

Spartan Reflections

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University of California Press

Berkeley Los Angeles

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

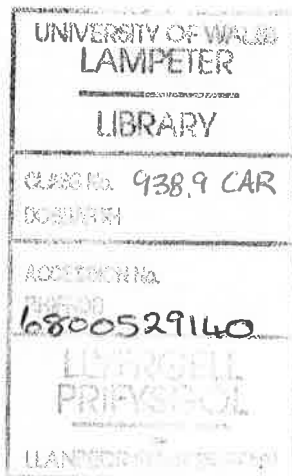
Published by arrangement with Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.

First California paperback printing 2003
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ISBN 0-520-23124-4 (pbk: alk paper)

Cataloging-in-Publication data is on file with
the Library of Congress



Printed in the United States of America

11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication is both acid-free
and totally chlorine-free (TCF). It meets the minimum requirements of
ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*). ☺

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A Spartan Education

Introduction

The original version of this chapter appeared in a privately printed and not easily accessible Festschrift, *Apodosis*, presented to my revered Latin schoolmaster, Dr W.W. Cruickshank of St Paul's School London, to mark his eightieth birthday in 1992. It began by quoting some words of the School's founder, the great Renaissance humanist John Colet, one of whose aims was 'the formation of good Christian life and manners', and pointing out that, although that aim had not been achieved in my case, nevertheless the title of my essay was not at all autobiographical. On the contrary, the essay owed its inspiration to the Demokritean *sententia* quoted as my epigraph below: if you think that *your* school was a regular Dothepersons Hall, then consider the Spartan alternative.

Since 1992, the major work to appear in this area is Kennell 1995, with which I have taken gentle issue in my review in *CR* n.s. 47 (1997) 97-8. Birgalias 1999, the book of a Paris doctoral thesis, with a Preface by the distinguished French historian of ancient Sparta, Claude Mossé, is a useful compendium of ancient information and modern bibliography; though Birgalias does not apparently know or at any rate cite Kennell's book. His observation (1999: 356) that, just as Athens' originality consists in its invention of democracy, so Sparta's resides in its invention of its pedagogical system is well worth pondering. Lupi 2000, the published version of a 1997 Naples doctoral thesis, is an important recent discussion of Spartan age-grades and classes.

*

You must not seek certain things and must be content with others, comparing your own life with that of those who do worse and deeming yourself fortunate, when you reflect on what they undergo.

(Demokritos B191, quoted in Cartledge 1998a: 48)

By most ancient Greeks' standards, and even by those of the Victorian public school (which liked to regard itself as somehow carrying on the 'Spartan tradition'), a Spartan education was pretty tough, not to say pretty gruesomely brutal.¹ Hence, in part, as we shall see, our still remark-

ably popular expressions: a 'Spartan' existence – spare, austere, self-denying mode of life; and 'laconic' speech – curt, clipped, military-style utterance. There is not, though, much profit or interest in merely cataloguing Sparta's pedagogical brutality. Rather, I propose to address what I take to be the three most important historical questions that Spartan education raises. First, why and how did the Spartan educational system come to be as it was in the Classical period² – that is to say, both a system, and a publicly imposed and minutely and centrally organized system? Secondly, what function or functions did this education serve within the wider context of the Spartan *kosmos*, the Spartans' social and political order as a whole? Finally, was it because of this peculiar educational system that the mighty Spartans had come to be viewed by most other Greeks as 'other', that is, as virtually a race apart and almost a different species of mankind – rather as we (or some of us) in the West may regard some Oriental peoples today?³

I begin, almost inevitably, with possibly the most famous piece of extant fifth-century BC Greek prose, the Periklean Epitaphios or Funeral Speech, as re-presented by Thucydides (2.35-46). Apart from its value as testimony to 'the invention of Athens', the fashioning of Athens' self-image as a democratic polity, it is also a prime example of the way in which the Greeks and especially the Athenians constructed Sparta as 'other', as a deviation from or rather a polarized inversion of the 'Greek' norm.⁴

[T]here is a great difference between us and our opponents ... in our educational systems (*en tais paideiais*). The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage (*to andreion*); we pass our lives without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are ... There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with a laborious training (*ponôn meletê*), with natural rather than with state-induced (*meta nomôn*) courage ...

(Thuc. 2.39.1,4, trans. R. Warner)

Whether or not 'Perikles' was right about the effects of the Spartan and Athenian approaches to education, he was undoubtedly correct that the Spartans' and Athenians' educational practices were not just very different from but radically opposed to each other. Education, moreover, was something that the real Perikles perhaps took a particular interest and pride in, for surely the description of Athenian democratic institutions and character in the Funeral Speech (Thuc. 2.41.1) as 'a process of education for all Greece' (*tês Hellados paideusin*) is a genuine quotation, not a Thucydidean conceit. Its relevance for our concerns is that, although Athens too was a highly exceptional Greek community, not least because of the thoroughgoing democratic lifestyle hymned by Perikles, yet in its educational system – or rather lack of one – Athens far more closely approximated to the vast majority of Classical Greek states than did

Sparta. A brief and inevitably somewhat crude preliminary sketch of an average Classical Athenian education will serve, therefore, not only to bring out the difference between Athens and Sparta, but also to highlight comparatively the peculiarity of Sparta in the context of the Classical Greek world as a whole.⁵

In Classical Athens education up to the age of eighteen was entirely a private affair. It was arranged and paid for by parents who were not legally compelled by the *nomoi* to have their children formally educated at all, let alone up to our current minimum school-leaving age of sixteen. Teachers in Athens were typically men of low status and badly paid. It was, for example, one of the many unpleasant characteristics of Theophrastos' Illiberal Man (*aneleutheros*) to reduce the teacher's income by keeping his children at home and pretending they were ill (*Characters* XII.6, composed at Athens in c. 300); but the Illiberal Man will not have been alone in behaving like that. Poor Athenian parents, indeed, may not have been able to afford any formal education outside the home whatsoever. Such schools as existed were run from private houses or from rooms attached to a public or private *gymnasium* (training-ground for a variety of athletic sports), which could be used for physical education.

Boys normally began to attend school from the age of seven, or earlier if the family were well-to-do. Girls, however, rarely attended formal school at all. They were 'educated' at home, chiefly for the purely manual and domestic tasks that were to be their lot as married women. Thus the rich Athenian who serves as the fictional or at all events fictionalized protagonist in one of Xenophon's dialogues (the *Oeconomicus* or *Treatise on Household-management*) may have been excessively conservative in many ways (and conversely somewhat liberal in others),⁶ but he was not by any means untypical of his class in deliberately marrying a girl of only fourteen from a sheltered background so that he could teach her what he considered necessary.⁷ So by 'education at Athens' in the formal sense we mean the education of boys, and more specifically of prospective citizens.

