, 257.

LGPN III.A Πανσανίας 32) refused to advance his portion of the Greek forces until the customary pre-battle sacrifices turned out favorably. Under withering fire from the Persian archers, the Tegeates eventually advanced on their own, but the Spartans held their position until the omens finally turned good (Hdt. 9.61-62).

And yet, their normal reverence for the gods notwithstanding, the Spartans were certainly capable of abusing or violating religious law. We see this, in particular, in episodes of Spartan behavior ranging from cynical manipulation to blatant and shocking transgression regarding the killing of suppliants on sacred ground and heralds, whom Greek religious doctrine deemed inviolable⁵. In this paper I will examine this topic by presenting a series of case studies that together span the time from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period. Since the treatment of sanctuaries and suppliants by foreign enemies in war has recently received full and detailed discussion (Nevin 2017), I will focus on major incidents that originated within the domestic jurisdictions of Sparta and Athens, but whose ramifications redounded between and beyond those cities.

The Cylonian curse, the Alcmaeonids, and Sparta

In an Olympic year after 640 and before 620, Cylon seized the Athenian Acropolis in an attempt to set himself up as tyrant. But a siege led by Megacles (I) the Alcmaeonid (*PA* = *APF* 9688; *LGPN* II Μεγακλῆς 1) and his fellow archons ended with Cylon's partisans agreeing to abandon sanctuary at the statue and altar of Athena – the tutelary goddess of both Athens and Sparta⁶ – and surrender on condition that they would be liable to any penalty except death and would suffer no immediate harm at the hands of their besiegers. Despite

⁵ Suppliants: e.g., E. *Ion* 1312-1319; Lys. 12.98 (οὐτ' ἂν ἱερὰ οὐτε βωμοὶ ὑμᾶς ἀδικουμένων...ὠφέλησαν, ἃ καὶ τοῖς ἀδικοῦσι σωτήρια γίνεταί); X. *Agés.* 11.1; Sinn 1993; Nevin 2017, pp. 111-132. Herald's were Διὶ φίλοι (Hom. *Il.* 8.517), Διὸς ἄγγελοι ἡδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν (Hom. *Il.* 1.334, 7.274), and enjoyed the additional protection of their special patron god, Hermes ([Hom.] *h. Merc.* 331, 528-532); the immunity afforded to vessels bearing the κηρύκειον (D. 51.13; cf. Th. 1.53) applied *a fortiori* to the κηρυξ himself ([Hom.] *h. Merc.* 528-532; scholl. vett. Th. 1.53.1 b, 1.146 b Kleinlogel). See Adcock, Mosley 1975, pp. 152-154, 183, 202-203, 229; Sinn 1993, p. 90; Allen, Halliday, Sikes 1936, pp. 324, 343; Richardson 2010, pp. 197, 216-217.

⁶ At Athens, as Athena Πολιάς: e.g., Ar. *Av.* 826-828; *IG* II² 1357 b 1-2 = Sokolowski, *LSCG* nr. 17, C 1-2. At Sparta, as Athena Πολιάχος (= Attic πολιοῦχος), *alias* Athena Χαλκίουκος: e.g., *IG* V.1 213.2-3. Recent discussion: Sassu 2022, pp. 56-72.

this guarantee, as the Cylonians descended the Acropolis, many of them were seized and killed, including some who took sanctuary at the altars of the *Semnai Theai* on the Areopagus⁷. For this grave sacrilege the Alcmaeonid clan was tried by a special jury of 300 men chosen by birth, and sentenced to a curse and perpetual exile (Hdt. 5.71; Th. 1.126.3-12; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 1 with Heraclid. Lemb. fr. 2 Dilts; Plu. *Sol.* 12.1-9)⁸. “Perpetual”, though, turned out to mean two generations or less: the Alcmaeonids had been restored to Athens by the time of the First Sacred War (c. 595-586), in which Megacles’ son Alcmaeon (I, *PA* 651; *APF* 9688, II; *LGP*N II Ἀλκμέων 1) commanded the Athenian forces (Plu. *Sol.* 11.2)⁹. Yet at least some Athenians believed that the curse remained in effect: in 556/5, the tyrant Peisistratus refused to procreate with his new Alcmaeonid wife, the daughter of Megacles II (*PA* 9692; *APF* 9688, II, V; *LGP*N II Μεγακλῆς 3), «since he already had sons who were young men, and the Alcmaeonids were said to be under a curse» (Hdt. 1.61.1; cf. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 15.1)¹⁰.

The Spartans made two famous attempts to exploit the Cylonian curse to their benefit. In 508/7, siding with the eponymous archon

⁷ For the sanctuary and altars of the *Semnai*, cf. A. *Eu.* 794-1047, esp. 804-807, 832-836, 854-857, 916-921, 948-955, 1003-1013, 1018-1026, 1032-1042; E. *El.* 1270-1272, *IT* 968-969; Ar. *Eq.* 1311-1312, *Th.* 224-228; Din. 1.47, 87; Paus. 1.28.6, 7.25.1-3; and see Judeich 1931, p. 300; Sommerstein 1989, pp. 10-11.

⁸ See Phillips 2008, pp. 35-49; Phillips 2013, pp. 47-52 (nr. 1); Schmitz, *LegDrSol* F 1 with introduction and commentary (vol. 1, pp. 65-86).

⁹ Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, p. 428; Fornara, Samons 1991, pp. 7-12; more tentatively, Manfredini, Piccirilli 2011, pp. 146-147. Solon’s amnesty law, passed in 594/3, restored full civic rights to all outlaws «except those who were in exile issued by the Areopagus or by the *ephetai* or the Prytaneion, having been judged guilty by the kings, for homicide, slaughters, or tyranny» (Plu. *Sol.* 19.4; Schmitz, *LegDrSol* FF 50, 51a; Phillips 2013, nr. 358); since the Alcmaeonids had been convicted and sentenced by a special jury, they were included in the amnesty (Manfredini, Piccirilli 2011, p. 155).

¹⁰ The curse appears never to have been formally lifted (contrast the case of Alcibiades, D.S. 13.69.2; Plu. *Alc.* 33.3), for neither in 508/7 nor in 432/1 (see below) did the Athenians offer the obvious riposte that the curse was no longer in effect. Cf. *APF*, p. 371; Fornara, Samons 1991, pp. 8-12, 15-17; Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella 2007, p. 123. On the inconsistent treatment of the Alcmaeonids, see Parker 1983, pp. 16-17. R. Gagné acutely observes (Gagné 2013, p. 307) that Herodotus’ «use of the present tense» at 5.71.2, φονεῦσαι δὲ αὐτοὺς αἰτίη ἔχει Ἀλκμεωνίδας, «has the interesting effect of keeping its force both in the time of the narrative and in the time of the audience». But his assertion that Ar. *Eq.* 445-446 (Cleón to the Sausage-Seller: ἐκ τῶν ἀλιτηρίων σέ φημι γεγονέναι τῶν τῆς θεοῦ) «show[s] how burning and actual the accusation of being one of the ἀλιτήριοι τῆς θεοῦ was in 424» is less convincing than his immediately succeeding comment: «a charge made doubly funny by being put in the mouth of Pericles’ former enemy» (Gagné 2013, p. 309).

Isagoras in his struggle with Cleisthenes for supremacy at Athens, king Cleomenes I sent a herald to Athens to demand that the Alcmaeonids be expelled as accursed, including, and especially, Cleisthenes, the son of Megacles II (*PA* 8526; *APF* 9688, VI; *LGP*N II Κλεισθένης 1). Cleisthenes complied, but the rest of the Alcmaeonids remained, so Cleomenes came to Athens with a small force of men and drove out 700 households identified by Isagoras, again citing the curse as grounds for their expulsion. Despite Cleomenes' intervention, the regime of Isagoras quickly collapsed. An attempt to dissolve the Council of the Areopagus¹¹ and entrust power to 300 partisans of Isagoras caused massive Athenian resistance: a two-day siege of the Acropolis ended with the departure of the Spartans and Isagoras under truce and the execution of Isagoras' Athenian supporters. The Athenians then recalled Cleisthenes and the rest of the Alcmaeonids, and Cleisthenes enacted his democratic reforms (*Hdt.* 5.69-73, 6.131.1; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20-22.1). In 506, Cleomenes attempted to redeem his failure by invading Attica with a Peloponnesian army in order to restore Isagoras to power, but the expedition dissolved in embarrassing scandal, owing to the departure first of the Corinthians, then of Cleomenes' own royal colleague, Demaratus, and finally of the rest of Sparta's allies (*Hdt.* 5.74-76).

Any pretense of piety as the motive for Cleomenes' actions had been quickly dispelled when he trespassed upon the *adyton* of the Old Temple of Athena over the express prohibition of the priestess of Athena *Polias* (*Hdt.* 5.72.3-4)¹². And in fact the entire scheme had been devised by Isagoras: Cleomenes issued his initial demand according to Isagoras' instructions (ἐκ διδασχῆς τοῦ Ἰσαγόρεω, *Hdt.* 5.70.2; cf. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20.2), and then relied on Isagoras to target for banishment the 700 actual or supposed Alcmaeonid households (*Hdt.* 5.72.1), which Cleomenes obviously had no way of identifying on his own. Only three years previously, at the insistence of Delphi,

¹¹ Herodotus (5.72.1, 2) and the author of the *Ath. Pol.* (20.3 *bis*), paraphrasing Herodotus, say simply «the Council» (τὴν βουλὴν, τῆς βουλῆς). Since the Solonian Council of 400 is a figment (*pace*, e.g., Rhodes 1993, pp. 153-154, 246) and Cleisthenes had not yet had time to install his new Council of 500 (to meet this difficulty, M.H. Chambers proposed «ein provisorischer Rat»: Chambers 1990, pp. 222-223), the Council of the Areopagus is the only possibility (cf., e.g., Sealey 1976, pp. 149-150).

¹² Identification of temple and priestess: Hornblower 2013, p. 214; cf. Travlos 1971, p. 143. On this incident, see Phillips 2003, pp. 308-310. Compare Cleomenes' forcible intrusion into the Argive Heraeum in 494 (*Hdt.* 6.81).

the Spartans had collaborated with the Alcmaeonids in deposing Hippias and expelling the Peisistratids; any hesitation they felt arose from their friendship with the Peisistratids (Hdt. 5.63.1-2; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 19.4), not the status of the Alcmaeonids¹³. The Cylonian curse was simply a convenient pretext for Cleomenes' attempt to install in Athens an oligarchy under Isagoras that would be friendlier to Sparta than the radical (and hence, from the Spartan point of view, troublesome) government proposed by Cleisthenes¹⁴.

The Spartans revived the issue of the Cylonian curse on the eve of the Peloponnesian War. After the declaration of war by the Peloponnesian League but before the commencement of hostilities, Sparta sent ambassadors to Athens demanding that the Athenians drive out the curse by expelling the Alcmaeonids once again; this time, the principal target was Pericles, an Alcmaeonid on his mother's side (Th. 1.125-126.2, 127; *PA* = *APF* 11811; *LGNP* II Περικλής 3)¹⁵. As much as the Spartans wished to portray themselves as the noble defenders of piety tilting at the windmill of *Realpolitik*, Thucydides was surely far from alone in realizing that their appeal to religion was purely opportunistic (δῆθεν τοῖς θεοῖς πρῶτον τιμωροῦντες, Th. 1.127.1)¹⁶ and their motives were strictly practical. This embassy and those that followed bought additional time for the Peloponnesian League to prepare for the coming war (1.125.2), and Athenian rejection of this and other Spartan demands would provide Sparta and its allies with

¹³ Cleomenes could have retorted, though, that he was unaware of the Cylonian curse before Isagoras informed him of it, and/or, as the Spartans eventually learned, that the Delphic command to liberate Athens was fraudulent, since it was the result of Alcmaeonid bribery (Hdt. 5.90.1, 91.2; cf. 5.63.1), which confirmed and compounded Alcmaeonid impiety.

¹⁴ Cf. Gagné 2013, pp. 321-323. The same motivation, confirmed by the enactment and success of Cleisthenes' reforms, impelled Cleomenes' attempt to restore Isagoras in 506 and Sparta's proposal, frustrated by the refusal of its allies, to restore Hippias as tyrant of Athens in or about 504 (Hdt. 5.91-93).

¹⁵ Pericles' mother was Agariste (II), daughter of Hippocrates: Hdt. 6.131; *PA* 92; *APF* 9688, X; 11811; *LGNP* II Αγαρίστη 2.

¹⁶ But see *contra* Fornara, Samons 1991, pp. 1-24, arguing that «[t]he interplay of human and divine, reflected in the charges and countercharges leveled by both sides before the opening of the war, should not be taken by the modern reader as a mere exercise in propaganda» (pp. 2-3). This is a valuable corrective to the extreme position taken by A.W. Gomme (Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, p. 447): «It is remarkable that a special embassy should have been sent with this idle demand, however superstitious the Spartans may have been... If they wanted simply to weaken the position of Perikles..., one would have expected the mention of the ἄγος to have been part of more serious negotiations».

the best possible pretext for war (1.126.1). The Spartans calculated that if the Athenians expelled Pericles, they would be easier to deal with (1.127.1), while if, as they expected, the Athenians refused to do so, Pericles' popularity would suffer as his countrymen blamed him in part for the conflict (1.127.2)¹⁷.

Sparta's cynical opportunism in this matter is further exposed by its treatment of Alcibiades. In 420, the Spartans at least tacitly permitted Alcibiades to resume, however informally, his family's traditional *proxenia* of Sparta (Th. 5.43.2, 6.89.2; Plu. *Alc.* 14.1), despite his status, identical to that of his cousin and former guardian Pericles, as an Alcmaeonid on the distaff side (Isoc. 16.25, 28; Pl. *Alc.* 1 104b3-8, *Prt.* 320a3-b1; Plu. *Alc.* 1.1-2; *PA* = *APF* 600; *PA* 3187; *APF* 9688, X; *LGPN* II Ἀλκιβιάδης 23, Δεινομάχη 2). Then, after Alcibiades became implicated in the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries in 415 (Th. 6.27-29, 53, 60-61; Plu. *Alc.* 19-22, esp. 22.4-5; *IG* I³ 421.12-25 = Meiggs, Lewis 1988, nr. 79 A 12-25; And. 1.11-14, 16), Sparta not only invited him in and granted him asylum (ἐς τὴν Λακεδαίμονα αὐτῶν τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων μεταπεμψάντων ὑπόσπονδος ἐλθών, Th. 6.88.9) but employed him as a key advisor and a vital agent in the eastern Aegean (Th. 6.88.10-93.2; 7.18.1; 8.6.3, 11.3-12, 14, 17, 26; Plu. *Alc.* 23-24). For over two years – until Alcibiades' affair with Timaea, the wife of Agis II, led to a warrant for his death¹⁸ – the Spartans were evidently willing to risk incurring the wrath of Demeter and Persephone as well as Athena and the *Semnai*; so much for valuing divine over human concerns!

Darius' heralds, Sperthias and Bulis, and the wrath of Talthybius

In 491, seventeen years after their first demand that Athens expel the Alcmaeonids, the Spartans created a major scandal of their own by violating, in dramatic and shocking fashion, the sacrosanctity of heralds. When the heralds of Darius I came to Sparta demanding earth and water as tokens of submission (cf. Hdt. 6.48-49.1), the Spartans

¹⁷ Cf. Gagné 2013, p. 311.

¹⁸ Th. 8.12.2, 45.1; fr. com. adesp. 123 K-A; Eup. fr. 385.2 K-A; Plu. *Alc.* 23.7-9, 28.3-4; *Lys.* 22.6-13; *Ages.* 3.1-4.1, citing Duris of Samos, *FGrHist* 76 F 69; *Mor.* 467f, *De tranquillitate animi* 6. See Phillips 2022a, pp. 30-32.

executed them by throwing them into a well, telling them to fetch their water from there (Hdt. 7.133.1). Effective as this was at the time as a sign and catalyst of resistance to Persia¹⁹, the Spartans came to realize the gravity of their offense. For a long time, Spartan sacrifices yielded bad omens, and the Spartans concluded that they had incurred the wrath of Talthybius, the herald of Agamemnon (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 1.320-321) and patron hero of his colleagues, who had a sanctuary at Sparta, and whose supposed descendants, the Talthybiads, had the exclusive privilege of serving as Spartan heralds²⁰. Repeated meetings of the Spartan Assembly featuring proclamations seeking men willing to die for their country eventually resulted in two Talthybiads, Sperthias son of Aneristus (*PL* 673; *LGNP* III.A Σερχθίας 1) and Bulis son of Nicolaus (*PL* 176; *LGNP* III.A Βούλις 1), volunteering to travel to the court of Xerxes to make the ultimate sacrifice²¹. Although Xerxes refused to put them to death and thereby release the Spartans from their guilt, the wrath of Talthybius slept until 430, when the sons of Sperthias and Bulis, Aneristus (II, *PL* 95; *LGNP* III.A Ανήριστος 2) and Nicolaus (II, *PL* 562; *LGNP* III.A Νικόλαος 42) respectively, dispatched as ambassadors to Artaxerxes I, were betrayed, captured at Bisanthe on the Propontis, brought to Athens, and immediately executed without trial, thus involuntarily expiating the offense that their fathers had attempted to expiate voluntarily (Hdt. 7.133-137; Th. 2.67)²².

The historicity of the slaying of Darius' heralds and the mission of Sperthias and Bulis, as described by Herodotus, has frequently been challenged. R.W. Macan treats the Spartan story with extreme skepticism, finding it unlikely that the Spartans killed Darius' heralds, and maintaining that if Sperthias and Bulis were sent to Xerxes, their mission was not to recompense the king by their deaths; rather, «[i]t may have been purely exploratory, or it may have carried a protest against the reception accorded to Demaratos. The least likely suggestion would be that Sparta was making, at this time, any direct

¹⁹ Cf. Hammond 1988, p. 498.

²⁰ The Spartans may have reached this conclusion on their own, or they may have been so informed by an oracle (*Plu. Mor.* 235f, *Ap. Lac.* anon. 63; Theseus, *FGrHist* 453 F 3 = Stob. 7.70); Vannicelli, Corcella, Nenci 2017, p. 454.

²¹ The mission of Sperthias and Bulis must therefore have taken place after the accession of Xerxes (486) and before Xerxes invaded Greece (480); for the chronological problems, see Macan 1908, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 175-176.

²² On the issue of volition, see Gagné 2013, pp. 299-300, 304. For the relationship of this story to Herodotus' theory of causation, see Gould 1989, pp. 80-81.

bid for Persian support»²³. R. Sealey accepts that the mission took place but goes further than Macan in characterizing it as «a Spartan attempt at a rapprochement with the Persian king»; he contends that «when this story reached Herodotus, a generation had passed since the defeat of Xerxes in Greece and medism had become a disgrace; so the Spartans might wish to disguise anything in their record that resembled an approach to Persia»²⁴.

These doubts and the corresponding alternative reconstructions are, however, unconvincing. Thucydides' omission of the Herodotean prelude to the deaths of Aneristus and Nicolaus is not an impeachment of Herodotus²⁵ but simply an instance of Thucydides' general lack of interest in the supernatural²⁶. The fact that Herodotus does not mention Sparta specifically, much less the slaying of the Persian heralds and its consequences, when he recounts Darius' dispatch of heralds «throughout Greece» (ἀνὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα) at 6.48-49, does not prove that he became aware of the Spartan tradition only after the deaths of Aneristus and Nicolaus²⁷. There is nothing unnatural in Herodotus' postponing the anecdote in order to use it as an explanation of Xerxes' decision not to send heralds to Sparta (and Athens) in 481 (Hdt. 7.131-133.1)²⁸. And even if Herodotus learned the story in or after 430, that would by no means necessitate the conclusion that the Spartans had

²³ Macan 1895, vol. 1, pp. 307-308; vol. 2, pp. 98-101; Macan 1908, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 174-182; vol. 2, pp. 189-199 (quotation: pp. 198-199), 217. Demaratus, deposed from the Euryptid kingship in 491, took refuge at the court of Darius and then served as an advisor to Xerxes: Hdt. 6.61-70; 7.101-105, 209, 234-239; 8.65. Macan rejects absolutely Herodotus' parallel account of the Athenians' executing Darius' heralds by casting them into the pit where they disposed of condemned major offenders against the state (Hdt. 7.133.1-2; for the pit, see, e.g., Lyc. 1.121, with Phillips 2013, pp. 475-476 [nr. 369]). Both the Spartan and the Athenian executions are rejected by F.W. Walbank (Walbank 1967, p. 177, *ad* Plb. 9.38.2, where either the speaker (the Acarnanian ambassador Lyciscus) or Polybius himself mistakes Xerxes for Darius). C. Hignett (Hignett 1963, pp. 87 with n. 3, 95 with n. 7, 97 with n. 4) doubts that Darius sent heralds in 491 (Hdt. 6.48-49, *infra*) and assigns the killing of the Persian heralds at Sparta to 481.

²⁴ Sealey 1976, pp. 201-202. Cf., tentatively, Cartledge 2002, pp. 173-174; Vannicelli, Corcella, Nenci 2017, pp. 455, 458.

²⁵ Cf. Gagné 2013, pp. 297-298; *pace* Macan 1908, vol. 1, part 1, p. 180.

²⁶ Cf. Hornblower 1991, p. 351; Hornblower 1992, pp. 151-152.

²⁷ *Pace* Macan 1895, vol. 2, p. 98; cf. vol. 1, pp. 307-308; Macan 1908, vol. 1, part 1, p. 174; vol. 2, p. 189.

²⁸ Cf. Macan 1908, vol. 1, part 1, pp. lviii-lix.

invented it in the intervening time²⁹. For the Spartans had absolutely no motive to concoct a fabrication of this sort. This is, indeed, the story that the Spartans themselves told (ὥς λέγουσι Λακεδαιμόνιοι, Hdt. 7.137.1)³⁰, and if they had fabricated it, it would have been far more flattering to themselves. The necessity of repeated calls for volunteers (ἀλῆς τε πολλάκις συλλεγομένης καὶ κήρυγμα τοιόνδε ποιευμένων κτλ, Hdt. 7.134.2) belies the Spartans' carefully cultivated reputation for willingness to die for their city (see, e.g., Lyc. 1.107, including Tyrnt. fr. 10 West)³¹; in a story concocted by the Spartans, the first call would have sufficed, and might even have occasioned a brawl in which numerous Spartiates suffered serious injuries as they vied for the honor of sacrificing themselves. Most fundamentally, if the Spartans wished to cover up an embarrassing diplomatic overture to Xerxes, they could simply have claimed that Sperthias and Bulis warned Xerxes against invading Greece, as their predecessor Lacrines had warned Cyrus against harming the Greeks of Ionia (Hdt. 1.152-153.2). They would certainly not have needlessly inculpated themselves in a grave violation of both divine law and the *ius gentium* (τὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων νόμιμα, in the words of Xerxes: Hdt. 7.136.2)³², which not only caused significant harm to Sparta's reputation for piety but also carried a much greater risk of falsification³³.

²⁹ Cf. How, Wells 1928, vol. 2, pp. 180-181.

³⁰ Despite the hesitation of Macan (1908, vol. 1, part 1, p. 180), this must refer to the entire tradition, not just the incidence of the wrath of Talthybius in 430. The sentence reads in full χρόνῳ δὲ μετέπειτα πολλῶ ἐπηγέρθη κατὰ τὸν Πελοποννησίῳ καὶ Ἀθηναίων πόλεμον, ὥς λέγουσι Λακεδαιμόνιοι; χρόνῳ...ἐπηγέρθη shows that the original incidence and cause of the wrath is included. The fact that the story originated in Sparta does not, of course, mean that knowledge of it was restricted to Sparta.

³¹ It should be noted, though, that the suicide mission of Sperthias and Bulis differed in some significant ways from the prospect of death in combat. (This is noted but, in my opinion, underappreciated by E. David [David 2004, pp. 28-29], who also characterizes Herodotus' report of the difficulty in securing volunteers as «somehow surprising and embarrassing».) Sperthias and Bulis had months to contemplate what they believed to be their certain death (cf. Hdt. 5.50, three months' journey from the Ionian coast to the court of Darius); they would not die in battle among their countrymen, and their bodies would presumably not be repatriated. Truly, as Herodotus remarks (7.135.1), αὕτη...ἡ τόλμα τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν θώματος ἀξίη! Cf. Gagné 2013, p. 301.

³² *Ius gentium*: Valckenaer, comparing Ant. 4 α 2 (ὅστις οὖν...ἀνόμως τινὰ ἀποκτείνει, ἀσεβεῖ μὲν περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς, συγχεῖ δὲ τὰ νόμιμα τῶν ἀνθρώπων), *ap.* Gaisford 1824, p. 854; Baehr 1834, p. 642. Cf. Adcock, Mosley 1975, p. 184; Gagné 2013, p. 302.

³³ If the correct text of Theocr. 15.98 is ἄτις καὶ Σπέρχιν τὸν ἰάλεμον ἀρίστευσε, we

The curse of Taenarum

When the Spartans demanded in 432/1 that the Athenians drive out the Cylonian curse by banishing Pericles and the other Alcmaeonids, the Athenians demanded in response that the Spartans drive out two curses: the curse of Taenarum and the curse of Athena *Chalkioikos*. The curse of Taenarum arose because «at one time (ποτε) the Spartans had raised up helot suppliants from the sanctuary of Poseidon at Taenarum, led them away, and killed them; and this, the Spartans believe, is why the great earthquake in Sparta happened to them» (Th. 1.128.1)³⁴. Since the great earthquake struck in 465 (Th. 1.101.2), the slaughter of the suppliants probably occurred no earlier than about 470³⁵. While

have valuable confirmation of the Herodotean tradition, for the presumptive date of composition for such a song (whether the singer in question won the prize «for the dirge [titled] *Sperchis*» (*LSJ*⁹ s.v. ἰάλεμος I) or «for [singing of, or singing the song titled] *Sperchis* the lamentable» (or «melancholy»: *LSJ*⁹ s.v. ἰάλεμος II.1) would be after the departure of Sperthias and Bulis and before their safe return. (Alternate spellings of Herodotus' Περσθίης include Σπέρχις (Plu. *Mor.* 815e, *Praec. rep. ger.* 19: Σπέρχιν), Σπέρχης (Theseus, *FGrHist* 453 F 3 = Stob. 7.70), and Σπέρτις (Plu. *Mor.* 235f, *Ap. Lac.* anon. 63): see *PL* 673; Nachstädt, Sieveking, Titchener 1935, p. 201; Bernardakis, Bernardakis, Ingenkamp 2008-2017, vol. 2, p. 178; vol. 5, p. 104. For the alternation of θ and χ, see Schwyzer 1968, p. 702; cf. p. 634; Chantraine 2009, s.v. σπέρχομαι.) Herodotean commentators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently cited Theocr. 15.98 to this end: Schweighauser *ap.* Gaisford 1824, p. 853; Baehr 1834, p. 639; Blakesley 1854, p. 258, n. 367; Stein [1908] 1963, p. 128; How, Wells 1928, vol. 2, p. 179. It appears that H.G. Liddell and R. Scott also read Σπέρχιν at Theocr. 15.98: in the seventh (Liddell, Scott 1890) and eighth (Liddell, Scott 1897) editions of their lexicon, they cite Theocr. 15.98 under ἰάλεμος II, «hapless, melancholy». (Both Liddell (d. 1898) and Scott (d. 1887) predeceased the revision that produced *LSJ*⁹, which cites Theocr. 15.98 under ἰάλεμος I, «lament, dirge».) By contrast, although Σπέρχιν has the support of most of the MSS, fits the meter, and is the *lectio difficilior*, prominent editors of Theocritus such as R.J. Cholmeley (Cholmeley 1913, p. 120), U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1910, p. 51), A.S.F. Gow (Gow 1952a, vol. 1, p. 116; Gow 1952b, p. 60), and K.J. Dover (Dover 1994, p. 49) have preferred πέρυσιν, which is supported by one papyrus (*P. Antinoae*; a second papyrus, *P. Oxy.* 1618, reads [σ]ιν: Gow 1952a, vol. 1, p. 116).

³⁴ Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 510-511, Dicaeopolis: καὶ τοῖς [i.e., the Spartans] ὁ Ποσειδῶν οὐπὶ Ταῖνάρῳ θεὸς/σεῖσας ἅπανιν ἐμβάλοι τὰς οἰκίας. For the catastrophic effects of the earthquake, cf. D.S. 11.63-64.1; Plu. *Cim.* 16.4-7; Paus. 4.24.5-6; and for varying modern estimates, see Cartledge 2002, pp. 186-191; Doran 2018, pp. 3, 6-7, 25-28. On the importance of the shrine as a place of refuge, especially but not only for helots, see Schumacher 1993, pp. 70-74, 80-83.

³⁵ On the disputed chronology of the earthquake and the helot revolt that it set off, see Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, pp. 298, 401-411; at p. 403 n. 2 Gomme hypothesizes that «[i]t may be also that the first Spartan ἄγος, τὸ ἀπὸ Ταῖνάρου..., was considered to have followed soon after Pausanias' conspiracy with the helots..., and to have caused, or helped to cause, the revolt».

the ephors' annual declaration of war against the helots (Plu. *Lyc.* 28.7 = Arist. fr. 538 Rose = fr. 543 Gigon) meant that under normal circumstances Spartiates could kill helots without incurring liability at the hands of gods or men³⁶, and enemies in war may have had a lesser expectation than others of their suppliant rights' being honored³⁷, the Spartans' interpretation of the catastrophic earthquake as the vengeance of Poseidon constitutes an admission that they had done a grave wrong by killing his suppliants. We have no evidence, though, that any specific individual or group was designated or punished as accursed by either religious or state authorities³⁸; presumably the Spartans believed that they had collectively and fully expiated the curse by their sufferings in and after the earthquake³⁹.

It was a rhetorically effective maneuver for the Athenians to cast this incident in the Spartans' teeth, for the killing of the suppliants at Taenarum presents several significant points of comparison with the massacre of the Cylonians⁴⁰. In each case, the victims were enemies of the state: the Taenarum suppliants *de iure* as helots, and Cylon and his Athenian and Megarian partisans *de facto* as participants in a failed *coup d'état*. It is, moreover, nearly certain that in the Taenarum case, as in that of the Cylonians, the killers violated a pact with their victims. Pausanias asserts that the ephors forcibly removed the suppliants from the altar at Taenarum (ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ...ἀποσπάσασα, 4.24.5).

³⁶ MacDowell 1986, pp. 36-37; Phillips 2022a, p. 41.

³⁷ See Nevin 2017, pp. 111-132, for discussion of Cleomenes' and Agesilaus II's respecting and violating the suppliant rights of enemies.

³⁸ Even in Pausanias' account, which identifies the ephors as responsible for the removal and execution of the suppliants (4.24.5: see below), the wrath of Poseidon fell upon «the Spartiates» (Σπαρτιάταις, 4.24.6). It is important, though, to offer the *caveat* that the general Spartan policy of secrecy (τῆς πολιτείας τὸ κρυπτόν) that prevented Thucydides from obtaining an exact number of Spartan troops at the battle of Mantinea in 418 (Th. 5.68.2) will have imposed even more severe limitations on foreigners' knowledge of internal Spartan affairs.

³⁹ Note that, according to Pausanias (4.24.7), at the end of the helot revolt that was sparked by the earthquake, the Pythia guaranteed the safe conduct of the rebels from Ithome to Naupactus by declaring to the Spartans that they would face punishment if they wronged the suppliant of Zeus of Ithome (ἢ μὴν εἶναι σφίσι δίκην ἀμαρτοῦσιν ἐς τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Ἰθωμάτα τὸν ἱκέτην). Cf. Th. 1.103.2: ἦν δέ τι καὶ χρηστήριον τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις Πυθικὸν πρὸ τοῦ, τὸν ἱκέτην τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Ἰθωμήτα ἀφίεναι. Parke, Wormell 1956, vol. 1, pp. 183-184; vol. 2, pp. 51-52 (nr. 115).

⁴⁰ Cf. Kagan 1969, p. 320: «This seemed closely parallel to the curse attached to the Alcmaeonidae and was a very convenient means with which to embarrass the Spartans».

Although his credibility is compromised by his false identification of the suppliants as Spartans condemned to death for an offense that he admits he cannot specify (Λακεδαιμονίων ἄνδρες ἀποθανεῖν ἐπὶ ἐγκλήματι ὅτω δὴ καταγνωσθέντες, *ibid.*), his identification of the ephors as the authority in charge is entirely reasonable and likely to be correct⁴¹. Thucydides names the authors of the deed simply as οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, but this too must designate some arm or incarnation of the Spartan government⁴². So, in either case, the removal and execution of the suppliants was carried out by agents of the state, as in the Cylonian affair⁴³. On the other hand, Thucydides' description of the removal by the single word ἀναστήσαντες gives no indication that it occurred by force (which might be designated by the addition of βία and/or the substitution of ἀποσπάσαντες *vel sim.*)⁴⁴, as Pausanias claims, and makes it far more likely that the suppliants abandoned sanctuary under the terms of an agreement, as in the descriptions of the Cylon episode by both Herodotus (ἀνιστᾶσι...ὕπεργγύους πλὴν θανάτου, Hdt. 5.71.2) and Thucydides himself (ἀναστήσαντες...ἐφ' ᾧ μηδὲν κακὸν ποιήσουσιν, Th. 1.126.11)⁴⁵. So even if Aelian is merely deducing from Thucydides (as opposed to relying upon a fuller tradition) when he says that the Spartans violated a truce when they removed and killed the suppliants (παρὰσπονδήσαντες ἀνέστησαν καὶ ἀπέκτειναν, VH 6.7)⁴⁶, he is in all probability correct. While there

⁴¹ Note in particular the role of the ephors in the case of Pausanias the regent, *infra* with n. 49.

⁴² Cf. Hornblower 1991, p. 213.

⁴³ Th. 1.126.8, 11 (the Athenians entrusted to the nine archons the conduct of the siege and full discretionary powers to resolve it; these then concluded and violated the truce with the Cylonians) corrects Hdt. 5.71.2 (the presidents of the naucreries concluded the truce). Cf. *supra* with nn. 6-8.

⁴⁴ In addition to Paus. 4.24.5, cf., e.g., Th. 3.81.5: during the Corcyraean civil war, people ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀπεσπώντο; Th. 4.98.3: ...ὅσοι ἐξαναστήσαντές τινα βία νέμονται γῆν; Lys. 13.29: ἐκὼν ἀνέστη Ἀγόρατος ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ· καίτοι νῦν γε βία φησὶν ἀφαιρεθῆναι; X. HG 2.3.55: Satyrus εἴλκε and the attendants of the Eleven εἴλκον Theramenes from the altar where he had taken sanctuary.

⁴⁵ Cf. Forbes 1895, Part II, p. 100: in Th. 1.128.1, «ἀναστήσαντες...impl[ies] a pledge of safety». For similar usages, cf. Th. 1.133 (*infra*); Th. 1.137.1: Admetus, king of the Molossians, ἀνίστησι the suppliant Themistocles and then refuses to surrender him to the Spartans or the Athenians; Th. 3.28.2: the Athenian general Paches, ἀναστήσας the Mytileneans who had taken sanctuary at the altars ὥστε μὴ ἀδικῆσαι, deposits them on Tenedos pending a decision of the Athenian Assembly.

⁴⁶ Aelian's phrasing, Ὅτε οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τοὺς ἐκ Ταινάρου ἰκέτας παρὰσπονδήσαντες ἀνέστησαν καὶ ἀπέκτειναν κτλ, is more naturally taken as

were thus significant similarities between the Cylonian and Taenarum cases, the respective responses of the Athenians and Spartans diverged sharply. The Athenians had cursed (however ineffectively) and exiled (however temporarily) the entire Alcmaeonid *genos*, while, in a much more recent incident, the famously religious Spartans had evidently punished no one.

The death of Pausanias and the curse of Athena *Chalkioikos*

The second curse that the Athenians demanded that Sparta drive out was the curse of Athena *Chalkioikos*, which the Spartans had incurred by their actions in the death of Pausanias the regent (Th. 1.128.2-135.1). Toward the end of the 470s⁴⁷, Pausanias was recalled to Sparta for the second time on suspicion of medism, and the ephors finally decided to arrest him after a confidant of his first showed them a letter that Pausanias had given to him to convey to Artabazus, satrap of Dascylium, and then, feigning supplication at Taenarum with the ephors' connivance, allowed some of them secretly to listen in as Pausanias confirmed his authorship. The ephors waited to conduct the arrest until Pausanias returned to Sparta, intending to apprehend him in public (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, Th. 1.134.1), but two of them, who were sympathetic to Pausanias, tipped him off by signals, and he ran to the nearby Temple of Athena *Chalkioikos* and took sanctuary in a small chamber⁴⁸. The ephors removed the roof of the chamber,

meaning that the Spartans raised the helots up from supplication under truce and then violated that truce (i.e., that the consequence of raising up – namely, the killing – violated the truce and demonstrated that the Spartans had obtained it under false pretenses) than that the act of raising up itself violated the truce, since in that case we would expect more violent language than ἀνέστησαν (see above). N.G. Wilson translates, «When the Spartans broke the terms of an agreement by removing the suppliants from Taenarum and executing them» (Wilson 1997, p. 235). Unlike Pausanias, Aelian correctly identifies the suppliants as helots (ἦσαν δὲ οἱ ἰκέται τῶν εἰλωτῶν, *ibid.*).

⁴⁷ On the chronological difficulties and for various proposals, see Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, pp. 397-401, 403 n. 2 (see n. 35 *supra*); Hornblower 1991, p. 217; Cartledge 2002, pp. 183-186.

⁴⁸ A.W. Gomme comments (Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, p. 436): «apparently, now that the ephors had personal knowledge of Pausanias' guilt, there was to be no trial: he could be condemned straightway... Or is it only that they wanted to but could not arrest the suppliant and bring him to trial?». The second explanation is certainly the correct one (cf. MacDowell 1986, pp. 144-145; Pausanias

barricaded the doors⁴⁹, and starved him to death. When he was on the point of expiring, the ephors brought him out so that his death would not pollute the sacred ground. Immediately upon his removal, Pausanias died; his countrymen initially resolved to throw his body into the Caeadas pit, where they cast the most serious offenders⁵⁰, but then decided instead to bury him near the Caeadas. Later, though, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi instructed the Spartans to move Pausanias' grave to the spot where he died, declared that their actions had brought a curse upon them, and accordingly mandated that they pay back Athena *Chalkioikos* «two bodies for one» (δύο σώματα ἀνθ' ἑνός, Th. 1.134.4). So the Spartans transferred Pausanias' grave to the entrance to the *temenos* of Athena *Chalkioikos*, had two bronze statues of him made, and dedicated them to the goddess⁵¹, in order that they might serve as expiatory compensation for his death (ὥς ἀντὶ Πανσανίου, Th. 1.134.4)⁵².

Pausanias' case presents illuminating parallels with both the Cylonian affair and the killing of the suppliants at Taenarum. While Pausanias was not as blatantly guilty as Cylon and his partisans, he was manifestly implicated in high treason and attempted subversion of the Spartan state involving conspiracy with both Xerxes (Th. 1.128.3-131.1, 132.5-134.1, 135.2) and Sparta's own helot population (Th. 1.132.4-5). The Cylonians' besiegers violated their (at least) implied promise of a trial (they stipulated that the Cylonians would be ὑπεγγύους πλὴν θανάτου, Hdt. 5.71.2; Plutarch makes this explicit: ἐπὶ δίκη, *Sol.* 12.1) and their explicit promise not to inflict any immediate harm (Th. 1.126.11: *supra* with n. 45); the ephors starved Pausanias to death in contravention of Spartan law, which permitted the execution of a

«died of starvation before trial»), as the first explanation is false: sole competence to impose a sentence of death upon a Spartiate – let alone a member of a royal family and guardian of a king (Th. 1.132.1) – belonged to the *gerousia* (X. *Lac.* 10.2; Arist. *Pol.* 1294b33-34; cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 26.2; *Mor.* 217a-b, *Ap. Lac.* Anaxandridas 6; D. 20.107; Isoc. 12.154; see MacDowell 1986, pp. 127-128, 144-150; de Ste. Croix 1972, pp. 131-138, 349-353; Manfredini, Piccirilli 2010, pp. 274-275; Phillips 2022b, p. 80).

⁴⁹ Diodorus (11.45.6-7) reports a tradition that the Spartans hesitated to act until Pausanias' mother (Alcathoe, *PL* 55; *LGP*N III.A Ἀλκαθόα 1) wordlessly set a brick against the entrance and then returned to her house, whereupon the rest, concurring with her judgment, completed what she had begun.

⁵⁰ Cf. Paus. 4.18.4-5, and see MacDowell 1986, pp. 144-146.

⁵¹ In the time of Pausanias the periegete, the statues were located by the altar of Athena *Chalkioikos*: see Paus. 3.17.7-9.

⁵² Parke, Wormell 1956, vol. 1, pp. 182-183; vol. 2, p. 51 (nr. 114).

Spartiate only upon trial, conviction, and sentencing by the *gerousia* (*supra*, n. 48). The Cylonians and Pausanias took refuge with their cities' tutelary goddess, only to have their rights of sanctuary violated by agents of their respective states⁵³. And, as in the Taenarum case (and with the same *caveat* expressed in n. 38 *supra*), the Spartans evidently held neither the ephors nor anyone else personally responsible for Pausanias' death.

The severity of his offenses notwithstanding, in purely religious terms, the events of Pausanias' final days portray him in a far better light than the ephors. When the ephors cynically manipulated the sanctuary of Poseidon at Taenarum by planting a false suppliant, Pausanias raised him up with a guarantee of his safety (πίστιν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ διδόντος τῆς ἀνασπάσεως, Th. 1.133) – which, admittedly, the regent did not live to fulfill or violate. Then, when Pausanias assumed the position of a true suppliant under the protection of Athena *Chalkioikos*, the ephors brazenly trampled upon his right of asylum in the temple of Sparta's own tutelary deity. Their endeavor to circumvent the prohibition against killing a suppliant by sophistically anticipating the Roman jurists' distinction between killing (*occidere*) and furnishing the cause of death (*causam mortis praestare*)⁵⁴ utterly failed to persuade the Delphic authorities. (The Athenians, aided by the ambiguity of the phrase δύο σώματα, evidently argued that dedicating two statues of Pausanias had not in fact expiated the curse.)

In practical terms, had Pausanias perceived his peril sufficiently in advance, he would have done better to flee abroad – if not to Xerxes, which would confirm his guilt, then at least beyond Laconia and Messenia. Pausanias' son Pleistoanax (*PL* 613) and grandson Pausanias (*PL* 596; *LGPN* III.A Πανσανίας 33) clearly learned the lesson provided by his demise. When Pleistoanax fled Sparta in 446/5 to avoid the death penalty, he so feared the long arm of Spartan law

⁵³ Cf. Hornblower 1991, p. 203.

⁵⁴ The former activated a statutory action under the *lex Aquilia* on *damnum iniuria datum*, whose first chapter addresses the wrongful killing of another's slave or four-footed herd animal (Gai. (7 *ad ed. prov.*) D. 9.2.2); the latter activated an *actio in factum*. For the distinction between *occidere* and *causam mortis praestare*, see esp. Ulp. (18 *ad ed.*) D. 9.2.7.6; Ulp. (18 *ad ed.*) D. 9.2.9; Ulp. (9 *disputationum*) D. 9.2.49 *pr.*; Julian (86 *dig.*) D. 9.2.51 *pr.* The case most directly comparable to the demise of Pausanias is that of the slave who is shut up and starved to death, which constitutes *causam mortis praestare* and thus gives rise to an *actio in factum* (Gai. 3.219; Ulp. (18 *ad ed.*) D. 9.2.9.2; *Inst. Iust.* 4.3.16).

that half of his new house, at Mt. Lycaeum in Arcadia, lay within the sanctuary of Zeus. There he lived for nineteen years until the Spartans, acting on repeated commands of the Pythia, recalled him and restored him to the Agiad throne (Th. 5.16)⁵⁵. Pleistoanax' son Pausanias, who succeeded his father as king first during Pleistoanax' exile and then after his death, was put on trial in 395/4 for arriving too late at the battle of Haliartus, obtaining the return of the Spartan dead under truce instead of engaging the enemy, and (nine years earlier) failing to crush the Athenian democratic resistance to the Thirty Tyrants. He ignored his summons to trial, was sentenced to death, and fled to the sanctuary of Athena *Alea* in Tegea, where he remained until his death by illness in or after 380 (X. *HG* 3.5.6-7, 17-25 [cf. X. *HG* 2.4.28-39; Lys. 18.10-12; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 38.3-4]; Paus. 3.5.2-6; Plu. *Lys.* 28-30.1, *Agis* 3.5; *IG* V.1 1565 = Tod 1948, nr. 120)⁵⁶.

Homicide and sanctuary from the reign of Agis IV to the interregnum

Despite the numerous and rampant illegalities that characterized the opening phases of the Spartan revolution⁵⁷, during the reigns of Agis IV and Cleomenes III, both the advocates and the opponents of reform appear consistently to have respected the rights of suppliants in sanctuaries. In 243/2, facing trial for illegally procreating with a foreign woman and settling abroad – the latter offense carrying a penalty of

⁵⁵ Cf. Th. 1.114.2, 2.21.1; Ephor. *FGrHist* 70 F 193; Plu. *Per.* 22.1-3; for the sanctuary of Zeus Lycaeus, see Paus. 8.38.6-7. I follow the reconstruction of D.M. MacDowell (MacDowell 1986, pp. 147-148; cf. Phillips 2022b, p. 89 with n. 37; Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, p. 341) whereby Pleistoanax was convicted of taking a bribe to abandon his invasion of Attica, was sentenced to a fine, and then incurred the death penalty for failure to pay the fine. Alternatively, Pleistoanax may have been sentenced to exile for receiving the bribe (e.g., Cartledge 2002, p. 197), or he may have fled to avoid a sentence of death for receiving the bribe (e.g., *PL* 613).

⁵⁶ MacDowell 1986, p. 147; de Ste. Croix 1972, p. 160; Phillips 2022b, p. 86, n. 25. The sanctuary of Athena *Alea* had earlier served as the place of refuge for Leotychidas II, who fled there in 476 either to avoid trial (so Pausanias) or upon conviction (Herodotus' wording is ambiguous) for receiving bribes, and remained there until his death: Hdt. 6.72; Paus. 3.7.9-10; MacDowell 1986, pp. 148-149; Phillips 2022b, p. 85, n. 20. At that sanctuary Leotychidas and Pausanias could view the fetters in which the Tegeates had bound their Spartan prisoners during the First Tegeate War (Hdt. 1.66.3-4; cf. *supra* with n. 2).

⁵⁷ See most recently Phillips 2023.

death⁵⁸ – Leonidas II took refuge in the Temple of Athena *Chalkioikos*. Joined there by his daughter Chilonis (*PLAA* 2; *LGP*N III.A Χιλωνίς 4), he refused to emerge for his trial, and so was deposed and replaced by Cleombrotus II. The next year, the new board of ephors convinced Leonidas to leave sanctuary, but when Agis and Cleombrotus removed and replaced those ephors, Leonidas, again fearing for his life, fled to Tegea. And his fears were justified: Agis' uncle Agesilaus (*PLAA* 2; *LGP*N III.A Ἀγησίλαος 12), one of the replacement ephors, sent men to kill him on the road, but Agis sent his own men, who escorted Leonidas safely to Tegea (Plu. *Agis* 11.2-12; Paus. 3.6.7-8)⁵⁹. There he remained until the following year, when the enemies of Agesilaus brought him home and restored him to the Agiad throne (Plu. *Agis* 16.4), which he held until his death (Plu. *Cleom.* 3.1).

The ascendancy of the opponents of Agis and Agesilaus and the return of Leonidas catalyzed a new round of flights to exile or sanctuary. Agesilaus' son Hippomedon (*PLAA* 1; *LGP*N III.A Ἰππομέδων 4) persuaded his fellow Spartiates to let him sneak Agesilaus out of the country to safety (Plu. *Agis* 16.5), while Agis took sanctuary at the Temple of Athena *Chalkioikos*, and Cleombrotus sought refuge at a sanctuary of Poseidon (*Agis* 16.6)⁶⁰. Leonidas brought troops to Poseidon's sanctuary and confronted Cleombrotus, but Chilonis had publicly switched allegiance from her father to her husband and joined Cleombrotus in his supplication (*Agis* 16.7-18.1), and Leonidas permitted Cleombrotus to go into exile, accompanied by Chilonis and their children (*Agis* 18.2-4). Despite Leonidas' assurances, Agis refused to abandon sanctuary altogether, but he occasionally left Athena's protection to go to the bath. This assumption of risk turned out to

⁵⁸ Cf. X. *Lac.* 14.4; Isoc. 11.18; Arist. fr. 543 Rose = fr. 549.1 Gigon = Harpo. s.v. καὶ γὰρ τὸ μηδένα τῶν μαχίμων ἄνευ τῆς τῶν ἀρχόντων γνώμης ἀποδημεῖν, κ 8 Keaney; Plu. *Lyc.* 27.6; *Mor.* 238d-e, *Ap. Lac.* Inst. Lac. 19; and see MacDowell 1986, pp. 115-116; Cartledge 1987, pp. 36-37, 49-50, 244; Manfredini, Piccirilli 2010, pp. 277-278; Phillips 2022b, p. 86, n. 26.

⁵⁹ Given the attempt on his life, he may have taken sanctuary in the Temple of Athena *Alaea*, like his predecessors Leotychidas II and Pausanias (*supra* with n. 56).

⁶⁰ Plutarch says «the sanctuary of Poseidon» (τὸ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος ἱερόν), which *in vacuo*, and especially from the point of view of a non-Spartan, should mean the most famous one, at Taenarum (cf., e.g., Sinn 1993, p. 106). But some commentators (e.g., Flacelière, Chambry 1976, p. 149; Marasco 1994, p. 788, n. 86; Magnino 2020, p. 166, n. 49) have proposed that a different Laconian sanctuary of Poseidon may be meant, such as that of Poseidon Ἀσφάλιος, in the agora of Sparta (Paus. 3.11.9), or Poseidon Γαῖά(φ)οχος, near Therapne (*IG* V.1 213.9, 50-51, 83, 92; Paus. 3.20.2).

be mortal. On his last such outing, his supposed friends Amphares (*LGPV* III.A Ἀμφάρης 1: a member of the board of ephors recently installed by Leonidas), Damochares (*LGPV* III.A Δαμοχάρης 5), and Arcesilaus (*PLAA* 1; *LGPV* III.A Ἀρκεσίλαος 9) summarily arrested him and took him to the prison, which Leonidas promptly surrounded with a large contingent of mercenaries. There, after a sham trial, the ephors and some like-minded members of the *gerousia* sentenced Agis to death and hastily executed him by hanging⁶¹. Amphares then lured Agis' mother, Agesistrata, and grandmother Archidamia (*LGPV* III.A Ἀρχιδάμεια 2) into the prison by telling them that no harm would come to Agis, and had them summarily executed (*Agis* 18.4-20).

These executions involved gross violations of Spartan law. Agis, as king, was entitled to a public trial by the full *gerousia*, the board of ephors, and his fellow king (as predetermined as the verdict might have been, publicity might have mitigated the sentence)⁶². Agesistrata and Archidamia received no trial at all. But Amphares and his fellow plotters had carefully refrained from violating Agis' suppliant rights: they purposely waited to strike until he had abandoned sacred ground (ἐκεῖ συλλαβεῖν αὐτὸν ἔγνωσαν, ὅταν ἔξω τοῦ ἱεροῦ γένηται, *Agis* 19.1). Had Agis remained obdurate in his supplication, he might have suffered only deposition, like Leonidas two years previously, or deposition and exile, like Cleombrotus; but his overconfidence spelled his doom.

Fourteen years later, in 227, Cleomenes III began in earnest his quest to resume Agis' failed revolution with a plot to assassinate the ephors and eliminate their office. The assassins attacked the ephors as they dined in their *syssition*, and killed four of them and ten men who came to their aid. But the fifth ephor, Agylaeus, played dead after receiving a wound, and after the assassins left, he dragged himself out, surreptitiously crawled into the adjacent small Temple of Phobos, and barred the door. The next day, he left the temple, and Cleomenes and his supporters spared him further harm (*Plu. Cleom.* 7.6-8.4, 9.7). While Plutarch does not say so, we may assume with some confidence that a guarantee of continued safety was Agylaeus' condition for abandoning sanctuary.

⁶¹ On execution by hanging in the room of the prison known as the Dechas, see MacDowell 1986, pp. 145-146.

⁶² Paus. 3.5.2; MacDowell 1986, pp. 128-129; de Ste. Croix 1972, pp. 350-353.

The respect for the rights of suppliants that had apparently obtained, even amidst homicidal political chaos, since the accession of Agis IV vanished during the interregnum between Cleomenes' flight after the battle of Sellasia (222) and the restoration of the dyarchy in 219. During his brief occupation of Sparta in the wake of Sellasia, Antigonos III Doson revived the ephorate as part of his restoration of Sparta's «ancestral constitution and laws»⁶³, but the consequent bloody *stasis* in a Sparta now bereft of kings culminated in the assassinations of ephors within the sacred precinct of Athena *Chalkioikos* in both 221/20 and 220/19⁶⁴. In the first incident, the three pro-Aetolian ephors of 221/20 ordered a muster under arms in the *temenos* of Athena *Chalkioikos*, ostensibly because the Macedonian army was approaching Sparta, but in fact so that they might rid themselves of their colleague and opponent Adeimantus (*LGP*N III.A Ἀδείμαντος 7), who they feared would inform Philip V of their actions. As Adeimantus addressed the assembled troops, young men who had been suborned by the pro-Aetolian ephors stabbed him to death, along with four other prominent Macedonian sympathizers and several more Spartiates besides (*Plb.* 4.22.5-11).

The next year, the Spartans elected pro-Macedonian ephors, and their pro-Aetolian predecessors resolved to kill all five of them, again suborning young men to pollute the sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos* by homicide. At the culmination of a traditional armed procession to the sanctuary by the men of military age, the designated assassins jumped out from the ranks and killed the ephors as they were conducting the prescribed sacrifices at the altar and offering-table of the goddess (*Plb.* 4.35.1-4). As skeptical of religion as he could be⁶⁵, even Polybius condemns this slaughter as an act of unsurpassed impiety (*πρᾶγμα... πάντων ἀσεβέστατον*, 4.35.1) and denounces the utter contempt for the sanctuary, which «provided its safety to all who fled to it for refuge, even if a person had been condemned to death», that the perpetrators displayed by butchering their victims at two of its most

⁶³ *Plb.* 2.70.1; *Plu.* *Cleom.* 30.1; *Paus.* 2.9.2. See Walbank 1970, p. 288; Forrest 1968, p. 148; Shimron 1972, pp. 60-63; Phillips 2023, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁴ On these events, see Walbank 1970, pp. 469-470, 483-484; Shimron 1972, pp. 72-74; Cartledge in Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, pp. 61-62; Kralli 2017, pp. 251-254, 285; Michalopoulos 2019, pp. 207-209.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., his pragmatic and instrumental view of Roman religion (*Plb.* 6.56.6-15), with Walbank 1970, pp. 12, 741-743.

sacred spots⁶⁶. Polybius gives no indication that the killers or their fellow conspirators were prosecuted at law⁶⁷, or that the curse of the goddess was pronounced either against them specifically or, as in the case of Pausanias, against the entire Spartan community. But the attendant circumstances of acute and constantly oscillating civil strife will have militated against the pursuit, enactment, and enforcement of such measures, especially within Sparta itself.

Conclusions

In the Hellenistic cases from the reign of Agis to the interregnum following Sellasia, as described by Plutarch and Polybius, we find a stark contrast between the honoring of suppliants' rights under Agis and Cleomenes and the atrocious violation of those rights during the interregnum. Why was the principle of suppliant immunity seemingly the only norm that the reforming kings and their opponents were not willing to breach? I suspect that a combination of pragmatic and symbolic factors provides the answer. As long as the various actors believed that they could achieve their aims without harming suppliants, there was no need to compound the existing danger to themselves by incurring additional risk to their standing with both gods and men. And so the enemies of Leonidas II were (mistakenly, as it turned out) contented with isolating him in the Temple of Athena *Chalkioikos* and removing him from the throne, the exile of Cleombrotus II sufficed for Leonidas, and Agylaeus was allowed to live because the assassination of the other four ephors had accomplished Cleomenes' goal of abolishing their office⁶⁸.

The respect for those suppliants, and the care taken by the plotters against Agis to arrest him only after he had abandoned sanctuary,

⁶⁶ καίτοι πᾶσι τοῖς καταφυγοῦσι τὴν ἀσφάλειαν παρεσκεύαζε τὸ ἱερόν, καὶ θανάτου τις ἢ κατακεκριμένος· τότε δὲ διὰ τὴν ὀμότητα τῶν τολμῶντων εἰς τοῦτ' ἦλθε καταφρονήσεως ὥστε περὶ τὸν βωμὸν καὶ τὴν τράπεζαν τῆς θεοῦ κατασφαγῆναι τοὺς ἐφόρους ἅπαντας (Plb. 4.35.3-4). Defiling an altar – the *sanctum sanctorum* (Burkert 1985, p. 87; Sinn 1993, pp. 96-97) – by homicide was a supreme act of sacrilege: compare the Cylonian case, in which some of Cylon's partisans were killed at the altars of the *Semnai* (Th. 1.126.11; Plu. *Sol.* 12.1: *supra* with n. 7).

⁶⁷ On Spartan homicide law, see Phillips 2022b.

⁶⁸ Cf. Michalopoulos 2019, p. 104: «Ο θρίαμβός του [*scil.* Κλεομένη] ήταν τόσο απόλυτος ὥστε να του επιτρέπει εκδηλώσεις μεγαλοψυχίας».

was in all probability also motivated by the ongoing battle over the Lycurgan inspiration and precedents claimed by both the reformers and their adversaries (Plu. *Agis* 4.2, 6.2, 9.4, 10.2-8, 19.7; *Cleom.* 10.2, 8-10; 16.6; 18.2, 4; *Comp. Ag. Cleom. Gracch.* 2.4, 5.3-4)⁶⁹. According to Plutarch, one of the elements of the Lycurgan tradition that Cleomenes specifically cited was the story that Lycurgus, wishing to rule as king, made an armed appearance in the Spartan agora that frightened king Charillus into taking sanctuary at the altar there; but Charillus was such a good man and a patriot that he quickly partnered with Lycurgus and accepted his transformation of the Spartan constitution⁷⁰. Thus, Cleomenes maintained, Lycurgus had demonstrated the difficulty of effecting constitutional change without violence and terror, tools that Cleomenes himself had employed with great moderation in removing those who opposed the salvation of Sparta (*Cleom.* 10.8-10). Of course, a vast gulf separated the mere threat of violence attributed to Lycurgus from the killing of fourteen people (*Cleom.* 8) and the exile of eighty more (*Cleom.* 10.1) that Cleomenes sought to justify. Significantly, though, the moral of the story that Cleomenes promulgated entailed by implication the duty of Lycurgan reformers to follow the great legislator's example by honoring suppliant rights. Abandoning that duty would, therefore, cede valuable Lycurgan ground to the opposition, and Cleomenes cannot have been the first or only prominent Spartiate to realize this.

Why, then, the sudden and drastic departure from this supposedly Lycurgan precedent during the interregnum? To be sure, the assassinations of 221/20 and 220/19 confirm κατ' ἐξοχήν Thucydides' observations regarding the *stasis* at Corcyra and elsewhere during the Peloponnesian War (Th. 3.81-83). The constancy of human nature (3.82.2), in Thucydides' analysis, dictates that severe civil strife produces a reversal of values, including an abandonment of piety (εὐσεβεία... οὐδέτεροι ἐνόμιζον, 3.82.8), so radical that at the culmination of the conflict at Corcyra, «as tends to happen in such a circumstance» (οἷον φιλεῖ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ γίγνεσθαι), no extremity of homicidal conduct went undone: fathers killed sons; people were dragged from

⁶⁹ See most recently Phillips 2023.

⁷⁰ In the version Plutarch relates at *Lyc.* 5.6-8, Lycurgus is accompanied by thirty men, Charilaus (as he is there called) flees to the sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos*, and he abandons sanctuary only upon receiving oaths (λαβὼν ὅρκους: *scil.*, guaranteeing his safety).

sanctuaries and killed next to them; some were even walled up inside the Temple of Dionysus and starved to death (3.81.5; cf. n. 44 *supra*). But what of the specific cases at hand? According to Polybius, Antigonus' «liberation» of the Spartans (ἡλευθερωμένοι) and the absence of kings suddenly transformed the Spartans: previously accustomed to obey their kings and other leaders absolutely, now all sought equal political power, and this caused the homicidal *stasis* of the interregnum (Plb. 4.22.3-4).

While there is something to be said for the potentially (but not necessarily) moderating influence of kings as a counterweight to the power of the ephors, Polybius' analysis is, at best, incomplete⁷¹. It does not explain a dereliction of religious law so complete that the sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos*, which had been abused before, in a manner less extreme by comparison, in the case of Pausanias, was now deliberately chosen as the staging-ground for repeated assassinations, with the altar and offering-table of Athena providing no more protection to the ephors of 220/19 than the altars of the *Semnai* had to the partisans of Cylon⁷². The leaders of the pro-Aetolian faction clearly calculated that the practical benefits of carrying out assassinations in Athena's sanctuary outweighed the risk of divine anger and its consequences. They chose the place and times for the assassinations in order that they might simultaneously decapitate the opposition and terrorize its surviving members to maximum effect. If ephors could be killed within the sanctuary of Sparta's tutelary deity, in and despite the presence of the entire fully-armed Spartan host – and in the latter case,

⁷¹ Cf. Walbank 1970, p. 469: «P.'s picture of the troubles at Sparta as the growing pains of a people unused to freedom is disingenuous and inadequate; the existence of a strong pro-Cleomenean faction was the real issue, as is evident from the fact that three of the five ephors [of 221/20] chose the Aetolian side».

⁷² A. Papatheodorou (Papatheodorou 1961, pp. 662-663, n. 1) notes *ad* Plb. 4.35.3 that Pausanias «δὲν ἐφονεύθη μὲν ἀπέθανεν ὅμως ἀποκλεισθεὶς ἐντὸς τοῦ ἱεροῦ». Cf. Sassu 2023, esp. pp. 52-57 (including Agis IV, p. 55), 60-61 (Cleomenes III and the ephors of 227), on «the weakening of the fear of divine revenge and the change in the perception of impiety» (pp. 52-57) and «the decay of traditional rules, sacred precincts and deities», including «the decline, in the role of asylum, of the sanctuary [of] Athena *Chalkioikos*» (p. 61). In ancient Greek literature, the *topos* of Spartan decline is at least as old as Xenophon (*Lac.* 14, culminating with the accusation that the Spartans φανεροὶ εἰσιν οὔτε τῷ θεῷ πειθόμενοι οὔτε τοῖς Λυκούργου νόμοις, *Lac.* 14.7). The god in question is Delphic Apollo, who ratified Lycurgus' laws and thereby made it οὐ μόνον ἄνομον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνόσιον...τὸ πυθοχρήστοις νόμοις μὴ πειθεσθαι (*Lac.* 8.5, with Weiske *ap.* Schneider *ap.* Dindorf 1866, p. 38; cf. Plu. *Lyc.* 6.1-6; Hdt. 1.65.2-5; etc.).

while the ephors were sacrificing on behalf of the Spartan state – then woe betide the ordinary Spartan who dared to resist the revolutionary regime. And the second round of assassinations proved particularly effective: the pro-Aetolians drove their surviving opponents into exile, chose replacement ephors from among themselves, concluded an alliance with the Aetolian League, and restored the dyarchy by the appointment of Agesipolis III and Lycurgus (Plb. 4.35.5-15).

As we have seen, neither the assassins of the ephors nor their high-ranking accomplices nor, evidently, the Spartans as a community incurred any legal or religious liability; this is probably to be expected, given the (temporary) triumph of the guilty faction and the general state of severe insecurity and instability at Sparta. More surprising is the contrast within the Spartan responses that we see in the Archaic and Classical cases. When prompted by Delphi (after the death of Pausanias the regent) or disaster (after the killing of Darius' heralds and the slaughter of the helots at Taenarum), the Spartans readily assumed, and accordingly endeavored to expiate, communal religious liability⁷³. However, on the evidence we have, they consistently refused to impose any form of liability upon specific Spartiate individuals or groups, despite their enforcement of just such a sanction against the accursed Alcmaeonids in 508/7 and their demand that the Athenians repeat it in 432/1. Part of the reason for this may be the Spartans' habitual disinclination – at least after the problem of *oliganthrôpia* became severe⁷⁴ – to inflict the penalties of death or exile on their own citizens⁷⁵; it is also possible that some offenders were punished by fines that our sources either were not aware of or did not deign to report.

The prevalence of accounts involving Spartan offenders, both at home and abroad⁷⁶, indicates that the Spartans were no less likely than their fellow Greeks, and quite possibly more likely, both to manipulate religious law and to violate it outright. In this they were

⁷³ Cf. Parker 1989, p. 161 (emphasis added): «When they broke their own rules they acknowledged their guilt, and *as a state* they appear in our sources as almost uniquely willing to ascribe national misfortunes to collective religious guilt».

⁷⁴ For the argument that the earthquake of 465 was the initial catalyzing event, see Doran 2018, pp. 25-28.

⁷⁵ Th. 1.132.1 (*supra*, n. 48); Phillips 2022b, p. 85; cf. MacDowell 1986, 140.

⁷⁶ Cf. Nevin 2017, p. 200, noting «the conspicuous number of colourful episodes in which the Spartan kings personally step over the boundaries». On the actions of Spartan commanders abroad, see Nevin 2017, esp. pp. 111-132 (*supra*, n. 37).

both abetted and compromised by their reputation for piety⁷⁷. They relied on this reputation to lend credibility to their blatantly self-serving and opportunistic charges against the Alcmaeonids, and to their claims of full atonement for the deaths of Pausanias and the Taenarum suppliants⁷⁸. On the other hand, the same reputation had the potential to make the instances in which Spartans belied it especially damaging. To be sure, that potential was not always realized: we have no evidence that the killing of Darius' heralds cost Sparta anything (except, according to Herodotus, the lives of Aneristus and Nicolaus) and no reason to believe that, on the eve of the Peloponnesian War, other Greeks took Athens' appeal to the curses of Taenarum and Athena *Chalkioikos* any more seriously than Sparta's invocation of the Cylonian curse.

These reciprocal charges nonetheless demonstrate the influence that such major incidents of sacrilege could have on foreign affairs. Regardless of its speciousness, both Cleomenes I and the Spartans in 432/1 thought it necessary to proffer the pretext of the Cylonian curse in order to legitimize their interference in Athenian affairs; and the Athenians' retort on the latter occasion both exposed Spartan hypocrisy and endeavored (to whatever effect) to paint Sparta as a greater offender against the gods than Athens⁷⁹. Cleomenes' intervention, ending in his embarrassing withdrawal, the departure of Isagoras, and the execution of Isagoras' partisans, only strengthened the popularity of Cleisthenes and his democratic reforms⁸⁰. The rift between Cleomenes and Demaratus that opened during Cleomenes' failed quest for redemption in 506 would culminate fifteen years later in Demaratus' deposition and defection to Persia (Hdt. 6.61-70). The killing of Darius' heralds cast Sparta's policy of resistance to Persia in

⁷⁷ Cf. Bayliss 2009, on the Spartans' propensity to deceive their adversaries by oaths.

⁷⁸ Cf. Flower 2009, p. 214: «the Spartans sought to control not only themselves, but also other social groups in Laconia and even other Greek communities, by creating and projecting an image of their piety that entailed the possession of a special relationship with supernatural powers».

⁷⁹ Cf. Adcock, Mosley 1975, pp. 184, 228-229; Sinn 1993, p. 94.

⁸⁰ The Athenians were so determined to safeguard their nascent democracy against further Spartan aggression that, immediately after the recall of Cleisthenes and the rest of the Alcmaeonids, they even attempted to secure an alliance with Persia (Hdt. 5.73). At 5.78 Herodotus famously testifies to the increased military morale and effectiveness under the democracy that was displayed in Athens' victories over the Boeotians and Chalcidians in 506.

stone and encouraged other Greeks to adopt a similar, if less spectacular, posture of intransigence, which, together with Sparta's leadership, led to victory in the Second Persian War⁸¹. The slaughter of the suppliants at Taenarum was a, if not the, proximate grievance that motivated the helots to take advantage of the earthquake of 465 and rise in revolt (cf. n. 35 *supra*), which posed a grave and lasting threat to Sparta's internal security⁸², led to the deterioration of its relations with Athens following the dismissal of the Athenian allied force commanded by Cimon (Th. 1.102), and limited Sparta's participation in the opening years of the resulting First Peloponnesian War⁸³.

How the survival of Pausanias the regent might have affected the course of Spartan history is anyone's guess; it will have depended in large part on whether he could have rehabilitated himself among his countrymen. But the foreign-policy effects of the assassinations of pro-Macedonian leaders in 221/20 and 220/19 are absolutely clear. The killing of Adeimantus and others in 221/20 caused a backlash that returned the pro Macedonians to power, but their total eclipse swiftly followed. While popular demand upon the death of Cleomenes III (Plb. 4.35.9) would probably have produced the restoration of the dyarchy irrespective of the party in power, the decapitation and dispersal of the pro-Macedonian faction by their pro-Aetolian adversaries in 220/19 ensured that Sparta would ally with the Aetolian League against Macedon in the Social War.

⁸¹ Cf. Gagné 2013, pp. 302, 305.

⁸² See Luraghi 2008, pp. 183-184.

⁸³ Retaining the MSS' δεκάτω in the phrase δεκάτω ἔτει at Th. 1.103.1 (for the controversy, see Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, pp. 302-303, 401-411) brings the end of the helot revolt down to 456. It is not coincidental that the earliest Spartan involvement in the First Peloponnesian War mentioned by Thucydides is the expedition to Doris, which culminated in the battle of Tanagra, one year earlier (Th. 1.107.2-108.2): by that point, the Spartans evidently believed that they had the helot situation sufficiently under control to risk sending a large force (1,500 Spartiates and 10,000 allies, Th. 1.107.2) beyond the borders of Laconia and Messenia. See Fornara, Samons 1991, pp. 132-137; *contra* Gomme, Andrewes, Dover 1945-1981, vol. 1, pp. 402-403, n. 3.

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Wealth and Religiosity in Sparta: Production, Dedication and Diffusion of Laconic Bronze Vessels during the 6th cent. BC

*Chiara Tarditi **

Keywords: bronze vessels, Laconia, sanctuaries, Archaic period, votive offerings.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: χάλκινα αγγεία, Λακωνία, ιερά, αρχαϊκή περίοδος, αναθήματα.

Abstract

The study of the bronze vessels fragments from Laconian sanctuaries offers the possibility to recognize some specific characters of the Laconian production and the role of bronze vessels in the votive offerings.

Περίληψη

Η μελέτη των θραυσμάτων χάλκινων αγγείων από λακωνικά ιερά προσφέρει τη δυνατότητα να αναγνωριστούν ορισμένοι ιδιαίτεροι χαρακτήρες της λακωνικής παραγωγής και ο ρόλος των χάλκινων αγγείων στις αναθηματικές προσφορές.

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Introduction

The dedication of bronze vessels in the Greek sanctuaries was very common during the Archaic period, as the finds from several sacred pieces attest, as in Olympia, on the Athenian Acropolis, etc. These offerings are well attested also in the Laconian sanctuaries, even if not very numerous. Without significant funerary assemblages, the development of the wealth in Laconia can be evaluated essentially through the votive objects (mostly pottery, bronze and lead objects), which have been offered in cult places¹. The bronze vessel fragments there found are extremely useful as they attest the richness of the devotees and the use and the votive function, bronze vessels had in Laconian religious practices. They are an important set of evidence of the material and religious investment, as bronze is a relatively precious metal, whose votive use indicates a not insignificant effort², well representing the individual and community wealth. The votive dedication of bronze vessels is an interesting aspect of the Laconian social practice also in relation to the question of the Spartan austerity, as addressed by several scholars³. In fact, the bronze vessels give an important contribution to better clarify what must have been the peculiar traits of the Laconian archaic society, helping to outline a picture that, at least for the archaic period, is far from the idea of an austere and sober, “Spartan” world. Looking at the bronze vessels, together with the other categories of luxury objects, we have the picture of a society characterized by a notable development of artistic craftsmanship, intended for both local and export customers.

The finds

Bronze vessels fragments have been discovered in almost all the main cult sites archaeologically investigated, as the sanctuaries on the Acropolis of Sparta, those of Artemis *Orthia*, *Menelaion*, *Amyklaion*, Apollo *Maleatas*, Apollo *Tyritas* and Apollo *Hyperteleatas*.

¹ See summary in Cavanagh 2017; Prost 2017; Hodkinson 2000; Hodkinson, Gallou 2021; on lead figurines Lloyd 2021.

² Hodkinson 1998a, p. 55.

³ Hodkinson 1998b with previous bibliography.

As already noted for other contexts⁴, also the knowledge of the bronze vessels from the Laconian sanctuaries is made difficult due to a series of post-depositional factors: recasting of bronze votives by the temple officials, frequent lootings in the sanctuary areas, corrosion and disintegration of the bronze, especially in swamps and damp conditions. For these reasons, as Hodkinson says, «the numbers of excavated bronzes are a minimum to be multiplied many times over in any estimation of the original level of bronze dedications»⁵. And, last but not least, our knowledge is limited also by the uncomplete publication of the excavated finds⁶. As well known, the published studies, especially the oldest ones, contain a very partial presentation of the materials found during the excavations, as their approach was generally aimed to enhance the best pieces, neglecting for example the objects without any figurative decoration, often just collectively mentioned (for example: “basin handles” or “vase basis”⁷). This makes them unusable for the purposes of an investigation based on the exact quantity of the pieces and on the stylistic analysis of the formal, typological and decorative variants.

How many fragments?

On the basis of the edited studies, a list of the bronze vessels finds from the archaic period found in Laconia has been presented by Stephen Hodkinson⁸ and Conrad Stibbe⁹. Hodkinson mentions only the fragments from the sanctuaries of the Acropolis of Sparta, Artemis *Orthia*, Menelaion and Amyklaion, with a total of at least 50 fragments, excluding those undated or uncertain; Stibbe adds also the finds from the sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas* at Phoiniki.

This sanctuary is particularly interesting because it is a good example of how the number of the known pieces could increase if we move from the objects known from old publications to a direct

⁴ Tarditi 2021.

⁵ Hodkinson 1998a, p. 56.

⁶ Hodkinson 1998a, p. 56.

⁷ Pavlides 2018b.

⁸ Hodkinson 1998a: tables 5.3a-c and 5.4 a-d also indicate notable differences in the distribution of bronze artefacts between the various sanctuaries.

⁹ Stibbe 2009, tab. 15.1.

analysis of all the materials kept in storerooms and Museums. In his study of the materials from Phoiniki¹⁰ Stibbe presents the results of a research carried out on the personal examination of the pieces kept in the storerooms of the Archaeological Museum of Sparta and of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Even if he couldn't see all the pieces coming for sure from this site¹¹, the results of Stibbe's research are nevertheless extremely meaningful, as he was able to identify thirteen pieces of archaic bronze vessels more than the twelve mentioned in his previous study based only on the published material, for a total of twenty-five pieces¹². The sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas* thus yielded the largest quantity of bronze vessels among all the Laconian sites¹³. Faced with the discrepancy between the published materials and those preserved in the museums, we could expect a similar increase from a direct examination of all the finds from the other investigated sanctuaries.

Even with all these limitations, the fragments known from the Laconian sanctuaries are enough to recognize the presence of many bronze vessels in Sparta and Laconia as well. If we accept the total number of 50 archaic pieces mentioned in the Hodkinson's study of 1998¹⁴, adding the 25 fragments from Phoiniki known from Stibbe's researches, at least two vessels from the sanctuary of Apollo *Tyritas*, one handle from that of Apollo *Maleatas*, one from Karyai and a *phiale* from Aghia Thekla¹⁵, we get a total of at least 80 Archaic bronze vessels or fragments from different shapes: volute craters, *hydriai*, *oinochoai*, *lebetes*, basins, *situlae*, tripods, *phialai*, plastic vases.

The Laconian production

The first question about these fragments is if they can be attributed to a Laconian production or were imported from elsewhere. The

¹⁰ Stibbe 2008.

¹¹ Stibbe 2008, p. 43, n. 16. As already noted by other scholars (Tarditi 2016; Sholl 2006), for the rules of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens it is possible to make a study request only for the pieces, for which the inventory number is known. This means, that the never mentioned or unpublished pieces will remain unpublished.

¹² Stibbe 2008, pp. 20-27.

¹³ Stibbe 2008, p. 36.

¹⁴ Hodkinson 1998a, tab. 5.3a.

¹⁵ Pavlides 2018b, n. 9 (bucket from Karyai) and n. 46 (*phiale* from Agia Thekla).

figured elements on the bronze vessels fragments found in the Laconian sanctuaries strictly correspond for shape and style to the decoration of other products of the Laconian handicraft, as painted pottery, relief *pithoi*, carved ivories, lead figurines. This allows us to attribute these bronze vessel fragments to a local production, to define its stylistic features and to attribute to this artistic field also many other bronze vessels, with the same style of the decoration, found in several geographically far contexts, such as south Italy, Sicily, France and the inner area of the Balkans.

The existence of the Laconian bronze vessels craftsmanship and its priority compared to that of other production centers has long been recognized, especially for shapes such as *hydriai* and craters. The characteristics of the bronze vessels attributable to Sparta have been recognized by Politis in his study of the *hydria* found in Eretria¹⁶. His observations were confirmed by other researches, which highlighted in particular the peculiarity of some shapes and decorative motifs, which were later resumed by other production centers, as Corinth or Athens¹⁷.

Bronze vessels from Laconian sanctuaries¹⁸

Aryballoi

In Laconia bronze *aryballoi* are known only by an inscribed one from Sparta¹⁹ (fig. 1). Some pottery examples from the Acropolis of Sparta in shape of warrior's head²⁰ are very close to a bronze one from the Athenian Acropolis²¹, attributable to the Laconian production for the style of the warrior's face and of the small lions, suggesting that this shape could be exported out of Laconia.

¹⁶ Politis 1936.

¹⁷ Hafner 1957; Hill 1958; Diehl 1964; Stibbe 2000a.

¹⁸ The pieces here analyzed are the only ones for which some picture and/or detailed description was available from the previous bibliography.

¹⁹ Paris, Louvre, Br 2918 (online catalogue).

²⁰ Droop 1926-1927, p. 64, fig. 8.

²¹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6632 (Vokotopoulou 1997, nr. 120; Stibbe 2003, figs. 57-58).



Fig. 1: Aryballoi: a) aryballos from Sparta (© 2008 RMN-Grand Palais, Musée du Louvre; R.-G. Ojéda); b) clay aryballoi from Sparta (from Lamb 1926-1927a; Droop 1926-1927); c) bronze aryballos from Athens (from Vokotopoulou 1997).

Basins

In several sanctuaries out of Laconia basins are the most widespread shape of bronze vessels, with many formal and decorative variants. They were used for many different purposes in the sanctuary life, as ritual washing, food containers, etc. In Laconia on the contrary this shape is rarely attested, as we know only few pieces (fig. 2): a handle from the *Menelaion* with the attachments decorated with snakes' protomes²², one from the Sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* with

²² Wace 1908-1909, p. 147, tab. IX, nr. 18.