This was divided into three main areas at what we would call the 'primary' level: basic literacy (and possibly numeracy), music, and physical education. Some schools offered instruction in all three, but it seems to have been usual for parents to choose different teachers for the different subject-areas. Basic literacy was easy enough to teach, thanks to the simplicity of the Greeks' fully phonetic alphabet of twenty-four to twenty-eight letters;⁸ and it would seem that most Athenian citizens were functionally literate in the most rudimentary sense that they could scratch a name, at any rate their own, on a broken potsherd (*ostrakon*) or wax-tablet as public or private necessity dictated. The implication of the famous apocryphal anecdote about Aristides – he was allegedly once asked, by an illiterate citizen from the sticks who had never so much as clapped eyes on him but was just heartily sick of hearing him called 'the just', to write his own name on a potsherd during an ostracism (Plut.

Aristeides 7) – is that only the most boorishly rustic of *agroikoi* could not manage as little as that.⁹

The music teacher taught Athenian boys pipes- or lyre-playing and singing. These were important, indeed basic, social skills in a society where music played such a large political role: for instance, every year at the Great Dionysia festival some 1200 citizen participants were required for the dithyrambic and dramatic competitions, that is, some four per cent of the total adult male citizen body, the equivalent of about a million people in the UK today.¹⁰ Physical training involved running, long jump, javelin-throwing, boxing and wrestling. This was useful training for competition in athletic games such as those held in association with the Great Panathenaia festival every four years, but it was also essential training for warfare, at least for the richer one third to one half of the citizenry who were able to equip themselves to fight as heavy-armed infantrymen (*hoplitai*) – though it was not exactly valueless, either, for the other half, the thetes who rowed Athens' trireme warships.¹¹ In the Classical period, between c. 500 and 322, Athens was at war with someone on average three years in every four.¹²

That tripartite educational curriculum might, as I said, be described by us as 'primary'. But it could also become 'secondary', if parents wished their sons to continue within it after the age of twelve or so and could afford the fees. There did not exist, in other words, a separately defined 'secondary' curriculum at Athens. Nor, *a fortiori*, was there a third-level curriculum. However, in the course of the second half of the fifth century something that we might want to label a form of 'higher' education was introduced at Athens, though again it was available only to the sons of the rich. This novel pedagogy was that offered by the mainly non-Athenian 'Sophists', self-styled sages (*sophistês* was originally an honorific term) who offered, at a price, instruction on literally any subject under (and indeed including) the sun. But the basic skill they claimed to be able to impart was the ability to argue a case persuasively – hence Plato's impassioned denial (in the *Protagoras*) that virtue (*aretê*) could be taught, and Aristophanes' wicked parody of Sophistic debate in the *Clouds*, in which the 'Wrong' Argument (*logos*) paradoxically and thus truly sophistically triumphs over 'Right'.¹³ Although the Sophists taught widely throughout the Greek world, even in Sparta, they were most at home in democratic Athens, 'the city of words', where all major political decisions were taken communally in public by several hundreds or several thousands of citizens after competitive debate in the Assembly or People's Court.¹⁴

So much, in brief, for Athenian formal education: hardly very extensive or organized, and not at all compulsory. In Sparta they ordered these matters as differently as could be, as the expatriate, pro-Spartan publicist Xenophon, Athenian by origin and upbringing, was at pains to stress in the short pamphlet he wrote on Spartan society in the first half of the fourth century.¹⁵ Xenophon could assume, for instance, that outside Sparta chil-

dren were not normally given any formal education whatsoever after early childhood, and although (or because) he was a former pupil of Sokrates, he entirely agreed with other, less well educated 'Lakonizers' (fans of all things Spartan) that the Spartan educational system could not be surpassed. In fact, so wholeheartedly did he approve of it that he put his money where his mouth was so to speak, by actually putting his own two sons through it, at the suggestion of his patron and friend King Agesilaos II.¹⁶

The reasons for Xenophon's approval of Sparta included personal gratitude to the city for giving him a home during his long exile; but the warmth of his approval was due – rather oddly, given Sparta's official disdain of theoretical speculation – to loftier, philosophical considerations. First, Spartan education was comprehensive in its organization. Second, it was compulsory for all Spartan boys from the age of seven until they attained their socio-political majority (as opposed to physical maturity) at eighteen. All Classical Greek political philosophers, apart from the near-anarchist Cynics, were agreed that comprehensiveness and compulsoriness were pedagogic desiderata for the production of 'good' citizens.

The most general Classical Greek word for 'education' was *paideia* or, as used by Perikles (above), *paideiai* in the plural; this picked out the immaturity, the 'child-ishness', of those receiving it. The Spartans, however, as so often (e.g., in their homoerotic sexual vocabulary: below), preferred their own local technical terminology and invented a word specifically for their own peculiar brand of education: *agôgê*. Literally, this means a 'leading' or 'raising' and might therefore be thought by us to be more appropriate for cattle than humans. But the Spartans could not have agreed less: on the contrary, they extended the cattle-rearing metaphor to the groups and sub-groups into which the boys were divided and subdivided by age (*bouai*, *agelai*, *ilai*), and the official in immediate overall charge of the training programme as a whole was likewise called literally the 'Boy-herd', *Paidonomos*. One modern school of thought would trace the terminology, like the origins of the *agôgê* itself, back to a (yet more) primitive Sparta whose economic basis was nomadic pastoralism rather than sedentary agriculture.¹⁷ But if we suspend judgement on ultimate or immediate origins to concentrate instead on structure and function, the terminology does by itself speak worlds for the Spartans' rigidly hierarchical attitude to the process of education and gives a peculiar twist to our jocular description of unruly boys as 'little beasts'.

The *agôgê* began for a Spartan boy at the age of seven. We are not nearly so well informed about the education of Spartan girls, but there is reason for thinking that they, uniquely in Greece, did undergo some sort of formal, communal and public educational cycle. To some extent this seems to have resembled the 'primary' education given to Athenian boys, but in other ways, especially the physical exertions, it was a carbon copy of the Spartan boys' curriculum, and that is presumably an important clue to its meaning

and function. For a Spartan woman's primary social rôle was not, unlike that of her Athenian sister, the performance of strictly domestic tasks – though she was expected to be able to run a home. Rather, the goal of her life was childbearing (*teknopoia*), so that the reason for the exceptional treatment and valuation of Spartan girls before their relatively late marriage was broadly eugenic. Manpower in Classical Sparta was, as we shall see, a particularly pressing political issue, and it was in recognition of the woman's indispensable role that her childbearing was accorded equal public status with her warrior husband's fighting in battle.¹⁸

To return to (and stay with hereafter) the boys: at seven they were snatched away from the possibly loving arms and the certainly not so cosy warmth of their parental homes and placed, along with their age-mates (boys born between two fixed points, probably celebrations of one of the major annual festivals – the Hyakinthia, Karneia or Gymnopaediai) in a kind of state *crèche* or public dormitory.¹⁹ Thenceforth, until they retired from potentially active military service at the age of sixty (supposing by some chance they had managed to survive for that long), they were the property of the Spartan state (*to koinon*, e.g. Hdt. 1.67.5) rather than masters of their own destiny.