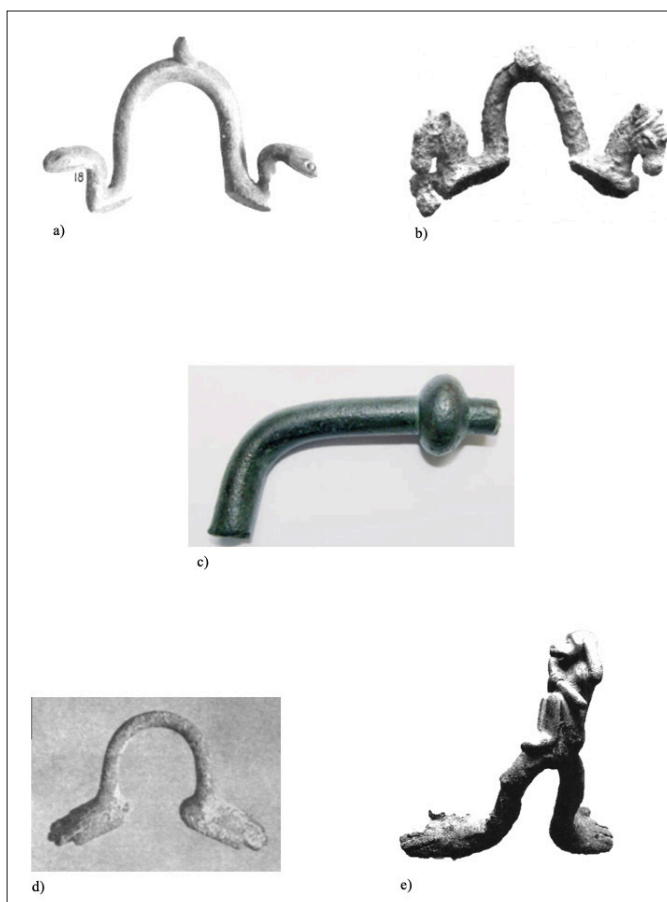


Fig. 2: Basin handles from Sparta: a) with snakes' protomes (from Wace 1908-1909); b) horse's forepart (from Lamb 1926-1927b); c) simple rod with a bead (from Stibbe 2008); d-e) in shape of an open hand (from Wace 1908-1909; Stibbe 2006).

the attachments in the shape of horse's forepart²³, part of a handle in simple rod with a bead in the middle from Phoiniki²⁴ and two handles in shape of an open hand, one from *Menelaion*²⁵ and the other from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* with a monkey figure²⁶. This shape of

²³ Lamb 1926-1927b, p. 103, nr. 24, tab. XI, 24.

²⁴ Sparta, museum store (Stibbe 2008, p. 22, fig. 14).

²⁵ Wace 1908-1909, p. 148, fig. 14,1.

²⁶ Sparta, National Archaeological Museum (Stibbe 2006, p. 111, fig. 15).



Fig. 3: Tripod ring basis: a) ring fragments from Phoiniki (from Stibbe 2008); b) fragments of basis feet in shape of lion's paw from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* (from Dawkins 1929).

handle has been used on other shapes, as *hydriai*, as finds from other areas indicate.

Tripod ring bases

Often associated, but not exclusively, with the basins are the low tripod ring bases. And, as the basins, they are scarcely attested among the Laconian finds. We can mention for sure only two ring fragments from Phoiniki, from the same base²⁷, and few fragments of basis feet in

²⁷ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8168 and 8168a (Kalligas 1980, p. 23, nr. 3; Stibbe 2008, p. 21, nrs. 7-8, figs. 11-13).

shape of lion's paw from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*²⁸ (fig. 3). The ring fragments are decorated with small raised beads and engraved tongues, a very common decoration, attested also in other areas, as Olympia²⁹ or the Athenian Acropolis³⁰. The lack of any peculiar character and of particular concentration of the finds in some places makes it difficult to attribute the pieces to a specific production area.

Craters

Craters were the most prestigious bronze vessel shape. They were offered in the sanctuaries as sumptuous votive gifts, as well attested by epigraphic and literary sources (as the mention of the huge crater sent from Sparta to Croesus stolen by Samian pirates in Herodotus³¹).

The important role of the Laconian craftsmanship in the production of the archaic bronze craters is attested by the well-known existence of a kind of crater called in the literary sources "*Κρατήρ Λακωνικός*", today identified with the volute-craters³². This shape is well known for many pottery examples and the first bronze pieces are dated to the early 6th cent³³.

Bronze craters in Laconia are attested only by some cast figurines originally part of the decoration. There are at least seven in the round cast figurines, which should have been fixed to the edge of the lid-filter or to the neck of the crater³⁴ (fig. 4). These pieces are enough to

²⁸ Dawkins 1929, p. 201, tab. LXXXVIII c, e, f.

²⁹ Olympia, inv. B 6123 (three fragments), 6124, Br. 12591, Br. 7615 (Gauer 1991, p. 245, U9-U12, tab. 64).

³⁰ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 21784, 21234, 21094, 21790, 21789, 21804 (Tarditi 2016, pp. 101-102; 230: variant BT.1.II.C).

³¹ Hdt. 1.70. Gaunt 2013.

³² Rumpf 1957.

³³ Craters from Capua, tomb 1426: Capua, Museo Archeologico, Monte San Mauro: Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 23123 and a handle from Didime: Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. M149b (Hitzl 1982, pp. 243-245, nrs. 7-9).

³⁴ From Sparta: running man: Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 15893 (Herfort Koch 1986, nr. K109, tab. 15,4); Silenus: Sparta Museum, inv. 3245 (Stibbe 2009); Menad: Sparta Museum, inv. 3305 (Herfort Koch 1986, nr. K48, tab. 6.2 = Stibbe 2009); two statuettes of "wagon puller": Sparta, Archaeological Museum, inv. 3242 and Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 12312 (Delahaye 2002, p. 132); *hydria* carrier: Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 13662 (Delahaye 2002, p. 132); from Phoiniki, *hydria* carrier: Athens National Archaeological Museum, inv. 7614 (Herfort Koch 1986, nr. K 112, tab. 15, 5-6).

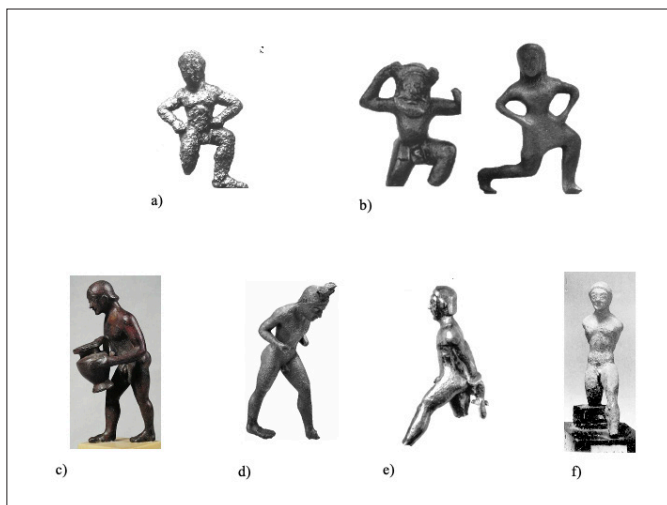


Fig. 4: Crater decorations: a) running man (from Lamb 1926-1927a); b) Silenus and menad (from Stibbe 2009); c) *hydria* carrier from Phoiniki (from Vokotopoulou 1997); d) *hydria* carrier (from Delahaye 2022); e) wagon carrier inv. 3242 (from Delahaye 2022); f) wagon carrier inv. 12312 (from Herfort Koch 1986).

demonstrate that Laconian bronze craters were made not only for export and that in Laconia too they could have had the same votive function.

Also in other Greek sanctuaries there are only small and partially preserved fragments from bronze craters, just cast decorative elements, attested at Athens, Delphi, Dodona and Olympia³⁵.

Complete craters or just handles, always decorated with a Gorgon figure, have been found only in some princely burial in indigenous contexts of France, inner Balkans and southern Italy³⁶. We cannot resume here the long-debated question of the attribution to a specific

³⁵ Athens: handle fragment (Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6649: Tarditi 2016, p. 194); foot fragment (Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 21764: Tarditi 2016, p. 194). Delphi: rim's fragments (Delphi, Archaeological Museum, inv. 2812 and 23997: Rolley 2003, p. 102, figs. 59-60); snake's head (Delphi, Archaeological Museum, inv. 23699: Rolley 2003, p. 103, fig. 61). Dodona, some statuette probably from crater's rim (list in Rolley 2003, p. 122); goat's statuette (Berlin Antikensammlung, inv. Misc 10584: Vokotopoulou 1997, pp. 104, 241, n. 90). Olympia: figures from the rim decoration, a complete foot and some fragments, a complete lid, etc. (Gauer 1991, pp. 252-256, M9-M34).

³⁶ Craters from Vix (Chatillon sur Seine, Musée du Pays); Trebenishte, tombs I (Beograd, National Museum, inv. 174/I) and VIII (Sofia, National Museum), Ruvo di Puglia (Munich, Antikensammlungen, inv. 4262).

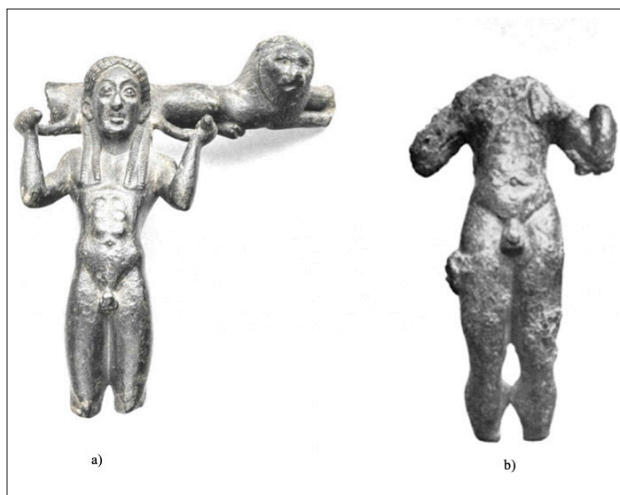


Fig. 5: *Hydriai* handles in kouros' shape: a) from Phoiniki (© Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 2785; Stibbe 2008); b) from Sparta (from Lamb 1926-1927a).

production center of the complete craters and of the single handles, as it is probably that the “Κρατήρ Λακωνικός” was imitated and taken up in other regions, but it is here important to remark that the shape is attested in Laconia, confirming the important role, this region had in crater production. Just to mention the most famous piece, the clear Laconian style of all the decorative elements preserved on the crater from Vix (Gorgoneia, lions, female figure, warriors all of Laconian style) remains a central element in all the issue³⁷.

Hydriai

The *hydriai* were the earliest Laconian bronze vessels clearly recognizable by a stylistic point of view. They started to be produced as early as the second half of the 7th cent., even if no fragments have been found in Laconia itself. The first are the *hydriai* of the so-called Duck's head group³⁸, of late 7th cent., and those of the Telesstas' group³⁹, slightly later. The style of the female head on the Telesstas' *hydriai* is

³⁷ Tarditi 2006.

³⁸ Stibbe 1992, pp. 5-6, 53: group A.

³⁹ Stibbe 1992, pp. 11-13, 53-54: group C.

exactly the same of many female figurines found in Laconia⁴⁰, allowing us to recognize them as Laconian products. The same origin can be proposed for the Duck's head group, as they are formally so close to the Telesstas' ones.

During the 6th cent. other decorations start to be added to the Laconian *hydriai* handles, as lions instead of the snakes at the upper attachment of the vertical handle and a palmette at the lower one, a variant attested in Laconia by a handle from Sparta today in the Munich Antikensammlung⁴¹. The archaic Laconian lions are characterized by the collar mane with radial engraved lines, a U-shaped line engraved on the upper legs, the well molded muzzle, as well shown also by some fibulae in lion's shape, as those from the *Menelaion* and from Phoiniki⁴².

Another rich and important decorative variant of Laconian origin is the use of a *kouros'* figure as vertical handle, attested among the finds from the Laconian sanctuaries by two pieces, one from Phoiniki⁴³ and the other one from the Spartan Acropolis⁴⁴ (fig. 5). This shape, as well known, was widely exported in different regions. The attribution to the Laconian production is based on the *kouros'* style (rather "dry" body shapes, hairstyle with braids worn on the shoulders, eyebrows with engraved lines) and on the other elements of the decoration, as lions, rams and palmette at the handle attachment⁴⁵. The *kouros'* figure is used for the handle both of *hydriai* and *oinochoai* and it was quickly resumed by other production centers.

Lebetes

From the *lebetes* there are few pieces of handles and of rims (fig. 6). The handles have been found in the sanctuaries of Artemis *Orthia*⁴⁶ and of Phoiniki⁴⁷. They are two complete handles with the characteristic

⁴⁰ See for example from Sparta several female heads, figurines and mirror bases (Herfort Koch 1986, tab.1,4; tab. 4, 6, 8).

⁴¹ Munich, Antikensammlungen inv. 3860 (Pfister-Haas 2019, fig. I, 1 4a).

⁴² *Menelaion* (Wace 1908-1909, p. 147, tab. IX, 7); Phoiniki: Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 7792 (Stibbe 2008, fig. 27).

⁴³ Paris, Louvre, inv. 2785 (online catalogue; Stibbe 2008, p. 20, nr. 2, fig. 6).

⁴⁴ Lamb 1926-1927a, p. 83, tab. IX,2.

⁴⁵ On Laconian bronze handles in *kouros'* shape: Stibbe 2000a, pp. 21-46.

⁴⁶ Dawkins 1929, fig. 65, d.

⁴⁷ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18547 (Stibbe 2008, p. 23, nr. 13, fig.



Fig. 6: *Lebetes* handles: a) from Phoiniki (from Stibbe 2008); b) from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* (from Dawkins 1929).

oval ring decorated with two beads, the attachment in shape of half-reel and a palmette with double volutes, and two fragments of attachments of the same shape from Phoiniki⁴⁸. This kind of handle has been frequently found in many sanctuaries, as for example Perachora, Dodona and mainly Olympia, while it is scarcely attested on the Athenian Acropolis⁴⁹. For the many pieces from Olympia, this shape can be attributed to a Peloponnesian production, may be Laconian. The rims are attested by three fragments from Phoiniki, two of them with a votive inscription⁵⁰.

Oinochoai

This vessel shape is attested on Laconia by not very much pieces (fig. 7). From the sanctuary of Apollo *Maleatas*⁵¹ came a handle with a very peculiar decoration at the upper attachment, a lion's head

19).

⁴⁸ Sparta, museum store (Stibbe 2008, nrs. 14-15, figs. 20-21).

⁴⁹ Tarditi 2016, p. 196, inv. 7139; p. 280, with references for the other contexts.

⁵⁰ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8011, 8015, KAR 778/3 (Stibbe 2008, pp. 22-23, nrs. 10-12, figs. 15-18).

⁵¹ Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. Misc 7268 (online catalogue; Stibbe 2003, figs. 54-55). For the Spartan influence on the sanctuary of Apollo *Maleatas* see Pavlides 2018a.



Fig. 7: Oinochoai: a) from the sanctuary of Apollo *Maleatas* (© online Antikensammlung catalogue, Berlin; N. Franken CC BY-SA 4.0); b) from Phoiniki (from Stibbe 2008).

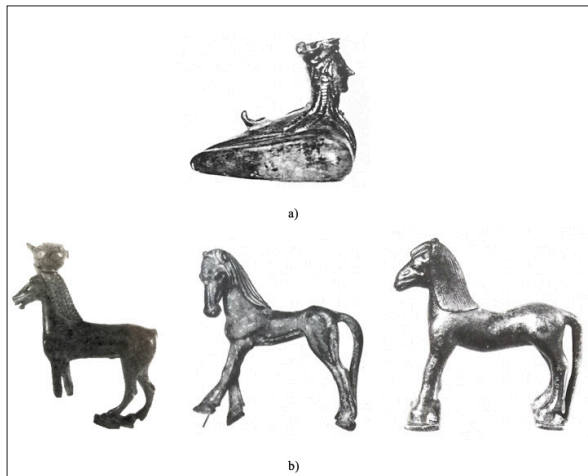


Fig. 8: Plastic vessels: askos in shape of a siren from the sanctuary of Apollo *Tyritas* (from Stibbe 2001); b) vessels in shape of a horse from the sanctuary of Apollo *Tyritas* and *Amyklaion* (from Stibbe 2008; Herfort Koch 1986).

with two side ape heads, a decorative variant which had a great success⁵², widely exported and often imitated by other productions⁵³.

⁵² Stibbe 1999; Stibbe 2006, p. 139.

⁵³ Examples from Capua: Capua, Museo Archeologico dell'Antica Capua, inv. 264128

From Phoiniki there is a handle fragment with the lower attachment decorated with a palmette and double volute with a double contour line⁵⁴, a shape that is recurrent on other Laconian archaic pieces⁵⁵, part of the rim of a trefoil *oinochoe*, with an inscription⁵⁶, the upper part of a handle decorated with two side lying lions⁵⁷, the handle⁵⁸ and the rim with inscription⁵⁹ of a mug, a really unusual shape.

Plastic vessels

Very rare are also the plastic vessels (fig. 8). An *askos* in shape of a siren, from the sanctuary of Apollo *Tyritas*, is the earliest of this kind, dated from the first quarter of the 6th cent. BC⁶⁰ and a vessel in shape of a horse with a vessel on its head from the same sanctuary seems to be a *unicum* among the Greek bronze vessels⁶¹. Its style is very close to that of other Laconian horses, as a statuette from the *Amyklaion* and one from the sanctuary of Apollo *Tyritas*⁶² and they help in defining some characters of the Laconian horse type.

Situlae

Bronze *situlae* are scarcely present among Laconian finds (fig. 9): we know only two handle attachments, one in shape of double volutes with palmette⁶³ and the other decorated with a *Gorgoneion* of Laconian

(Stibbe 1999, figs. 9-10); Galaxidi: London, British Museum, inv. 1882, 1009.22 (online catalogue); Hipponion: Vibo Valentia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 87286 (Meirano 2002, pp. 211-212); Matera: Matera, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 12291 (Lo Porto 1970); Orvieto: Orvieto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 1925.92 (Hill 1967, fig. 12.1).

⁵⁴ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18574 (Stibbe 2008, p. 20, fig. 8).

⁵⁵ Stibbe 1997, pp. 52-53, group II; Tarditi 2023.

⁵⁶ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. KAR 778/2 (Stibbe 2008, p. 21, fig. 9).

⁵⁷ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18576 (Stibbe 2008, p. 21, fig. 10).

⁵⁸ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8594 (Stibbe 2008, p. 25, figs. 28-30).

⁵⁹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. KAR 777 (Stibbe 2008, p. 26, fig. 31).

⁶⁰ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18805 (Stibbe 2001, p. 26, fig. 38; Pavlides 2018a, p. 293).

⁶¹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18808 (Stibbe 2000b, p. 100, figs. 44-45; Pavlides 2018a, p. 293).

⁶² Herfort Koch 1986, nr. K171 and K173, tab. 22.

⁶³ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18575 (Kalligas 1980, p. 24, fig. 15; Stibbe 2008, p. 24, nr. 17).

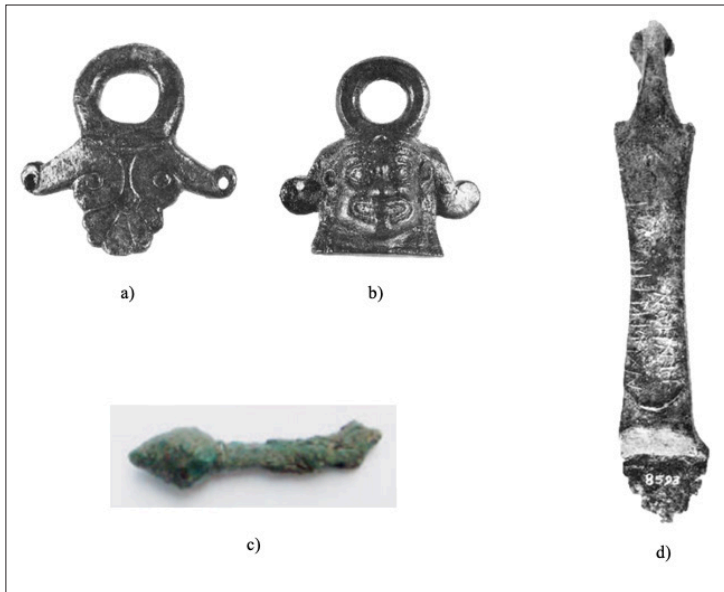


Fig. 9: *Situlae* and strainer: a) handle attachment in shape of double volutes with palmette (from Kalligas 1980); b) handle attachment with a *Gorgoneion* (from Kalligas 1980); c) small fragment (from Stibbe 2008).

type⁶⁴, and a small fragment from a handle, ending in a flower bud, all from Phoiniki⁶⁵.

Strainer

Strainers were very useful in symposia, private and public, and they should be very common among the sanctuary furniture. But only two handles of strainer are known from Laconia, both from Phoiniki⁶⁶ (fig. 9), one with a votive inscription ("*Xeneion anetheke Apeloni*"). This handle shape is enough attested at Olympia but not very often in other Greek sacred areas, maybe for the incompleteness of the old publications.

⁶⁴ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 18649 (Kalligas 1980, p. 24, fig. 13; Stibbe 2008, p. 24, nr. 16).

⁶⁵ Sparta, museum store (Stibbe 2008, p. 25, nr. 20, fig. 25).

⁶⁶ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 8593 and 18580 (Kalligas 1980, p. 22).

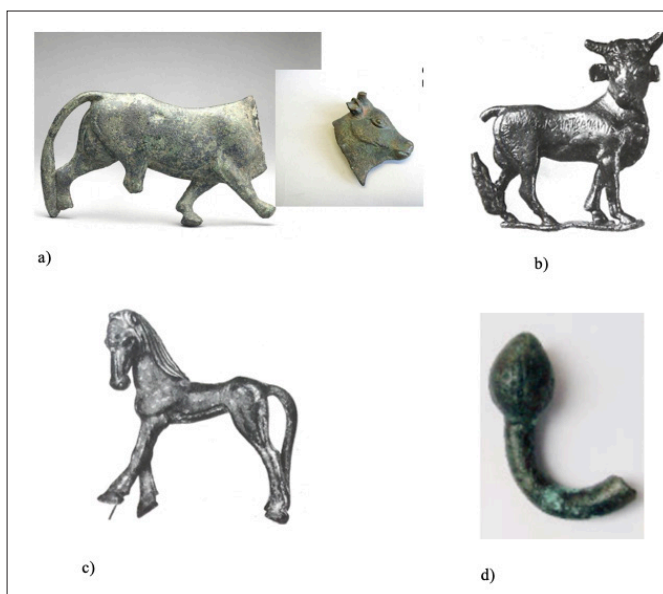


Fig. 10: Rod-tripods fragments: a) two appliques in shape of a cow from Sparta (© Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 4254.1-2; © Archaeological Museum, Sparta, inv. 2161; from Herfort Koch 1986); b) an applique in shape of a horse from the *Amyklaion* (© National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. 7645; from Herfort Koch 1986); c) a fragment with a bud flower from Phoiniki (© Archaeological Museum store, Sparta; from Stibbe 2008).

Rod tripods

There are few pieces of rod tripods too (fig. 10): two appliques in shape of a cow from Sparta⁶⁷, one in the shape of a horse from the *Amyklaion*⁶⁸ and one fragment with a bud flower from Phoiniki⁶⁹. The cows, the horse and the bud flower are very close to those, which decorate the rod-tripod from Metaponto⁷⁰; and the same kind of horse is also on the tripod from Trebenishte⁷¹. Both the Metaponto and Trebenishte tripods could be attributed to the Laconian production for

⁶⁷ Paris, Louvre, inv. 4254.1-2 (online catalogue) and Sparta, Archaeological Museum, inv. 2161 (Herfort Koch 1986, p. 125, nr. K175, tab. 22,4).

⁶⁸ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 7645 (Herfort Koch 1986, p. 124, nr. K171, tab. 22,2).

⁶⁹ Sparta, museum store (Stibbe 2008, p. 25, nr. 19, fig. 24).

⁷⁰ Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. Fr.768 (online catalogue).

⁷¹ Trebenishte, tomb XIII: Belgrade, National Museum, inv. 173-I (Stibbe 2000a, pp. 78-88, figs. 49-51).

the style of all the elements of the very rich decoration, as also the palmettes and the lions⁷².

Conclusions

The old conception of the Spartan austerity for the archaic period is no longer supported by the archaeological data, as also the bronze vessels fragments indicate.

The pieces found in the Laconian area are all stylistically attributable to the local production, without any evidence of imports from abroad. There are vessels shapes and decorative variants which, when found also in other geographical regions, have been attributed to the Laconian production for the style of the decoration, such as the volute kraters and several groups of *hydrai* and of *oinochoai*. The finds from the Laconian sanctuaries confirm these attributions and their number indicate that the bronze vessels were made not only for the exports, but also for the local use.

The preserved objects are mainly cast and very few are the fragments of simple hammered sheet (as small parts of the body of the vessels).

Even considering the incompleteness of the available data, the quantity of bronze vessels fragments from the Laconian sanctuaries is not at all comparable with the at least 2000 pieces from the Athenian Acropolis for the archaic and early classical periods⁷³ or with the more than 1200 fragments from Olympia⁷⁴, to which it must also be added a large quantity of unpublished items kept in the sanctuary's storerooms.

So, we can ask if in Laconia the bronze vessels offering as votive gift was a rare, exceptional practice, as the small number of fragments seems to indicate. Or if this small quantity of finds is due to the ways, in which in the Laconian sanctuaries the periodic cleaning of the votive offerings was managed: for example, they may have preferred to bury devotedly inside the sanctuary area just a small part of the old, broken vessels, kept as memory of the offering, while the main quantity was re-casted, to make new furniture for the sanctuary or other objects (as weapons in some period of crisis?).

⁷² Tarditi 2023.

⁷³ Tarditi 2016; Tarditi 2023.

⁷⁴ Gauer 1991: 1242 fragments.

The period of greatest flourish of the Laconian bronze vessels production is certainly the 6th cent., up to the last quarter, after which no more variants are known, which can be traced back to the Laconian production⁷⁵, with a local almost complete disappearance of the bronze vessels.

It has been suggested that the trade of the Laconian products was managed, at least partially, by the Samians and that the interruption of the exports of the Laconian bronze vessels could be linked to the political crisis between Samos and Sparta in 525 BC, among the causes of which there is also the accusation that the Samians taken possession of a Laconian bronze krater intended for Croesus⁷⁶. But the interruption of the political and commercial relations with Samos should not have had so dramatic consequences, because Sparta could have easily employed other vectors for the diffusion of its products, which in any case should have continued to be used inside the Laconian area.

But this didn't happen and the Laconian bronze vessels production seems to disappear also within Laconia itself. As in several cases the Laconian productions could be in fact the result of the activity of very few workshops, as proposed for the production of the black figured pottery or the carved ivories, it has been suggested that something similar could have happened also for the bronze vessels; if one of the workshops had closed for any reason, this alone could have thrown an entire production system into crisis⁷⁷. But in this case, the Laconians could start to import bronze vessels from abroad. But this too didn't happen.

On the other hand, we cannot speak of a generalized crisis of all the Spartan and Laconian craftsmanship, since other classes of metal artefacts continued to be made at least until the beginning of the 5th cent. (bronze statuettes and mirrors; lead figurines) and they ceased only a few decades later. But it is true that the bronze vessels were probably the most expensive offering and the lack of imports from abroad indicates that in Laconia from the late 6th cent. the bronze vessels were no longer used as votive gifts in the sanctuaries. In the other regions of the Greek world, even where the production and the

⁷⁵ Hokinson 1998a, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Hdt. 3.47; Johannowsky 1974.

⁷⁷ Hodkinson 1998b, p. 109.

use of the bronze vessels went on for all the following centuries⁷⁸, a similar decrease in the votive dedication of the bronze vessels start to be is attested later, from the mid-5th cent., as we can see in Olympia⁷⁹ and on the Athenian Acropolis⁸⁰. But while at Olympia and Athens the 5th cent. saw a great spread of the more expensive bronze statues and among the offerings on the Athenian Acropolis from the second half of the 5th cent. many gold and silver vessels are mentioned⁸¹, at Sparta we don't have any evidence for this.

For all these reasons, it is possible that from the end of the 6th cent. the Spartan society started to require a kind of limitation in the wealthy votives, starting from the most precious ones, the figured bronze vessels, as expression of the Spartan *homoioi*'s control of the ostentation and of the status in front of the fellow citizens⁸².

⁷⁸ Touloumtzidou 2011.

⁷⁹ Hodkinson 1998a, p. 62.

⁸⁰ Tarditi 2016, pp. 319-321.

⁸¹ Harris 1995; Tarditi 2021, p. 62.

⁸² Hodkinson 1998a, p. 62.

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— 5 —

The Sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* in Sparta: the Difficult Architectural Interaction between Ritual and Spectacle, between Civilization and “Barbarism”

*Paolo Storchi**

Keywords: Artemis *Orthia*, Sparta, theatre, amphitheatre, shrine.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Άρτεμις Ορθία, Σπάρτη, Θέατρο, Αμφιθέατρο, Ιερό.

Abstract

The sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* is one of the most extraordinary sites in ancient Sparta, both because of the ancestral sacredness of the site and because it is one of the few sites in ancient Lacedaemon that has been fully excavated with layers and structures dating from the so-called Greek Dark Ages to the Middle Ages. In this article, we will examine in particular the great monumentalisation that this shrine underwent in Late Antiquity and we will attempt to understand its motivations, placing this phenomenon within the Spartan context of the Roman period and proposing how this reorganisation can be traced back to the profound search for identity of Spartan society in that period. The following are only working hypotheses, but they could explain the reasons for such a sudden and evident transformation and perhaps also the deep meanings of its architecture, we would say unique, in the ancient world.

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Περίληψη

Το ιερό της Αρτέμιδος Ορθίας είναι μια από τις πιο εξαιρετικές τοποθεσίες στην αρχαία Σπάρτη, τόσο λόγω της προγονικής ιερότητας του χώρου όσο και επειδή είναι μια από τις λίγες τοποθεσίες στην αρχαία Λακεδαίμονα που έχει ανασκαφεί πλήρως με στρώματα και δομές που χρονολογούνται από τους λεγόμενους ελληνικούς σκοτεινούς αιώνες έως τον Μεσαίωνα. Στο άρθρο αυτό θα εξετάσουμε ειδικότερα τη μεγάλη μνημειακή αναδιαμόρφωση που υπέστη το ιερό αυτό κατά την Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα και θα επιχειρήσουμε να κατανοήσουμε τα κίνητρά της, εντάσσοντας το φαινόμενο αυτό στο σπαρτιατικό πλαίσιο της ρωμαϊκής περιόδου και προτείνοντας πώς η αναδιοργάνωση αυτή μπορεί να αποδοθεί στη βαθιά αναζήτηση ταυτότητας της σπαρτιατικής κοινωνίας εκείνης της περιόδου. Τα παρακάτω είναι μόνο υποθέσεις εργασίας, αλλά θα μπορούσαν να εξηγήσουν τους λόγους για μια τόσο ξαφνική και εμφανή μεταμόρφωση και ίσως και τα βαθιά νοήματα της αρχιτεκτονικής της, που θα λέγαμε μοναδικής, στον αρχαίο κόσμος.

Introduction

In a famous passage¹, Thucydides expressed the idea that if one day Sparta and Athens were to be completely neglected, future generations would have attributed excessive importance to the latter based on its monumental remains, while running the risk of undervaluing the first one. A glance at the earliest extraordinary 19th cent. photographs of Athens reveals the *Olympieion* in the countryside with the Acropolis in the background, instead of the concrete jungle that overshadows the city today. Thus, comparing these photos with the accounts of Grand Tourists who visited Sparta, one would be tempted to agree with Thucydides. The temptation would also arise to believe in the semi-legendary narrative of Spartans that celebrated their uniqueness for centuries, creating a mythical aura of “diversity” *vis-à-vis* all other Greeks, which continues to fascinate the imagination today. That strange city, made up of villages and lacking even walls, must have enjoyed a unique appeal. However, this narrative fails to incorporate the characteristics that Sparta shared with other *poleis* and, above all, overlooks the historical and urban evolution of a centre that may

¹ Th. 1.10.

have originated in the “Greek Dark Age” but underwent significant transformation until late antiquity. Indeed, much of the current “rural” appearance of Sparta is due not so much to a lack of monuments, that certainly existed at least in the Hellenistic-Roman period, but rather to the absence of systematic archaeological research².

The sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* is an outstanding example of what we alluded to thus far. It was one of the most sacred locations in ancient Sparta³, the focal point of one of the villages that made up the city (that of *Limnai*⁴). Its exceptional monumental nature makes it one of the few surviving structures of the ancient, great Lacedaemon and, as one of the very few sites excavated comprehensively, analysing its stratigraphy ranging from the Geometric Period to the Middle Ages, this exceptional site makes it possible, first and foremost, to shed light on the history of Sparta. Finally, the sanctuary is one of those rare instances where archaeological data can be meaningfully linked to a number of written⁵ and epigraphic⁶ sources that help us know and understand it.

To date, scholarly research has focused on the rites of passage⁷ that took place in the sanctuary and the extraordinary votive offerings of precious metal, lead, bronze, terracotta, and ivory items⁸ found in abundance. The earliest phases of the sanctuary have been thoroughly studied, while considerably less attention has been paid to its architecture and, above all, the impressive monumentalisation it underwent in the late Roman Period – an architectural evolution that is truly astonishing and still difficult to explain.

In this paper, we shall attempt to frame a working hypothesis on the interpretation of this complex by observing the phenomenon under

² Lupi 2017, p. 37.

³ For the sacred landscape of Sparta see Sassu 2022.

⁴ However, the identification of these villages remains problematic, and many authors have assumed that the city did not need walls – Spartans proudly said that the walls were the citizens themselves – because the various villages did not correspond to the neighbourhoods of Roman Sparta, but rather to villages that were quite distant from each other and therefore could not be surrounded by a single city wall, as recently argued by Lupi (Lupi 2017, pp. 67-68).

⁵ Kennel 1995, app. I.

⁶ Santaniello 1989; Baudini 2010, p. 28; Baudini 2013, p. 194.

⁷ Calame 1977, p. 280. For an overview of the rituals performed at the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*, see des Bouvrie 2009.

⁸ Dawkins 1929; Coudin 2009, pp. 54-58; Muskett 2014.

scrutiny as part of the transformation of Spartan society and culture. First, we shall analyse, albeit briefly, all the various architectural phases of the sanctuary.

Architectural phases

In-depth contemporary knowledge of the sanctuary is largely attributable to the archaeological excavations conducted at the site by the British School of Archaeology at Athens between 1906 and 1910⁹, published as reports in the *Annual of the British School* and in a monograph edited by Dawkins in 1929 (fig. 1). These data were later revised in the light of the absolute dating of the stratigraphic sequence by Bormann in 1963¹⁰, drawing on a better understanding of the evolution of pottery, particularly from the Geometric Period, and improved stratigraphic techniques. The earliest phases of the sanctuary were further analysed by Luongo based on early 20th cent. excavation notes¹¹.

These studies suggest that the site was initially a place of worship presumably devoid of structures, occupying a small area (only about 30 sqm), directly SW of the Eurotas River. The river probably had a straighter course in antiquity, flowing closer to the sanctuary and giving rise to marshy areas (hence the location being known as Λιμναῖον, swamp). For this reason, Spartans had to face drainage issues on a number of occasions. The sanctuary was initially established near a natural cave where, in the 9th cent. BC, what is usually referred to as an “ash altar”¹² was formed, i.e. a mound of sacrificial remains (ashes and fragments of animal bones), associated only with small, shapeless scraps of bronze and sherds of Geometric pottery that allowed scholars to date the structure. The hypothetical attribution of some wall remains to this early phase of the sanctuary by Luongo is captivating but unfortunately difficult to prove due to some hard-to-fill gaps in

⁹ See Bosanquet, Wace, Dickins et alii 1905-1906; Dawkins 1907; Dawkins 1908; Dawkins 1909; Dawkins 1929.

¹⁰ Boardman 1963; see also Cartledge 2002.

¹¹ Luongo 2015; Id. 2017.

¹² See some contemporary case studies in Lippolis, Livadiotti, Rocco 2007, p. 62.

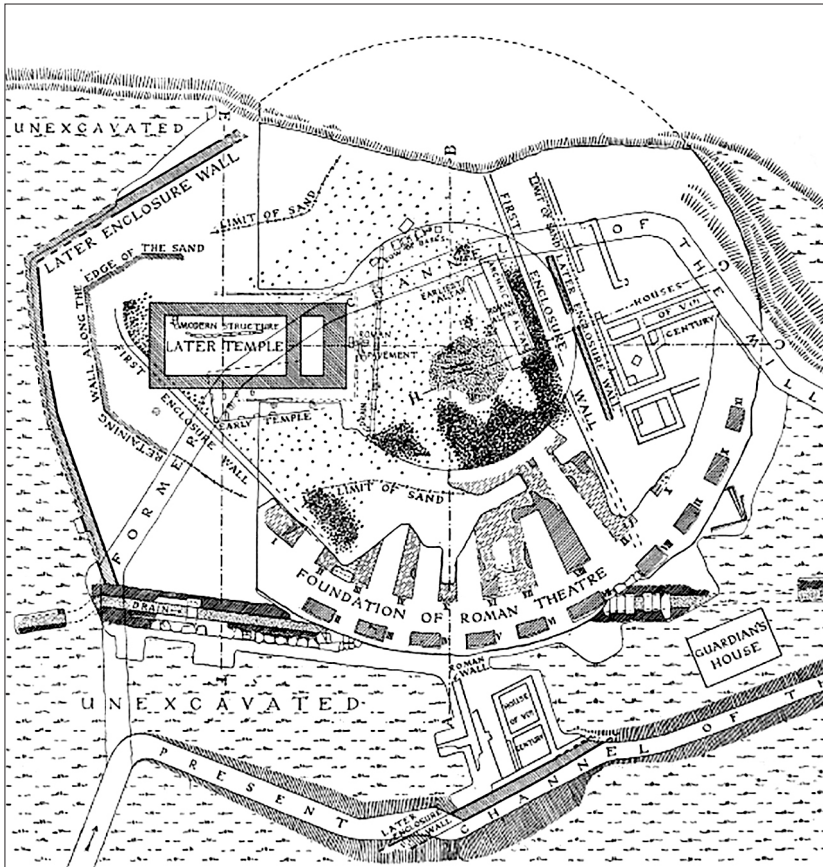


Fig. 1. Sparta, sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*. General plan of the structures discovered after the British excavations (from Dawkins 1929).

the archaeological data collected by British scholars more than one hundred years ago¹³.

Following this phase, the first certain signs of monumentalisation can be observed in the early 7th cent. BC, when the so-called “first enclosure wall” and the first altar were erected in the complex (fig. 1).

¹³ Luongo’s analysis of the excavation notebooks led to the identification of a series of walls, only one of which was included in the layout by Dawkins, that seem to enclose this very early worship area. Luongo interpreted them as the first *temenos* wall. However, it is difficult to understand why Dawkins and his team did not include them in their 1929 monograph on the sanctuary, nor in the partial reports published between 1906 and 1910. Thus, we should suspend judgment on their interpretation.

It should also be noted that the area was provided with a cobblestone floor – an important issue in our discussion below.

In this phase, there is no evidence of a temple, but Dawkins argues that it was likely constructed. Indeed, as discussed in greater details hereafter, many aspects of the sanctuary's topography remained essentially unaltered until late antiquity, despite changes and updates made to the architectural forms. It is therefore possible to imagine a small shrine completely concealed by later temples.

The following century witnessed the creation of the first temple that left archaeological traces. However, due to subsequent overlapping layers and the fact that it only had stone foundations, with walls made of sun-dried bricks found scattered above the foundations, not much of it has survived (fig. 1, "early temple"). It featured a pedestal on the rear wall, likely designed to accommodate the statue of the goddess, and was very narrow with elongated proportions, like many other archaic temples¹⁴, as well as very small, especially when compared to the imposing new altar, suggesting that the latter played a more prominent role than the temple itself¹⁵. Notably, in the 6th cent., a large altar (9 m long) was erected. It was rudely adorned with stone slabs outside, while inside there was a simple stone filling surrounded by the accumulation of sacrificial debris.

These phases have attracted significant scholarly attention, mainly because they were exceptionally sealed, and thus perfectly preserved, by a massive layer of sand artificially laid over the entire sanctuary, probably to raise the ground level and protect it against flooding from the nearby Eurotas River. Based on the materials found, this event is arguably datable to c. 570-560 BC.

As noted above, despite this hiatus in the archaeological sequence, the topography and worship practices do not appear to change, at least as far as archaeology and material evidence are concerned. Extraordinary terracotta masks¹⁶ are deposited below and above this layer of sand¹⁷. A new wall was constructed to delimit the sanctuary known as the "later enclosure wall" (fig. 1), and a new temple was erected, significantly more imposing than the previous one and almost

¹⁴ Lippolis, Livadiotti, Rocco 2007, p. 89.

¹⁵ See Baudini 2010, p. 28.

¹⁶ Vernant 1984.

¹⁷ Dawkins 1929, p. 16; Lloyd Rosenberg 2015, p. 148.

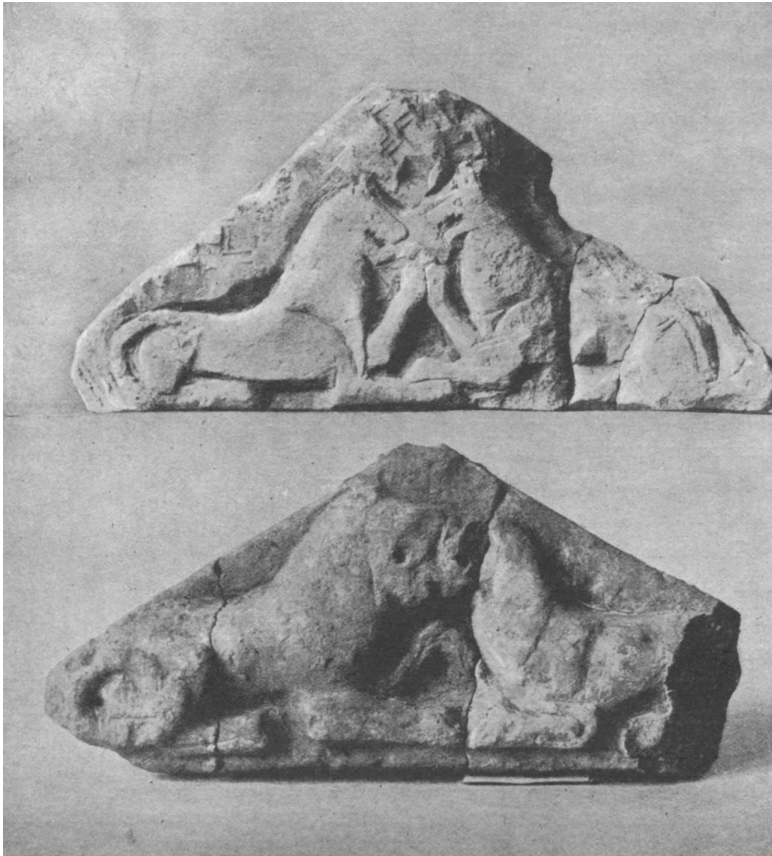


Fig.2. Small limestones reliefs of lions facing each other heraldically, maybe representing the pedimental group of the temple (from Dawkins 1929).

in the same position. Based on the foundations discovered, on a capital and a piece of a column both re-used in the foundation of the Roman structures, this new temple was likely prostyle *in antis* and Doric in style. The pediment was adorned with a group containing a *poros* stone figure of a lion, of which part of the mane survives. Two small reliefs representing two couchant lions facing each other heraldically may provide some valuable insights into the temple's original appearance and its decoration (fig. 2).

While the new temple deviates by a few degrees in orientation from the archaic layout, almost entirely overlapping with the previous structure, this time a new imposing altar was erected above the sand level, exactly aligned with the two earlier altars (fig. 3). As noted above,

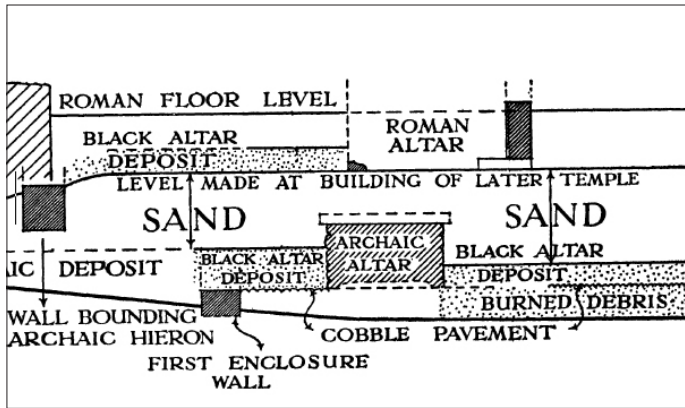


Fig.3. Part of the section of the "arena", note the perfect topographical correspondence between the altars (from Dawkins 1929, section on line G - H).

the sanctuary originated on low and marshy ground, always at risk of flooding from the Eurotas River, so in the Hellenistic Period, canals were excavated to keep it dry and operational. Some roof tiles inscribed with the name of the goddess attest to the refurbishment, at least, of the temple's roof: tiles dated by epigraphists to the 2nd cent. BC have been found. However, based on the wall stratigraphy, it is likely that the renovation was more extensive. A different type of wall, probably Hellenistic, was built on the foundations from Classical antiquity. It is possible that the famous stele of Xenokles depicts the Hellenistic phase of the temple (fig. 4).

During the Roman Period, the roof of the temple and the pavimentation of the area were renovated together with the altar, incorporating both Classical and Hellenistic pieces into a marble covering that used recycled elements. Among these, the presence of a seat is especially important, suggesting that some form of fixed seating arrangement for spectators already existed between the Hellenistic and early Roman centuries. This is confirmed by the discovery of two inscribed seats¹⁸ (and the fragment of a third) carved from a single block of marble during the dismantling of part of the late antique *cavea*, which will be discussed below. Epigraphists have dated these seats to the 1st cent. BC.

¹⁸ IG V 254. A dedication to Artemis *Orthia* by a certain Soixiadass.



Fig.4. The stele of Xenokles which may represent the façade of the temple in the 2nd BC (from Dawkins 1929).

We know nothing about these facilities for spectators; the presence of a structure with terraces arranged in linear sequence¹⁹ has been posited because the three above-mentioned seats are straight²⁰. However, they could also belong to a simple platform²¹, while the rest of the building may have had a different form. Scholars have often speculated on the existence of a first structure that must have been largely wooden²², which, in our opinion, is very likely given the complete absence of archaeological traces of this early hypothetical structure. However, the renovation that the sanctuary underwent in late antiquity was so extensive that it may even have obliterated all traces of the previous terrace system.

¹⁹ Baudini 2010, p. 30.

²⁰ Baudini 2010; see also Baudini 2013, pp. 196-197.

²¹ For instance, one of the best-preserved parts of the terraces has been interpreted as a platform even in the late antique (amphi)theatre structure, Baudini 2010, p. 29.

²² Musti, Torelli 1991, p. 226; Cusumano 2009-2010, p. 46; Pucci 2013.

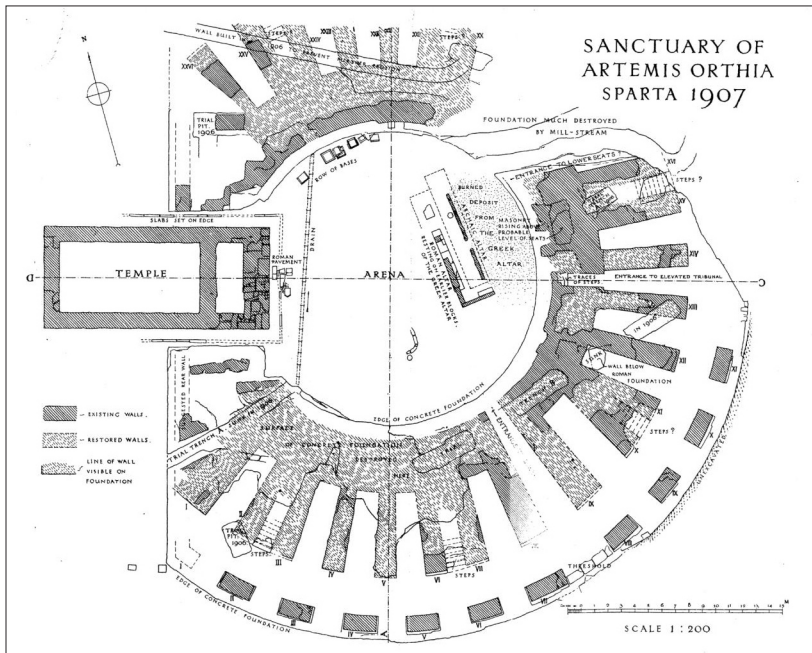


Fig.5. Sparta, sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*: general plan (from Dawkins 1929, reworked version by Baudini 2013)

Indeed, the true radical change of the sanctuary occurred in late antiquity when a sort of amphitheatre was erected around the sacred area (fig. 5). Despite showing some construction defects²³, this structure is undoubtedly massive, a surprising countertrend during a period of widespread crisis, in which no significant building projects were carried out in Sparta or nearby. This period saw few newly constructed buildings for spectacles; at most, they were refurbished. The boom in these types of structures had already come to an end²⁴.

Is that an amphitheatre?

Not much remains of the structure erected in Late Antiquity – the main focus of this paper – due to the ravages of time and the

²³ Baudini 2010, p. 30; Baudini 2013, p. 197.

²⁴ The construction of amphitheatres did not die out in this period, but it was extremely rare and limited to economically strong areas. See the magnificent amphitheatre of El Djem (Thysdrus) in Tunisia.

actions of modern Spartans, who used it as a quarry when the new city of Sparti was founded in 1834²⁵. Furthermore, as noted above, the British archaeologists destroyed a large part of it to reach the earlier layers, especially the archaic sections, considered significantly more important. In Dawkins's words: «The Roman theatre had done its work thoroughly in preserving untouched (...) the great wealth of archaic objects»²⁶.

The dismantling of these portions of terraces, while significantly diminishing the building's monumental stature, led to the discovery of a series of inscriptions (a total of 150) that proved crucial for dating the structure and understanding the activities that took place therein²⁷.

In most cases, the inscriptions celebrated the *bomonikes*²⁸, the "victors at the altar", referring to winners of the most important ritual/competition that took place here, a topic to be addressed below. Only one stele dates to the 4th cent. BC, while the vast majority date between the 1st cent. BC and 2nd cent. AD. The latest one²⁹ is datable to 225 AD, serving as a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the impressive structure.

A hypothesis put forward by early excavators, and still generally accepted, is that the so-called amphitheatre was built after 267 AD, thus after the incursion of the *Heruli*, as part of a restoration and renovation programme linked to the period of recovery following their raids. However, it is unknown whether the *Heruli* caused any serious damage to Sparta, and indeed it is unclear whether they ever reached Sparta³⁰. In any case, the proper theatre of Sparta (that on the acropolis) is known to have been restored in the 3rd cent.³¹ and perhaps this sacred area may also have been monumentalised on that occasion.

Although the form of this structure appears to be a hybrid between a theatre and an amphitheatre, it actually deviates from both and is something extremely peculiar, or even unique, in the ancient world.

²⁵ Dawkins 1929, p. 3; Cartledge 1979, p. 357.

²⁶ Dawkins 1929, p. 50; a fact also noted by Cartledge. See Cartledge 1979, p. 357.

²⁷ Nafissi 2024a; Nafissi 2024b.

²⁸ *IG* V 1, 252-356.

²⁹ *IG* V 1, 314.

³⁰ Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, p. 122.

³¹ *SEG* 11, 850.



Fig.6. Artistic recreation of the shrine of Artemis *Orthia* (© of the street Artist and Illustrator Hazkj).

Dawkins initially defined the central portion as an “orchestra or circular arena”³², blending theatrical and amphitheatrical elements, then outlined the building as follows: «It was, in fact, a theatre, in which the place of a *proscenium* was filled by the front of a temple constructed in quite a different style»³³, and finally, he states that «the theatre differs in no way from an ordinary Roman amphitheatre, except in having an opening for the temple. The facade of which took the place occupied in a theatre by the stage-building». Even in more recent studies, the nature of the structure remains controversial, with scholars who tend to associate it more with an amphitheatre, or use ambiguous terms to avoid taking a stance, like (amphi)theatre³⁴, a term that perhaps more aptly conveys the appearance of the structure. All these labels, however, highlight the difficulties in defining this incomplete ring-shaped monument (of 22 or 54 metres, respectively its internal and external diameter). It was a game changer for the sanctuary, where for centuries the faithful had practiced very simple rituals revolving around a small temple and a monumental altar, perhaps featuring

³² Dawkins 1929, p. 3.

³³ Dawkins 1929, p. 3.

³⁴ Baudini 2010.

some platforms, but likely unimpressive, possibly made of wood. The late antique building, on the other hand, represents a true structural revolution that some have linked to changes in the rituals that took place in the sanctuary (fig. 6).

Rituals, public rituals, performances?

A certain level of spectularity must have always been connected with the rituals held at the sanctuary of *Orthia*. It is worth noting that in some versions of the myth, the abduction of Helen by Theseus and Pirithous allegedly took place in this sanctuary while she was performing dances³⁵. Additionally, as mentioned above, a whole series of terracotta masks was found in deposits both below and above the 570 BC layer, and, according to some interpretations, the rituals performed here gave birth to Greek tragedy³⁶, which, as reported by Aristotle³⁷, is said to have originated in Laconia.

The inscriptions found during the dismantling of the terraces of the late Roman structure also refer to rituals that, in some way, could be adapted as performances involving the presence of an audience. There are references to singing competitions (*Mousa*) and hunts (*Keloi*), the latter somewhat recalling the *venationes*, especially if one interprets the late antique building as an amphitheatre. However, the most spectacular ritual, that for which the sanctuary won acclaim throughout the ancient world, is the whipping competition of the *epheboi*. Ancient sources discussing this ritual are quite abundant³⁸, but usually they are just cursory mentions of a practice that was evidently well-known and, therefore, did not require detailed explanations. The most complete account of the ritual is given by Pausanias in the 2nd cent. AD³⁹. The traveller and geographer describe it as a particularly bloody competition. The young *epheboi*, from the leading families of the Spartan aristocracy⁴⁰, would position themselves on the altar and

³⁵ Plu. *Thes.* 31.2.

³⁶ Nielsen 2002. On this subject, see also Carter 1987; Lloyd Rosenberg 2015.

³⁷ Arist. *Po.* 1448b. 22-4.

³⁸ X. *Lac.* 2.9; Plb. 633b; Cic. *Tusc.* 2.34, 5.77; Plu. *Lyc.* 18.2; Plu. *Apophthegmata Laconica* 239d; see Vernant 1984, pp. 13-27; Pucci 2013.

³⁹ Paus. 3.16.10-12.

⁴⁰ Baudini 2010, p. 33.

be whipped by the officiants of the cult. It was a matter of endurance, and the judge of this contest was the goddess herself: her *xoanon* was held by the priestess and theoretically became heavier if the lashes were more moderate, and lighter if the goddess was satisfied with the inflicted violence.

It was such a fierce ritual that the altar would be soaked in blood (indeed, that was the purpose, as we will see), and often, according to Pausanias, the young men would die just to prove their valour.

The ritual was so bloody and brutal that it was difficult to conceive it as genuinely Greek. As emphasised by Baudini, Sextus Empiricus⁴¹ included this competition in a list of barbaric practices that ran counter to Greek morality, preceded by the myth of Tydeus (an instance involving cannibalism) and followed by the human sacrifices that the Scythians performed in honour of Artemis. Pausanias also alluded to an oriental or barbaric origin of the ritual (ἐκ τῶν βαρβάρων) to justify its presence in a refined and rational world like the Greek one, claiming that the *xoanon* of the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* was brought to Sparta from Tauris by Orestes⁴². This was the only way to explain its violence. Pausanias expatiates on the origin of the ritual, the *aition*, which he connects to a sort of human sacrifice stemming from the bloodthirsty nature of the oriental goddess⁴³. He recounts that people from the four ancestral tribes of Sparta (*obai*) used to perform a sacrifice in honour of Artemis *Orthia*, but a quarrel ensued between them, and many were killed at the altar. In response, an oracle was delivered to the Spartans, advising them to continue soaking the altar with human blood. Henceforth, young boys began to be sacrificed on the altar. However, Lycurgus changed this practice to a whipping of the *epheboi*, still ensuring that the altar received the required blood, albeit in a less cruel manner⁴⁴.

While Pausanias remains our main source, there are other important authors that provide insights into the Orthian rituals over time.

⁴¹ S.E. P. 3.208. See Baudini 2010, p.31.

⁴² Paus. 3.16.7-11; Vernant 1990, pp. 185-207; Pucci 2013.

⁴³ Bonnachère 1993.

⁴⁴ Some authors thought that there were different types of bloody rituals at Orthia, as suggested by clues in the sources, but they probably refer to two phases of the same rite, as hypothesized by M. Nafissi (see Nafissi 2024a, p. 202).

Among them is the eyewitness account of Cicero⁴⁵. He also made reference to the blood-soaked altar and claimed that occasionally some of the competitors would die. Moreover, and this is consistent with the Spartan myth, they would die without uttering a single lament. However, for Cicero, these deaths did not occur frequently, but only on rare occasions (*non numquam*). Indeed, as noted⁴⁶, Cicero seems to present the possibility of death in a hyperbolic manner, almost as a rumour (*audiebam*). Conversely, for Pausanias, writing two centuries later, the *epheboi* often died (πολλάκις) and the ritual increasingly took on, in the inscriptions, expressions and words typical of athletic competitions⁴⁷, thus transforming it into a true trial of endurance⁴⁸.

The first account of these rituals, however, was given by Xenophon⁴⁹, who in the 4th cent. BC described it in quite a different way, portraying it as a true rite of passage and a fundamental stage of the *agoge* for a good Spartan⁵⁰. At that time, the use of the whip was certainly involved, but was by no means pivotal. The *epheboi* were required to steal cheese placed on the altar, a loot defended by other individuals armed with whips⁵¹. The focus of the ritual was then on skill and the ability to procure food, with no mention of blood or violence, which were undoubtedly present but somewhat accidental.

There was, therefore, a significant change⁵² in the ritual which, at a certain point, transformed in form and meaning, and gradually became more brutal and certainly more spectacular⁵³. This could clearly explain the structural changes that the sanctuary underwent. The increasingly bloody evolution of the ritual has been interpreted as a logical consequence of Rome's influence on Sparta, and the "amphitheatre" would be the main evidence. According to modern

⁴⁵ Cic. *Tusc.* 2.4.34.

⁴⁶ Spawforth questions whether these games were less bloody in Cicero's time (Spawforth 2012, p. 93); see also Baudini 2010, p. 31; Baudini 2013, p. 199.

⁴⁷ E.g. *IG V* 1, 290.

⁴⁸ According to Nafissi 2024a, p. 199, this change in the competitions may be linked to the change in the deity's designation: Artemis *Orthia* rather than simply *Orthia*. See also Nafissi 2024a, pp. 205-213.

⁴⁹ X. *Lac.* 2.9.

⁵⁰ On the *agoge*, see Kennel 1995.

⁵¹ See Nafissi 2024a, pp. 195-6.

⁵² See also Nafissi 2024b, pp. 139-148.

⁵³ Brelich 1969, p. 134.

critics, the (amphi)theatre was designed not so much for the Spartans themselves, but rather for the tourists who came from not only Greece but the entire empire to admire this peculiar spectacle. As it has been written, «The Spartans by the 1st cent. AD had become exhibits in a museum of their past»⁵⁴, and while this is, for sure, partly true, can one be certain that it applies also to the rituals performed in the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*?

A seemingly more complex scenario

Paradoxically enough, the violence that modern scholars ascribe to the influence of the Romans, was instead attributed by the ancients to the oriental origin of the ritual. Thus, in ancient times, the ritual was perceived as something ancestral.

Furthermore, tourism alone cannot explain the erection of such a structure. Indeed, the (amphi)theatre does not date to the period of the *Pax Romana*, when Sparta was one of the stops for ancient tourists and was even equipped with a sort of hotel, built to accommodate Roman magistrates⁵⁵. Instead, it dates to a period of uncertainties, during which the phenomenon clearly existed but could not by any means be defined as “mass tourism” nor could this explain its construction (did Sparta ever have mass tourism⁵⁶?). At that time, the major attractions were elsewhere, first and foremost in Alexandria and Athens⁵⁷. Thus, in our opinion, the structure was likely created primarily for the Spartans⁵⁸.

Admittedly, thinking of an amphitheatre in Sparta might not seem illogical. Aside from the values and skills at play in the arena, which certainly could fit with both cultures, such as strength, courage, contempt for fear, and military prowess, Sparta had a special relationship with Rome, and perhaps its society was ready to embrace a genuinely Roman structure, which the rest of Greece had seemingly rejected⁵⁹, at least in its stable forms (it is worth noting that there is

⁵⁴ Cartledge 1979, p. 319, see also p. 323.

⁵⁵ Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, p. 94.

⁵⁶ Cusumano 2009-2010, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁷ See Watts 2006.

⁵⁸ See also Nafissi 2024a, p. 213; Nafissi 2024b, pp. 157-160.

⁵⁹ Storch 2020.

only one amphitheatre in the entire province of Achaia, in Corinth⁶⁰, unsurprisingly a Roman colony).

However, while it is true that at first glance the structure may look like Roman architecture, a closer analysis reveals that, although the building techniques⁶¹ are certainly those of self-supporting Roman structures with radial walls and masonry wedges, from a purely technical perspective they update something conceptually different from anything else in the Roman world⁶². In a nutshell, the structure employs the Roman architectural language to convey a completely different message.

Aside from the fact that there is no evidence of amphitheatres or theatres connected with sanctuaries – where at most one could find *sacella* usually dedicated to *Nemesis* or shrines erected in the *summa cavea*⁶³, so in a very different position from the case in point – this quasi-circular structure can be compared to only one building known to date, that of *Lucus Feroniae*, whose round shape appears to be influenced by geomorphology⁶⁴. At any rate, the Spartan structure also differs from that in *Lucus Feroniae*, which consists of a complete, unbroken circle devoid of any religious element. Thus, the architecture in Sparta remains unique as well.

The classical form of the amphitheatre was elliptical, although to define it merely as an ellipse would be an understatement. Roman engineers meticulously calculated how to ensure that the spectacle performed in the centre was clearly visible from every part of the building. If they had wanted to construct an amphitheatre, or something conceptually akin to it, they could have built an elliptical structure with the altar at its centre, where the bloody rituals took place. Instead, something very different happened here because “the show”, namely the spectacular ritual, did not occur in the centre, but on one side of the building, likely reducing visibility for some spectators (figs. 5-6).

To fully understand this odd feature, one must consider the fact that Sparta, starting from the 4th-3rd cent. BC, underwent significant changes and, above all, a major crisis that culminated in a genuine attempt to

⁶⁰ Welch 2007, pp. 178-183.

⁶¹ Vitti, Vitti 2010.

⁶² See also Nafissi 2024a, p. 213.

⁶³ Hanson 1959, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁴ Trivelloni 2020, pp. 14-15.

pattern itself after other Greek cities, especially within the Achaean League. The myth of the great Sparta had gradually faded away, and it became an increasingly isolated and marginal city in the Hellenic political and cultural space. This trend continued until the dramatic defeat at Sellasia and the forced entry into the Achaean League, when Philopoemen, «based on a conviction that any remaining vestiges of institutional exceptionalism at Sparta had to be eliminated»⁶⁵, even went so far as to abolish Spartan traditional education, the *agoge*, replacing it with the programme used in other areas of the League⁶⁶. The sources inform us that it was only generations later, with some partial restorations already earlier, but mainly under the Romans, that the Spartans were granted permission to readopt (and readapt) their ancestral customs⁶⁷. The Romans, perhaps captivated by the allure of the city's myth, supported the Spartans in restoring their traditions and, in some cases, reinventing them. And while it is true that the Second Sophistic led to a rediscovery of ancient local myths and fostered archaising trends throughout the Greek world, the Spartan situation was taken to the extreme⁶⁸. The laws of Lycurgus were reintroduced «as far as was possible after so many misfortunes and such degradations»⁶⁹, as Plutarch wrote, a meaningful note that may also shed light on what happened to the rites at sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*. Under Trajan, there was a revival of the *Leonideia*, presented as a renewal of funeral games for those who fell at Thermopylae⁷⁰. During the reign of Hadrian⁷¹, a *patronomos* explained some expenses incurred as the “patronage of the Lycurgan customs”⁷², with young individuals re-enacting a sort of *agoge*, breaking down into groups with archaic-sounding names such as *mikikhizomenoi*, *pratopampaides*, *hatropampaides*, *melleirenes*, and *eirenes*⁷³. However, they unwittingly

⁶⁵ Kennel 2010, p. 181. See also Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, pp. 77-81 and 90.

⁶⁶ Paus. 8.51.3, the Spartans could not brook this decision, see Liv. 38.34.9. See also Kennel 2010, p. 182.

⁶⁷ Plu. *Phil.* 16.9, Paus. 8.51.3. See Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, p. 90.

⁶⁸ Kennel 2010, p. 189.

⁶⁹ Plu. *Phil.* 16.9; Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, p. 93.

⁷⁰ IG V 1, 18; Paus. 3.14.1.

⁷¹ IG V 1, 32 a, 486; SEG 11, 492; see Spawforth 2012, p. 244.

⁷² IG V 1, 543-5444, see Kennel 2010, p. 190.

⁷³ Kennel 2010, p. 190; Nafissi 2024a, pp. 214-215; Nafissi 2024b, pp. 160-163.

practiced a training quite different from the *epheboi* of archaic and classical Sparta⁷⁴.

In a Sparta that desperately sought to reconnect with its mythical roots and the “true Sparta”, where everything had to be ancient, even the language, the inscriptions dedicated to Artemis *Orthia* display an «anachronistic pastiche of the old Laconian dialect»⁷⁵, «a simulation of the ancient Laconian dialect»⁷⁶. It was a sort of pseudo-archaism, a re-invention of tradition overemphasized, which even confused a careful observer like Cicero: «the only people in the whole world who have lived now for more than seven hundred years with one and the same set of customs and unchanging laws»⁷⁷.

In the reconceptualised ritual of Artemis *Orthia*, the myth of Spartan militarism and valour is taken to the extreme⁷⁸, and the excess of violence is understandable only in the light of the need to reaffirm the Spartan identity.

While Rome may have endorsed such a need, all of this cannot be attributed solely to a generic Roman influence, nor to mere tourism: it was something far more profound and nearly fanatical. We must remember that the participants to the rituals at the altar were young members of the most prominent families in the city who were willing to be killed without uttering a word.

It was a competition to reclaim a glorious past, even reinventing it, and, on the part of the *Spartiates*, to prove to everyone that they were the true heirs of the mythical Three Hundred, the great heroes of Sparta, and that they belonged to that city, not to the politically weakened Sparta that from the outside risked appearing like any other city, with a monumental *agora*, *stoas*, sanctuaries, a theatre, and even walls (as is well known, it was said that the “true Spartans” believed the citizens themselves were the walls of Sparta) and temples dedicated to the worship of Roman emperors⁷⁹. The only way to reaffirm their identity was, one could say, to focus on the intangible heritage, namely the

⁷⁴ Lupi 2017, *passim*. See also Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, pp. 203-206. For example, it appears that training began at a much later age than the traditional seven years, but lasted much longer than in antiquity, up to six years.

⁷⁵ Kennel 2010, p. 190.

⁷⁶ Spawforth 2012, p. 245; see also Kennel 1995, pp. 87-93.

⁷⁷ Cic. *Flac.* 63.

⁷⁸ Bonnechère 1993, p. 55.

⁷⁹ Cartledge, Spawforth 1989, p. 128.

ritual, the distinctive education, the pursuit of courage and virtue like their ancestors (or at least as they thought their ancestors did). In such a climate, the construction of an amphitheatre in a location so sacred and foundational for the *agoge* would appear to be unlikely. Instead, one must think of the recovery of something ancestral and identity-affirming.

In our opinion, based on the foregoing considerations, this unique building must have been constructed primarily for the Spartans, as we said above. Given the evolution of Spartan society from the Hellenistic period onwards, it likely served the purpose of reaffirming the city's identity and myths. Perhaps, this structure was linked to some ancestral myth related to Artemis *Orthia*.

As for the understanding of its architecture and the interpretation of this peculiar circle centred not on what should theoretically be the focal point of the "spectacle", it is worth mentioning what Dawkins wrote about the floor laid in the area during the earliest monumental phase of the sanctuary, beneath the sand layer: «This irregular distribution is marked on the plan. Which also distinguishes, towards the centre of what was later the arena of the theatre, a patch made of much finer pebbles at a slightly higher level»⁸⁰ (see the area at the centre of the arena in fig. 1). Thus, the centre of the 3rd cent. arena surprisingly coincided (approximately) with a special part of the sanctuary, also characterised by a different type of floor.

While this correlation between a significant point in the 7th cent. BC and in the 3rd cent. AD may appear strange or perhaps accidental, one cannot be certain that there was not something similar in the Classical, Hellenistic, or Roman periods. The sanctuary was extensively looted when the modern village of *Sparti* was built, and even before that, the stratigraphy was compromised, when a millstream that traversed the entire arena was dug⁸¹. In the Middle Ages or later, a sort of shelter was also erected near the temple, and some Christian tombs were excavated in the arena⁸². Indeed, it may not be inconsistent to attempt to identify Roman structural elements in the earlier phases (as opposed to what is generally done), given that the temple remained in

⁸⁰ Dawkins 1929, p. 7.

⁸¹ Dawkins 1929, p. 5.

⁸² Dawkins 1929, pp. 48-50.



Fig.7. Artistic recreation of the xoanon of Artemis *Orthia* (© of the street Artist and Illustrator Hazkj).

the same position for over a millennium, as did the altar⁸³ (fig. 3). Thus, it can be argued that the ritual revolved on the spot at the centre of the arena before this structure was even built (which also proves the clear pre-eminence of the ritual over the role of “building for spectacles” of the entire structure). So probably the focus of the rite remained in the same position over the centuries. An archaeologically unconfirmed but perhaps logical hypothesis is that this could have been the place where the priestess/referee positioned herself. From there, one could understand not only if the deity was pleased, but also if those *epheboi* were still the valiant Spartans, if that was still the true Sparta, even though architecturally it had become almost like any other city.

So, while positing only a working hypothesis, this paper suggests that, just as the overall topography of the sanctuary partly evoked its most ancient phases, so the overall architecture of the late antique addition was influenced by the remote past.

⁸³ The poorly preserved altars dated to the Roman and Hellenistic periods were recognised as such only when deeper excavations revealed the Archaic and Geometric altars beneath the sand layer; Dawkins 1929, p. 5.

In addition, by way of conjecture, if one observes the sanctuary from above or examines its layout, the two wings of the late structure appear to “architecturally embrace” the temple of the deity. In our opinion, this configuration is unparalleled in the ancient world and could once again refer to an account by Pausanias⁸⁴. He claimed that *Orthia* was also called *Lygodesma*. According to the geographer’s account, the *xoanon* of the goddess was miraculously found standing upright (hence the term *Orthia*) by the heroes Astragalus and Alopecus. The statue was indeed held, almost embraced, by the young willow branches that supported it (fig. 7). The layout of the sanctuary seems to architecturally narrate this myth, as it could have been imagined by an architect who was familiar with the great innovations of Roman architecture.

Conclusions

In a Sparta that increasingly diverged from its past, becoming more and more similar to any other city, from the Hellenistic period onwards, the local society sought to recover archaic features and values attributed to Sparta by the entire ancient world, sometimes overemphasising them.

It was in this context that the construction of a sort of amphitheatre around the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* took place. The Hellenic world, as extensively demonstrated, was reluctant to accept the erection of such a structure, considering it a symbol overly associated with the culture of the invader. Therefore, it would never have been built around one of the most sacred locations in all of Sparta. The core argument of this paper is that, even though the influence of Roman architecture, what can be seen around the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* is something profoundly different from an amphitheatre or a theatre. Although it was erected in late antiquity, this unique building was rooted in the mythical past – a call to the ancestral history and almost a reification, a material representation, of the myth of Sparta⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ Paus. 3.16.11.

⁸⁵ See Nafissi 2024a, p. 218.

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— 6 —

Religion and Foreign Policy in Ancient Sparta: Metaphysics, Cults, and the National Interest

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Keywords: Spartan kings, policy, religion, metaphysics, social cohesion.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Σπαρτιάτες βασιλείς, πολιτική, θρησκεία, μεταφυσική, κοινωνική συνοχή.

Abstract

The resurgence of the discourse on religion in recent decades has sparked a renewed scholarly interest in exploring the intricate relationship between culture, faith, and political decision-making, particularly within the realm of international politics. This paper adopts modern analytical tools to delve into a vastly different era, specifically focusing on ancient Sparta. As a conservative society, Sparta heavily relied on customs and religious beliefs as pillars for enhancing social cohesion and stability. Central to Sparta's religious framework were its kings, who were revered as beings of divine descent, affording them both respect and the privilege of overseeing religious practices and divine consultations, notably through oracles. Through meticulous examination, this research illuminates how, from a political standpoint, the Spartan kings adeptly manipulated shrines and oracular consultations to further their political objectives. While religion instructed discipline and unequivocal faith for the

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populace, for the political leaders, it emerged as a valuable tool to bolster their cause with a perceived superior and divine mandate. This study sheds light on the complex interplay between religion and politics in ancient Sparta, offering insights that resonate with contemporary discussions on the intersection of faith and governance.

Περίληψη

Η αναζωπύρωση του επιστημονικού διαλόγου για τη θρησκεία, τις τελευταίες δεκαετίες, έχει προκαλέσει το ανανεωμένο επιστημονικό ενδιαφέρον για τη μελέτη της αμφίδρομης σχέσης μεταξύ κουλτούρας, πίστης και πολιτικής, ιδίως στο πεδίο των Διεθνών Σχέσεων. Η παρούσα έρευνα χρησιμοποιεί σύγχρονα μεθοδολογικά εργαλεία για να εμβαθύνει, ωστόσο, σε μια εξαιρετικά διαφορετική εποχή και πιο συγκεκριμένα στην αρχαία Σπάρτη. Ως συντηρητική κοινωνία, η Σπάρτη βασίστηκε σε μεγάλο βαθμό στα έθιμα και τις θρησκευτικές παραδόσεις για να θεμελιώσει την κοινωνική συνοχή και την πολιτική σταθερότητα. Κεντρικό ρόλο στη θρησκευτική ζωή της Σπάρτης διαδραμάτιζαν οι βασιλείς της, οι οποίοι θεωρούνταν θεϊκής καταγωγής, ως απόγονοι του Ηρακλή. Αυτό το γεγονός τους καθιστούσε σεβαστούς αλλά ταυτόχρονα τους όριζε να είναι αυτοί που εποπτεύουν τις θρησκευτικές πρακτικές και την επίκληση στο θείο, όταν για παράδειγμα ζητούσαν τον χρησμό κάποιου μαντείου. Η παρούσα έρευνα υποστηρίζει πώς, με αυτές τις δυνατότητες, οι Σπαρτιάτες βασιλείς μπορούσαν να ερμηνεύουν τα «θεϊκά σημάδια», είτε τους χρησμούς είτε τους οικανούς, με τρόπο που εξυπηρετούσε τους πολιτικούς τους στόχους. Ενώ η θρησκεία απαιτεί την πειθαρχία και την αδιαμφισβήτητη αποδοχή για τους πιστούς, οι πολιτικοί ταγοί την αξιοποιούσαν ως ένα πολύτιμο εργαλείο για να ενδύσουν τις αποφάσεις τους με τον μανδύα της ολύμπιας καθοδήγησης.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence of interest in the role of religion within the disciplines of political science and international relations. This resurgence reflects a growing desire to explore the intricate dynamics between faith and politics, moving beyond the traditional secularization thesis¹. An increasing body of literature² now directs attention to nonmaterialistic factors, including

¹ For the theory of secularization, see Swatos, Christiano 1999.

² Thomas 2005, Taylor 1998, Casanova 2019, Asad 1999.

culture and religion, prompting inquiries into the role that they play concerning the origins of peripheral rivalries and sources of conflict. Consequently, the study of religion has regained prominence, offering an opportune platform for linear examination unrestricted by geographical or temporal constraints.

Within this context, the present research delves into the religious practices and cults of ancient Sparta, aiming to elucidate the interplay between religion and politics within Spartan society, as well as the purported correlation between political authority and religious leadership. With a particular emphasis on foreign policy affairs, it further probes Spartan cults, seeking to assess their role in influencing or supporting political decision-making.

The initial segment acquaints readers with the institutional role of religion in ancient Sparta, while the subsequent section delves into the interaction between religious customs and rituals with political objectives. However, this endeavor encounters a dual challenge. Firstly, contemporary religion and international politics differ significantly from their ancient counterparts. Today's international system is characterized by globalization, while technological advancements have transformed the nature of diplomacy, information dissemination, and conflict resolution. Secondly, the analytical frameworks developed for the investigation of religious phenomena through the lens of political science may not seamlessly apply to ancient cases, given the structural disparities between Greek polytheism and Abrahamic religions³.

Acknowledging these contradictions, this paper adopts a blended approach, combining applied and empirical assessment to address its research inquiries. It recognizes the necessity of considering broader interdisciplinary dialogues to avoid oversimplified generalizations and stereotypes in the study of religion in politics. While examining a much earlier period in human civilization, this study underscores the significance accorded by political actors to religious traditions, studying the complexities of these relationships. Grounded in a realist perspective, it scrutinizes Spartan religion through the prism

³ The Abrahamic religions are not the only ones that exist today but they are used as an example because they form the majority in the world and because they are dominant in the areas where Greek polytheism flourished in antiquity.

of political interests, aiming to enrich the positivist approach by highlighting structural determinants⁴.

The study of religion and politics

The study of religion holds a peripheral role in the realm of international relations, which traditionally focuses on material factors such as strategic interests, military capabilities, and economic goals. However, societies and their leaderships do not exist in isolation; rather, a multifaceted blend of elements, including ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and social behaviors, constitute their identity and define their unique culture. Political expressions within societies, including the formulation of foreign policy, are invariably influenced by this culture and the perceptions of the social milieu. Therefore, religious practices and theological assumptions play a significant role in shaping political aspirations and can offer justifications for political causes. During times of crisis or transition, recourse to supernatural guidance has often been sought when secular arguments falter. For instance, historical figures like Alexander the Great strategically endorsed the gods of conquered peoples to bolster their popularity among subordinates. Similarly, the Eastern Roman Empire's identification as a Christian kingdom conferred divine legitimacy upon its ruler, with sovereignty over imperial territories perceived as divinely ordained. Additionally, during the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman Sultan and Caliph issued a call for jihad, framing it as a sacred duty for all Muslim subjects.

Nevertheless, for a considerable period, the intersection of religion with politics has been largely marginalized, if not intentionally disregarded. On one hand, the prevailing neorealist approach views culture and faith as simplistic factors with minimal impact on our understanding. On the other hand, ideological tendencies from (post) positivist thinkers, influenced by Enlightenment criticism, have developed research approaches based on idealistic beliefs about how the world ought to be, rather than analytical methodologies focused on its true nature. Embracing the secular axiom that faith has no place in political life may lead to the dismissal of religion as a social agent, ignoring its significance.

⁴ Thomas 2005, p. 65.

Today, significant differences distinguish the contemporary landscape from the ancient past. These include the transnational nature of religion, the promotion of interreligious dialogue for peace, the ascent of secularism, and the radicalization of religion leading to violence. Unlike examples of modern times, ancient Greek religion contained no violent elements, and religious violence was unknown⁵, although occasional military conflicts led to the destruction of sanctuaries and places of worship. Moreover, Greek religion played an integral role in political life and was occasionally employed as a means to advance political and foreign policy objectives.

Ancient Greek religion was organized at the city level and bore little resemblance to modern monotheistic religions. While the Christian Church embodies a communion of all Christians, united by shared doctrines, sacramental practices, and worship, Greek religion lacked such unity. Instead, it comprised a loose “commonwealth” wherein each city-state maintained its own distinct religious practices, cults, and traditions, including methods for selecting priests⁶. Greek religion was inherently decentralized, with diverse traditions and legacies varying from one *polis* to another. Different cities, and even different temples within a single city, often adhered to distinct traditions and rituals⁷.