Indeed, right from his birth – or before it, if the *agôgê* be counted as in part a eugenic device – the Spartan state had intervened in a boy's life-trajectory at the expense of parental initiative and control. For it was not the boy's father who, as in other Greek states, decided as a matter of private business whether he was fit to be reared: that was the task of 'the elders of the tribesmen' (Plut. *Lyk.* 16.1). Ancient Sparta, like China today, was formally a gerontocracy, dominated by the members of the (minimum-age 60) Gerousia or (literally) Senate; as a foreign visitor is alleged apophthegmatically to have remarked, 'Only in Sparta does it pay to grow old' (Plut. *Mor.* 235f [60]).²⁰ If, moreover, the tribal elders' decision was negative, the infant's fate was to be hurled, as an un-person, a non-entity, debarred a priori from the civic community, into the mountain chasm known euphemistically as the 'Deposits' (*Apothetai*). That, though, was just the first of an endless series of official measures illustrating another general feature of Spartan social organization, namely the concerted and determined effort to minimize the importance of the family – or, to be more accurate, family life – and to emphasize rather the cardinal and overriding significance of communal ties.²¹

Some modern historians, abandoning their proper function perhaps, have condemned this Spartan approach to social engineering as 'totalitarian', as if ancient Sparta were Stalinist Russia, Hitler's Germany or present-day China.²² But such an implied (and sometimes explicit) comparison is, I think, misleading in one crucial respect. For all Classical Greeks typically assumed that the interests of the state – or, as they saw it, the *koinônia* of the citizens, since there was no State (with a capital 'S') in a post-Hobbesian sense in Classical Greece²³ – overrode the interests of

the individual; indeed, there is no ancient Greek word for 'individual' in that privatized sense.²⁴ Sparta, in other words, merely held an extreme version of the general ancient Greek view of the collectivity's prior claims, a difference of degree, not of kind. (Although differences of degree, if sufficiently extreme, can turn into differences of quality, I do not believe that to have been the case here.) Extremism, too, is arguably a key to all Sparta's extra-ordinary social practices, including its educational system. For the Spartans pursued their social objectives with a single-mindedly ruthless determination that either enthralled or appalled other Greeks.

It has been denied by Kennell (1995) that we can know anything very much about the details of a Classical Spartan boy's educational cycle. His grounds are that our mainly non-contemporary evidence, from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, reflects only the altered, post-Classical conditions, after Sparta had ceased to be a great power and had re-created, that is, invented anew, its educational system. That is too extreme and severe. There are sufficient fits between what we learn from Plutarch and what we have in Xenophon to justify the hypothesis of significant continuities, or at any rate the accuracy and extensiveness of Plutarch's reading in Classical sources.²⁵

Between the ages of seven and twelve a Spartan boy 'studied' pretty much the same subjects as his Athenian counterpart (cf. Beck 1993): reading and writing, music and dancing, and physical exercise. But the Spartan boy studied them compulsorily, because successful passage through all the stages of the *agôgê* was a precondition, a sort of trial by ordeal, for his eventually qualifying for admission to full citizenship *via* election to a common mess (Singor 1999) at the age of twenty. Some Classical Greek commentators considered the *agôgê* to be, like the common messes, a 'democratic' feature of the Spartan system, precisely because it was equally compulsory for all (with the sole exception of the heirs-apparent to the two Spartan thrones); but since it was of the essence of a genuine Greek democracy that there should be no qualifications, let alone qualifying tests, for citizenship other than legitimate citizen birth, this would seem to be straining the sense of 'democratic' unduly.²⁶ Moreover, the conditions under which a Spartan boy 'studied' were inordinately tougher than those imposed on an Athenian of the same age. In particular, they included a rich variety of imaginatively nasty punishments, such as having his thumb bitten by the young adult 'teacher' for failing to answer a question sufficiently 'laconically' (i.e., snappily and wittily).²⁷ Then again, rather than going to a private 'school' (*didaskaleion*) the Spartan boy was taught his lessons in a kind of communal 'brat pack', in which he lived all his life away from home.

A final major difference between the 'primary' education of Athenian and Spartan boys was that for the latter the physical element of the regimen, which placed the emphasis on endurance, was far and away the most important. The Spartan boys were required to go barefoot in all

weathers and terrains, wearing just a single homespun garment against the sometimes bitter cold of a Spartan winter. They had to cut reeds from the banks of the River Eurotas, with their bare hands, to serve as beds. They were kept on short rations from the public food-stores, so short, in fact, that in order to survive they had to, indeed were officially encouraged to, steal extra food – provided that they were not caught red-handed. If they were caught, they were punished severely, and corporally, not for stealing, but for being caught. Hence the apocryphal tale of the boy who stole a fox and rather than confess allowed it to gnaw through his entrails until he dropped down dead in front of a senior (Plut. *Lyk.* 18.1). The tale is of course literally untrue, even fantastic (how does one steal a wild animal?), but emblematically, mythically, it carries conviction. For if there were one member of the animal kingdom on which a Spartan boy's lifestyle could be said to be modelled, it was the fox, and *phouaddein* (a verb meaning to exercise the body) and *phouaxir* (noun denoting a late adolescent about to undergo the ritual whipping ceremony) were technical terms of the *agôgê* derived from the epichoric word for 'fox' (*phoua*, elsewhere in Greece *alôpêx*).²⁸

After the age of twelve the boys' training regimen is said, almost incredibly, to have become even tougher. From now on, surveillance (the appropriate term, with its military and police connotations) of the boys by their seniors was made constant. The adolescent boys were subjected to the strict, quasi-military discipline that led Plato and Isokrates among others to speak of Sparta as a kind of barracks or armed camp. Each year-class was given its own name, and progress from one class to the next was made conditional upon undergoing and successfully surviving certain specified competitive tests, usually linked to the performance of some religious ritual. A well-known instance is the braving of whip-lashing seniors in order to steal the largest possible number of cheeses from the altar of (Artemis) Ortheia, a goddess of vegetation and fertility, and the patroller of the boundary between youth and adulthood.²⁹ Spartan education at this second stage thus resembled nothing so much as a paramilitary assault course. Music and dancing were not dropped from the curriculum, because they had religious associations and military applications, encouraging fitness and a sense of rhythm vital for successful hoplite warfare. But it took the Spartans to transform the joyous social activity of dancing into a parade-ground endurance test, as they did in the annual festival of the Gymnopaïdai (probably meaning Festival of 'Unarmed Dancing') celebrated at the height of Sparta's exceptionally hot summers.³⁰ Paramilitary physical exercises were the order of the day for the Spartan male pre-citizen youth.