Socially, religious superstition typically played a subordinate role to political leadership designations. While religious traditions influenced political attitudes and consultation with gods was common, there was no structured intervention by the priesthood to challenge political decisions. Priests were not necessarily experts in the cults they served, and their class did not qualify them to pronounce on broader religious matters. Political leadership often invoked divine guidance in their decisions, interpreting omens and oracles favorably to serve the city’s interests. Both city-wide sacrifices and oracle answers from autonomous shrines in remote locations⁸ were subject to manipulation

⁵ It is Late Antiquity the historical period in which the widespread rise of religious intolerance was first observed, Mayer 2020.

⁶ Mikalson 2016.

⁷ Sourvinou-Inwood 2020, p. 20.

⁸ Kearns 1989.

and favorable interpretation by political leaders⁹, particularly in Sparta, where the king held sway over religious affairs.

Spartan hero cults and Greek leadership

Sparta was a notably conservative society in which tradition served as a pillar of cohesion, earning it great admiration and respect. Structured around an annual routine, Spartan social life heavily relied on domestic institutions, including religious rituals and customs. Religion played a significant role in maintaining the harmonious function of the city, supporting dominant norms and standard patterns, thus ensuring internal stability and political unity against adversaries.

The Spartans' distinct cultural identity set them apart from other Greeks, fostering a sense of superiority based on values such as discipline, austerity, and military excellence. They took pride in their military prowess, considering themselves the best-trained and most effective warriors in Greece. Consequently, Sparta asserted a natural right to leadership among the dispersed Greek city-states, a claim often acknowledged, as seen in conflicts like the war against Persia.

However, the Spartans' uniqueness wasn't solely based on their military might. They grounded their identity in a heritage blending divine and archaic elements. According to Spartan tradition rooted in mythology and religious beliefs, the kings of Sparta were thought to be direct descendants of Hercules, the son of Zeus, and the mortal woman Alcmena. This lineage traced back to the legendary founder of Sparta, King Agis I, supposedly a descendant of Heracles. As such, his successors claimed divine ancestry, elevating their status and authority within Spartan society. This belief legitimized the rule of the Spartan kings, reinforcing their position as the state's leaders.

In addition to their divine lineage, the Spartan kings played crucial roles in the city's religious rituals and ceremonies, serving as its high priests. They oversaw religious observances, sacrifices, and other duties, further emphasizing their connection to the divine and reinforcing their authority in both religious and secular matters. Moreover, the belief in divine ancestry intertwined with political and social structures aimed at maintaining Sparta's rigid hierarchy

⁹ Powell 2009.

and military discipline. The Spartan kings were expected to lead by example and uphold the values of the city¹⁰.

To assert their Panhellenic role and justify their hegemonic ambitions, the Spartans promoted cultural and political continuity between the Achaean and Doric traditions¹¹. They presented themselves as heirs to the Achaean tradition, particularly the Atrids, who united the Greeks in the Trojan War. Monuments such as the *Menelaion* in Therapne, the sanctuary of Agamemnon in Amyklai, and the tomb of Orestes in the agora were essential pieces in the Spartan narrative of authenticity.

The *Menelaion*, is associated with Menelaus, the legendary king of Sparta, whose struggle to retrieve his wife Helen from Troy is documented in Homer's *Iliad*. The stories of Menelaus and Helen were not confined to Sparta but they resonated throughout the Greek world. By honoring these figures through the *Menelaion*, Sparta displayed its ties to broader Greek traditions and mythology, contributing to its Panhellenic character. The sanctuary likely served as a pilgrimage site where worshippers from various parts of the Greek world would come to pay homage to Menelaus and Helen, contributing to Sparta's reputation as a hub of religious and cultural activity.

Similarly, by honoring Agamemnon, the Spartans sought validation for their ambitions of regional dominance. Agamemnon was a figure of immense importance for the Greeks, not only because he served as the commander-in-chief in the Trojan War, but also because the Mycenaean civilization was widely recognized as foundational in shaping Greek culture, politics, and society. Agamemnon received cult in Mycenae and Amyklai, both of which claimed to have his grave. The Spartans offered him heroic worship in Amyklai, beginning with the establishment of the sanctuary, along with his consort Cassandra¹². It is thus reasonable to believe that the cult associated with the shrine served in promoting the Spartan attempts when they aspired to become the sovereigns of the Peloponnese, and later the rightful leaders of their fellow Greeks.

Orestes' sanctuary in Lakonia added to Spartan prowess, through the strategic use of religious relics to bolster political status. Orestes,

¹⁰ See the case of Agesilaus in: Claukwel 1976.

¹¹ Golino 2022.

¹² Salapata 2011.

was the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and the last figure of the Mycenaean dynasty to have his sanctuary in Lakonia. In his quest for purification and redemption, after he had avenged his father's murder, he sought refuge in Tegea, a neighbor and rival to Sparta. In the 6th cent. BC, the Spartans faced difficulties in confronting the Tegeans, and the battles they had lost devastated them. According to Herodotus, at some point, they addressed the oracle of Delphi which advised them to retrieve the bones of Orestes -buried in an unknown place in Tegea-, and bring them to Sparta. Through deceit, they managed to find the location, obtain the relics, and return triumphantly to Sparta; then, they enshrined them in a sanctuary in the agora, the most eminent place in the city, where they were venerated as sacred objects and symbols of Spartan power and legitimacy.

The Spartans' emphasis on political symbolism through ancestral relics echoes practices in other Greek city-states and finds parallels in later Christian traditions, such as Emperor Constantine's intentions with the Church of the Holy Apostles (Imperial Polyándreion) in Constantinople. His intention, which was never materialized in full, was for the temple to function as an imperial mausoleum, housing also the relics of all the Apostles. Relics were believed to hold spiritual power and served as tangible connections to revered figures, underscoring the importance of religious cults for political legitimacy.

Political interpretations of the divine

In Sparta, the secular and the divine were intricately intertwined under the authority of the King. Unlike in any other Greek city, the Kings' lineage traced back to Zeus conferred upon them a semi-divine status, enabling them to simultaneously hold the mantle of political leadership and the esteemed title of high priest, overseeing all public sacrifices on behalf of the city. They bore the general responsibility for managing the relationship between the community and the gods¹³, often serving as the conduits for divine guidance through consultation with oracles on matters spanning war, politics, and governance. Among the most renowned oracles consulted by the Spartans was the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi, whose pronouncements carried significant weight and influence. However, the decision to seek divine counsel rested

¹³ Richer 2007, p. 241.

solely with the King, and if deemed necessary, it was his exclusive prerogative to articulate the inquiry¹⁴, thereby assuming a paramount role in soliciting and managing oracular responses.

Consequently, before embarking on military campaigns, the King customarily conducted public sacrifices at home to Zeus the Leader¹⁵. In tandem with these rituals, the appointment of the *chresmologos* (oracle teller) to receive, relay, and elucidate oracle messages, alongside the *mantis* (soothsayer), tasked with interpreting signs pertaining to the immediate future, was deemed essential. Drawing on references from Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, the paper posits that religious prophecy constituted a significant factor in Sparta's political decision-making. A notable instance cited by Herodotus involves the renowned *mantis* Tisamenos from Elis¹⁶. The Spartans, eager to secure the services of this charismatic seer, acceded to all his demands, granting him an executive role alongside the King¹⁷. While it was customary to perform religious rites and offer sacrifices to curry favor with the gods before battle, it would be unrealistic for the disciplined Spartans to cede sovereignty over such consequential matters. Hence, the presence of Tisamenos likely served to validate the King's decisions with a perceived divine mandate¹⁸.

Political challenges and oracular ambiguity

Oracular consultations were characterized by ambiguity which left them open to the interpretation of a *chresmologos* or the King himself. Political leaders were in a position to emphasize aspects of the oracle's message that supported their decisions while downplaying or disregarding elements that contradicted them. Through this process, they could manipulate public opinion, defend their decisions to allies, legitimize their authority, and rally support for their policies. A study of some pivotal historical facts portrays the interrelationship between divine consultation and political decision-making in Sparta.

¹⁴ Parker 1989.

¹⁵ X. *Lac.* 13.4f.

¹⁶ Nikoloudis 1983.

¹⁷ Hdt. 9.33-36.

¹⁸ Powell 2009, p. 43.

The involvement of Sparta in the Persian Wars, particularly in the early stages, was marked by some reluctance and hesitation, primarily due to internal political factors and strategic considerations. During the first phase of the Persian invasion, Athens appealed to the Greek cities, including Sparta, to establish a joint front against the enemy forces. Although the majority agreed to help repel the Persians and fight at Marathon, Sparta delayed dramatically in reply, eventually missing the battle. They invoked their faith, stating they could not let the army leave the Peloponnese until the moon was full. Plato rejected their excuse, suggesting the most probable reason was fear of a revolt by the Messenians¹⁹. Hereward, however, wondered why they did not tell the Athenians the truth²⁰ and proposed other possible explanations. One reason may have been that the Spartans did not want to reveal whether they deemed the Athenians worthy of help or if they should limit their forces in defense of the Peloponnese. Another reason could be the domestic clash between the two kings, Cleomenes and Damaratos. The former considered the latter pro-Persian and wanted to oust him to Persia permanently. Thus, at the time when Athenians were asking for help, the Spartans did not know who would be on the throne in a few days' time²¹. Damaratos was eventually exiled due to the divination of the Ephors, who observed the sky every 8 years – if they saw shooting stars, a king could be suspended. Since there is no night without shooting stars, it is reasonable to believe that these prophecy conditions were constructed essentially as a predetermined punishment.

The scenario was different in the Battle of Thermopylae. Amid a great threat to all of Greece, Sparta pursued to make up for its absence from Marathon and demonstrate its commitment to collective cause. The defense of the narrow pass located in central Greece was of strategic importance, so Sparta dispatched a small unit led by King Leonidas, joined by allied forces from other cities. Herodotus²² writes that Delphi had prophesied that either the Spartans would lose a great and noble city, sacked by men descended from Perseus, or Sparta would mourn the death of a king of Heraclid descent, one whom even the strength

¹⁹ Wallace 1954.

²⁰ Hereward 1958, p. 246.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²² Hdt. 7.220.

of lions could not hold. Indeed, Leonidas fell in the battle along with his men, leaving behind a strong legacy of self-sacrifice and duty. Following Herodotus' reference, popular tradition connected Perseus with the Persians and the lion with Leonidas, seemingly proving the oracle. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the prophecy was added at a later stage²³, from unknown sources, as a way to elevate the status of Sparta and legitimize its role as a leader among the Greek city-states.

In Plataea, the commander of the Greek forces was Pausanias, one of the two Spartan kings at the time, serving as regent for the young King Pleistarchus. Pausanias chose a defensive position on high ground near the city of Plataea in Boeotia. This elevated position provided the Greeks with a strategic advantage, allowing them to control the battlefield and forcing the numerically superior Persian army to attack uphill. The plan was to hinder the Persian advance and funnel enemy troops into narrow chokepoints where their numerical superiority would be less effective. Mardonius, on the Persian side, was not getting omens to his liking from the sacrifices, and for this, he had delayed his attack. The Spartans stood nervous under pressure, but since the plan was based on the defense, Pausanias had to keep them still and disciplined, thus he told them he was looking for an encouraging omen. Only after he prayed to Hera did the sacrifices of the Lacedaemonians become favorable; in the meantime, the Persians had started their march and Pausanias gave the signal to move against the enemy²⁴.

Oracular consultation was asked to help Sparta with the Messenian Revolt, in the 460s. More precisely, in 464 BC, a strong earthquake hit Peloponnese, causing severe damage in Sparta and the entire Lakonia²⁵. The catastrophe significantly undermined Spartan authority across various regions, prompting insurgencies among the Messenian Helots and a portion of the *perioikoi*. The rebels found a safe stronghold in the area of Mount Ithome in Messenia. The occupation of Ithome represented a major spatial challenge to Spartan authority at a time when the city was devastated by natural phenomena²⁶. The Spartans even asked Athenians to help them suppress the rebellion,

²³ Powell 2009, p. 41.

²⁴ Hdt. 9.62.1.

²⁵ French 1955.

²⁶ Clements 2022.

but once the latter arrived, they changed their minds out of fear for their security. Thucydides²⁷ implies the war lasted for a long time and came to an end in the tenth year, becoming absorbed into the wider Peloponnesian antagonisms. Looking for an exit from the stalemate, the Spartans sought a diplomatic solution. According to Herodotus²⁸, the Lacedaemonians had in their possession for some time an oracle from the Pythia of Delphi, saying to let go the suppliant of Zeus of Ithome. Thus, Sparta was invoked for not killing the rebels. Instead, they negotiated a settlement with the helots in 458 BC: those in Ithome were allowed to leave so long that they never returned to the Peloponnese under penalty of slavery. The Athenians helped the Messenians to resettle in Nafpaktos and later on Cephallonia.

An earthquake was also at the epicenter of Agesipolis' invasion of Argos in 388, in the context of the Corinthian War. The two cities had a long history of territorial rivalry, but this time Sparta had besieged Argos for having allied with Corinth. Having received consultation from Olympia and Delphi, the Spartan King was advised to decline the truce being offered by the Argives as it was exploitative. Reinforced by the gods' backing and the allied units from Tegea, he camped outside of the city, near the city walls, and remained there even after an earthquake that many perceived as a bad omen. To calm his army, Agesipolis argued that only if it had happened before invading the Argive inland it would be a negative sign²⁹. Xenophon, however, says that Agesipolis was antagonizing his Europodid co-King Agesilaos who had campaigned against Argos earlier³⁰ and his primary concern was to advance as close as possible to his enemies³¹. His decision to end the siege was again attributed to the divine, after a sacrifice to Poseidon. However, it is possible that Agesipolis acted considering his chances; he did camp a stone's throw away from the city walls, but staying longer would have no effect given that the Cretan archers who were very important for the attack were missing in another expedition³².

²⁷ Th. 103.1.

²⁸ Hdt. 10.103.2.

²⁹ Flower 2008, p. 114; X. *HG* 4.7.4.

³⁰ X. *HG* 4.7.2.

³¹ Hamilton 1994, p. 252.

³² X. *HG* 4.7.7.

The evidence gleaned from these historical examples underscores the integral role of religion in the political sphere within Sparta. Every decision and action bore a religious aspect and entailed participation in religious rituals. On top of that, the social structure of Spartan society delineated the king as the conduit between the divine and the human realms. This bestowed upon the king certain privileges, notably the authority to orchestrate religious processes with autonomy. Analysis of the above major events further corroborates the contention that religion was frequently manipulated in service to political objectives. Both modern scholars and ancient authors articulate a shared perception regarding the utilization of religious rituals and cults by politicians to advance their agendas, underscoring the enduring intersection between religion and politics in ancient Spartan society.

From Sparta to modern politics: the religious factor

The observation of the political events and their religious aspects in Sparta, reveal a pattern. The Kings, combining institutional and divine features, were in a position to increase their ability to mobilize the community monopolizing control of the cults. Unarguably, religion played a central role in any Greek society, fostering a collective ethos within each city-state through shared beliefs, rituals, and values that bolstered communal identity and cohesion. Concurrently though, it functioned as a political instrument for leaders seeking validation for their agendas. In Sparta, where tradition and communal interests overshadowed individual pursuits, adherence to customary rites and ceremonies fortified political stability and resilience. Spartan deities, embodying the city-state's martial character, such as the imposing Apollo statue at Amyklai³³, symbolized its dedication to military prowess, while the divine lineage of the Kings, serving as Chief Priests, conferred upon them the authority to interpret oracles.

According to Parker³⁴, divination in Sparta was meticulously regulated, with Jameson³⁵ suggesting a seamless integration of the

³³ Faithful to the city's spirit, the Spartans very often portrayed their gods as warriors, combining pride in their military vigor and emphasis on their martial image. The colossal statue of Apollo at Amyklai, approximately 14 meters, was armored giving the impression of a "supernatural warrior". Plb. 5.19; see also: Parker 1989.

³⁴ Parker 1989, p. 160.

³⁵ Jameson 2014, p. 124.

practical and metaphysical realms, making it challenging to distinguish between the two. This perspective suggests that while ordinary citizens typically followed divine guidance unquestioningly, Spartan leaders strategically employed religion, utilizing oracles, sacrifices, and historical traditions to justify their political and military decisions. This amalgamation of religion and politics not only contributed to Sparta's unique identity but also augmented its influence in the ancient Greek world. Despite indications hinting at the manipulation of sacrifices and interpretations of prophecies by the Kings, religion in Sparta should not be viewed as a radicalizing force but rather as a pragmatic tool for achieving political and foreign policy objectives.

This careful balance between religious tradition and political pragmatism allowed Sparta to maintain internal cohesion and project power externally, shaping its distinct role in ancient Greek history. Through the strategic use of religion, Spartan leaders navigated political challenges, reinforced communal values, and asserted their authority both domestically and abroad, contributing to the enduring legacy of Spartan society in the annals of antiquity.

The resurgence of religion within the realm of political studies and international relations serves as a significant avenue for scholarly inquiry, unveiling the methodologies through which ancient kings utilized religious ceremonies as conduits for conveying messages of leadership, sovereignty, and legitimacy to their subjects. This examination of the political symbolism enshrined within these rituals not only elucidates the intricate nexus between religion and politics in ancient Greek society but also furnishes pertinent conclusions applicable to contemporary issues and challenges. Recognizing the heterogeneous nature of human societies, scholarly endeavors necessitate inclusive and pluralistic methodologies to yield insightful outcomes. Indeed, religion has perennially intersected with political authority and governance. By scrutinizing the interrelationship between the two, scholars gain insights into the mechanisms through which religious beliefs and institutions have been employed to propagate political ideologies, consolidate authority, and uphold social order. Against the backdrop of a global resurgence of interest in religion and culture, such insights serve to illuminate the enduring power dynamics spanning from ancient Sparta to contemporary societies.

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— 7 —

The Terracotta Large Figures from the Spartan Sanctuaries

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Keywords: terracotta sculpture, sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*, *Amyklaion*, technique, Sparta.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: γλυπτό από τερακότα, ιερό της Αρτέμιδος Ορθίας, Αμύκλαιον, τεχνική, Σπάρτη.

Abstract

This study examines the large terracotta figures from Spartan sanctuaries, with a particular focus on the *Amyklaion* and the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*. The findings comprise four fragments from the *Amyklaion*: two, dated to the Late Helladic IIIB period (1230-1190 BC), could represent deities or ritual performers, and two handmade terracotta heads, datable to the end of the 8th and the early 7th cent. BC, which could be elite votive offerings. The sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* yielded an early example of mould-made sculpture, which marks a significant technological shift.

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τις μεγάλες μορφές από τερακότα από τα σπαρτιατικά ιερά, με ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στο Αμύκλειο και το ιερό της

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Αρτέμιδος Ορθίας. Τα ευρήματα περιλαμβάνουν τέσσερα θραύσματα από το Αμύκλειο: δύο, που χρονολογούνται στην Υστεροελλαδική ΙΙΒ περίοδο (1230-1190 π.Χ.), θα μπορούσαν να αναπαριστούν θεότητες ή τελετουργικούς εκτελεστές, και δύο χειροποίητα κεφάλια από τερακότα, που χρονολογούνται στα τέλη του 8ου και στις αρχές του 7ου αι. π.Χ., τα οποία θα μπορούσαν να είναι ελίτ αναθηματικές προσφορές. Το ιερό της Αρτέμιδος Ορθίας απέδωσε ένα πρώιμο παράδειγμα γλυπτικής από καλούπι, το οποίο σηματοδοτεί μια σημαντική τεχνολογική αλλαγή.

Introduction

Literary and archaeological sources reveal that terracotta statues played an important role in the production of sculpture in the ancient world. However, this category of material has attracted relatively little scholarly interest¹. As N. Bookidis has observed: «On the whole, terracotta sculpture has tended to fall between scholarly cracks. It is generally considered the poor sister of marble and bronze, and therefore omitted from most studies of large-scale sculpture, and its scale is too large for inclusion with terracotta figurines»². The aforementioned observations are also applicable to the field of Spartan terracotta statuary. Therefore, this paper focuses on five fragments of terracotta figures, discovered at *Amyklaion* and the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*. Although these artefacts are incomplete, they demonstrate technical innovations within the field of terracotta sculpture production in Greece.

Terracotta figures from the *Amyklaion*

The Sanctuary of Apollo *Amyklaios*, an ancient religious site, is situated approximately 5 km to the south-west of Sparta's city centre and on the hill of Agia Kyriaki³. As documented in written sources,

¹ Regarding the Greek world, the only existing work on terracotta statues is *Les statues de terre-cuite en Grèce* (1906) by W. Deonna. The catalogue includes twenty-eight fragments belonging to statues, but also including architectural terracottas; Deonna 1906, pp. 47, 51-52, 57-58, nrs. 1, 3-4, 9. For a comprehensive bibliography on terracotta statues prior to this work, see Deonna 1906, p. 7, n. 1.

² Bookidis 2010, p. 40.

³ The excavations began in 1890 under the direction of C. Tsountas (Tsountas 1892), continued in 1904 under the direction of A. Furtwängler and E. Fiechter (Fiechter

the sanctuary was the most significant religious centre for the Lacedaemonians during the ancient era⁴. The significance of the Agia Kyriaki hill as a religious centre from the end of the Late Helladic period III B until the end of the Late Helladic period III C is substantiated by the discovery of a considerable number of votive figurines.

The finds associated with the Mycenaean shrine include 145 clay figurines, predominantly female figurines of the Psi type, handmade animal figurines (horses, bovids, dogs, sheep, goats and a bird), fragments of wheel-made bovine figures and fragments of two nearly life-sized wheel-made figures⁵. These two fragments comprise a portion of a head with a *polos* and a left hand grasping the base of a *kylix*.

The head of the slightly under-life-size human figure is adorned with a *polos*, which features moulded waves. The forehead, eyebrows and a small portion of the eye are preserved beneath this garment (fig. 1a)⁶. The presence of the *polos* suggests that the head is from a female statue, likely representing a deity. Both the *polos* and the surviving portions of the eyebrows show traces of brown glaze paint. The similarity of the clay and paint to those used in other Mycenaean figurines found at the *Amyklaion*, support the identification of the head as a Mycenaean work⁷.

The narrow forehead and eyebrow line of the fragment evoke the almost life-size plaster head discovered in the ancient citadel at Mycenae in 1896⁸. The Mycenaean headpiece features a flat blue segmented element outlined by vertical black lines, paired with a red band from

1918, pp. 109-118) and in 1907 under E. Fiechter and A. Skias (Skias 1907). The third and most important excavation project began in 1925 under the direction of E. Buschor and A. von Massow (Buschor, von Massow 1927). For the findings of these excavations see Demakopoulou 1982; Calligas 1992. Since 2005, the Amykles Research Project has been conducted under the direction of A. Delivorrias and S. Vlizos with the objective of resolving issues pertaining to the sanctuary of *Amyklaion* and the monumental Throne of Apollo (see <https://amyklaion.gr/en/>).

⁴ Plb. 5.19.3.

⁵ Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 43-68; Demakopoulou 2009, p. 96, n. 21; Demakopoulou 2015.

⁶ Sparta, Archaeological Museum; h. 9.5 cm, w. 14 cm. Buchholz, Karageorghis 1973, p. 103, nrs. 1246-1247; Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 54-56, pls. 25, 26a-b; Demakopoulou 2009, pp. 95-96, figs. 10.1-2.

⁷ Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 55-56; Vlachou 2017, pp. 13-25, fig. 4a-b.

⁸ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 4575; h. 16.8 cm. Tsountas 1902; Vlachopoulos 2009, pp. 114-115.

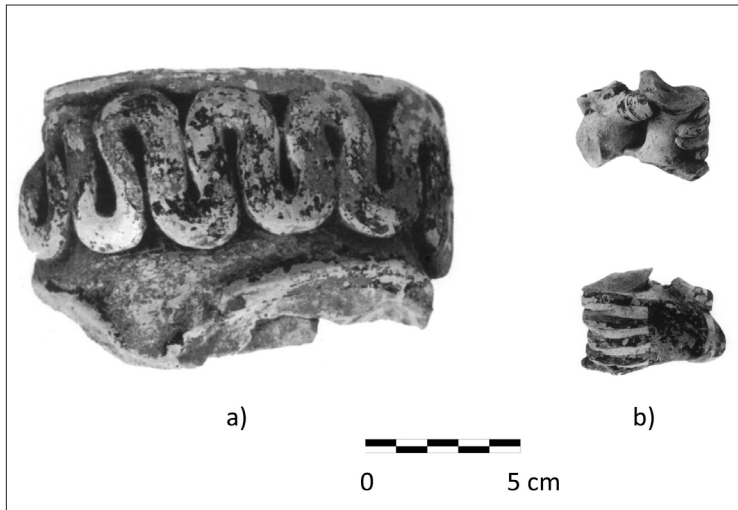


Fig. 1. Mycenaean terracotta life-size figures from *Amyklaion* (from Demakopoulou 2009): a) a female head with polos; b) a left hand with a kylix.

which short, curly bluish-grey locks emerge. This bluish-grey colour also appears in the arched eyebrows and the remarkably lifelike eyes, while the painted red mouth complements the red spots adorning the cheeks and chin. The plaster head is dated to between 1250 and 1200 BC; however, its identity has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars. Some scholars posit that the head may have formed part of a sphinx, while others suggest that it may represent a woman or a goddess⁹. The discovery of the head within the “Cult Centre” of Mycenae’s citadel lends considerable weight to the suggestion that it is, in fact, the head of a goddess.

The fragment discovered at *Amyklaion* is an example of a specific category of large Mycenaean human figures, crafted on a wheel, which began appearing in mainland Greece from the late 15th cent. onwards¹⁰. The most notable examples of these wheel-made figures, a considerable number of which are female, have been unearthed in the sanctuaries of Mycenae, Tiryns, and Phylakopi on Melos¹¹. Although the large wheel-made figures belong to the same category, there is considerable variety among them, with each figure displaying a distinctive appearance.

⁹ Mylonas 1983, p. 210; Rehak 2005, p. 275; Palaiologou 2015, p. 100.

¹⁰ Demakopoulou 1999, pp. 198-199.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 55, nrs. 145-147 with bibliography.

However, these figures, which are typically identified with deities, are generally smaller than the statue to which the *Amyklaion* head belongs. The restricted surviving elements of this head indicate that the statue was an exceptional exemplar of its kind, with no other Mycenaean terracotta statue of comparable size or appearance.

The remaining fragment from *Amyklaion* depicts a well-executed left hand grasping the foot of a *kylix*¹² (fig. 1b). A small portion of the serpentine body is still visible above the hand, which suggests that the creature is about to drink from the cup. The depiction of the hand, in particular the grasping of the cup by the fingers, is executed with remarkable skill. The majority of the hand is painted in full, while the fingers are accentuated with bands reminiscent of those observed in other Mycenaean figures from sites such as Mycenae, Tiryns and Midea¹³. It has been postulated that this detail may indicate either that the ladies wore gloves or that their fingers were painted for cosmetic purposes, potentially for a symbolic reason¹⁴. The light brown clay and shiny brown-black paint are similar to those of many other Mycenaean statuettes found in the *Amyklaion*. This similarity provides further evidence that this fragment is also a part of a Mycenaean statue. Furthermore, the chronology of the statue is corroborated by the shape of the vessel held by the hand. The *kylix* is characterised by a tall stem with a splaying base, which is typical of the Late Helladic III B and C period.

In conclusion, the two fragments unearthed at *Amyklaion* are consistent with the style of statues that can be dated to the end of Late Helladic IIIB (1230-1190). As previously stated, the shape of the *kylix* and the comparisons of the female head indicate that the pieces can be dated to this period. It can therefore be concluded that these are the oldest figures to have been discovered in the sanctuary.

Regarding the identity of these statues, the presence of the *polos* and the snake prompted K. Demakopoulou to propose that the fragments were part of statues representing deities¹⁵. In Mycenaean religion, the snake was regarded as a sacred and chthonic entity, frequently

¹² Sparta, Archaeological Museum; l. 4.5 cm, h. 2.6 cm. See n. 6.

¹³ Demakopoulou 2009, p. 97, n. 24.

¹⁴ Demakopoulou 1999, p. 200, n. 22.

¹⁵ Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 55-56; Demakopoulou 2009, pp. 95-96. For the function of these statues see also Vlachou 2017, pp. 13-25.

associated with the divine. For example, terracotta figurines of snakes were discovered in Mycenae's so-called "Temple Complex", which serves to underscore this connection. However, M. Pettersson presents an alternative interpretation, whereby the *kylix*-carrier is understood to represent a human figure, potentially a priestess engaged in cult rituals. In this context, K. Kilian has examined the fragment showing a hand holding a *kylix* and related it to amphora fragments from Tiryns illustrating a horse race and dated to LH IIIC¹⁶. One of the fragments shows a female figure seated on a throne holding a *kylix*. To shed light on the role of this figure, K. Kilian compares it with similar depictions on a *larnax* from Tanagra and another from Episkopi, near Hierapetra. The Tanagra *larnax* depicts a woman holding a *kylix* in her left hand, while other women are depicted in mourning poses. K. Kilian suggests that the presence of *larnakes* and mourning gestures suggests that the *kylix* bearer was involved in a cult of the dead. In addition, the combination of a *kylix*-bearer and horse-racing scenes on the Tiryns amphora reinforces the idea that the *kylix*-bearer was associated with funerary cults. Based on this connection between female *kylix* bearers and funerary cults, M. Pettersson suggests that the life-size *kylix* bearer from *Amyklaion* could represent a priestess performing libation rituals within a cult of the dead.

M. Pettersson argues that the worship of the deceased Hyakinthos was a fundamental aspect of the *Amyklaion* cult from its earliest stages¹⁷. The scholar suggests that the association of the *kylix*-bearer with a funerary cult, as well as the associated horse races, provide evidence that the key elements of the *Hyakinthia* festival were already in place in the late Mycenaean period. It seems plausible to suggest that the cult of the deceased Hyakinthos may have functioned as a form of ancestor worship, aimed at fostering group cohesion during the Late Bronze Age (LHIIIB), particularly in the context of the collapse of the Mycenaean settlement on *Menelaion* hill.

The open-air sanctuary continued to be used for cult activities throughout the Early Iron Age and into the Protogeometric and Geometric periods (1050-700). From the 10th cent. BC, and especially during the 7th cent. BC, there was a noticeable increase in religious practices as evidenced by the large number of bronze votive offerings

¹⁶ Kilian 1980, pp. 21-31.

¹⁷ Pettersson 1992, pp. 95-96.

found at the site¹⁸. Of particular importance are two terracotta heads discovered by C. Tsountas in 1890. They were found in a mixed deposit of sacred objects between the altar and the base of the throne. The heads, which were formed by hand on a potter's wheel, suggest that they were once part of a larger, wheel-thrown figure.

One of the heads is that of a helmeted warrior¹⁹ (fig. 2a). The hair is depicted as a thick mass flowing down the neck, where it abruptly ends. Vertical wavy lines are then added to the hair to add texture and visual interest. The ears are prominent, and the nasal bridge is sharply delineated. The eyes are encircled by prominent eyebrows, while the chin, which is situated on an elongated neck, exhibits a receding contour. The entire head is coated in a white slip, with the features and hair outlined in black glaze. The conical helmet is embellished with a red meander pattern, which serves to accentuate the figure in a striking manner.

The female head is adorned with disc earrings and a *polos*²⁰ (fig. 2b). It is notable that the nose is absent, although it is presumed to have been pointed, akin to that of the warrior. The two heads are strikingly similar. Both heads exhibit distinctive brow ridges, receding chins, prominent eyes, and pointed noses. They are similarly adorned with black paint, which outlines the eyes and eyebrows, as well as wavy lines that imitate the appearance of hair. The two terracotta figures were produced in the same workshop and are believed to have been crafted by the same coroplast²¹.

¹⁸ This period corresponds to Amyklaion II (see <https://amyklaion.gr/en/sanctuary/chronology/>).

¹⁹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 4381; h. 11,5 cm. Tsountas 1892, p. 13, pl. 4.4; Kunze 1930, p. 155, pls. 42-43; Hampe 1936, pp. 32-38; Higgins 1967, p. 24, pl. 9B; Nicholls 1970, p. 17; Schweitzer 1971, p. 142, pls. 162, 63; Hampe, Simon 1981, nrs. 397-399; Demakopoulou 1982, p. 139, nr. 73; Sweeney, Curry, Tzedakis 1987, pp. 86-89, nr. 17; Calligas 1992, p. 34; Langdon 1998, pp. 252-256, figs. 1-2, 5; Walcek Averett 2007, pp. 84-85, 272 (A1), fig. 42; Kaltsas 2006, p. 60, nr. 11; Vlachou 2017, pp. 25-31, fig. 15.

²⁰ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 4382; h. 8 cm. Tsountas 1892, p. 13, pl. 4.5; Kunze 1930, p. 155, pls. 42-43; Higgins 1967, p. 24, pl. 9A; Nicholls 1970, p. 17; Hampe, Simon 1981, nrs. 400-401; Demakopoulou 1982, p. 139, nr. 73; Sweeney, Curry, Tzedakis 1987, pp. 86-87, nr. 16; Byrne 1991, p. 96, n. 65; Calligas 1992, p. 34; Langdon 1998, pp. 252-256, figs. 2, 3, 5; Walcek Averett 2007, pp. 84-85, 272 (A2), fig. 74; Kaltsas 2006, p. 59, nr. 10; Vlachou 2017, pp. 25-31, fig. 16.

²¹ Langdon 1998, p. 256.

Although the two heads are similar to each other and were found together, the stratigraphy was mixed, so the two heads were dated stylistically. Researchers have suggested a wide range of dates for these terracotta heads, from the Mycenaean to the Archaic periods. While there are clear similarities, scholars have proposed different chronological assessments, leading to different interpretations of their exact dating²².

The male head is comparable to that of late geometric warrior figurines with analogous helmets dedicated at Olympia, the Athenian Acropolis, and other significant sanctuaries, as well as some bronze figures from Geometric tripods²³. These comparisons, particularly with a bronze statuette from the Acropolis of Athens and a terracotta head from the Heraion of Perachora²⁴, indicate that the head from *Amyklaion* could be dated to the period between the end of the 8th and the early 7th cent. BC.

The consistency of technique, modelling and painted decoration, together with their stylistic coherence, suggests that the two figures were probably made as a pair by the same coroplast and served a common purpose. Previously, scholars had identified the helmeted male head as that of Apollo *Amyklaios*, suggesting that it was modelled on the famous helmeted cult statue. While the theory that these statuettes were votive offerings has now been rejected, their size suggests that they were not typical offerings. Instead, they were probably made for a more elite group of patrons²⁵.

A terracotta figure from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*

At the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*, archaeologists have unearthed a terracotta head that is one of the earliest known examples of the use of moulds in the production of statue heads. This find suggests an evolving technique in sculpture, in which the head was cast in a mould, while the body was most likely sculpted by hand (fig. 2).

Furthermore, R.M. Dawkins stated that "There were several fragments of figure on a large scale. All were found with Laconian III

²² Langdon 1998, pp. 253-256.

²³ Rolley 1999, p. 111.

²⁴ Rolley 1999, p. 141, n. 53, fig. 120 with bibliography.

²⁵ For the function of these figures see Vlachou 2017, pp. 25-31.



Fig. 2. Late Geometric terracotta hand-made heads from *Amyklaion* (Author's own elaboration from Sweeney, Curry, Tzedakis 1987): a) a helmeted warrior; b) a female figure with disc earrings and a polos.

and IV pottery, and so belong to the 6th cent. They were: a foot in a shoe; a foot on a stand; an arm, clumsily made; a hand, about half life-size"²⁶. However, the scholar did not provide any additional information or photographs of these items.

The head is a meticulously crafted, unpainted piece crafted from a smooth red clay, with a flat posterior²⁷. The hair is depicted as crimped locks. The absence of the nose and eyes indicates that these features were originally more pronounced, likely formed by discrete pieces of clay that were subsequently applied and imperfectly attached to the face. Furthermore, a section of hair from the right side of a similar head, measuring approximately twice the size, was also identified within the sanctuary.

In his work, *Laconian Terracottas of the Dedalic Style*, R.J.H. Jenkins dates the terracotta head to the final two decades of the 7th cent. BC²⁸. According to the scholar, it is a later production than the two small heads from the Acropolis of Sparta²⁹. The two small heads, along with

²⁶ Dawkins 1929, pp. 159-160, n. XLIII, pl. XLIII:1.

²⁷ Sparta, Archaeological Museum; h. 15 cm.

²⁸ Jenkins 1932-1933, p. 76, pl. 11, nr. 4.

²⁹ Woodward 1928, p. 93, nr. 46; Jenkins 1932-1933, p. 75, pl. 11, nr. 3.

the head from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*, exhibit the ears – a feature that first emerged during the Subgeometric period.

The end of the 7th cent. BC as chronology for the head seems acceptable. It still shows some characteristics of Dedalic art such as the wig-like hair with strong internal divisions, large facial features, and long face with emphatic chin, such as the bronze *kouros* statuette from Delphi dated to the third quarter of the 7th cent. BC³⁰ and a female figure of a metope (second half of the 7th cent. BC) from the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis at Mycenae³¹. However, the head from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* also shows features that will be characteristic of archaic sculpture: the head is not flat, the forehead is not low and the cheeks and muscles of the neck are represented. This detail is present, for instance, in *kouroi* such as those of Kleobis and Biton from the sanctuary of Delphi or in the *kouros* from Dipylon. The Spartan head for the rendering of the ears and neck muscles is similar to a terracotta head found in Tarentum and dated around 600 BC, which, as C. Rolley points out, shows a lively expressiveness that perhaps derives from new laconic models³².

Spartan terracotta figures: on overview of terracotta statues from Greece

During the Bronze Age, the primary centres of terracotta statue production were located in Crete, Cyprus, and the Cycladic Islands³³. During the 13th and 12th cent. BC, large female figures with raised arms, reaching up to 87 cm in height, were a common feature of bench sanctuaries in Crete (Gournià, Gazi, Kannià, Karphì, Kavousi)³⁴.

³⁰ Rolley 1999, p. 129, fig. 113.

³¹ Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 2869. Rolley 1999, p. 142, fig. 121 with bibliography.

³² Rolley 1999, p. 154, fig. 138.

³³ Hood 1978, p. 94. For a list of fragments pertaining to Mycenaean anthropomorphic and zoomorphic clay statues found in Crete, mainland Greece and the islands see Wright 1994, pp. 37-78; Veters 2020, p. 543, tab. 3.7.2.

³⁴ Rethemiotakis 1998. The body was constructed using a wheel, while the head and arms were affixed to the body at a later stage. In Cyprus, the technique of moulding on the potter's wheel was introduced during the Late Cypriot IIIA period. The earliest statuettes represent the so-called "dressed Astarte" type, a female figure with a long robe holding her breasts. For further information on Cypriot clay statuary, see Gjerstad 1948. It is likely that the «type of large, wheel-made female

Nevertheless, the largest terracotta statues from the Bronze Age were unearthed at the sanctuary of Ayia Irini on Keos³⁵. These fragments are associated with over fifty-five terracotta statues, standing between half to three-quarters life-size (70-135 cm), which represent standing female figures with hands on their hips. The coil technique was employed in their fabrication, with the use of internal wooden supports³⁶. At Milos, in the “West” and “East Shrines” of Phylakopi, fragments of male and female statuettes were discovered³⁷. These were crafted by combining wheel-thrown and hand-moudeled parts. Among the female statuettes³⁸, predominantly dated to the Late Helladic IIIA2 period (1350-1300), the “Lady of Phylakopi” (h. 45 cm) is considered an import from the Argolid during the Late Helladic IIIA2 period³⁹.

During the Bronze Age, terracotta statues were also produced in mainland Greece. However, the majority of these were wheel-thrown and reveal a lower level of craftsmanship than those from Crete. An example is the statues discovered in Mycenae, within the so-called “Temple Complex”, also known as the “House of Idols”⁴⁰. They comprise twenty-seven statues which exhibit a rough workmanship

terracotta figures with upraised arms» was introduced in Late Cypriot IIIA2, most probably from the Mycenaean world; Kourou 2002, pp. 17-18.

³⁵ Caskey 1986. The statues are dated to the Late Cycladic II/Late Minoan IB (1500-1425 BC); the only life-size statue has been attributed to the Late Helladic III; Caskey 1986, pp. 32-35.

³⁶ A vertical wooden pole was inserted to ensure stability, around which clay was added to build the torso. Analyses conducted on the statues revealed that some were fired at temperatures between 650 and 800 °C; therefore, the craftsmen had gained experience which indicated that the risk of deformation and collapse could be minimised by firing the statues between 650 and 800 °C; Caskey 1986.

³⁷ French 1985, pp. 209-230.

³⁸ Female statuettes belong to the three main types: the “Cretan type”, characterised by the grafting of the body onto the so-called “bell-skirt”; the “Mycenaean type”, comprising vase-shaped figures with attached heads and arms; and a third category, comprising statuettes with a cylindrical body, crafted using a wheel or the coil technique, and featuring separate modelling of the heads and other parts.

³⁹ French 1985, p. 221, SF 2660, fig. 6.4, pl. 31, 32 a, 33 a-b.

⁴⁰ The *terminus ante quem* for their production is the Late Helladic IIIB period. The figures frequently exhibit both arms elevated, or the right arm elevated with the other extended, or both arms in front of the chest with hands joined. Based on their gesticulations, it is probable that «they functioned as representations of cult celebrants [...] their role was to perform certain of the activities of the cult in perpetuity»; Moore, Taylour 1999, p. 101.



Fig. 3. Terracotta figure from the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* (Author's own elaboration from Jenkins 1932-1933).

and a height ranging from 35 to 69 cm. The bodies were using the coil technique, with the head, neck (wheel-thrown), arms, and details added subsequently. Further examples of mainland Greek production include two similar heads, both wheel-thrown. The first is a head with a diadem, known as the "Lord of Asine"⁴¹, which was found in a 12th cent. BC sanctuary in Asine, but it may belong to a statue erected in another sanctuary in the late 13th cent. BC. The second is a smaller head from Tiryns, dated to the 13th cent. BC. The two fragments from Amyklai, analysed within the context of Bronze Age mainland Greek terracotta statue production, are notable for their high quality and precise modelling, comparable to the statues from Ayia Irini or the Cretan goddesses with raised arms.

During the Iron Age, there was a degree of continuity in the production of terracotta figures in Crete; however, in mainland Greece the situation is more complex. R.A. Higgins hypothesized that a gap existed in Greek terracotta production during the 11th and 10th cent. BC⁴² which was subsequently resumed at a later date, due to the introduction of the requisite techniques from Crete. Nevertheless, the discovery of terracotta figures in Greece, albeit scarce, suggests that terracotta production likely continued in some areas of mainland

⁴¹ Frödin 1938, pp. 307-308, fig. 211; Nicholls 1970, p. 6, pl. Ic.

⁴² Higgins 1967, pp. 17-21.

Greece. Where the tradition was interrupted, it was reintroduced by neighbouring centres that had maintained it, rather than by Crete⁴³. During the second phase of the Iron Age (9th and 8th cent. BC), there was a notable increase in terracotta production, predominantly of male figures with chariots or warriors, which appear to reflect *elite* activities. This production was widespread, particularly in the Peloponnese, as evidenced by the statue from *Amyklaion* (fig. 3a) along with examples from Olympia. The reappearance of female terracotta statues in mainland Greece is confined to the Late Geometric period, when they were influenced by the artistic traditions of Crete and Cyprus. In the 8th cent. BC, there was a notable increase in the production of wheel-thrown statues, the majority of which were votive figures⁴⁴. An exemplar of this production is the figure from *Amyklaion*, of which solely the head has survived (fig. 3b). To sum up, the discovery of two heads at *Amyklaion* provides evidence that terracotta statuary was produced in Sparta during the 8th cent.⁴⁵

A significant development in the production of terracotta figures was the introduction of moulds in mainland Greece shortly after 700 BC. The use of the wheel facilitated the resolution of the primary challenges associated with the utilisation of clay in statuary, namely stability and firing. The introduction of the wheel enabled the production of statues with thin walls, which could be fired without the risk of cracking, and vertical walls, which reduced the danger of collapse. Nevertheless, the use of the wheel did not facilitate the creation of statues that were entirely naturalistic in appearance. An important innovation in technique was the introduction of moulds in the 7th cent. BC⁴⁶. They were common in the East and were sporadically used in Crete during the Late Minoan period, as evidenced by the discovery of bull-shaped *rhyton* from Pseira and terracotta moulds for *faience* or clay objects

⁴³ Nicholls 1970, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Veters 2020, pp. 556-560.

⁴⁵ The archaeological record of the Acropolis in Athens provides evidence of the existence of substantial terracotta statues alongside marble sculptures as early as the 7th cent. BC; Moustaka 2009, pp. 41-49. Two female figures stand out among the fragments: one is approximately three-quarters of the original size and is dated to around 680 BC; Nicholls 1991, pp. 23-27; Moustaka 2009, p. 41. The other is dated to the second half of the century and consists of clay reliefs applied to a wooden core; Moustaka 2009, pp. 42-49.

⁴⁶ Bookidis 2010, p. 37.

from Gournia⁴⁷. It is probable that the new technique was introduced from Cyprus⁴⁸ or Syria, or both simultaneously. It is also likely that Eastern craftsmen opened workshops in major Greek centres⁴⁹. «The new technique saved time and labor», contributed to the rapid decline of wheel-thrown statue modelling and facilitated the creation of large statues⁵⁰. By the conclusion of the 7th cent. BC, the utilisation of sizable moulds had become prevalent, as evidenced by the three heads discovered within the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* in Sparta⁵¹. An additional example is the fragmentary mould discovered in a well at Anaploga in Corinth, dating to the final decade of the century, which was used to create a two-thirds life-size head⁵².

In conclusion, as N. Bookidis has observed, terracotta sculpture is often regarded as the less prominent sibling of marble and bronze, and consequently excluded from the majority of studies on large-scale sculpture. However, this study highlights the significance of examining terracotta statues, emphasizing their historical and artistic value.

⁴⁷ Higgins 1967, p. 12.

⁴⁸ A significant number of large clay statues have been unearthed at various places of worship in Cyprus, including Idalion, Salamis, Marion, Tamassos-Frangissa, Mines and Ayia Irini. These statues exhibit a distinct style, commonly referred to as the “koine”, due to the use of similar moulds. This observation was first made by Karageorghis in 1993.

⁴⁹ Higgins 1967, p. 25; Karageorghis 1993. In Crete, moulds were used to make clay plaques from the Late Bronze A to the Early Iron Age; Pilz 2011, pp. 49-54; Vettters 2020, p. 559.

⁵⁰ Osborne 1996, pp. 208-211; Vettters 2020, p. 559.

⁵¹ Dawkins 1929, p. 159, n. XLIII, pl. XLIII:1; Bookidis 2010, p. 37.

⁵² Bookidis 2010, p. 58, pl. 118c-d. A votive head from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth has been identified, which does not correspond to a statue. It is approximately half the size of the original statue or slightly larger, and was produced using two or more moulds, one for the front and one or two for the back; Bookidis 2010, pp. 85-87. The Corinthian sanctuary has yielded a total of 673 fragments, which can be attributed to at least 132, and potentially 147, half-to-full-size statues created between the late 7th and early 3rd cent. BC. The twenty-six statues, dating from the late 7th to the early 6th cent. BC, were crafted using the coil technique and were furnished with an internal structure, a terracotta cylinder, which served as a support. The matrices were employed intermittently, solely for the purposes of creating the faces.; Bookidis 2010, pp. 44-49, 81-122.

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— 8 —

The Lacedaemonian Isolationism: Rethinking Sparta and Religion in Thucydides

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Keywords: Thucydides, Sparta, isolationism, religion, grand strategy.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Θουκυδίδης, Σπάρτη, απομονωτισμός, θρησκεία, μεγάλη στρατηγική.

Abstract

Scholars tend to label the Spartans in Thucydides as pious or hypocritical, yet both labels assume that the Spartans should prioritize religious matters over military affairs. However, a closer examination of the Spartan decisions in Thucydides reveals that in most cases where the Spartans appear to prioritize religious needs over military ones or neglect religious obligations, they are actually prioritizing domestic issues over foreign relations. Similarly, the decisions of Spartans' allies, enemies and supplicants indicate that these parties also perceive this isolationist image of Spartans. Thus, the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War, as portrayed by Thucydides, are isolationist rather than pious or hypocritical.

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Περίληψη

Οι μελετητές τείνουν να χαρακτηρίζουν τους Σπαρτιάτες στον Θουκυδίδη ως ευσεβείς ή υποκριτές, ωστόσο και οι δύο χαρακτηρισμοί προϋποθέτουν ότι οι Σπαρτιάτες θα έπρεπε να δίνουν προτεραιότητα στα θρησκευτικά ζητήματα έναντι των στρατιωτικών υποθέσεων. Ωστόσο, μια προσεκτικότερη εξέταση των σπαρτιατικών αποφάσεων στον Θουκυδίδη αποκαλύπτει ότι στις περισσότερες περιπτώσεις όπου οι Σπαρτιάτες φαίνεται να δίνουν προτεραιότητα στις θρησκευτικές ανάγκες έναντι των στρατιωτικών ή να παραμελούν τις θρησκευτικές υποχρεώσεις, στην πραγματικότητα δίνουν προτεραιότητα σε εσωτερικά ζητήματα έναντι των εξωτερικών σχέσεων. Ομοίως, οι αποφάσεις των συμμάχων, των εχθρών και των ικετών των Σπαρτιατών δείχνουν ότι και αυτά τα μέρη αντιλαμβάνονται αυτή την απομονωτική εικόνα των Σπαρτιατών. Έτσι, οι Σπαρτιάτες στον Πελοποννησιακό Πόλεμο, όπως τους παρουσιάζει ο Θουκυδίδης, είναι μάλλον απομονωτιστές παρά ευσεβείς ή υποκριτές.

The Spartans in Thucydides, pious or hypocritical?

Many scholars argue that the Spartans in Thucydides are known for their piety, while others disagree. Their arguments are based on specific instances. Let us take the Spartans' decision in the summer of 419 BC as an example. The Spartans were on an expedition whose destination is not given by Thucydides. However, due to unfavourable results in τὰ διαβατήρια, they abandoned this expedition and postponed it to the end of the month of *Carneia*¹. This vague episode leaves room for disagreement. H. Popp believes that in this case Sparta acted out of «genuine religious feelings»², while D. Kagan, perpetuating G. Busolt, sees the unfavourable results as a «pretext by which the sudden withdrawal was explained»³. On the other hand, our historian, whether atheist or pious⁴, may despise the hypocrisy of the Spartans, reflected in their lack of piety in certain cases. The Spartans

¹ Th. 5.54.1-2.

² Gomme 1970, p. 74; also see Hornblower 2008, p. 143.

³ Kagan 1981, p. 85, n. 19.

⁴ Most scholars remain agnostic about his personal piety due to lack of evidence. See Furley 2006, p. 415; Jordan 1986, pp. 119-121.

in Thucydides, making decisions at the intersection of military and religious issues, are often labelled either “pious” or “hypocritical”.

Both labels assume that the Spartans should prioritize religious matters over military ones. However, a closer examination of the Spartan decisions in Thucydides reveals that in most cases where the Spartans appear to prioritize religious needs over military ones or neglect religious obligations, they are actually prioritizing domestic issues over foreign relations. Thucydides portrays the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War as isolationist, rather than pious or hypocritical.

This paper will present Lacedaemonian isolationism from this perspective in the following steps. Section two provides a statistical description that suggests the boundary is not between the military and the religious. Instead, it is between domestic affairs and foreign relations. Sections three and four demonstrate that the military-religion dilemma does not explain Spartan decisions inside and outside the polis. They also show how a domestic-foreign dichotomy can explain some of these decisions. The final section will serve as a test of the hypothesis of Lacedaemonian isolationism put forward by illustrating that in Thucydides, Sparta’s isolationist image is well perceived by her allies, enemies and supplicants alike. This paper does not aim to explain why the Spartans tended to be isolationist in foreign affairs, whether it was the helots or not⁵, but it attempts to demonstrate that isolationism is what Thucydides makes of the Spartan grand strategy.

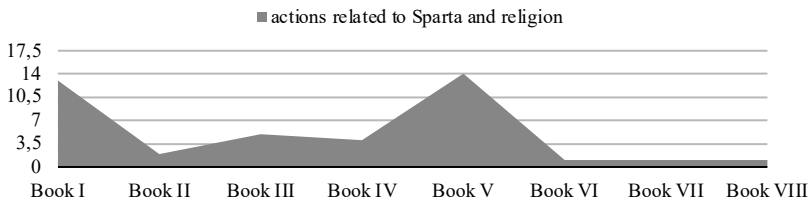
An overview: the prominence of such cases in peacetime

This paper discusses the decisions related to the Spartans and religious elements. To begin, all cases in Thucydides were compiled and arranged in the following manner.

The cases from the same book are grouped together, highlighting the prominence of Book V (Graph 1). They are then categorised based on two dichotomies: whether religion is the cause or effect of the action, and whether the action is a one-off decision or an ongoing

⁵ Nevertheless, this debate provides many insights for this essay. De Ste Croix argues that the conquest of Messenia was the origin of Spartan militarism. This position has been vigorously challenged by later studies that attempt to date and find a cause for Spartan militarization; De Ste. Croix 1972, p. 91; Lewis 2024, pp. 127-128. More recently, Paul Rahe has argued that the reason for Spartan isolationism is the need to protect *eunomia* in the *polis*, and that this explains everything else, including piety and militarism; Rahe 2016, pp. 121-123.

behaviour. Sections three and four provide detailed discussions of the one-off decisions. The cases are also categorised based on the agent of action: whether the causal link between religion and Spartan action is established by the Spartans themselves or by other cities, including allies, enemies, or supplicants. The second group is analysed in section five.



Graph 1: Number of cases by Book.

Firstly, let us examine the frequency of such cases from book to book, as shown in the line graph above. It is immediately noticeable that Book V has the highest number, followed by Book I. While the low numbers in Books VI and VII can be attributed to the fact that they are the so-called “Sicilian Books”, which mainly focus on Athenian actions, the contrast between Books II-IV, VIII and Books I, V remains striking.

Why does Thucydides include so many Spartan actions involving religious elements in Books V and I, more so than in the books on the Archidamian War? The distinction between peace and war may provide an explanation. During peacetime, religious formalities occupy the Spartans at home, and their attention to religious matters marks a concern for domestic affairs rather than a priority of religious matters.

Military vs. Religion: no dilemma for Spartans

Thucydides portrays Sparta as prioritising military concerns over religion in both foreign and domestic affairs. Although there may be some religious considerations, military objectives take precedence, such as in the Plataea case (Case 3.3) and the outbreak of the Archidamian

War (Case 7.1). Even in domestic politics, the Spartans use religion as a pretext when they have to murder some of the helots (Case 4.2) or exile one of their kings (Case 5.3). Each case will now be briefly examined.

Waging the Archidamian War (case 7.1)

The Spartans refused to submit their disputes to arbitration, as stipulated in the Thirty Years' Treaty between them and Athens, and instead waged the Archidamian War. This action constituted a breach of their oath in the treaty and caused them to feel guilty for almost two decades (431-413 BC) due to religious reasons, which they «have been pondering deeply in heart» (7.18.2: ἐνεθυμοῦντο) as Thucydides puts it. However, the decision to go to war against Athens was ultimately made, with military considerations taking priority over religious ones.

Plataea trial (case 3.3)

In the Plataea Trial, Thucydides takes great care to demonstrate that religious reasons were not the primary concern of the Spartans. He achieves this through an antithetical pair of speeches and a rare authorial comment. The Plataeans were wronged in religious matters, and their supplication is supported by various sophisticated and touching religious arguments.

The Plataeans were wronged in terms of religion. They emphasise that their city was attacked «during a peace agreed by treaty, and furthermore, on a holy day» (Th. 3.56.2: πόλιν γὰρ αὐτοὺς τὴν ἡμετέραν καταλαμβάνοντας ἐν σπονδαῖς καὶ προσέτι ἱερομηνίᾳ). They hoped that this would prompt Sparta to provide assistance, but their reasoning ultimately failed. The Thebans rejected their arguments using a tit-for-tat strategy (Th. 3.65.1), and the Spartans chose to side with the Thebans.

The Plataeans invoke two more religious arguments in their speech: (i) that the Plataeans established hereditary sacrifices for the Spartans who had fallen in the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC, and (ii) that the Spartans and the Plataeans have sworn allegiance.

The first of these two arguments is mentioned several times in the speech. The Plataeans remind the Spartans that they honoured their fallen ancestors «year after year with public gifts of garments and traditional offerings, as well as with the first fruits of their land

produced each season» (Th. 3.58.4: ἀποβλέψατε γὰρ ἐς πατέρων τῶν ὑμετέρων θήκας, οὓς ἀποθανόντας ὑπὸ Μήδων καὶ ταφέντας ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ἐτιμῶμεν κατὰ ἔτος ἕκαστον δημοσίᾳ ἐσθήμασί τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις νομίμοις, ὅσα τε ἡ γῆ ἡμῶν ἀνεδίδου ὥραϊα, πάντων ἀπαρχὰς ἐπιφέροντες). The Plataeans even made it «the hereditary sacrifices» (Th. 3.58.5: θυσίας τὰς πατρῖους). They also remind the Spartans that they have sworn an alliance, and therefore, «for the sake of the gods who once sanctioned their alliance» (Th. 3.58.1: καὶ θεῶν ἔνεκα τῶν ξυμμαχικῶν ποτὲ γενομένων), the Spartans are obliged to reciprocate their favour. However, their pleas meet nothing but indifference from the Spartans.

A final comment on style is necessary. The Plataean speaker repeatedly points to the tombs while speaking, making the whole speech traditional, touching, and even un-Thucydidean (Th. 3.58.4: ἀποβλέψατε γὰρ ἐς πατέρων τῶν ὑμετέρων θήκας; 3.59.2: προφερόμενοι ὄρκους οὓς οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν ὤμοσαν μὴ ἀμνημονεῖν ἱκέται γιγνόμεθα ὑμῶν τῶν πατρῶων τάφων). However, the Spartans remained unmoved. The Spartan indifference is clarified both by the Spartan reaction in narrative and by an authorial comment that attributes the real Spartan motive here to usefulness (Th. 3.68.4: ὠφελίμους εἶναι) in this war that had just begun (Th. 3.68.4: ἐς τὸν πόλεμον αὐτοὺς ἄρτι τότε καθιστάμενον).

Regarding the Plataea Trial, it is possible to attribute the absence of religious elements in Spartan reckoning to impiety, as opposed to the constant use of these elements by the Plataeans in their cause, arguments, and style. However, it is not advisable to rely on this explanation as it may create difficulties in other cases where the Spartans appear to be pious. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the priority of *raison d'état* is determined by the context of foreign relations. As the Spartans are already engaged in a war with other cities, military concerns always take the priority. This answer will not encounter the same challenges as the former. Therefore, it can be concluded that the strategic preference is not a choice between military and religious affairs, but rather between foreign and domestic concerns.

The helots (case 4.2)

In matters of great importance to their city, such as the expulsion of disliked individuals like the helots and Pleistoanax, the Spartans

exhibit a similar approach. In order to avoid the potential threat posed by the «youth and mass» (Th. 4.80.3: τὴν σκαιότητα⁶ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος) of the helots, the Spartans emancipated those who they believed had performed best in wars (Th. 4.80.3: ὅσοι ἀξιούσιν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις γεγενῆσθαι σφίσιν ἄριστοι), and subsequently eliminated them (lit. “made <them> disappear”, ἠφάνισαν).

Scholars discussed over to what extent the murder was premeditated. B. Jordan points out that the garlanding (ἐστεφανώσαντο) and circumambulation (περιῦλθον) were privileges of the free population⁷, and that the selection of victims resembles that of the *gerousia*, the most august body of the free population⁸. He then suggests that it was the transgression of this ceremony after emancipation that gave the Spartans motives for slaughter⁹. Other scholars regard it as an intended cruelty, as G. Grote’s sharp words set an example: «a stratagem at once so perfidious in the contrivance, so murderous in the purpose, and so complete in the execution, stands without parallel in any history¹⁰.» The Spartans’ intentions aside, religion should not impede the Spartans from undoing the effects of a previous religious decision for the sake of “security” (τῆς φυλακῆς).

Pleistoanax (case 5.3)

Another similar case is how the rivals of Pleistoanax, the Agiad king of Sparta (458-409 BC), constantly denied him entry to the city, exploiting the religious scruples (Th. 5.16.1: ἐξ ἐνθυμίας) of the Spartans¹¹, blaming him for all the misfortunes that befell Sparta.

The motivation is undoubtedly political. Why a religious pretext? R. Parker’s observation that «problems about the kingship could not be resolved by political means, because the kingship was the foundation of the political structure¹²» provides the answer. To combat the king

⁶ A. W. Gomme follows MS in reading it as τὴν νεότητα. Gomme 1962, p. 547.

⁷ Jordan 1990, pp. 39-43.

⁸ Jordan 1990, pp. 58-62.

⁹ Jordan 1990, p. 63.

¹⁰ Gomme 1962, p. 548.

¹¹ S. Hornblower quotes Dio Cassius as the only other occurrence of the word ἐνθυμία. He unequivocally states that this word has religious connotations; Hornblower 1996, pp. 464-465.

¹² Hornblower 1996, pp. 465-466.

who is the «foundation of the political structure¹³», his rivals need to get around politics by religion.

To sum up, in domestic politics, when Spartans need to make people they don't like out of sight (Th. 4.80.4: ἡφάνισαν), religion is at least not their foe (as in the case of eliminating some helots), or even their friend and help (as in the case of Pleistoanax). Taken together with the previous two cases in their foreign relations, it is safe to say that the Spartans never put religious concerns at the top of their list of priorities.

A Choice between Domestic Affairs and Foreign Relations

If religion is never the primary concern of the Spartans, why do we get the impression that they are always preoccupied with religious activities? I would suggest that this impression is given primarily by Book V, and that such an impression points to the Spartans' attention at home, not their attention to religion. More specifically, most of the instances that concern both Sparta and religion point to a Lacedaemonian principle about foreign relations that Thucydides lays out early in Book I: «They have never been quick to enter (interstate) wars unless they are strongly compelled to do so» (Th. 1.118.2: ὄντες μὲν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὴ ταχεῖς ἰέναι ἐς τοὺς πολέμους, ἢν μὴ ἀναγκάζωνται).

This Lacedaemonian principle of foreign policy can be deduced from three types of religious activity recorded by Thucydides in Book V: (i) τὰ διαβατήρια, offerings before crossing the border, which suggests the Spartans' caution before taking action; then (ii) fear of earthquakes, which implies their caution after taking action; and finally (iii) the festive obligations, which suggest that the need for a well-ordered domestic life overrides almost all other needs, including the need to engage in affairs beyond the borders.

Τὰ διαβατήρια: caution before taking action (cases 5.9, 5.14)

In Book V it is reported that the Spartans abandoned their expeditions three times due to unfavorable results of τὰ διαβατήρια, an offering before crossing the border. As mentioned in the beginning

¹³ *Ibid.*

of this paper, in the summer of 419 BC, the Spartans under Agis marched out for a mysterious destination, but abandoned it due to the unfavourable results of the sacrifices made at the frontier (Th. 5.54.2: ὥς δ' αὐτοῖς τὰ διαβατήρια θυομένοις οὐ προυχώρει). In the same summer, the Spartans made another abortive expedition, this time probably to Argos¹⁴, due to the exact same reason (Th. 5.55.3: ὥς οὐδ' ἐνταῦθα τὰ διαβατήρια αὐτοῖς ἐγένετο, ἐπανεχώρησαν). In the winter of 416 BC, another Spartan attempt at Argos was aborted for the same reason (Th. 5.116.1: ὥς αὐτοῖς τὰ διαβατήρια [ἱερὰ ἐν τοῖς ὁρίοις] οὐκ ἐγίνετο, ἀνεχώρησαν). From verbal echoes in these passages, a pattern of Spartan policy to Argos emerges, with a same target, similar scruples, and the same result.

Scholars either say that τὰ διαβατήρια is attested only in Sparta or admits that it is particularly important for the Spartans¹⁵. In any case, the meticulous attention paid to such offerings should indicate a certain Spartan idiosyncrasy. Conventionally, scholars have seen this ritual, among others, as a kind of religious meticulousness characteristic of the Spartans. This may not be a Thucydidean invention, as the evidence gathered by M.D. Goodman and A.J. Holladay shows¹⁶. But it may also be true that such an institution was created precisely because of the Spartans' reluctance to cross borders and become involved in foreign affairs.

W. Burkert categorizes τὰ διαβατήρια as sacrifices in occasions «*wo immer bewußt und unwiderruflich ein neuer Schritt getan wird*¹⁷». But unlike the other examples Burkert gives here, such as entering a new age group or joining a secret society, in what sense is crossing the border “irrevocable” (*unwiderruflich*)? The Athenians were engaged in perpetual expeditions. If military action overseas is indeed irrevocable, why haven't they developed an interest in setting up a similar institution? The answer should be that the Athenians did not consider military actions overseas to be irrevocable, but the Spartans did. For this reason, the Spartans needed additional confirmation to take the step, and τὰ διαβατήρια fulfils this function.

¹⁴ Thucydides does not specify the destination of the Lacedaemonians in this occasion, mentioning only Caryae, which, as A.W. Gomme sees it, is a clear hint of Argos; Gomme 1970, p. 76.

¹⁵ Hornblower 2008, p. 143.

¹⁶ Goodman, Holladay 1986, p. 155.

¹⁷ Burkert 1997, p. 50.

Fear of earthquakes: caution during action

Just as τὰ διαβατήρια has the function of appealing for caution before action is taken, the Spartan fear of earthquakes has a similar function, albeit after action has been taken. Thucydides records several times that the Spartans «retreated because earthquakes happen», in almost identical phrases: σεισμοῦ γενομένου (...) ἀπεχώρησαν. In the summer of 426 BC they abandoned a routine invasion of Attica (Th. 3.89.1, case 3.4); in the summer of 414 BC, another Spartan attempt at Argos during the Peace of Nicias was aborted (Th. 6.95.1, case 6.1); and in the winter of 412 BC, the Spartans reduced a naval aid to Chios and Erythrae (Th. 8.6.5, case 8.1).

B. Jordan suggests that earthquakes serve as warnings to the Spartans «transgressions in the past and warnings for their conduct in the future¹⁸». Some attribute the Spartans' reactions to earthquakes to religious beliefs, but B. Jordan argues that they are a result of the psychological impact of the 464 BC upheaval¹⁹. Another possible explanation for why Sparta retreats when an earthquake occurs is that the Spartans need extra strong divine confirmation to take action overseas, whereas earthquakes nullify that confirmation. These are indications of a strong preference not to act overseas, not of piety, hypocrisy, or any other collective trait.

Festive obligations: the need to maintain a domestic order

The Spartans' festive obligations also help to illustrate the Lacedaemonian principle of isolationism. Other needs are subordinated to the need to celebrate festivals and thus maintain a well-ordered domestic life. In Book V the Spartans allow three types of festivals to interfere with their military actions or diplomatic affairs: τὰ Ὑακίνθια, a festival in honour of Hyacinthus (case 5.8), τὰ Κάρνεια, the festival of Carneia (cases 5.9, 5.10, 5.11), and τὰ γυμνοπαίδια, the *Gymnopaidia* (case 5.13).

First, when negotiating an alliance with Argos, the Spartans hope that the finalisation and swearing of the alliance treaty can take place during the festival of Hyacinthus (Th. 5.41.3; case 5.8: ἦκειν ἐς τὰ

¹⁸ Jordan 1990, p. 49.

¹⁹ Jordan 1990, p. 51.

Υακίνθια τοὺς ὄρκους ποιησόμενους). Although in dire need of Argive friendship (Th. 5.41.3: ἐπεθύμουν γὰρ τὸ Ἄργος πάντως φίλιον ἔχειν), the Spartans decided not to let a diplomatic “folly” (Th. 5.41.3: μωρία) interfere too much with their religious formalities.

Second, the Spartans let τὰ Κάρνεια get in the way of their expeditions more than once. As mentioned above, a Spartan attempt at Argos in the summer of 419 BC was aborted due to unfavourable results of τὰ διαβατήρια, and was further delayed by τὰ Κάρνεια (Th. 5.54.2). After the battle of Mantinea in the summer of 418 BC, the Spartans sent back aid from home and hurried back for τὰ Κάρνεια (Th. 5.75.2). During this Κάρνεια, the Spartans watched an allied enemy force march on Epidaurus and the Athenians blockade the city (Th. 5.75.5), and they waited until the festival was over before setting out again for Argos (Th. 5.76.1: ἐπειδὴ τὰ Κάρνεια ἤγαγον). Even if we dismiss the last reference to the expedition to Argos (Th. 5.76.1) as an interpolation²⁰, it is clear from Thucydides’ Book V that the Spartans attached great importance to this sacred month and its celebration in times of peace. A.W. Gomme suggests that Sparta achieved its position through this practice, «by their traditional virtue, βραδυτής, slowness²¹». The Spartans were able to do this mainly because they were able to maintain their normal lives at home and celebrate the holy month undisturbed. For a Spartan, this would be the ideal way to coordinate foreign and domestic affairs.

The last identifiable type of festivals celebrated by the Spartans in Book V is the *Gymnopaidia*, when a stasis occurred in Argos. The Spartans, who are about to celebrate the *Gymnopaidia* (Th. 5.82.2: τηρήσαντες αὐτὰς τὰς γυμνοπαιδίας τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων), are too late to send help (Th. 5.82.3: ἀναβαλόμενοι δὲ τὰς γυμνοπαιδίας ἐβοήθουν), and too early to withdraw it from their Argive friends (Th. 5.82.3: ἀναχωρήσαντες δὲ ἐπ’ οἴκου τὰς γυμνοπαιδίας ἤγον). Again, the strong preference to celebrate the *Gymnopaidia* on time overrides the will to save their Argive friends and keep an ally. We need not say that it is religion that the Spartans value most, since we have shown in the third section that religion is never their primary concern, either in foreign relations or in domestic politics; but we might say that keeping life in the polis on track is what the Spartans value most.

²⁰ Hornblower 2008, p. 194.

²¹ Gomme 1970, pp. 127-128.

In addition to these identifiable festivals mentioned in Book V, there is also an unidentifiable festival that cost the Spartans dearly in the Archidamian War. When Demosthenes and his troops were fortifying Pylos, the Spartans “happened to hold a festival” (Th. 4.5: οἱ δὲ ἐορτήν τινα ἔτυχον ἄγοντες) and they neglected the Athenian action there. How the Spartans treat the event as a triviality impresses Thucydidean readers like H. Popp²², but other readers are not satisfied with the usual Spartan lethargy as an explanation. While R.B. Strassler attributes all the Spartan anxiety in the Pylos episode to their grave concern about a Helot revolution at home²³, P. Rahe’s suggestion that the Spartans’ perennial desire to protect *eunomia* in their polis can also be a powerful explanation²⁴.

In short, all these festive obligations were designed to maintain order at home. The real implication of such obligations is not that the Spartans trusted divine signs more than other Greeks, but that they held to a Lacedaemonian principle of isolationism: unless the gods provide a particularly strong favourable portent, the Spartans consider it unnecessary to get involved outside the city. The same can be seen in Book I. As mentioned above, Book I has the second highest number of cases involving Spartan actions and religious elements. The reason for this is that most of the cases concern a single question that runs through this pre-war book: is it absolutely necessary to get involved in a war with other cities? A question of lesser priority such as this requires a strong affirmative answer.

This section has allowed us to see that the priority of domestic affairs over foreign affairs can explain why there are so many religious cases in Book V. This tendency can be called a Lacedaemonian isolationism.

A Test: Sparta mirrored in others’ considerations

That this kind of Lacedaemonian isolationism is what Thucydides makes of the Spartan grand strategy can be further corroborated by a very different kind of cases: what others – including allies, enemies, and supplicants – make of Spartans when they try to interact strategically with Sparta.

²² Hornblower 1996, p. 156.

²³ Strassler 1990, p. 119. Also see Hornblower 1996, p. 157.

²⁴ Rahe 2016, pp. 121-123.

Allies

In Thucydides, Sparta's allies like to include religious arguments in their communication with their hegemon. In discussions within the Athenian Empire or within the city of Athens²⁵, on the other hand, we hardly see any religious arguments. Corinth, a significant ally of Sparta, emphasises their oath of alliance (Th. 1.71.5: οἷς ἂν ξυνομόσωσιν) when exhorting the Spartans to wage war against Athens. The Spartans, who share a common position, immediately echo such an idea by referring to gods (Th. 1.86.5: ξὺν τοῖς θεοῖς ἐπίωμεν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας). According to what we have shown in section four, the Corinthians invoke the gods to reassure the Spartans of the need for war: the gods are helpful, do not be afraid to go beyond the borders; otherwise, domestic concerns would override the will to help allies.

Religion is also used by allies to justify actions that the Spartans do not approve of. During the Peace of Nicias, the Spartans accused the Corinthians' non-acceptance of the treaty with Athens on religious grounds, saying that the Corinthians' decision was «against their oaths» (Th. 5.30.1: παραβήσεσθαι τε ἔφασαν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ὅρκους), that the allied vote should not be altered «without the intervention of gods and heroes» (Th. 5.30.1: μὴ τι θεῶν ἢ ἡρώων κώλυμα ἦ). Diametrically, the Corinthian envoy countered that it would be against their oaths to betray their sworn allegiance to the Thracians, and claimed that the gods and heroes did intervene (Th. 5.30.3: ἦν μὴ θεῶν ἢ ἡρώων κώλυμα ἦ' φαίνεσθαι οὖν σφίσι κώλυμα θεῖον τοῦτο).

This phenomenon – that a city using religious arguments either to blame other cities or to excuse herself – is not seen in the Athenian Empire, at least in Thucydides. Such a phenomenon suggests that the isolationist principle of Lacedaemonian foreign policy is well known among Spartan allies. Since the allies are in no position to tell Sparta not to worry about her internal affairs, religious arguments are used as a detour to help Sparta overcome her isolationism.

Enemies

The knowledge of the Lacedaemonian isolationism is also shared by Sparta's enemies. Both her arch-enemies, Athens and Argos, are aware

²⁵ Hornblower 1991, pp. 462, 445.

of the strategic opportunities this preference offers. We discussed both cases in the fourth section. In Argos, the democratic party, which is hostile to Sparta, uses the Spartans' obligation to celebrate the *Gymnopaidia* to bring about a stasis and then a break from the alliance with Sparta (Th. 5.82.2-4). In the same year, the siege of Epidaurus is attempted, also by taking advantage of the Spartans being occupied by the festival of *Carneia* (Th. 5.75.5-6: ἕως οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι Κάρνεια ἦγον). These cases support the thesis in section four that the preference for festive formalities indicates that the Spartans prioritise domestic life over foreign affairs. The Athenians could not resist the opportunity.

Supplicants

The last group of people who share the knowledge of the Lacedaemonian isolationism are the supplicants, those cities that are not allied to Sparta, but who seek help from the Spartans. Among them are the Mytileneans and the Plataeans. The Melians could be considered as a negative case, which also deserves some attention.

When stasis breaks out in Mytilene (case 3.1), the envoys who are sent to seek Spartan help go to the Olympia – another case showing that the Spartans are scrupulous about religious formalities – and compare themselves to real supplicants in a temple of Zeus Olympus (Th. 3.14.1: ἐν οὗ τῷ ἱερῷ ἴσα καὶ ἰκέται ἐσμέν). The Spartans listen to the Mytileneans and take them on as allies²⁶. The Plataeans (Case 3.3) were not so lucky. As discussed in section three, the Plataeans were careful enough to imbue their entire speech with religious overtones, but their appeal was rejected by the Spartans on the grounds of utility, and our historian could not help but scorn this consideration²⁷.

Finally, it is worth noting the absence of religious considerations in the Melian mentality. The Melians invoke the gods and Sparta in the hope of being saved, but they never link the two hopes, i.e. they never say that Sparta will come to their aid for religious reasons. It may be concluded from this example that when other cities genuinely contemplate what the Spartans value and how they make decisions, the people in Thucydides share a consensus that Sparta would not act

²⁶ Th. 3.15.1.

²⁷ Th. 3.68.

for religious reasons. To be sure, when no Spartan is present, there is no need to console a Spartan's isolationist worry.

Conclusion: the Lacedaemonian isolationism

In summary, the religious elements in Spartan actions in Thucydides do not show that religion takes precedence over military matters, but that the emphasis is on maintaining an orderly domestic life. This is a principle of isolationism. This principle is what Thucydides makes of the Spartan grand strategy in his *Histories*, as evidenced by the fact that in times of peace the Spartans are often preoccupied with domestic affairs, whereas in times of war the Spartans never put religion above the realistic *raison d'état*, and that their allies, enemies, and supplicants alike well perceive this image. On the basis of this reading, discussions can be taken forward on the formation of this isolationism and how this image differs from the historical reality of Sparta.