This intensified period of training extended between the ages of twelve and eighteen, up to the threshold of manhood. It was thus principally as a manhood-ritual that the Spartans, like some other better documented, non-state societies, institutionalized the practice of pederasty. The *agôgê*

provided a hospitable framework.³¹ From the age of twelve, that is to say, a Spartan boy became eligible, or rather was officially obliged, to take a lover, an older male lover, usually a man who belonged to the youngest grade of adult male warrior citizens (the *eirenes*) and was not yet married. What might be considered child-abuse and legally actionable behaviour in our society was thereby not only officially approved but legally enforced in Classical Sparta. Precisely how the boys and young men paired off, we do not know, although there is good evidence that at least the sons of the Spartan elite did not have total freedom of choice. Nor do we know, because the sources are riddled with *arrière-pensée*, exactly what was the nature of the physical-sexual element in these relationships, although I am now more than ever convinced that Erich Bethe's original hypothesis of anal copulation (Bethe 1907) was right. In Athens it was counted degrading for the younger partner to be submitted to such supposedly bestial treatment; but a central motif of the latter stages of the Spartan *agôgê*, as Vernant (1991) has brilliantly demonstrated, was precisely the inversion or subversion of adult norms, and this method of sexual intercourse both inverted the norm of adult equality and subverted the sharp normative distinction drawn by all other Greeks between men and beasts. The overall aim of this ritualized pederasty is, however, clear, namely to foster the initiation and ease the incorporation of the youths into adult Spartan society as fully-fledged citizen warriors.

The older partner was supposed therefore to serve for the junior partner as a kind of substitute father and more generally as a rôle-model, the ideally courageous, resolute and loyal warrior, a paragon of what the Spartans called *andragathia* or 'manly virtue' (e.g., Hdt. 5.42.1). One anecdote (Plut. *Lyk.* 18.8), subject to the usual historiographical reservations, brings out this special educational significance of the pederastic pairing relationship particularly neatly. In one of the gruelling physical contests that were *de rigueur* for the adolescents a youth reportedly made the mistake of crying out in pain; but in contrast to the situation when one of the younger boys was caught in the act of stealing, it was not the clamant youth himself who was punished – but rather his older lover, for having failed to 'inspire' in his 'hearer' (these are the technical Spartan homoerotic terms) a properly Spartan *karteria* (endurance) and *enkrateia* (self-control).

When – and if (fatal accidents in the *agôgê* are easily predictable and in fact attested: Xen. *Anab.* 4.8.25-6) – a Spartan boy eventually reached the age of eighteen, the formal educational cycle came to an end and he entered the liminal phase of his life during which he was classified technically as 'boy-ish' (*paidiskos*), that is, between a 'boy' (*pais*) and a man (*anêr*). The majority of the *paidiskoi* now underwent, like their Athenian coevals known as *ephêboi* (those on the threshold of *hêbê*), a period of 'national service', as it were, preparing them for entry at the age of twenty (provided they passed the next test, election to a common mess) into the

standing army of adult citizen warriors. However, apparently an élite few of the eighteen-year-olds were specially selected (again, we know not how nor by whom) to join a corps dubbed rather sinisterly the Krypteia or 'Secret Service Brigade'. On the one hand, in a manner characteristic of rituals of adult initiation, this period of service continued and indeed reinforced the inversion of adult norms that we have already detected in the second stage of the *agôgê*: the Kryptoi lived away from Sparta (whereas adult Spartans most of the time lived concentrated in the central place, unlike, say, the citizens of Athens, who resided in demes scattered throughout Attica, most of them outside the Athens Peiraeus 'City' area: see Chapter 2, above); they lived as isolated individuals, not as corporate members of a solidary band; they were armed only with a knife (not strictly a piece of military equipment), and they were obliged to fend and forage for themselves (whereas as adult members of a common mess in Sparta or as soldiers on campaign they had their material wants met from their common mess-fund or by the state's elaborately organized commissariat). They were, in short, as Vidal-Naquet has brilliantly described them, 'anti-hoplites'.³²

But there is also an 'on the other hand'. A clandestine survival exercise superficially similar to the Krypteia is, I understand, prescribed today in the Western Isles of Scotland for recruits to Her Majesty's Marines. With this, rather crucial, difference: that trainee Marines are not also expected or required to go around intimidating or murdering the local population, without provocation. For the Kryptoi, however, that was the main and immediate object of the exercise: to kill, after dark, any of the Spartans' enslaved Greek population of Helots whom they should accidentally-on-purpose come upon in either Lakonia or more especially Messenia. The humane and philosophic Plutarch (*Lyk.* 28.4) could not bring himself to believe that the wise and gentle Lykourgos had instituted such a barbaric practice and preferred to ascribe it to Spartan paranoia following the great earthquake and subsequent Helot revolt of the mid-460s. But we, who perhaps do not even believe in the historicity of Lykourgos the man, let alone in 'his' singlehanded authorship of the Classical Spartan social, economic, military and political regime, need not be so squeamish. For the Krypteia's Helot-culling can be given a 'logical' explanation as an integral part of the aim and functions of the *agôgê* as a whole, and there is no reason not to suppose that it had been so interpreted and integrated from the very inauguration of the *agôgê* (somewhere in the mid-seventh century, as I should suppose).³³

Which brings me back, finally, to the questions I asked at the start. Without wishing to appear reductionist, I suggest the answer to all three lies in a famous Thucydidean parenthesis: *aiei gar ta polla Lakedaímonios pros tous Heilôtas tês phulakês peri malista katheistêkei* (Thuc. 4.80.3). Even if we read this, as the word-order may suggest we should, to mean 'So far as the Helots were concerned, most Spartan institutions had

always been designed primarily with a view to security' (rather than 'Most Spartan institutions had always been designed with a view to security against the Helots'), and even if we take it that it was the Helots of Messenia rather than Lakonia who solely or mainly determined the Spartans' precautionary attitude, I would still want to insist, against a recent 'revisionist' trend of interpretation, on the absolutely fundamental causal role being ascribed here by Thucydides to the Helots.³⁴

For if I may explicate that suitably laconic parenthesis (as Thucydides himself had no need to do), it was the Helots who constituted the Spartans' principal agricultural workforce and therefore enabled a Spartan citizen to pay the mess-dues on which his continued citizenship depended. More generally, it was the Helots who, by freeing the Spartan citizens *en bloc* from all productive labour (other than warfare), enabled their masters to develop their uniquely military society, a workshop of war. But at the same time it was also the Helots who so outnumbered the Spartan citizen population that the latter gave a unique spin to the normal Greek concern with legitimate procreation and developed a remarkably (and for many Greeks unacceptably) high public valuation of mothers. More especially, it was the Helots who, as the enemy within, 'lying in wait for their masters' disasters' in the striking phrase of Aristotle (*Pol.* 1269a37-9), necessitated as well as enabled the Spartans' military mode of life, and their unique transformation of a *polis* into a military-police state.³⁵ Within Sparta's elaborately and minutely organized machinery of prophylaxis against the Helots the *agôgê* fitted as smoothly and as noiselessly as any other moving part. For its principal aim and function, admirably served by the climactic Helot-culling, was to initiate Spartan boys and youths into Spartan manhood in such a way that they internalized the values of the adult citizen warriorhood.

So, indeed, it would seem to have operated successfully enough until 370/69, when for reasons that it would take – indeed, has taken me – a whole book (Cartledge 1987) to try to explain, the larger part of the Helots finally revolted successfully into not just personal freedom but full political autonomy and statehood, becoming citizens of the new – or, as the Messenians' own myth-history had it, reborn – *polis* of Messene. Sparta, the real historical city of Sparta, never recovered fully from that blow and remained a relatively minor, though none the less fascinating, state for the rest of antiquity.

However, by a sort of ideological compensation the idea(l) of Sparta, first propagated in literary form by radical Athenian conservatives such as Kritias (leader of the 'Thirty Tyrants' junta of 404-3) and Xenophon, has survived and flourished right down to our own day.³⁶ Not the least stirring element in the tradition of that ideal, or mirage, of Sparta has been its educational system, the *agôgê*, though in more recent times it has of course been cauterized, in Plutarchan fashion, of such monstrous carbuncles as Helot-culling. If, however, you accept the thesis of this essay, to remove

that feature would be to void the *agôgê* of its ultimate rationale and *raison d'être*. In contemporary political terms, therefore, it would be an unusually insensitive educationalist who followed in the footsteps of Kritias and Xenophon and seriously contemplated adopting the Spartan alternative.

The Politics of Spartan Pederasty

Introduction

The original published version of this essay (1981a) was a revised version of a talk delivered to the Cambridge Philological Society in 1980 under the title 'Sodom in Sparta'; the chairman introduced it as 'Sodomy in Sparta', which was only partly inaccurate. Since then, it has been reprinted as such, without authorization, in W.R. Dynes and S. Donaldson (eds) *Homosexuality in the Ancient World* (Garland: N.Y., 1992) and, with permission and addenda, in A.K. Siems (ed.) *Sexualität und Erotik in der Antike* (WdF 605: Darmstadt, 1988) 385-412, 413-15. The following version incorporates those addenda and includes further updates, but the argument remains substantially the same. It is rather homosexuality and pederasty in Classical Athens that have undergone the more substantial scholarly revision during the past two decades. Two major issues have been raised. First, granted that ancient Athenian homosexuality was not in all respects merely an earlier version of the homosexuality (or homosexualities) of contemporary Western societies, was it yet something fundamentally different? To put that rather crudely, were there 'gays' in Classical Athens? Second, was sex between Athenian males, and characteristically that means between a young adult citizen man and an adolescent pre-citizen boy or youth, conceptualized exclusively or predominantly in terms of power, or might the pleasure principle be equally or at any rate significantly in play also? The opposing positions are represented, with vim as well as some animus, respectively by Winkler 1990 and Davidson 1997.

There has, moreover, been something of a sea-change in conceptualization of the whole field during that same period, that is, not only in ancient history but in all historiography to do with sexual and other relations between and within the two sexes. To put it very briefly, histories of sexuality and 'women's history' have tended to be superseded by histories of gender: see, e.g., Larmour et al. eds 1997. Masculinity – ideas of what it is to 'be a man' – is now every bit as lively an issue as 'the position of women' or 'the woman question'. For simplicity's sake I cite here in illustration only two collective volumes, to one of which I was myself a contributor: Foxhall & Salmon eds 1998, 1999. I hope that my own

approach to Spartan pederasty in 1980/1981 will be considered sufficiently compatible with these later approaches.

*

I

Homosexuality tends now to claim the same amount of space in the public prints that was not long ago lavished on the 'woman question'.¹ The incidence of AIDS and concern over the homosexual content of sex-education in schools have continued to make it a major news item. Its prominence in contemporary life is reflected in art. There are some sixty current journals dealing with the subject in all its multifarious manifestations. The experience of homosexuals in the Third Reich concentration camps and the rôle of the homosexual as hero in contemporary fiction have lately provided matter for book-length studies. Biographies of Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and W.H. Auden and the memoirs of John Addington Symonds have discussed their subjects' writings on or practice of homosexual behaviour. The sexological team of Masters and Johnson have applied their peculiar quantitative approach to homoerotic physical response. Christian attitudes to homosexuality, notably in mediaeval Europe, have been extensively canvassed. In a less scholarly vein Edmund White has written of his travels in gay America; he is much concerned, as are Jeffrey Weeks and other members of the British Gay Left Collective, with the politics and political vocabulary of homosexuality. 'Homophobia' has entered the language. Many other illustrations could be given. In short, 'the love that dared not speak its name has become ... insistently communicative'.²

Thus the scholarly books devoted by K.J. Dover and F. Buffière to ancient Greek homosexuality represented the specifically ancient Greek fall-out of a veritable publishing explosion.³ But they also made plain enough the gulf that separates prevalent western conceptions and practice of homosexuality from those of the Greeks.⁴ In sharp contrast to our generally observed social and psychological norms, the Greeks did not see themselves as presented with an either/or choice between being 'a heterosexual' and being 'a homosexual'. They applied the same range of words, including both primary and metaphorical obscenities, with the same explicit and implicit meanings to both heterosexual and homosexual behaviour. Anyone – at least anyone in Classical Athens, which provides a disproportionate amount of our evidence – was free to declare openly the intensity of his homosexual response.⁵ The Greeks did inevitably recognize that a very small minority of individuals might be predominantly or exclusively homosexual in orientation. But in so far as adult males practised homosexuality, this typically took the form of pederasty with an adolescent junior partner and occupied a defined, and transient, phase and

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place in the masculine life-cycle. For 'homosexuality' in ancient Greece, therefore, we can normally read 'pederasty', although – a useful reminder of the dangers of etymology – ancient Greek *paiderastia* was not the equivalent of our 'homosexuality'. For the latter, the Greeks did not have a word.⁶ Finally, and this is in some ways the most important cultural difference of all, the Greeks did not labour under the incubus of a doctrinal tradition reinforced by ponderous temporal authority which holds that homosexual relations in whatever guise or context, or undertaken from whatever motives, are essentially diabolical or, on a slightly more charitable view, the manifestation of a shameful disease.⁷

The modern scholarly study of Greek homosexuality, which goes back well over a century and a half,⁸ has inevitably had to wage a constant struggle to avoid importing extraneous moral judgements.⁹ The other major obstacle to enlightenment is the state of the available evidence, which is such that recreating a picture of Greek pederasty has been well likened (by Buffière) to the problem of restoring a Minoan fresco. The five most important written sources are late Archaic and early Classical poetry; Attic comedy; Plato; Aeschines I (*Against Timarchos*); and Hellenistic homosexual poetry. Only two of these five, Attic comedy and Plato, inform directly on Spartan pederasty, and there is good reason to question the unvarnished truth of their testimony. Our fullest sources of information, Xenophon and Plutarch, are hardly more unimpeachable, chiefly because they are both purveyors of the 'Spartan mirage' – the partly distorted, partly imaginary picture of Sparta that its non-Spartan admirers needed and wanted to believe represented the reality. None the less, I hope to show that the evidence on the nature of Spartan pederasty, taken all together, can be made to yield further information and insights without being unduly tortured.

My other main aim is to elucidate the development and specify the functions of pederasty in Sparta between about the seventh and fourth centuries BC, the period of Sparta's greatest power and widest influence in the Greek world. Having established its nature with the degree of precision permitted by our inadequate ancient sources, I shall attempt to illuminate its social functions by locating it firmly within what has been called broadly the Spartan 'ritual system'; this is the strand of Spartan social organization comprising the *rites de passage*, the *agôgê* or compulsory and comprehensive educational cycle, the age-sets and the *syssitia* or common messes.¹⁰ There is nothing novel in locating pederasty here: Xenophon and Plutarch both made the connection between pederasty and the *agôgê*, and recent scholarship has gone some way towards what I consider a plausible explanation of the connection by using, if not always appropriately, comparative ethnographic material.¹¹ No previous student, however, has fully brought out the crucial element in Spartan pederasty that may quite precisely be called homosexual politics.