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Appendix

Form 1: Spartan actions with religious elements				
No.	place in Thucydides	description of the event	one-off decision or ongoing behavior	agent of action
1.1	1.10.2	The Spartans have no lavish shrines.	ongoing	Spartans
1.2	1.71.5-6	The Corinthian appeals to their oaths of allegiance when exhorting Spartans to act.	one-off	ally
1.3	1.86.5	Sthenelaidas appeals to god when exhorting his fellow Spartans to act.	one-off	a Spartan
1.4	1.103.2	The Spartans end the war at Ithome according to a Pythian warning.	one-off	Spartans
1.5	1.112.5	The so-called Sacred War	one-off	Spartans
1.6	1.118.3; 2.54.4	The Spartans consult Delphi about going to war with Athens	one-off	Spartans
1.7	1.123.1	The Corinthian mentions divine help when exhorting the Spartans to act.	one-off	ally
1.8	1.123.2	The Corinthian mentions the divine recognition of the oaths having been breached by the other party when exhorting the Spartans to act.	one-off	ally
1.9	1.126-127	Spartans' first ultimatum to Athenians: to expiate the curse of the goddesses, i.e. Pericles	one-off	Spartans
1.10	1.128.1	Spartans kill helots who seek suppliance in Poseidon's sanctuary at Tainaron.	one-off	Spartans
1.11	1.131.2-3	Pausanias inscribes a tripod at Delphi, later erased by the Spartans.	one-off	a Spartan & the Spartans

Form 1: Spartan actions with religious elements				
No.	place in Thucydides	description of the event	one-off decision or ongoing behavior	agent of action
1.12	1.134-135.1	Starving Pausanias in the temple of the Bronze House causes the curse of Athena.	one-off	Spartans
1.13	1.143.1	Pericles thinks that the Spartans could use the money at Olympia or Delphi in the war.	one-off	enemy
2.1 (=3.3)	2.71.2-4, continued in 3.52-68	Plataeans beg Archidamos not to plague their land by mentioning Pausanias' promise which was made by sacrifices on the Agora.	one-off	supplicant
2.2	2.74.2-75.1	Archidamos decides to invade Plataea anyway, calling gods and heroes to witness.	one-off	Spartans
3.1	3.8.1	Spartans tell the Mytilenean envoys to go to the Olympia to present themselves.	one-off	Spartans
3.2	3.14.1	Plataeans compare themselves to real supplicants in the sanctuary of Zeus the Olympian.	one-off	supplicant
3.3 (=2.1)	3.52-68	The Plataea Trial, in which the Plataeans cite numerous religious reasons to plead for mercy from the Spartans, while the Spartans turn a deaf ear.	one-off	supplicant
3.4	3.89	Spartans abandon an invasion of Attica due to a number of earthquakes.	one-off	Spartans
3.5	3.92.5	Spartans consult Delphi about colonization of Heracleia in Trachinia.	one-off	Spartans
4.1	4.5	Spartan neglect of the fortification of Pylos because they are holding a festival.	one-off	Spartans
4.2	4.80.4	Spartans select 2.000 helots, make them circumambulate the temples with garlands and then make them disappear.	one-off	Spartans
4.3	4.116.2	Brasidas makes a formidable place into a sacred precinct.	one-off	a Spartan
4.4	4.118.1-2	Sacred arrangements in the truce	ongoing	Spartans

Form 1: Spartan actions with religious elements				
No.	place in Thucydides	description of the event	one-off decision or ongoing behavior	agent of action
5.1	5.10.2	Brasidas makes sacrifices to Athena immediately after he enters Amphipolis.	one-off	a Spartan
5.2	5.11.1	Apotheosis of Brasidas in Amphipolis	ongoing	ally
5.3	5.16	Rivals of Pleistoanax use religious grounds to ban him from returning to the <i>polis</i>	ongoing	Spartans
5.4	5.18.1-2	Religious clauses in the Peace of Nicias	ongoing	Spartans; ally; enemy
5.5	5.23.4-5	Religious clauses in the Treaty of Athens-Sparta Alliance Treaty	ongoing	Spartans; ally
5.6	5.30	The Corinthians justify their non-acceptance of the Peace with Athens on religious grounds.	one-off	ally
5.7	5.31, 49	The Spartans arbitrate the religious dispute between the Eleans and the Lepreans, and the Eleans, unsatisfied by their arbitration, retaliate by excluding the Spartans from sanctuary in the Olympic Games.	one-off	ally
5.8	5.41	The Spartans ask the Argives to come to swear the oath during the festival of Hyacinthus.	one-off	enemy
5.9	5.54.1-2. 55.3	The Spartans abandon expeditions due to unfavorable results in τὰ διαβατήρια, and postpone one of the expeditions to the end of the month of <i>Carneia</i>	one-off	Spartans
5.10	5.75.2	The Spartans send back reinforcement from home and allies and then celebrate the festival of <i>Carneia</i>	one-off	Spartans

Form 1: Spartan actions with religious elements				
No.	place in Thucydides	description of the event	one-off decision or ongoing behavior	agent of action
5.11	5.75.5-6, 76.1	While the Spartans celebrate the festival of <i>Carneia</i> , the Athenians manage to wall off Epidaurus	one-off	enemy
5.12	5.77.4	Sacred arrangements in Spartans' alliance proposal to Argives	ongoing	Spartans
5.13	5.82.2-3	Celebration of <i>Gymnopaedia</i> delays the Spartans from sending aid to their friends in the Argive stasis	one-off	Spartans
5.14	5.116.1	The Spartans abandon an expedition to Argos due to unfavorable results in τὰ διαβλήματα	one-off	Spartans
6.1	6.95.1	Spartans abandon their expedition to Argos due to an earthquake	one-off	Spartans
7.1	7.18.2	Religious scruples plague the Spartans long after they break their oath and wage the Archidamian War	one-off	Spartans
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Cult and economy in ancient Sparta

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Keywords: Spartan sanctuaries, votive objects, Laconian hero-relief, Athena *Chalkioikos*, trade

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Σπαρτιατικά ιερά, αναθηματικά αντικείμενα, Λακωνικό ηρωικό ανάγλυφο, Αθηνά Χαλκιοίκου, εμπόριο

Abstract

This paper investigates the economic role of Sparta's major sanctuaries, which served not only as religious centers but also as hubs of artisanal production and trade. Traditionally viewed as a strictly militaristic society, evidence from sanctuaries such as the *Amyklaion*, *Artemis Orthia*, and Athena *Chalkioikos* reveals that Sparta actively engaged in the production and exchange of votive offerings, including bronze, ivory, and lead items. These findings indicate that Spartan sanctuaries were central to a complex interplay of religious and economic functions, supporting the city's social order and connecting it to Mediterranean trade networks. The production and export of Laconian votive objects suggest that Sparta's sanctuaries played a key role in fostering cultural and economic ties across the region. By examining the material culture of these sanctuaries, this study reveals Sparta as a society where religious devotion and

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economic activity were interwoven, challenging the view of a purely insular *polis*. Instead, Sparta emerges as a dynamic participant in the ancient Greek world, with its sanctuaries as vital contributors to both cultural exchange and economic vitality.

Περίληψη

Αυτή η εργασία διερευνά τον οικονομικό ρόλο των κύριων ιερών της Σπάρτης, τα οποία δεν λειτουργούσαν μόνο ως θρησκευτικά κέντρα, αλλά και ως κόμβοι παραγωγής και εμπορίου έργων τέχνης. Παραδοσιακά θεωρούμενη ως αυστηρά στρατιωτικοποιημένη κοινωνία, τα στοιχεία από ιερά όπως το Αμύκλειο, το ιερό της Άρτεμης Ορθίας και το ιερό της Αθηνάς Χαλκιοίκου αποκαλύπτουν ότι η Σπάρτη συμμετείχε ενεργά στην παραγωγή και ανταλλαγή αφιερωμάτων, όπως αντικείμενα από μπρούντζο, ελεφαντόδοντο και μόλυβδο. Αυτά τα ευρήματα δείχνουν ότι τα σπαρτιατικά ιερά αποτελούσαν κεντρικά σημεία μιας σύνθετης αλληλεπίδρασης θρησκευτικών και οικονομικών λειτουργιών, υποστηρίζοντας την κοινωνική τάξη της πόλης και συνδέοντάς τη με τα εμπορικά δίκτυα της Μεσογείου. Η παραγωγή και εξαγωγή λακωνικών αφιερωματικών αντικειμένων υποδηλώνει ότι τα ιερά της Σπάρτης διαδραμάτισαν βασικό ρόλο στην προώθηση πολιτιστικών και οικονομικών δεσμών στην περιοχή. Μελετώντας την υλική κουλτούρα αυτών των ιερών, η παρούσα εργασία αποκαλύπτει τη Σπάρτη ως μια κοινωνία όπου η θρησκευτική αφοσίωση και η οικονομική δραστηριότητα ήταν στενά συνυφασμένες, αμφισβητώντας την άποψη μιας καθαρά απομονωμένης πόλης-κράτους. Αντίθετα, η Σπάρτη αναδεικνύεται ως ένας δυναμικός συμμετέχων στον αρχαίο ελληνικό κόσμο, με τα ιερά της να αποτελούν ζωτικής σημασίας συνεισφέροντες τόσο στην πολιτιστική ανταλλαγή όσο και στην οικονομική ζωτικότητα.

Introduction

The interplay between religious practices and economy has become a subject of profound interest, which has drawn significant scholarly attention in recent times¹. This dynamic relationship is particularly evident in the functioning of sanctuaries, regarded not only as places

¹ On the topic, see: Bartoloni, Colonna, Grottanelli 1992 and the coeval Linders, Alroth 1992 (on the sanctuaries, particularly Ampolo 1992); more recently Sassu 2023; Sassu 2022a; Sassu 2014; McCleary 2011. Cf. also Lo Monaco 2020, pp. 9-13, with previous bibliography.

of worship, but also as crucial hubs of economic activities². Sanctuaries across the Greek world, including those in Sparta, were closely intertwined with the social, political, and economic aspects of their respective *poleis*. They acted as centers for production, trade, and even banking, playing a pivotal role in meeting the financial needs of the *polis*³.

Sparta, characterized by its unique social structure and militaristic culture, presents a fascinating case study in the relationship between cult and economy. While the Lacedaemonian *polis* is frequently portrayed as an antichrematistic society⁴, resistant to the influences of wealth and commerce, archaeological evidence – albeit limited – actually reveal a far more complex scenario.

Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the economic dimension of Spartan religious places and practices by examining some of its most significant sanctuaries, namely the *Amyklaion*, the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* and the sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos*. This analysis will explore the possible existence of workshops within these sacred spaces, yet examining the production and exchange of peculiar Laconian votive offerings, attempting to shed light on the broader implications of economic activities for a deeper understanding of Spartan society.

Potential workshops within the sacred areas

The *Amyklaion*

As one of Sparta's most important sanctuaries, the *Amyklaion* may have served not only as a pivotal religious center but also as a key-productive focal point. Beyond its religious significance, recent archeological findings and scholarly interpretations suggest that it may have had a multifaceted role, particularly associated with

² Sassu 2010, particularly n. 1, p. 247, for the bibliography; Linders 1992.

³ Sassu 2020; Davies 2020; Lippolis, Sassu 2016; Sassu 2014; Sassu 2010; Davies 2001.

⁴ For the economic aspects of this topic see van Wees 2018; Christesen 2004; Hodkinson 2000.

metalworking⁵. This dual-purpose function of the *Amyklaion* could be tied to its strategic and cultural significance.

Systematic excavations⁶ carried out since the beginning of the last century have confirmed continuous use of the sanctuary of Apollo and Hyakinthos from the Late Bronze Age to the Post-Byzantine period⁷. Moreover, the *Hyakinthia* celebrations seem created around the beginning of the 8th cent. BC⁸, attracting worshippers and pilgrims from the whole Laconia region, together with their devotional offerings, which may have been produced – at least partially – *in situ*. Indeed, archaeological evidence provide insights into the advanced craftsmanship practiced at the site, reflecting the broader economic and cultural dynamics of Spartan society. Notably, the sanctuary has yielded a significant array of metallic objects⁹ – mainly bronzes, including fragments of a small helmet¹⁰; plates¹¹; jewellery¹²; arrowheads¹³; figurines¹⁴; a lyre¹⁵ – which have revealed in recent times the possible existence of metalworking activities *in loco*¹⁶. Pausanias¹⁷ already observed metal-crafted objects here, including the colossal *xoanon* of Apollo, likely made in the 7th cent. BC in the shape of a bronze column¹⁸.

⁵ Vlizos 2023; Vlizos 2020; Vlizos 2017.

⁶ Tsountas 1892, pp. 1-18; Fiechter 1918, pp. 107-245; Buschor, von Massow 1927. For a short history of the excavations in the sanctuary's area see, as example, Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 29-42; Petterson 1992, pp. 92-99; Vlizos 2009, pp. 11-13. Researches concerning the *Amyklaion* are still ongoing. Although the results are mostly unpublished, there are continuous uploads on the state of the work through the web site of the *Amykles Research Project*, which supply also the most recent information: www.amyklaion.gr.

⁷ The inhabitants of the area possibly worshipped Hyakinthos as a local divinity, whose cult was partially absorbed into the later cult of Doric Apollo. On the origins of the cult: Richer 2012; Petterson 1992.

⁸ Vlachou 2018; Richer 2012; Petterson 1992. Literary sources: Hdt. 9.7-11; Thu. 5.23.4-5; X. *Agas.* 2.17; X. *HG* 4.5.11; Paus. 3.10.1-5; Philostr. *VA* 6.20, *VS* 2.12; Ov. *Met.* 10.217-219; Macrobian *Sat.* 1.18.2.

⁹ As jewelry and weapons. See Tsountas 1892, p. 10; Demakopoulou 2009, p. 103.

¹⁰ This bronze helmet has an inscription: [A]MYKΛAI OI (SEG 11. 690).

¹¹ Vlizos 2020. These bronze plates are without interpretation at the moment.

¹² Calligas 1992, pp. 31-48; Demakopoulou 2009, p. 103.

¹³ Calligas 1992.

¹⁴ Calligas 1992.

¹⁵ Calligas 1992.

¹⁶ Vlizos 2023; Vlizos 2020.

¹⁷ Paus. 3.18. 7; 3.19.2-3.

¹⁸ On the monument, particularly: Delivorrias 2009; Faustoferri 1996; Faustoferri 1993.



Fig. 1. Plan of the *Amyklaion* (Google Map's rielaboration by the Author).

Due to the findings recovered within the site, S. Hodkinson¹⁹ and C. Stibbe²⁰ have included the sanctuary of Apollo and Hyakinthos amongst the production and distribution's centers of votives in bronze both within and beyond Sparta, particularly from the 7th and, on a large scale, 6th cent. BC. This seems to be confirmed by recent excavations carried out in 2013²¹, which detected the activity of a metal workshop in the northern area of the sanctuary (fig. 1), between the monumental *propylon* and the altar²². Analogies can be found in the sanctuaries of Olympia²³, Athens²⁴ or Nemea²⁵, attested by the remains of smelting

In bronze was also the door of the tomb of Hyakinthos, functioning as the base of the Throne of Apollo.

¹⁹ Hodkinson 1998.

²⁰ Stibbe 2008.

²¹ Vlzos 2017.

²² Vlzos 2020.

²³ Heilmeyer 1987; Heilmeyer 1969.

²⁴ Zimmer 1990; Mattusch 1977.

²⁵ Miller 1978.

furnaces, tools, foundry pits, missing casts, unfinished products²⁶. Nevertheless, *Amyklaion*'s metal workshops were likely provisional structures, mostly due to the natural conformation of the site²⁷. The concentration of metalworking debris in specific areas of the sanctuary suggests that these activities were possibly seasonal, aligning with the religious calendar of Sparta. Major festivals like the *Hyakinthia*, which drew large numbers of worshippers to the *Amyklaion*, would have created a demand for votive offerings²⁸.

The presence of temporary workshops embedded in the natural bedrock may reveal a production model responsive to the sanctuary's needs. These workshops were likely established to produce large quantities of votive offerings in anticipation of the influx of worshippers during key religious events²⁹, further emphasizing the sanctuary's role as a major center of craft and production. Therefore, metalworking activities at the *Amyklaion* were not only significant for their religious implications but also for their broader economic impact on Spartan society. Access to raw materials, such as copper and tin, from Laconian mines of the east coast³⁰, likely facilitated this industry, positioning the sanctuary of Amykles as a central node within regional economic networks³¹.

The artifacts found at the *Amyklaion*, including molds for figurines and tools used in the casting process, demonstrate the proficiency of the local artisans in these techniques. The types of objects produced ranged from small figurines of deities and animals to larger, more elaborate items such as bronze plates and ceremonial weapons³².

The production of these votive offerings had also wider economic implications, as they were not only used locally but also likely traded

²⁶ On metal workshops in Greek sanctuaries, see Sassu 2022b, pp. 348-349.

²⁷ Vlizos 2017. Moreover, this seems supported also by the lack of a cistern or a system to ensure a reliable water supply for the workshops. It can be assumed that water supply was likely managed through temporary containers, which would have needed to be filled with water from the nearby Eurotas River (Vlizos 2020).

²⁸ Pilgrimage was particularly attested at the sanctuary of Apollo and Hyakinthos, since temporary tents were raised outside the sacred area to share the common meal (*kopis*) during the *Hyakinthia* (Petropoulou 2015).

²⁹ On the topic: Lo Monaco 2020.

³⁰ Vlizos 2023; Vlizos 2020.

³¹ Hodkinson 1998.

³² Vlizos 2023; Vlizos 2020; Vlizos 2017.

across the Mediterranean³³. The presence of Laconian bronze objects at sites such as Olympia³⁴ attests to the widespread distribution and high value of these goods. This trade would have brought wealth into Sparta, further enhancing the economic role of the *Amyklaion* and solidifying its position as a key player in regional and interregional trade networks.

Therefore, metalworking activities at the *Amyklaion* were a crucial aspect of Spartan society, reflecting the deep interconnections between religion, economy, and culture. The sanctuary's role as a center of production not only supported its religious functions but also contributed to the broader economic vitality of Sparta. The votive offerings produced there were not just objects of religious devotion; they were also products of skilled craftsmanship, valuable commodities in trade networks, and symbols of the complex cultural and economic life of ancient Sparta.

The sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*

Located in the *kome* of Limnai, the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* is one of the most significant and complex sacred sites in ancient Laconia³⁵, notable not only for its religious importance but also as a potential center for the production of votive offerings. Evidence from the site suggest that it may have been a hub for artisanal and economic activity, especially in the production of items crafted from metal, ivory and lead, reflecting the intertwined nature of religious devotion and skilled craftsmanship in Spartan society.

The possibility of metalworking *in loco* follows the discoveries during early 20th-century excavations led by the British School at Athens³⁶. Among the findings were partially finished bronze figurines³⁷,

³³ Prost 2018, pp. 165-170 for a general overview of Spartan trade. C. Stibbe posited that both permanent and itinerant workshops in Laconia and Sparta supplied high-quality metal objects to the local market and produced them on demand for large-scale export across the ancient world by the 6th cent. BC (Stibbe 2009). *Contra* this vision Rolley 1977, who has cut back the expansion of Spartan artistic production abroad.

³⁴ Kyrieleis 2008, pp. 177-198.

³⁵ New observations on the sanctuary have been pointed out by P. Storch in this volume.

³⁶ Dawkins 1929, p. 190.

³⁷ Droop 1929, pp. 196-202.



Fig. 2. Lead figurines from the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).

including fragments of horses, such as a horse's front part and legs, which suggest that the sanctuary may have been a place where artisans completed or consecrated metal objects before dedicating them as votive offerings. Though not definitive evidence of a fully operational workshop, these artifacts indicate that some degree of metalworking activity was likely conducted on-site or nearby, implying that the sanctuary may have been part of a broader network of production within Sparta that integrated religious and economic functions.

In addition to metal items, the sanctuary is renowned for a vast array of ivory artifacts³⁸, particularly enthroned figures, dating from the 7th and 6th cent. BC. These intricate carvings highlight Sparta as an important center of ivory craftsmanship in the Greek world³⁹, with artisans demonstrating a high level of skill that likely catered to both religious and social needs. The presence of such specialized ivory items suggests that the sanctuary may have supported a robust local economy that enabled the production of high-quality works, positioning it as a *locus* of artistic production as well as spiritual devotion. Furthermore,

³⁸ Dawkins 1929; Marangou 1969; Carter 1984; Kopanias 2009.

³⁹ For the reconstruction of possible cultural and artisanal exchanges with the East in the context of ivory production, see Kopanias 2009.

this ivory workshop had been active in Sparta at least up to the 6th cent. BC⁴⁰.

Nevertheless, one of the most distinctive forms of votive offerings associated with Artemis *Orthia* (as well as the *Menelaion*⁴¹) is the series of lead figurines, or Laconic figurines⁴² (fig. 2). These mass-produced figures, depicting dancers, musicians, animals and mythological beings, originated in the 7th cent. BC and peaked in the 6th cent. BC, likely reflecting a system of production that made offerings accessible to a broad range of worshippers. Scholars suggest these figurines may have represented ritual performances or served as personal dedications⁴³, further reinforcing the sanctuary's role in fostering votive production.

The sanctuary's extensive range of votives demonstrates a localized production system that not only catered to Sparta but also participated in broader exchange networks; indeed, examples have been found at sites such as the Argive *Heraion* and Bassai⁴⁴.

This combination of religious devotion and skilled craftsmanship at the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* underscores its unique position in Spartan society, where worship, artisanal production, and economic engagement possibly intersected. The localized creation of votive offerings, particularly in metal, ivory and lead, reflects a distinct Spartan tradition rooted in both spiritual and practical life, with the sanctuary serving as a space where the city's cultural and economic dynamics were vividly expressed.

The sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos*

The sanctuary of Athena *Chalkioikos*⁴⁵, located on Sparta's Acropolis (Palaiokastros hill), was a prominent religious site dedicated to Athena, "of the Bronze House". Known for its unique bronze votive offerings, this sanctuary played a central role in Spartan religious, cultural, and possibly economic life.

⁴⁰ Kopanias 2009, p. 130.

⁴¹ Cavanagh, Laxton 1984, pp. 23-36.

⁴² Dawkins 1929, pp. 249-284; recently, Lloyd 2020, pp. 33-44.

⁴³ Lloyd 2020.

⁴⁴ Prost 2018, p. 161.

⁴⁵ On the cult of Athena *Chalkioikos* at Sparta see particularly Sassu 2022c, pp. 56-72, and her paper in this volume.

Particularly, the bronze bells⁴⁶ recovered at the sanctuary may represent a distinctive facet of Spartan religious practices⁴⁷, potentially mirroring the city's martial *ethos* as well as its artisanal traditions. Produced predominantly between the 7th and 5th cent. BC, these bells offer valuable insights into the sanctuary's role not only as a religious site but as a possible center for metal production and skilled craftsmanship under Athena's divine patronage.

The significant number of these peculiar objects discovered at the main sanctuary of the *polis* – over 30 specimens in bronze and more than a hundred in clay⁴⁸ – suggest that their production may have been a consistent activity within or near the temple complex. This concentration of bronze bells, alongside other bronze items, highlights the potential scale and importance of metalworking associated with Athena “of the Bronze House”, whose epiclesis – associated with the other Acropolis' cult of *Ergane* (“patron of artisans”)⁴⁹ – may imply a direct link to metalwork. Additionally, the discovery of deposits of bronze and iron waste in a nearby stoa⁵⁰ provides further support for the hypothesis that the sanctuary may have operated as a hub for artisanal production. These waste materials suggest not only on-site production but also an organized system of metalworking within the sacred precinct, likely involving a dedicated workforce skilled in casting and shaping bronze.

The bells' connection to metalworking production is also supported by their stylistic and functional similarities to bells found in other sanctuaries, such as the *Heraion* of Samos⁵¹, indicating a broader network of artisanship and possibly trade across Greek religious sites. However, the volume of bronze objects at Athena *Chalkioikos*, including weapons, tools and votive artifacts, suggests that this Spartan sanctuary held a special place in local production, where religious devotion intertwined with economic activity. Athena's patronage, in this context, would extend beyond spiritual protection to encompass

⁴⁶ An overview concerned with the functions and diffusions of bells in Greek world is in Villing 2002, pp. 223-295.

⁴⁷ Some other specimens have also been found outside the Acropolis, for example at the *Menelaion*. See Gagliano 2017, p. 105; Villing 2002, pp. 247-248.

⁴⁸ Villing 2002.

⁴⁹ Paus. 3.17.4.

⁵⁰ Woodward 1926-1927; Gagliano 2017, p. 91.

⁵¹ Prost 2018; Gagliano 2017, p. 105; Villing 2002, pp. 261-266.

support for metalworkers and artisans, making the sanctuary a focal point for metallurgical expertise and possibly for the exchange of technical skills and resources.

Hypothetically, the sound of these bells may have been intended to evoke the auditory clash of weapons⁵², thereby symbolically reinforcing the city's martial ideals. Additionally, the ringing of the bells might have echoed the activity of metalworking, further connecting them to the world of Spartan craftsmanship⁵³. Another interpretation proposes an apotropaic function, as inscriptions bearing female names suggest these bells may have served a protective role, particularly for women and children under Athena's divine guardianship⁵⁴.

This evidence hints at the sanctuary's potential dual role as both a place of worship and a center for local industry, where bronze and other resources were worked into objects that reinforced Spartan cultural values. The extensive presence of bronze items may also reflect the accumulation of uncoined bronze as a form of economic reserve, with religious offerings doubling as symbols of wealth within Spartan society. Such an arrangement would align with the Spartan emphasis on self-sufficiency and resourcefulness, with Athena's "Bronze House" standing as a symbol of both spiritual and material support.

The Spartan *ex-voto*: an overview

Evidence for the existence of productive workshops within Spartan sacred sites remains somewhat limited, with notable exception at the sanctuary of Apollo and Hyakinthos in Amykles. However, the study of votive and ritual dedications provides insights beyond the purely religious, revealing aspects of Sparta's economic life, financial capabilities of individuals, social dynamics related to status and gender, as well as the motivations behind such offerings.

A wide variety of offerings has been found at major Spartan divine cult-sites, reflecting the wealth and social status of the dedicants⁵⁵. Prestigious offerings included: bronze artifacts⁵⁶, commonly used for

⁵² Gagliano 2017, p. 96; Villing 2002, p. 282.

⁵³ Gagliano 2017, p. 105.

⁵⁴ See R. Sassu in this volume.

⁵⁵ Pavlides 2023, pp. 79-84.

⁵⁶ See the paper of C. Tarditi in this volume.



Fig. 3. Pyramidal hero relief (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).

statues, weapons and other significant items, symbolizing both utility and prestige; intricately carved ivories⁵⁷, highly prized for their beauty and rarity; precious objects and jewelry in gold and silver, frequently offered to the gods as a sign of devotion and to secure divine favor; pottery⁵⁸, ranging from utilitarian to highly decorative pieces. For individuals of more modest means, simpler terracotta figurines and lead votives provided accessible ways to participate in religious practices.

In contrast, offerings found at heroic cult-places were often more modest, reflecting a different kind of devotion, accessible to the broader population. Spartan hero-reliefs in stone (fig. 3) and terracotta

⁵⁷ Dawkins 1929; Marangou 1969; Carter 1984; Kopanias 2009.

⁵⁸ For an introduction see Pipili 2018, pp. 124-153.

represent the main typology of *ex voto* to the heroes⁵⁹, typically depicting scenes of libation or ceremonial rituals. Created with molds, these reliefs were relatively inexpensive, yet easily transportable, making them accessible to the general populace. Such offerings «*par destination*»⁶⁰ emphasized the symbolic significance of the devotional act, underscoring the worshiper's personal connection to the hero. Similarly, terracotta⁶¹ and lead figurines⁶², affordable yet symbolically significant, allowed ordinary citizens to participate in hero cults, while miniaturized pottery reflected both communal and private aspects of worship⁶³.

The variety and nature of these votive objects provide a vivid picture of the Spartan socio-economic conditions, revealing a society where religious practices intertwined with social identity and economic status. The offerings made by individuals and families at these religious sites were not only acts of devotion but also statements of social positioning. Through their offerings, people expressed their faith, sought divine favor and affirmed their place within the *polis*. This broad participation highlights the integral role these sacred sites played in the cultural and social fabric of ancient Sparta. They were not merely places of worship but spaces where the social and economic dynamics of the community were on display.

The Laconian hero-relief

The Laconian hero-reliefs are among the most distinctive votive objects associated with the cult of the Spartan heroes, particularly at the sanctuary of Agamemnon and Alexandra at Amykles⁶⁴. These

⁵⁹ Pavlides 2023, pp. 30-36; Tsouli 2016; Salapata 2006. The discovery of hero-reliefs, seldom found outside the Peloponnese, supports the hypothesis of a local production accessible to all social classes and inclusive of both genders. These artifacts appear not only at major cult centers – distinguished, perhaps, by their abundance and iconographic diversity – but also at smaller hero shrines scattered throughout the urban area and just beyond its limits.

⁶⁰ Morel 1992, pp. 221-232.

⁶¹ Pavlides 2023, pp. 62-63.

⁶² For the lead figurines recovered at the *Menelaion*: Cavanagh, Laxton 1984, pp. 23-36; for those at the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia*: Dawkins 1929.

⁶³ Pavlides 2023, pp. 63-69.

⁶⁴ Salapata 2014; Salapata 1993. The iconography of the votive plaques recovered at Amykles demonstrate considerable diversity, portraying standing couples, warriors, standing triads, riders, and banqueters.



Fig. 4. Spartan hero relief from Bougdakis plot (© Archaeological Museum of Sparta, photo by the Author).

reliefs, remarkably widespread during the Archaic period⁶⁵, exhibit a highly codified iconography: a male figure seated on a throne, holding a *kantharos*, with a standing or seated female figure positioned beside or slightly behind him⁶⁶, sometimes accompanied by miniaturized attendants and various elements linked to the chthonic aspects of the heroes, such as snakes, pomegranates, or eggs, which underscore the ritualistic and symbolic complexity of these dedications⁶⁷. Notably, by the early 5th cent. BC, this iconography evolved, with the female figure gradually disappearing, leaving the seated male as the focal point⁶⁸. These hero-reliefs were instrumental in fostering a strong communal and civic identity in Sparta, extending beyond mere ethnic identity⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ They date from late-6th to the late-4th cent. BC (Salapata 2014, pp. 61-62).

⁶⁶ Salapata 2014; Salapata 2017; Salapata 2011.

⁶⁷ Salapata 2014; Salapata 2002a; Salapata 2002b.

⁶⁸ Salapata 2002b, pp. 142-143. Some additional elements, such as a dog or a horse protome, usually complete the scene. The male figure is holding a *kantharos* or a *phiale*; sometimes the snake drinks from it, but it is a later iconography dating to the Hellenistic period (Salapata 1993).

⁶⁹ On the topic, Golino 2022, with previous bibliography.

The earliest Laconian reliefs, dating back to the mid-6th cent. BC, introduce the iconic seated couple, a motif that rapidly gained popularity. Though many of these reliefs were not found *in situ*, similar examples have emerged at various sites throughout Laconia. Notably, the Chrysapha marble relief (fig. 4) is among the earliest instances⁷⁰, exemplifying the heroic iconography with a male figure enthroned and a female figure seated beside him, portrayed almost entirely in profile and largely obscured by the male⁷¹. In addition, The “Chilon relief” suggests that this heroic iconography may have been employed to honor historical figures who had recently been heroized⁷².

Numerous deposits of votive terracotta reliefs with heroic iconography have been unearthed across different areas of Sparta, though many are fragmentary⁷³. Typically, these reliefs are small and square in shape, with the most prevalent motif being the libation scene in which the hero is shown seated in profile, and a female figure pours wine into his *kantharos*. Other variations of these reliefs include depictions of a male figure standing before a snake, a rider on horseback, and the *Potnia*, a title often associated with female deities and winged goddesses⁷⁴.

The sheer quantity of these reliefs suggests their considerable importance to the Spartan community. Stone and marble examples, due to their expense, were likely dedicated by wealthier individuals or reserved for communal offerings, while the smaller, mass-produced terracotta plaques, more affordable and accessible, were likely personal offerings. By the end of the Archaic period, a decline in Spartan artistic production reflects a possible shift toward a public *ethos* with less emphasis on luxury and individual wealth display⁷⁵. This change aligns with the rise of a more egalitarian societal ideal,

⁷⁰ Salapata 1993. The chronology of this relief is ca. 550-540 BC.

⁷¹ The throne is decorated with lion feet and anthemion. A bearded snake is also present (Pavlidis 2011, p. 118).

⁷² The inscription [XI]AON is posed in retrograde under the throne of the seated figure. Both the chronology (6th cent. BC) and the name can presumably refer to the *ephor* Chilon. On the heroization of recently deceased: Pavlidis 2023, pp. 144-156.

⁷³ The majority of these deposits remain unpublished. An overview can be found in Pavlidis 2023, pp. 38-59; Flouris 2000, pp. 131-148.

⁷⁴ Wace 1905-1906.

⁷⁵ Prost 2018; van Wees 2018.

maybe influencing the shift toward terracotta reliefs at hero shrines in the Classical period, which underscored this emerging social dynamic.

Nonetheless, spanning from the Archaic to the Roman periods, hero-reliefs became a defining form of votive dedication in Sparta. These terracotta plaques, which became one of the most characteristic types of votive offerings in Laconia, are found in abundance not only in Sparta but throughout the Greek world⁷⁶, particularly in regions such as Taras⁷⁷ and Lokroi⁷⁸ in Magna Graecia.

Sparta as production center of votive objects

From the 8th cent. BC onward, Sparta emerged as a significant hub of artisanal production, with its influence peaking in the 6th cent. BC. This period is marked by a notable increase in the variety and quantity of votive offerings produced at Sparta's major cult sites, reflecting both the city's religious fervor and its economic ambitions.

Laconian art, especially black-figure pottery, had a wide-reaching influence across the Mediterranean⁷⁹. These artistic products were not confined to the local market; rather, they were actively traded and have been found in numerous archaeological contexts outside of Laconia. For instance, small bronze sculptures dating back to the 8th cent. BC have been unearthed at the sanctuary of Olympia, suggesting the presence of Spartan workshops that operated in close proximity to the sanctuary of Zeus⁸⁰. These workshops, either permanent or itinerant, likely produced bronze figurines, such as the iconic Laconian horses or bulls, which were in demand both locally and beyond Sparta's borders.

Moreover, the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia provides further evidence of Sparta's extensive production capabilities, particularly in the form of Laconian cups, which appear in significant concentrations at the site⁸¹.

⁷⁶ Salapata 2014.

⁷⁷ Lippolis 2009; Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli 1977.

⁷⁸ Lissi Caronna, Sabbione, Vlad Borrelli 1999; Lissi Caronna, Sabbione, Vlad Borrelli 2003; Lissi Caronna, Sabbione, Vlad Borrelli 2009; Torelli 1977;

⁷⁹ Pipili 2006, pp. 75-83; Coudin 2009a; Malkin 1994; Nafissi 1989, pp. 68-88.

⁸⁰ Prost 2018, p. 168.

⁸¹ Pipili 2018; Coudin 2009b, pp. 227-263.

The relationship between Sparta and other prominent centers of the ancient world, such as Samos, also underscores Sparta's importance as a production center. The Samian *Heraion* has yielded a substantial number of Laconian objects⁸², including bronze statuettes and rare ivory plaques, one of which depicts Perseus and the Gorgon, dating to the 7th cent. BC⁸³. This points to corroborate the hypothesis of an exchange network between Sparta and the cities of the East, facilitated not only by trade but also by the movement of artists and craftsmen. The presence of Ionian artists in Sparta, such as Bathykles of Magnesia, active at the *Amyklaion* during the 6th cent. BC⁸⁴, is a testament to the cultural and artistic exchanges that enriched both regions.

Beyond Greece, Spartan objects, particularly the Laconian black-figure vases, have been found across Etruria, Sicily, and notably in Taras⁸⁵. These items, often serving votive purposes, illustrate the broad geographical spread and the high demand for Spartan craftsmanship. The widespread distribution of Laconian art throughout the Mediterranean during the Archaic period paints a picture of a Spartan economy that was far more dynamic and interconnected than the traditional literary image of an austere, isolated Sparta might suggest.

This extensive network of production and trade highlights the sophistication and reach of Spartan artisanship. Far from being a society solely focused on military prowess, Sparta was also a vibrant center of artistic production and economic exchange. The circulation of Spartan goods across the Mediterranean not only brought wealth and prestige to the city but also helped to shape the cultural landscapes of distant regions, embedding Spartan influence in the wider tapestry of ancient Mediterranean civilization.

Conclusion

The exploration of Sparta's religious and economic life through its sanctuaries and votive objects challenges the conventional narrative of a society solely defined by its militaristic values and austere lifestyle. Instead, it reveals a multifaceted community where religious

⁸² Prost 2018, pp. 168-169, with bibliography.

⁸³ Marangou 1969, pp. 75-76.

⁸⁴ Paus. 3.18.9-16; Faustoferri 1993.

⁸⁵ Pipili 2018, pp. 124-153, esp. p. 140.

devotion, artisanal craftsmanship, and economic exchange were deeply interconnected, contributing to both the spiritual and material prosperity of the *polis*.

The variety of votive offerings found across the main religious centers, ranging from simple terracotta figurines to intricate bronze and ivory works, reflects the inclusive nature of Spartan religious practices. These offerings provided a means for individuals from all social strata – whether Spartiates, *perioikoi*, or helots – to participate in the religious life of the community. This inclusivity underscores the sanctuaries' roles as focal points for communal identity, where the social and economic diversity of Sparta was both represented and corroborated.

Moreover, the production and export of Laconian goods, especially during the Archaic period, indicate that Sparta was not isolated from the economic and cultural currents of the Mediterranean. The presence of Spartan votive objects in distant regions such as Etruria, Sicily, and the eastern Mediterranean highlights the city's engagement in long-distance trade and cultural exchange. This challenges the traditional view of Sparta as a closed society, revealing instead a *polis* that was actively involved in the economic and artistic life of the wider Greek world.

The role of sanctuaries as economic centers also had significant implications for Spartan society. The integration of religious and economic functions within these sacred spaces suggests that the Spartan state recognized and utilized the economic potential of its religious institutions to support its broader political and social objectives.

In conclusion, the study of Sparta's sanctuaries and their associated economic activities offers a richer and more nuanced understanding of the *polis*. This broader perspective on Spartan society, informed by the archaeological and historical evidence from its sanctuaries, encourages a reevaluation of the city's role in the ancient world. Sparta emerges not just as a militaristic state but as a complex and dynamic society where religious and economic life were deeply connected, contributing to its resilience and enduring legacy.

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— 10 —

Ancient Gods and Sanctuaries of the League of the Lacedaemonians/ *Eleutherolakones*

*Stavros Giannopoulos**

Keywords: *Koinon*, civic honors, religious communication, Asklepeions, mintage.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Κοινό, τιμητικά ψηφίσματα, θρησκευτική επικοινωνία, Ασκληπιεία, κοπή νομισμάτων.

Abstract

The political organization of the Free Laconian League (*Eleutherolakones*), recognized by Augustus in 21 BC, began to be confirmed through the numerous sanctuaries of the Lacedaemonian League. In these sanctuaries, and especially in the sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas* during the Hellenistic period and Poseidon *Tainarios* during the Roman period, numerous political decisions were taken and honorary inscriptions were dedicated. Ancient gods, Roman emperors and other deities were honored in the sanctuaries of the *Koinon*, where liturgies and sacrifices were accomplished. These sanctuaries acted as sacred places where religious needs were addressed; anyway, besides worshippers, they also welcomed travellers, *negotiatores* and other types of visitors. The sanctuary of Athena and Asclepius in Asopos, Isis, Hygeia, Poseidon and Asclepius in Boies, Apollo, Hercules, Dionysus, Asclepius, Poseidon, Demeter in Gytheion, Artemis, Hercules and Asclepius in the city of Las inspired the minting of Eleutherolakonian coins during the Severan Era. The obverse

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depicts Roman emperors and the reverse depicts the gods and deities of the sanctuaries of the eighteen cities, which are inscribed on the coins, and leads us to the conclusion of both: Pausanias' personal autopsy in Laconia and the sustainability on the part of the Free Laconians of operating the sanctuaries for centuries.

Η πολιτική οργάνωση του Κοινού των Ελευθερολακώνων που αναγνωρίστηκε απ' τον Αύγουστο το 21 π. Χ. άρχισε να επιβεβαιώνεται μέσα απ' τα πολυάριθμα ιερά του Κοινού των Λακεδαιμονίων. Στα ιερά αυτά και κυρίως στο ιερό του Απόλλωνα Υπερτελεάτη κατά την Ελληνιστική και Ποσειδώνα Ταϊναρίου κατά την Ρωμαϊκή περίοδο κατέφθαναν πολυάριθμες πολιτικές αποφάσεις και τιμητικά ψηφίσματα για φύλαξη. Αρχαίοι Θεοί, Ρωμαίοι βασιλείς και άλλες θεότητες τιμώνταν στα ιερά του Κοινού, όπου τελούνταν λειτουργίες και θυσίες. Καλύπταν την γενικότερη λατρεία Ελλήνων και Ρωμαίων της εποχής προς τη μυθολογία και το ελληνικό πνεύμα, τις θρησκευτικές ανάγκες και ενίσχυαν την επισκεψιμότητα της περιοχής από πραγματευτές και ταξιδευτές.

Τα ιερά της Αθηνάς και του Ασκληπιού στον Ασωπό, της Ίσιδος, Υγείας, του Ποσειδώνα και Ασκληπιού στις Βοιές, του Απόλλωνα, Ηρακλή, Διονύσου, Ασκληπιού, Ποσειδώνα, της Δήμητρας στο Γύθειο, της Αρτέμιδος, του Ηρακλή και Ασκληπιού στην πόλη Λάς ενέπνευσαν την κοπή νομισμάτων των Ελευθερολακώνων κατά την Εποχή των Σεβήρων. Ο εμπροσθότυπος απεικονίζει Ρωμαίους αυτοκράτορες και ο οπισθότυπος τους Θεούς και θεότητες των ιερών των δεκαοχτώ πόλεων, οι οποίες αναγράφονται επί των νομισμάτων, που μας οδηγεί στο συμπέρασμα, τόσο της προσωπικής αυτοψίας του Πausανία στη Λακωνία, όσο και της δυνατότητας εκ μέρους των Ελευθερολακώνων λειτουργίας των ιερών για αιώνες.

In the second half of the 2nd cent. AD (166-174) the historian Pausanias traveled to Greece and visited Sparta. Adhering to the archaic and romantic tendency that reflected his temperament and era, he presented Sparta and Laconia in the second book of *Description of Greece*. His work *Laconica* is also the main written source for the *Koinon* of the Lacedaemonians/Free Laconians, for which there is epigraphic and numismatic material. He dealt mainly with classical and pre-classical art, history, myths and everything that referred to the older years¹.