II

Xenophon was a participant observer of Spartan society towards the end of the period under special investigation here. But he was far from a disinterested observer. Politically speaking, he was a 'lakonizer', and few would dispute that his pamphlet on the Spartan *politeia* (*Lak. Pol.*) is mainly apologetic, if not actually encomiastic. Xenophon was, moreover, a client of the powerful Spartan king Agesilaos II, on whose death in c. 360 he felt obligated to publish a eulogy trumpeting his hero as a 'thoroughly and completely good man' (*Ages.* 1.1, 10.1). In the eulogy Xenophon (*Ages.* 5.4-7; cf. 8.8, 10.2, 11.10) does not disguise his subject's strong homoerotic proclivities but seeks rather to make a virtue of them by stressing Agesilaos' exceptional *enkrateia*, his repression of the urge to indulge his inclinations physically.¹² The suspicion arises that what Xenophon retrojects into the distant past as the ideal of homosexual chastity prescribed by the notional lawgiver 'Lykourgos' may in fact be the present programme or official propaganda of the reactionary and homophile Agesilaos.¹³ A final reason to doubt the objectivity of Xenophon's testimony is the fact that, wearing his philosophical hat, he in his *Symposium* (esp. 8.12) no less than Plato in his advocated the eschewal of physical gratification in sexual relations.¹⁴

The first chapter of the *Lak. Pol.* deals with *teknopoia* (reproduction), the second with *paideia*, the education of those whom Xenophon refers to generically as *paides* (boys). The aims of this *paideia*, he says, are to produce adult men who are, obedient, respectful, and self-controlled; and he believes it to be a truth universally acknowledged that in respect of these qualities the men of Sparta surpass other Greeks. It is in this context that Xenophon felt constrained to comment on *paidikoi erôtes*, 'intimacy with boys', as the Loeb translator rather coyly renders the phrase.¹⁵

For 'Lykourgos', according to Xenophon, deemed it 'a very fine form of *paideia*' if an honourable or respectable man who was enamoured of the *psychê* (character) of a boy should try to make of him a friend in all innocence and spend time in his company. On the other hand, in total contrast to the practice in Boiotia and Elis, 'Lykourgos' had branded physical lust as highly shameful and so ensured that there was no more copulation (*aphrodisia*) between *erastai* and their *paidika* than there was between parents and their children or between brothers. 'I am not, however, surprised', Xenophon concludes, 'that some people find it impossible to credit this (sc. rule of physical chastity). For many states tolerate sensual gratification with boys'.

This brief account is hardly satisfactory. It is defensive and polemical in tone, elliptical in content, and one-sided in its emphasis on the physical element – or rather the alleged absence of same.¹⁶ Xenophon does not say whether, other things being equal, every Spartan *pais* was expected, encouraged or required to enter into such a pederastic relationship. He

uses the standard Greek terms for older lover, *erastês*, and younger beloved, *paidika*,¹⁷ without even a hint that in Sparta as in Crete pederasty had generated a local technical vocabulary.¹⁸ He sets the relationship in the context of Spartan education, but he does not specify at what stage of the *agôgê* a *pais* became eligible to act as *paidika* nor, beyond saying that the *erastês* should be *hoion dei* (honourable or respectable), does he indicate how this pederasty might help to produce obedience, respectfulness and self-control in the *paidika*. He says nothing about the age and social (as opposed to moral) status of the *erastês* or the duration of the relationship. Finally, Xenophon leaves it doubtful how rigorously the allegedly prescribed norm of physical chastity was in fact observed. For although he represents the taboo on physical gratification as equivalent to an incest taboo, he does not state that it was actually illegal; and even if it was, as later sources allege,¹⁹ we have to allow for Xenophon's bitter observation in the appended fourteenth chapter of the *Lak. Pol.* that the Spartans now 'obviously do not obey ... the laws of Lykourgos'.

None of these many deficiencies is entirely made good either by our other directly preserved fourth-century sources, Plato and Aristotle, or by our most detailed single source on Spartan pederasty, Plutarch, who though writing around AD 100 drew directly or indirectly on fourth-century material among much else. According to the MSS of Plato *Smp.* 182a-c, the Athenian speaker Pausanias there contrasts Elis, Boiotia and other states where men are inarticulate and homosexual *erôs* receives unqualified approval with, on the one hand, states that give it their unqualified disapproval and, on the other hand, Athens and Sparta where the *nomos* is 'complicated' (*poikilos*). Yet in the later *Laws* (1.636b, 8.836a-c) Plato's mouthpiece, the anonymous Athenian interlocutor, twice emphasizes that in Sparta as in Crete male homosexual intercourse is not only tolerated but widely if not universally practised.

This seeming contradiction could be removed by the drastic expedient of tampering with the text of *Smp.* 182a-c.²⁰ Alternatively, and preferably, the contradiction could be treated as merely apparent. That is, the 'complication' of the *nomos* could be taken as a reference to the coexistence of official tolerance of state-sanctioned pederasty with condemnation of physical gratification therein, while Plato's Athenian could be read as either referring to homosexual acts outside approved pederastic relationships or implying that the *nomos* on pederastic chastity was not in practice observed. At any rate, Plato was the last person to have swallowed uncritically the anti-Spartan calumnies (if they are calumnies) of the Athenian comic stage.²¹

So far as Cretan practice is concerned, Plato's Athenian is explicitly supported by Aristotle.²² But in the case of Sparta Aristotle's evidence may tend in the opposite direction, towards corroborating the picture drawn by Xenophon. In the course of a lengthy critique of the Spartan *politeia*, also in the second book of the *Politics* (cf. Herrmann-Otto 1998), Aristotle cites

as one of its chief defects the fact that Spartan men are ruled by the women (*gunaikokratoumenoi*). This situation he considers typical of all military and bellicose peoples, except those like the Celts and some others who 'openly place a high social value on male homosexual intercourse'. The clear implication is that the Spartans did not so value it. However, Aristotle may of course have been referring only to intercourse between adult males and not to pederasty; and in any case his imputation of gynecocracy to Spartan society is not at all well founded (see Chapter 9).

Plutarch, especially in his 'biography' of Lykourgos, provides the most detailed information. On the whole, he follows Xenophon's general line on Sparta, but Xenophon's work was clearly not his sole source for his account of relations between Spartan *erastai* and their *paidika*, since his is appreciably more extensive. In describing the *agôgê* (*Lyk.* 16-21) Plutarch notes that, once the boys had turned twelve, their training was intensified. This change is implied too by late glosses on passages of Herodotus and Strabo which preserve the names given, from the thirteenth year on, to the age-sets into which the boys were divided between the ages of seven and seventeen inclusive.²³ It was at this stage of intensified training, says Plutarch (*Lyk.* 17.1), that '*erastai* began to frequent the company of those of the reputable (*eudokimoi*) boys who had reached that age'.²⁴

Plutarch next describes how the supervision of the boys was so stepped up that it became impossible for a miscreant to escape detection and punishment. In this heightened surveillance the role of the boy's *erastês* was so important, according to Plutarch, that he shared in the good or bad reputation of his *erômenos* (beloved). On one occasion, so it was said, an *erastês* was actually punished for an ignoble cry emitted by his *erômenos* in some boys' combat. However, Plutarch continues, competition for the exclusive love of a particular boy did not exist in Sparta. To the contrary, those who conceived *erôs* for the same boy regarded this as an occasion for starting mutual friendships and would thenceforth strive tirelessly and in common to improve their shared *erômenos* to the utmost.

It would not, I think, be unreasonable to doubt this uplifting vision of philerastic co-operation, especially as Plutarch himself elsewhere insists, rightly, on portraying Sparta as a society shot through with officially sponsored competitiveness at all levels. It is hard to see why in practice pederasty should have been an exception to this rule, however desirable that might have been in theory. Rather more problematic, and important, is the restriction implied by Plutarch's claim that would-be *erastai* confined their attentions to 'reputable' boys. Does this mean that not all Spartan boys would expect or be expected to find an *erastês*? Or is this just another moralizing gloss by Plutarch designed to repudiate the charge of sensual gratification and so to represent Spartan customs in their most admirable light?

The fullest evidence bearing on this problem is to be found in Aelian's *Varia Historia* (3.10,12), written later in the second century AD, but the

quality of this work is as variable as its subject-matter. Like his contemporary, Maximus of Tyre,²⁵ Aelian repeats the Xenophon-Plutarch line on Spartan pederastic chastity;²⁶ but he adds further information which if true would be highly significant. A fine and upstanding (*kaloskagathos*) Spartan, Aelian says, who did not act as *erastês* to boys of fine character (*kalôs pephekotes*) would be fined by the Ephors. This supports, indeed formally corroborates the public and official character of Spartan pederasty as it is presented by Xenophon and Plutarch. But again the specification of moral probity as a necessary condition of participation smacks of special pleading.²⁷ On balance, therefore, I am inclined to believe that for a Spartan boy to enter into a pederastic relationship after his twelfth year was the norm, whether or not he was strictly *eudokimos* or *kalôs pephekôs*. This hypothesis is at least consistent with the location of pederasty within the *agôgê*, which indisputably was compulsory for all Spartan boys (with one exception to be discussed later).

A strong supporting argument may be drawn from a characteristic feature of Spartan society as a whole, namely its general attempt to de-emphasize family life as opposed to communal life. Consistently with this, authority over boys was not the exclusive prerogative of their biological fathers but was transferred to the community as a whole as represented by the older age-grades. Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 6.1-2) speaks only of other fathers playing this authoritative role, but Plutarch quite clearly implies that *erastai*, who would not normally be fathers in the biological sense, acted as surrogate fathers to their *erômenoi*. This is a procedure familiar to anthropologists and psychologists, who classify it as displaced fathering.²⁸ It would, I think, be odd in this social context if only some, let alone a minority of, Spartan boys acquired such surrogate fathers after their twelfth year. In short, I have no doubt that the evidence of Xenophon and Plutarch is sufficient to establish the important conclusion that pederasty in Sparta was institutionalized and compulsory.²⁹ Whether or not sensual gratification, specifically sodomy, was a structural feature of institutionalized pederasty we cannot say for certain, though I would expect it to have been a widely prevalent feature.

I return to that point later. First, one final aspect of the nature of Spartan pederasty may usefully be examined through the literary sources, namely the possible duration of the pederastic relationship. In Plutarch's main discussion (*Lyk.* 17-18) there is no question but that, as in Xenophon, the *erômenos* or *paidika* is a *pais*, that is, below military age. Since Plutarch (like Xenophon) does not even glance at the age of the *erastês*, it seems legitimate to assume from their silence that in this respect at least Sparta conformed to general Greek practice and that Spartan *erastai* were normally unmarried young adults aged between about twenty and thirty.³⁰ However, in a relatively unnoticed passage a little further on (*Lyk.* 25.1), where Plutarch is talking about the Spartans' everyday activities, he says that those under the age of thirty 'absolutely never went to market but had

the transactions necessary for the management of their households carried out for them by their kinsmen and *erastai*. A Spartan, in other words, might still be an *erômenos* after becoming a fully adult warrior and member of a common mess at the age of twenty, when he would grow his hair long and grow a beard.³¹ Whether he would normally have had the same 'steady' *erastês* since his early teens we do not know. But we do learn from Xenophon's *Symposium* (8.35) that, in contrast to Theban and Eleian practice, it was not a feature of Sparta's military organization deliberately to post all *erômenoi* beside their *erastai* in line of battle.³²

That exhausts the usable testimony of the partial (in both senses) literary sources on the nature of Spartan pederasty.³³ There are to my knowledge no relevant Spartan inscriptions to compare with the rock-cut graffiti from Thera and Thasos or the *kalos*-inscriptions from Athens.³⁴ The archaeological evidence from Sparta is only slightly less exiguous and is almost entirely confined to the sixth century BC. A series of bronze figurines of nude girls or young women with decidedly masculine physique could somehow reflect the taste in adolescent youths of the average Spartan *erastês*.³⁵ A drinking-cup depicting heterosexual (?) anal copulation apparently in a ritual context might be perhaps indirect evidence for the corresponding homosexual mode.³⁶ The terracotta votive masks depicting unbearded 'Youths' and bearded adult 'Warriors' found in the sanctuary of Ortheia cannot be connected with any religious dance of which we have specific knowledge;³⁷ it is therefore conceivable that some at least of these may have been dedicated by *erômenoi* and *erastai* in a sanctuary that had special connections with the *agôgê*. Finally, it may be worth mentioning a crudely made terracotta figurine of a man in the notably gymnastic act of fellating himself, though I hasten to add that the ancients saw nothing peculiarly homosexual in fellation as such.³⁸

III

I turn now from the nature of Spartan pederasty in the fourth century BC to its possible origins, development and social functions in the seventh to fourth centuries. Any discussion should still begin from a celebrated article by Erich Bethe, almost a century old though it is.³⁹ Emboldened by the upsurge in the scientific study of homosexuality,⁴⁰ and strongly influenced by the not unconnected growth of anthropology,⁴¹ Bethe proposed a strikingly novel interpretation of Spartan – or, as he loosely and misleadingly called it, Dorian – pederasty. He was far from being the first modern scholar to question its alleged chastity.⁴² But he was the first to argue that the physical element, which he took to be anal copulation, was fundamental to the relationship between *erastês* and *erômenos*.