¹ Tigerstedt 1974, p. 162; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, pp. 193-194; Pavlides 2018, p. 279.

The Free Laconian League had its beginnings in the year 192 BC as League of the Lacedaemonians with twenty-four cities, but it was rarely mentioned in the literature and when it was mentioned, it was not always presented as an autonomous political entity within the Roman administrative system². However, the inhabitants of the six cities that returned to Sparta until the end of the 1st cent. are described by Pausanias as citizen subjects and they did not become autonomous like the other eighteen as Free Laconians, upgrading their role. The *Eleutherolakones* clearly implemented the idea of Herodotus and Aristotle, the politically and religiously autonomous city, mitigating Spartan domination at their expense³.

Characteristic of the ancient Greek religion and the cities of the League was the pantheon⁴ of heroes and gods, and mildly also the phenomenon of polytheistic religion with the appearance of new deities. The first city, which will concern us is Gytheio, the capital of the Free Laconians. It was the most developed port of Laconia from where marble, purple, agricultural products and timber were exported. Octavian's family had visited Gythio as early as 40 BC, hosted an active association of *negotiatores*, following the imperial cult after Augustus death with the celebration of *Caesarea* and *Eurykleia*⁵.

In the agora of the city stood statues of Apollo and Hercules, whom they honored as settlers of the city, while next to them stood another of Dionysus. In another part of the city, a statue of Apollo *Karneios* had been erected, a sanctuary of Amon, probably an Egyptian word referring to Libyan Zeus, had been built, while in a sanctuary without a roof was a bronze statue of Asclepius. Nearby there gushed a spring of water dedicated to the divine, there was a holy sanctuary in honor of Demeter and a statue of Poseidon *Gaiaochus* would probably be the patron saint of the city. The water supply was related with the existence of *perirrhanteria*, made for sprinkling the worshippers at

² See Shipley 1992, pp. 212-213.

³ The Eleutherolakonians applied their political organization to the local Laconian culture and presented themselves autonomously, even though they did not have full financial independence. Pausanias (110-180 AD) clearly sought in his work to highlight them, which is why we believe that he visited Sparta personally and listened to the testimonies of the inhabitants, when the *Koinon* was in a flourishing phase, Γιανννόπουλος 2017, p. 450; see Shipley 1992, p. 222.

⁴ Sassu 2022, p. 50.

⁵ Δουλφής 2019, p. 102; Hupfloher 2000, pp. 21, 169; Rüpke 2022, p. 895.

the entrance of the sanctuary, as well as during festivals in front of temporary entrances⁶.

It is worth noting that so far modern research has not identified any building mentioned by the ancient traveler. They were basically ancient buildings that were still functioning. However, there is also the opinion that Pausanias never visited the area, since buildings such as the theater and the *Caesarea* are silenced. After the end of Augustus, a temple of imperial worship was erected based on literary and epigraphic sources. The *Kaisarion* was recently identified with part or all of the building of the agora of Gytheio⁷. At a distance of three *stadia* from Gythio there is a stone surface, for which the legend says that when Orestes sat on it he got rid of paranoia, and took the Doric name Zeus *Kappotas*. In front of Gythio dominates the island of Kranai, on which a sanctuary of Aphrodite *Migonitis* is mentioned⁸.

The next attraction for Pausanias was in the city of Akriai, a temple and stone statue of the mother of the gods. The inhabitants of Akriai considered it to be the oldest sanctuary of this goddess in the Peloponnese and archaeological excavations proved its cult use in Roman times, where Roman architectural remains and mosaics were also found. Of particular value is the Roman columbarium type funerary monument, a two-stages monument with underground and aboveground part built with the technique *opus mixtum* (lattice masonry) and *opus testaceum* (plastered internal- and externally with mortar). There was found a great numismatic treasure from the time of Trajan up to the military emperors⁹.

At a distance of 120 *stadia* from this city we find Geronthres, another city of the Free Laconians, with a grove and a temple in honor of the god

⁶ Paus. 2.21.8-9: The one whom the Gytheans consider "elder" was said to have lived in the sea and was called Nereus. A series of gates in Gythio were called *Kastorides*, named after Castor, brother of Polydeukes, son of Zeus (or Tyndarea) and Leda. Also important was the dedication of a statue on the Acropolis in honor of Herodes Atticus, whom the Gytheans considered savior and builder; Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, pp. 19-21; Δουλφής 2019, p. 102.

⁷ Δουλφής 2019, pp. 103, 105.

⁸ Paus. 2.22.1.

⁹ Paus. 2.22.4: προελθόντι που σταδίου ἐπὶ θαλάσσης πόλις ἐστὶν Ἀκρία: θέας δὲ αὐτόθι ἄξια Μητρὸς θεῶν ναὸς καὶ ἄγαλμα λίθου. παλαιότατον δὲ τοῦτο εἶναι φασιν οἱ τὰς Ακρίας ἔχοντες, ὅποσα τῆς θεοῦ ταύτης Πελοποννησίοις ἱερὰ ἐστίν, ἐπεὶ Μαγνησί γε, οἱ τὰ πρὸς Βορρᾶν νέμονται τοῦ Σιπύλου, τούτοις ἐπὶ Κοδδίνου πέτρα Μητρὸς ἐστὶ θεῶν ἀρχαιότατον ἀπάντων ἄγαλμα: ποιῆσαι δὲ οἱ Μάγνητες αὐτὸ Βροτέαν λέγουσι τὸν Ταντάλου; Δουλφής 2019, p. 126.

of war Ares, for whom celebrations were organized on an annual basis. It was an important continental center of the laconic hinterland during Roman and late Roman times due to the reused built-in architectural members. The extract from the market decree of Diocletian confirm the existence of a market and numerous basilicas. It is worth noting that during the holidays women were forbidden to enter the grove. Cool and clear waters gushed around the agora and the Acropolis was dominated by a temple of Apollo with the statue of the god adorned by an ivory head¹⁰.

A significant political role of the sanctuaries was that the honorary inscriptions of the cities were preserved there. In an inscription from Geronthres, those who favored the city were honored by the assembly as *proxenoi* and benefactors with exemption of imports and exports in time of war and peace. This consulate had to be inscribed by the ephors during the generalship of Xenophanes on a stone column in the sanctuary of Apollo, on the Acropolis mentioned above. In fact, the city had to cover the cost. The city also honored Eudamus of Eucrates, a Lacedaemonian, as *proxenos* and benefactor and awarded him land and house building, *epinomia*, immunity of war and peace, but the inscription does not mention a deposit in a sanctuary. It was by no means obligatory to assign an inscription to the sacred place, it simply gave it greater prestige and security¹¹.

The Acropolis of the city of Geronthrai was located in the valley of Eurotas at a distance of 8 kilometers from the river and 26 from Sparta, so it was not clear to whom the fertile arable lands between the regions belonged. The most prevalent existing view was the coexistence of farmhouses of both Spartans and *perioikoi*. The honorary attribution of land tenure also signifies free management of land estates by the League. The existence of a League during the Imperial era does not indicate an official ban on the free movement of Spartans between the important passes of free-Laconian cities Geronthrai, Brasiai, Marios or Gytheio. The city of Marios was at a distance of 100 *stadia* from Geronthres. There was an ancient sanctuary of all the gods and around it a grove with water springs. Springs also gushed in the sanctuary of

¹⁰ Paus. 2.22.6-7; Δουλφής 2019, p. 144. The rest of the statue and the earlier temple were destroyed by fire.

¹¹ IG V 1, 1111; Sassu 2010, p. 248; Γιαννόπουλος 2010, pp. 91, 97. Nor should "Lacedaemonian" necessarily meant a Spartan, but a resident of Sparta or of Laconian cities outside the Lacedaemonian/Free Laconian League.

Artemis, so we know that the city of Marios was rich in water resources. The water was significant for the religion, in case of ritual purifications, libations and curing therapies. Oil and wine were for libations, prayers and acts of sacrificing appropriate¹².

From Akries, at a distance of 60 *stadia*, was another city of the Free Laconians, Asopos. There was a temple of the Roman emperors as a result of the policy of Eurycles and at a distance of 12 *stadia* above the city was the *gymnasium* and the sanctuary of Asclepius *Philolaus*. Later, around 130, the city benefited from the senator Eurykles Herculanus. Quarries operated, where burial and worship activity is testified, while during the Roman period it flourished, as Italian *negotiatores* were active and many columbarium-type funerary monuments were found¹³. On the Acropolis of Asopos a sanctuary of Athena *Kyparissia* had been erected, which is also depicted on the coin of the Free Laconians. In front of the Acropolis were the ruins of the city Paracyparissian *Achaeans*, the Achaeans, under the roof of Athena *Kyparissia*. In this very fertile area with olive and fruit trees and at a distance of 50 *stadia* from Asopos there was a village called Hyperteleton and a sanctuary of Asclepius in Roman times¹⁴. In 71-70 BC the League of the Lacedaimonians decided to mint a coin with the obverse ΡΩΜΗ and the reverse ΚΟΙ (-νὸν τῶν) ΛΑΚΕ (-δαίμονίων) ΚΥΠΑΡΙΣΣΙΑ. The letters TI in the inscription may be associated with the general of the League Timocrates, Timaristus, a coin minting officer of the League or less possible a Spartan¹⁵.

In the town of Boies, which also belongs to the League, the existence of a market is testified. The city was marked on *Tabula Peutingeriana*¹⁶. There, in the agora of the city, a temple of Apollo was erected and in other parts of the city a temple of Asclepius, Sarapis and Isis. At a

¹² Paus. 2.22.8; Shipley 1992, pp. 212, 218; Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, pp. 36-37.

¹³ Sassu 2019, p. 122; Γιαννόπουλος 2008, p. 116; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 100.

¹⁴ Paus. 2.22.9-10. At a distance of two hundred *stadia* from Asopos is called the place "Ὄνου γνάθος" (donkey jaw) with a sanctuary of Athena but without an icon and shelter. It is said that Agamemnon installed it; Shipley 1992, p. 219; Pavlides 2018, p. 299.

¹⁵ Chrimes 1952, pp. 437-438. Chrimes previous opinion issued this coinage to Spartans; Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann 1978, pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ Δουλφής 2019, p. 119. It was a natural harbor with rich resources, such as ore mining and metallurgical activities, which continued into the Roman period, judging by the surface pottery of the area; Σκάγκος 2021, p. 697.

distance of 7 *stadia* from Boies, Pausanias found the ruins of Hetis and on this route stood on the left a stone statue of Hermes, while in the ruins there was an important sanctuary of Asclepius and Hygeia¹⁷.

Sailing from the city of Boies to the cape of Maleas, one encounters a port called Nymphaeon, which was dominated by a statue of Poseidon in an upright position and near it gushed in a cave spring with fresh water. The water in sanctuaries was also used for cleaning reasons, washing of icons and statues, in order to keep the concept of *eukosmia* and respect of the gods¹⁸. At a distance of 100 *stadia* from the cape of Maleas, in a seaside village on the border of the city of Boiai, one encounters a sanctuary of Apollo called *Epidilion*. In fact, the wooden icon that was there once stood on Delos. The reason for the foundation of the sanctuary of Apollo on the border of Boiai probably had political significance with a religious starting point to secure a border zone away from the center of the city of Boiai. The same applies to the sanctuary of Artemis *Limnatis* of the neighboring city of Epidauros Limira. In conclusion, the security of the border between Boiai and Epidauros Limira is depicted in the worship of two twin deities, Apollo and Artemis, who were prominently located within the main road axis connecting the two cities. The safe of valuable divine pieces in sanctuaries was also a reason, because their destroy war a sacrilege¹⁹.

In the powerful city of the Free Laconians, Epidauros Limira, about 200 *stadia* from Epidilion, Pausanias met altars of Asclepius in

¹⁷ Paus. 2.22.13. The sanctuary can be identified with what Thucydides mentions (7.26.2-3) during the period of military operations of the Athenian fleet under Demosthenes on the laconic coast. From this sanctuary comes perhaps a Roman statue of a god that stands in the Archaeological Museum of Neapolis, Σκάγκος 2021, p. 698.

¹⁸ Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, pp. 1-2, 31; Δουλφής 2019, p. 121: Modern archaeological excavation excavated a corner of a Roman building, whose movable finds, such as shells and part of a head of a Roman period figurine, fragments of glass vessels, dimensions and orientation lead us to religious use.

¹⁹ Paus. 2.23.2: καὶ ἀνθρώποι περικυκλῶσι πολλοί. According to Pausanias' account, many inhabitants lived in this area, which contradicts our impression of the oliganthropy of Lacedaemon; Σκάγκος 2021, p. 667. The Delian sanctuaries and the worship of Apollo in the Aegean were already from the 5th cent. cohesive bond of the Athenian League and the religious navel for the preservation of Athenian hegemony, Σκάγκος 2021, pp. 682-686. The toponym Epidilion has a dual interpretation, declaring on the one hand a sanctuary of Apollo and on the other hand the coastal area with arable land, pasture, houses and rural settlements under his jurisdiction; see Sassu 2015, p. 15.

an olive grove. A short distance away, the base of three statues with the dedicatory inscription for Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, was found²⁰. On the right side, after two stages, we find the so-called “Water of Inous”, where a festival was organized in her honor. Rituals and myths were brought together from time to time in the antiquity. The city is located on the hill at a short distance from the sea and there were found a sanctuary of Aphrodite and Asclepius, on which stands an upright stone statue. On the Acropolis of the city we meet again a sanctuary of Athena, in front of the port a temple of Zeus with the invocation of the Savior and on the cape of the city we find a sanctuary of Minoa²¹.

Near the city of Epidaurus Limira was the religious and political center of the Lacedaemonian League, the sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas*. In the sanctuary we find civic honors, *proxenies*, that were recorded on a marble column and deposited so that they would not be destroyed, since they were kept in a sacred place²². Court decisions were even kept there, such as the decision on the dispute between Epidaurus Limira and Zarax over the borders of the cities in the 2nd cent. BC²³. The city of Kotyrta honored Aratus, son of Nicias, the Lacedaemonian and his successors as consul and benefactor, granted the right of land ownership, intermarriage, privilege, duty-free, immunity of war and peace, as they used to confer on other benefactors of the city. The ephors of Palaistias had to inscribe it on a marble inscription and assign it to the sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas*²⁴.

The epigraphic material is so numerous²⁵ that the sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas* was a religious metropolis for political use. A significant role had the sanctuary already from the 6th cent. But what

²⁰ Δουλφής 2019, pp. 131-132: During the Roman era, the city also flourished. An important feature was the niche with an inscribed monument and had imperial statues as a luxurious temple of imperial worship.

²¹ Paus. 2.23.8-11; Σκάγκος 2021, pp. 670-671; Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, p. 30.

²² SGDI III, nrs. 4546, 4548, 4549; Σκάγκος 2021, p. 698.

²³ SGDI III, nrs. 4543; Γιαννόπουλος 2018, p. 873.

²⁴ IG V 1, 961; Γιαννόπουλος 2020, pp. 616, 623. For the presence of the priests see IG V 1, 1022, 1024, 1025, 1028, 1034. In other sanctuaries like that of Apollo *Maleatas* were weapons for dedicative reasons found. But in Apollon *Hyperteleatas* were also in Classical period bronze statuettes, pottery and agricultural instruments mentioned. In Apollo *Amyklaios* were weapons after the excavations included, Pavlides 2018, pp. 282-283.

²⁵ IG V 1, 961, 962, 964, 965, 966.

happened to this important sanctuary as a political and religious center of Apollo and was not mentioned by Pausanias in his report on the Free Laconians? For the area of *Hyperteleton* he mentions in the 2nd cent. AD the existence of another altar of Asclepius²⁶. Sparta did not observe with positivism the separatist tendencies of the regional Laconian cities, on which for centuries was based its development. With the return of six cities out of twenty-four, the Sanctuary of Apollo *Hyperteleatas* ceased to be supported and collapsed at the end of the 1st cent. BC. However, because the sanctuaries were a living memory of political, epidemic or military events, it is more likely that the Free Laconians abandoned the sanctuary of Apollon *Hyperteleatas*, and continued to assign more commonly to the political-religious center of Apollon in Gytheion and mainly that of Poseidon *Tainarios*²⁷. It is important to mention that votive inscriptions, which mentioned “League of the Lacedaemonians” were also found in Poseidon *Tainarios* and were not excluded, as of course those who mentioned “League of the *Eleutherolakones*”²⁸.

In connection with the above, Philemon, son of Theoxenos, and Theoxenos, son of Philemon, father and son, choose to appear before the ephors and the municipality and ask permission to repair the sanctuary of Apollo in the center of the agora of Gytheio. Their proposal was accepted with the right of authority, protection and custody of the sanctuary, because due to financial constraints it had long been destroyed. They would retain for life as aristocrats honorary the right of priest. Due to their generous offer, the matter was referred to the highest political body of the League, the “Great Apella”. The ephors around Cleanor had to form a copy and the inscription at the expense of the city was deposited in the sanctuary of Apollo, perhaps as one of the first inscriptions²⁹. Gythio now chooses to archive civic honors in

²⁶ Paus. 3.22.10. In spite of political dedications there were sanctuaries, such as Apollo *Maleatas*, where weapons were very usual and indicated. Spartan gods and goddesses were armed in order to encourage the warriors, Pavlides 2018, pp. 286, 289; Sassu 2022, pp. 82-83.

²⁷ IG V 1, 1145, 1146; Rüpke 2022, p. 894; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 140.

²⁸ SGDI III nrs. 4593, 4594.

²⁹ IG V 1, 1144, 1-5: [Ἐπειδὴ Φιλῆμων Θεοξένου καὶ Θεόξεε] | [νος Φιλῆμονος οἱ πολῖται ἀμῶν πόθο] | [δον ἐπ]οιήσατο ποτὶ τε τοὺς ἐφόρου[ς] | [καὶ τ]ὸν δάμον, ὅπως ἐπισκευάσωσιν ἐκ | [τ]ῶν ἰδίων βίων τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ Ἀπόλλω | [ν]ος τοῦ ποτὶ τᾷ Ἀγορᾷ...; 33-36: οἱ δὲ Ἐφοροὶ οἱ ἐπὶ Κλεάνθορος τούτου | τοῦ νόμου ἀντίγραφον εἰς στάλαν λιθίναν γράψαντες ἀναθέτωσαν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ

the most prominent place of the agora³⁰ or in the sanctuary of the city in honor of Apollo, sometimes even if the priests had the agreement to accept, for example financial matters, since the ceremonies of the sanctuaries were not independent of political decisions and sanctuaries were described as sacred places, where collected wealth was managed³¹. It seems that Philemon and Theoxenos implemented their generous benefaction consistently and decided for the final partial privatization of the sanctuary of Apollo in Gytheio. The religious goodwill attended to mild the difference between Sparta and the League concerning political and financial matters. Rituals and festival occasions interacted as always the relations between Spartans and Perioikoi, who participated in Classical times in festivals organized by Spartans. Spartans participated in *perioikic* festivals too and three Spartans are mentioned as priests in the Temple of Apollon *Hyperteleatas* in the Hellenistic era³².

Because Gytheion, Asopos, Epidaurus, Limira and Leuktra maintained an Acropolis with a temple, it is no exaggeration to assume that the choice of the goddess Athena on the Acropolis was an imitation of the city of ancient Sparta. The imitation of Athena *Chalkioikos* and *Poliouchos* (Patron Saint) as a cult was associated with the public and military life of the city, and was honored in the Acropoleis of the Free Laconians certainly until the 3rd cent. AD. Sparta always used the religion to overlook Laconia, but the influence of Sparta in some sanctuaries *perioikic* cities like Apollo *Tyritas* was confined because of the lack of epigraphic evidence. Like Parthenon in Athens those Acropoleis could be related with financial transactions and the storage of the sanctuary precious items and possibly of the city too³³.

Απόλλωνος; Giannakopoulos 2017, p. 221. This sanctuary was not listed as Apollo *Hyperteleatas*, as in other inscriptions, but Apollo was for sure a war deity in Sparta. Pavlides 2018, p. 287.

³⁰ SGDI III nr. 4566, 6-7.

³¹ IG V 1, 1146, 52- 55: ἀναγραψάντω δὲ οἱ ἔφοροι οἱ ἐπὶ Νικαίῃ τούτων τῶν φιλιαν[θρώ]πων εἰς στάλαν λιθίναν! καὶ ἀναθέτωσαν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ Απόλλωνος, ἐν ᾧ ἂν τόλπω αἰ[ὲ]ροις οἱ ἱερεῖς συνχωρήσωσιν· ἃ δὲ δαπάνα ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἔστω; Sassu 2010, pp. 249-250.

³² Spawforth 1992, p. 230; Rüpke 2022, pp. 893, 902; Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, p. 5; Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann 1978, p. 6; Pavlides 2018, pp. 294, 297. For a doubt of the completion of the sanctuary see Giannakopoulos 2017, pp. 225-226.

³³ Sassu 2022, pp. 52-53; Hupfloher 2000, pp. 195-196, 200; Pavlides 2018, pp. 296-298; Sassu 2010, pp. 254, 256: The precious objects included not only coins or statues but

At a distance of 100 *stadia* from Epidaurus Limira developed another city of the Free Laconians with an imposing Acropolis and port, named Zarax. Inside the Acropolis, a columbarium with later interventions is preserved, measuring 5.65 x 3.70 m wide and 3.25 m high, built with the technique of *opus mixtum* (brick-encrusted lattice masonry). Perhaps it is a family burial monument of the family of T.C. Menekleidas of the 2nd and 3rd cent. AD as evidenced by the inscriptions found there³⁴. At the end of the harbor there was a temple of Apollo and a statue of the god with guitar. At a distance of 100 *stadia* from Zarakas are the ruins of the city of Kyfanta with a sacred cave of Asclepius and a stone statue of him. At this place cold water gushed from the rocks. Legend had it that Atalanti, while hunting in the area, was thirsty and with her spear hit the rock, resulting in water gushing to appease her thirst³⁵.

The last town of the Free Laconians on the west side of Laconia is called Brasiai, 200 *stadia* away from Kyfanta. And in this city we find the sanctuary of Asclepius and Achilles. In honor of Achilles, they organized a festival on an annual basis³⁶. At a distance of 40 *stadia* south of Gythio and 10 *stadia* from the sea was the city of Las. It was surrounded by the mountains of Ilion, Asia and Knakadium. In the ruins of the old city stood in front of the walls a statue of Hercules and a trophy of the Macedonians³⁷.

At a distance of 30 *stadia* from this temple was the village of Hypsois, where one could meet the sanctuary of Asclepius and Artemis *Daphnea*. Heading towards the sea there was the sanctuary of Artemis *Diktynnis* on the cape, where the festivals were held on an annual basis. Next to it flowed the river Smenos with fresh water and there were many springs

also weapons, furniture, clothes, musical instruments and jewels because of their metal value.

³⁴ Δουλφής 2019, p. 133.

³⁵ Paus. 2.24.1-2; Σκάρκος 2021, p. 698.

³⁶ Paus. 2.24.3; 5. At the cape of the city there were three bronze figurines one foot high (ca. 30.4 cm), bearing gates on their heads and representing the Dioscuri or the Korybantes. A statue in the same spot represented Athena.

³⁷ Paus. 2.24.6-8. Macedonians plundered the region of Laconian under Philip II in 338 BC. In the ruins there was also a temple of Athena called Athena *Asia* made by Polydeukes and Castor when they returned from Chalcis. Mount Ilion was dominated by a temple of both Dionysus and Asclepius, while on Mount Knakadion there was a temple of *Karneios* Apollo; Δουλφής 2019, p. 134; Sassu 2022, pp. 79-80.

in Taygetos too. In a village named Arainos there was also the tomb of La with a statue on the tomb³⁸.

Near the river Skiras was an ancient sanctuary and altar of Zeus. After 40 stages from the river was the city Pyrrichos³⁹. In the agora of Pyrrichos, Pausanias found sanctuaries of Artemis with the invocation *Astratia*, symbolizing the army of the Amazons, hence the sanctuary of Apollo *Amazon*⁴⁰. Starting from Pyrrichos towards the sea is Teuthroni. There they honored Artemis *Issoria* more than all the gods and the nearby spring is called Naia. Archaeological findings attest to the use of the sanctuary and in the Roman era⁴¹.

At a distance of 150 *stadia* from Teuthroni to the sea was Cape Tainaros with the ports of Achilleius and Psamathous. In a cave of Akrotiri was a statue in front and in the inner sanctuary of Poseidon. Philo, a Lacedaemonian, and his descendants, was honored for his benefactions by the assembly of the Lacedaemonian League as consul and benefactor⁴². Honorary resolutions from Tainaros in the imperial era did not necessarily have to be deposited in the sanctuary of Poseidon *Tainarius*. Some resolutions ended with the inscription Ψηφίσματι βουλῆς, “Resolution of Parliament”, others without it. It is also observed that the honored person was given the priestly office. In Gytheio, the city honored Marcus Aurelius Kalocles, son of Nicander, as a nobleman with a lifetime right of *agonothesia* and priest of the illustrious gods Zeus *Bulaeus*, Helios, Selene, Asclepius and Hygeia⁴³.

³⁸ Paus. 2.24.9-10.

³⁹ Paus. 2.25.1-2. Pyrrichos named after Pyrrhus the son of Achilles. Others believed that the name derives from the god Pyrrichus, one of the Curates; Hupfloher 2000, p. 101.

⁴⁰ Paus. 2.25.1-3: Both deities are depicted on wooden icons that were said to have been donated there by Thermodon's wife.

⁴¹ Δουλφής 2019, p. 124: The inhabitants consider themselves descendants of Teuthranta the Athenian. The residential complex was divided into center and peripheral towns of religious and commercial importance, since most of the crafts and commercial activities were undertaken in the past by the *Perioikoi*, who were now called Eleftherolakones. A large number of inscriptions and architectural parts of buildings of the Roman and late Roman era were found in second use; Shipley 1992, pp. 214, 221-222; Sassu 2022, p. 85.

⁴² *SGDI* III nrs. 4593, 4594: τὰν| δ]ἐ [προξενίαν] ταύταν ἀνα|[γρ]α[ψάτω] ὁ ταμίαις εἰς [στά|λαν λιθίναν] καὶ ἀνα[θέ][τω] εἰς τ[ὸ] ἱερὸν τοῦ Ποσειδᾶνος τοῦ ἐπὶ Ταῖνᾶ[ρως]; Γιαννόπουλος 2010, pp. 89-90. They honored him with ownership of land and house, privilege, exemption of taxes, immunity in time of war and peace, as well as other consuls and benefactors of the Lacedaemonian League.

⁴³ *IG* V 1, 1165, 1177: Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. | [Ἡ π]όλις ἡ Γυθειᾶτ[ων] | [Μ]ᾶρκ(ον) Αὐρ(ήλιον)

In Tainaros there were many votive offerings, including a bronze statue of the guitarist Arionas and a dolphin. Herodotus recorded Arion's story with the dolphin, as he heard it from Lydia. At the time of August we meet in the sanctuary the services of professional men and women, fortune tellers, who were engaged to read the entrails of sacrificial victims of the *ἱεροθύται* and in the annual festivals too. Many archaeological findings have been discovered in the area, mainly late Roman and early Christian architectural parts, which were mainly built into the post-Byzantine church of Agioi Taxiarches and elsewhere. Houses whose floors were covered with mosaics of various techniques and *opus signinum* were also excavated⁴⁴.

Sailing 40 *stadia* from Tainaros was the city of Kainipolis, which was formerly called Tainaros. Ancient finds, built in or not, mainly of the Roman period, honorary inscriptions, ruins of late Roman buildings and three early Christian basilicas were found in the area. The coast was dominated by a large temple of Demeter and Aphrodite with a marble statue⁴⁵. At a distance of 150 *stadia* from the port was the village of Itilos with the famous agora, the sanctuary of the goddess Sarapis and the wooden icon of *Karneios* Apollo. A little further was the city and port of Messa. The famous capitals found scattered in Karavostasi Itilo are attributed to the sanctuary of Sarapis. Among the ruins was the sanctuary of Athena *Hippolaitis*. And in this city there are many members and ruins of buildings of the Roman and late Roman era⁴⁶.

From Itilo to the city of Thalames the distance is about 80 *stadia*. Along the road there was a sanctuary of Inos and an oracle. There the

Λυσικρά[την] | [Λ]υσικράτους ἀγο[ρανο]|[μ]ήσαντα καὶ στρα[τη]|[γ]ήσαντα τοῦ Κοιν[οῦ]|τῶν Ἐλευθερολα[κώ]|νων, προσδεξαμ[έ]|νων τὸ ἀνάλωμα [τοῦ]|ἀνδριάντος Αὐ[ρηλίου] Δαμοκράτη[ρ] καὶ Λυσικράτους τῶ[ν] τέ[λ]|κνων. | Ψ(ηφίσματι) Β(ουλή); 1179:[H] λαμ(π)ρά τῶν Γυθε|[α]τῶν πόλις | Μᾶρ(κον) Αὐρ(ήλιον) Καλοκλέα | Νεικάνδρου, [τόν] | [ε]ὐγενέστατον αἰώνιον ἀγωνοθέ[την], τὸν ἱερέα τῶν | ἐπιφανεστάτων | θεῶν Διὸς Βουλαΐ|ου καὶ Ἡλίου καὶ Σε|[λ]ήνης καὶ Ασκληπι[ο]ῦ καὶ Ὑγ[ε]ίας καὶ - -; SGDI III nrs. 4595, 4596; Spawforth 1992, p. 232: The priesthood in Roman Sparta was associated with the possession of personal property.

⁴⁴ Paus. 2.25.4-6; Δουλφής 2019, p. 136; Spawforth 1992, p. 233.

⁴⁵ Δουλφής 2019, p. 137. The ruins of a monumental building of Roman times at Kastro or Ai Sotira may be identified with the mansion of Demeter or the sanctuary of Aphrodite mentioned by Pausanias. At a distance of 30 *stadia* are the Thyrides, another cape of Tainaro and the ruins of the city of Hippola, where the sanctuary of Athena *Hippolaitis* is mentioned. Little further was the city and the port of Messa.

⁴⁶ Paus. 2.25.9-10; Δουλφής 2019, pp. 127, 138; A sanctuary of Sarapis was previously constructed at Sparta, Spawforth 1992, p. 235.

believers in trance learned the oracles of the goddess in their dreams. In the outdoor area of the sanctuary stood bronze statues of Pasiphae and Helios, while fresh water flowed from a nearby sacred spring. Pasiphae was an invocation of the Moon and not a local deity of the inhabitants of Thalamai. In the 2nd cent. around 127-128 the conflict between Sparta and the Free Laconians was reduced, since a Spartan delegation seems to be present in the city to consult the sanctuary of Inos *Pasiphae*, known for its activity as an oracle⁴⁷.

At a distance of 20 *stadia* from the city of Thalames was a seaside place called Pephnos, behind an islet of the same name. It was there that the Chambers believed that the Dioscuri were born. Based on a chant of Alcmana, they were transferred from Hermes to Pellana. On this islet there were also bronze statues of Dioscuri, whose origin was claimed by the Messenians from the Lacedaemonians, arguing that since ancient times the area belonged to them⁴⁸.

20 *stadia* separated Pephnos from another city of the Free Laconians, Lefktra. There, more than all the gods, they honored Asclepius, whom they considered to be the son of Arsinoe, daughter of Leucippus. There was also a stone statue of Asclepius and Ino. A temple and a stone statue of Kassandra, the daughter of Priam, whom the locals called Alexandra, had been constructed. On the Acropolis of the city, a sanctuary and statue of Athena were rebuilt, while in the city of Lefktra one could find a sanctuary and a grove of Eros with running waters. During sacrifices water was required and the worshippers ought to be clean, not unwashed and pure from various *miasmata*, because of the importance of the body and soul purity in ancient Greece⁴⁹. A fire in the area also revealed a statue of Zeus *Ithomatas*, which the Messenians used as evidence that the area of Leuctra belonged to Messenia. Of course, this does not mean that Lacedaemonians could not be indigenous and honor the same God, *Ithomata* Zeus⁵⁰.

The next city was Gerinia. In this city there was the tomb of Machaon, son of Asclepius and holy sanctuary in his honor, to which people

⁴⁷ Paus. 2.26.1; Spawforth 1992, p. 230.

⁴⁸ Paus. 2.26.2-3; For the Dioskouroi in Taras see Sassu 2022, p. 81.

⁴⁹ Paus. 2.26.4-5; Sassu 2010, p. 251; Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, pp. 6-7, 14. Wooden icons of Apollo *Karneios* adorned the area, for which it is worth noting that the same worship practices were in force as the Lacedaemonians who lived in Sparta.

⁵⁰ Paus. 2.26.6.

came to be cured of diseases through remedies. The author of the “Little Iliad” mentions that Machaon was put to death by Eurypylos, the son of Telephus⁵¹. Pausanias mentions an empirical truth about this myth, which he himself observed in the *Asclepeion* of Pergamon. In other words, the hymns began with the praise of Telephus without mentioning anything about Eurypylos, nor mentioning his name in the sanctuary, because they considered him a murderer of Machaon. The bones of the dead Machaon were returned home by Nestor⁵².

In the periphery of Gerinia was the mount Kalathion, where stood the sanctuary of Claea. Nearby was a cave with a narrow entrance worth to be seen from the inside. At a distance of 80 *stadia* from Gerinia to the interior was the city of Alagonia with the sanctuaries of Dionysus and Artemis⁵³.

The ancestral religion was maintained at a very high level throughout Laconia during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Rome in the 3rd cent. renewed the religion even in the Agora of Sparta with Pausanias mentioning the sanctuaries of Caesar and Augustus. The office of “High Priest” can be traced back to Trajan times but imperial games, such as Caesarea and Livia, earlier⁵⁴. Sparta flourished in the Roman Era due to the discovery of rich residential remains excavated throughout the modern city, luxurious houses decorated with mosaic floors. Thermal baths, parts of rooms and atriums with cisterns of wealthy residents were discovered, sometimes decorated with peristyles. Hundreds of samples of frescoes and adjective plaster fragments were collected, samples of the wall decoration of Roman villas⁵⁵.

The ancient sanctuaries influenced the economic system as a whole, the temples were treasure storage areas and financially supported the city. But they operated with financial autonomy, created jobs for workers and served the circulation of money⁵⁶. During the reign of Septimius Severus (193-217) the Eleutherolaconian cities Asopos, Boiai,

⁵¹ Paus. 2.26.8-9: This sacred place was called “Rhodes”, where stood an upright bronze statue of Machaon with a crowned head.

⁵² Paus. 2.26.10.

⁵³ Paus. 2.26.11: the city was called in the Homeric epics Enopi with inhabitants from Messene, but in the Hellenistic and Roman times it belonged to the ranks of the Free Laconians under the name Gerinia.

⁵⁴ Paus. 3.11.4-5; Spawforth 1992, pp. 237-238.

⁵⁵ Βασιλογάμβρου, Τσούλη 2021, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁶ Sassu 2010, p. 247.

Gytheion, Las minted several bronze coins, local currency, and all of them were asses. In the front side were Roman emperors depicted and in the opposite side gods and deities, Zeus, Artemis, Dioscuri, Tyche, Hermes, Aphrodite, which we find in sanctuaries of the League of the *Eleutherolakones*; the four cities actually issued the opposite side of their coins inspired by the gods and deities of sanctuaries in operation of the eighteen cities of the League. Could they issued coins based only in Hellenistic sanctuaries? These coins make also the personal visit of Pausanias in Laconia more possible than before. Local sanctuaries of Athena, Asclepius in Asopos (Type A), Asclepius, Isis, Hygeia, Poseidon in Boiai (Type B), Apollon, Heracles, Dionysos, Asclepius, Dimitra, Poseidon in Gytheion (Type C) and Hercules, Asclepius and Artemis in Las (Type D) made the religion and the mintage once more directly connected which motivated not only the *Eleutherolakones*, but also the Romans to trade in Laconia and visit the place⁵⁷.

For reasons of viability of the Free Laconians, the operation of the sanctuaries revealed robustness and strength in the eyes of the natives and visitors. They were a physical mirror of the civic development and their approach was a process not a common custom⁵⁸. In the sanctuaries performed acts of religious communication and from an economic point of view were places where generals or wealthy people deposited their property for divine favor. In 160-170, Rome made financial claims on Sparta, which on its part received taxes and loan refunds from the Free Laconians. The sanctuaries collected and paid taxes and to ensure their viability, the *Eleutherolakones* had to be financially robust and self-sufficient. Furthermore the sanctuaries promoted art and cultural influences, giving work to artists and architects, were financially supported by the cities, whose social and political identity they reflected⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Τάντουλος 2020, pp. 102-119. Even if there were Christian communities because Paulus may visited Las in Laconia, these sanctuaries and coins served also the antiquity worship of the time and the favor of Rome in the area of the League, see Γιαννόπουλος 2012, p. 181, n. 1; Μπαλόγλου 2012, pp. 226-229; Spawforth 1992, p. 237.

⁵⁸ Klingborg, Ehrenheim, Frejman 2023, pp. 2-3, 14.

⁵⁹ Sassu 2010, pp. 248-249; Μιχαλόπουλος 2009, pp. 356-357: the Eleftherolakonians maintain the sanctuaries in operation and for other important reasons, referring to an area where the number of visitors of Romans and travelers was increased; Rüpke 2022, pp. 900-902, see Sassu 2015, pp. 8, 12-13; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 116; Pavlides 2018, p. 295.

In addition, medicine was developed in Gythio and other cities of the League. However, the existence of the many Asclepieia in the public undoubtedly leads to a mixture of empirical, scientific and theocratic medicine, based on which the residents and travelers burdened by heavy professions expected health and longevity with the contribution of the divine element and remedies. And the Romans placed their hopes of curing diseases on the power of gods and sanctuaries. Greek medical religious thought was mixed with Roman perception as early as 461 BC, when a sanctuary was dedicated to the healing god Apollo in Rome due to a deadly plague. In 293 BC the cult of Asclepius was established in Rome, as the poet Ovid mentions in his *Metamorphoses* (15, 626-640). For Rome, however, the cult of Athena (*Marvina*) was associated with her view as the protector of doctors⁶⁰.

The ancestral religion was maintained at a very high level throughout Laconia during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In conclusion was clear the interest of Caesar Hadrian in the middle of the 1st cent. for the antiquity and nobility of all cities in Greece, something that the *Eleutherolakones* followed⁶¹. Religion of the League of the Lacedaimonians/*Eleutherolakones* had always been the motivation and quarry, the designer and overcomer of urban settlements⁶².

⁶⁰ Paus. 2.26.9: ἐνταῦθα ἐν τῇ Γερηνίᾳ Μαχάονος τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ μνημα καὶ ἱερόν ἐστιν ἅγιον, καὶ ἀνθρώποις νόσων ἰάματα παρὰ τῷ Μαχάονι ἐστιν εὐρέσθαι; Τσουλογιάννης 2007, pp. 102, 110-114.

⁶¹ Cartledge, Spawforth 2002, p. 100.

⁶² Rüpke 2022, p. 895; Spawforth 1992, p. 238.



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The third issue of “The Historical Review of Sparta” deals with ancient Greek polytheism in Sparta and in the Peloponnese. Specifically, by focusing on ancient religion, it aims to analyse and discuss gods, cults, rites and sanctuaries attested in the Lacedaemonian *polis*, exploring them in the light of their socio-economic, political, military significances and implications. Therefore, the present volume critically illustrates several yet interconnected aspects of the Spartan sacred realm. Some contributions intend to shed light on the complex relation between kingship and gods, stressing the propagandistic side of divine worship. Other papers examine Spartan sanctuaries, also from a political, military and economic standpoint, in some cases highlighting the architectural, artisanal and artistic productions connected to the consecrated spaces. Finally, some of the articles aim to assess religion’s impact over the management of the *polis*’ urban organisation and societal structure, together with the role of cult in controlling the surrounding territory. By doing so, the current issue of the Journal means to provide a throughout and multifaceted reconstruction of ancient religious practices in ancient Sparta and the Peloponnese, from different perspectives, from the Archaic age until the Roman phase.

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