He suggested, on what were then the flimsiest of comparative ethnographic grounds, that the Dorians could have regarded semen as (in Edward Carpenter's somewhat fanciful formulation) 'the vehicle and spe-

cial condensation of the soul'⁴³ and the injection of semen *per anum* as a means whereby the excellence (*aretê*) of the *erastês*, specifically his military excellence, might be transmitted in a quasi-magical way to the *erômenos*. This, Bethe proposed, was the earthy physical reality behind the idealization of the pederastic relationship purveyed by the extant literary sources, sources who were reflecting an increased civility and growing distaste for homosexual anal intercourse.

Further, Bethe affirmed that for the Dorians of the seventh, sixth and most of the fifth centuries pederasty was institutionalized: it was 'ein öffentlich anerkanntes, heiliges, Grundlegendes und Leben bestimmendes Element'. So far as its origins were concerned, Bethe toyed with the hypothesis that the pederastic sexual act might have developed spontaneously as an initiation rite in the men's associations, that is as a *rite de passage* qualifying the initiate for entry as a full member into the adult male warrior community.

Reactions to this heady cocktail of comparative ethnography, philology and social history have been mixed.⁴⁴ My own – leaving aside the obviously false implications of the epithet 'Dorian'⁴⁵ – is generally favourable; but two stipulations regarding any use of comparative ethnographic evidence must be added. First, through the ignorance, reticence, indifference or distaste of western travellers, missionaries and anthropologists we are far less well informed cross-culturally on homosexuality than we could ideally wish.⁴⁶ Fortunately, though, we are not concerned here with the statistical incidence of homosexuality in global perspective, but with its form, location and functions in specific societies. In these respects the comparative approach, which cannot of course supply the primary evidence we lack, throws up enough of the right kind of material to suggest possibilities of explanation for the evidence we do have.

The second point of method has been well expressed by Finley: 'What anthropology illuminates about Sparta, paradoxically, are certain aspects of her lost early history rather than the Sparta from which the fossilized evidence comes'.⁴⁷ That is to say, even in the seventh century BC the Spartans were far from being a *Naturvolk* or 'primitive' people; and Sparta was not technically a 'smallscale' or 'pre-state' society. We cannot therefore treat Sparta and the communities studied by modern ethnographers and anthropologists as strictly analogous entities. If the evidence from the latter can shed light on the former, what will be illuminated are the origins or prehistory of certain Spartan customs or customary complexes. Comparative ethnography, in other words, may be used only as a kind of geological tool to lay bare the strata of cultural deposit below those exposed for us by the surviving literary sources.⁴⁸ It is the task of properly historical source-analysis to explain the functions of these customs or customary complexes within the society as a whole at different periods and to suggest why and how they might have been re-institutionalized or re-adapted to serve new functions.

Three contemporary 'primitive' societies – none of them known to Bethe, incidentally – seem particularly helpful for comparative purposes.⁴⁹ The first is that of the Aranda and neighbouring aborigines of central Australia. Among these tribesmen pederasty, as reported by a German missionary, was institutionalized within an initiatory framework.⁵⁰ An unmarried but fully initiated (i.e. circumcised and subincised) young adult male was allocated a youth aged between twelve and fourteen, who had to belong to a prescribed kinship category. The couple would then cohabit, often for several years, until the older partner married a woman. The junior partner meanwhile would be neither circumcised nor subincised, and he would be 'used as a woman', that is, required to play the passive role in anal copulation.

Among the Keraki Indians of Papua pederasty also occurred within the context of pubertal initiation.⁵¹ A youth from the previous batch of initiates was privileged to sodomize the initiand for the first time. Thereafter, during some months of seclusion, the novice was freely available for this purpose to his seniors of the opposite moiety, always taking the passive role. Come the next round of initiation, the newly-initiated could now take the active role in his turn. Full adult status was acquired subsequently on heterosexual marriage. Williams presumed (in classically culture-bound fashion) that the real motive of the anal copulation was simple gratification, but the Keraki themselves believed that it was conducive to desirably rapid physical growth.⁵²

The final and most extensively documented society is that of the Marind-Anim in what was Dutch New Guinea.⁵³ This is a sex-segregated, male-dominated society, once warlike, which divides the male youth into age-grades, prescribes elaborate rites to mark the passage from one grade to another and makes male homosexual anal copulation an integral part of initiation into full adult status. Sex segregation begins between the ages of five and eight, and from the onset of puberty the adolescent boy is placed under the tutelage of a surrogate father. The latter acts as master of ceremonies in the rituals symbolizing the boy's promotion from one age-grade to another and copulates anally with him in the men's house – a form of intercourse that the Marind, like the Keraki, link with physical growth. This actively sexual relationship between boy and surrogate father persists until the former's marriage at the age of nineteen or twenty, and the sexual act is considered to strengthen the bond between them. Even after adulthood and marriage homosexuality continues to occupy an unusually large slice of the sexual life of Marind males, and its general social approbation is reflected in their mythology. Marind women, on the other hand, have no separate or autonomous culture of their own, and emotional and physical relations between the sexes were judged to be unsatisfactory by van Baal.

We cannot, for the reasons stated, simply substitute 'Spartans' for 'Marind-Anim', despite the apparent formal similarities between their

socio-sexual arrangements. This in effect is the error of Brelich.⁵⁴ He took the view that the developed Spartan *agôgê* of Classical times was not just somehow derived from an initiatory cycle of primitive type but actually was such a cycle. He therefore argued, since he rightly located the pederastic relationship within the *agôgê*, that pederasty was precisely an initiatory *rite de passage* in Sparta, although he accepted from Xenophon that – unlike the rites of the Marind and so on – the relationship was a non-sexual one.⁵⁵ I prefer to suggest that the comparative ethnographic evidence does not illuminate directly the Classical Spartan *agôgê* but should rather be taken to reveal a cultural horizon below, though not necessarily immediately below, that portrayed, with some bias, by Xenophon.

We do not know whether the ancestors of the Classical Spartans had anything approaching an initiatory-cum-educational cycle of age-sets and *rites de passage* when they first settled permanently in the south-east Peloponnese, probably in the tenth century BC.⁵⁶ But we do know that at some point or points thereafter the *agôgê* was minutely organized and that successful passage through it was made one of the requirements for admission to the ranks of the *Homoioi* or Spartiates, the adult male citizens of full status. This comprehensive and competitive *agôgê*, though it contained overtly religious elements and associations, was an essentially secular institution. It fulfilled the twin functions of socialization and education, and its character and objectives were overridingly military.⁵⁷ The historical question therefore to be addressed is this: how and why did this bundle of customs of disparate origins and purposes become institutionalized so as to perform the secular, pedagogical and military functions described or implied by the sources?

Certainty is of course impossible. On the principle of economy of hypotheses it would be easiest to suppose that at least the fundamentals of this social reorganization coincided with the pivotal economic and military reform that transmogrified all Spartiates into professional heavy-armed infantrymen. That reform, I have argued elsewhere, should belong in the first half of the seventh century.⁵⁸ The militarization of Spartan society inevitably embraced matters erotic;⁵⁹ and in the time of Xenophon, if our earlier discussion is on the right lines, pederasty was incorporated in the militaristic ritual-educational package that was the *agôgê*. But had it been institutionalized there from the start, *ex hypothesi* from the first half of the seventh century, or was it not introduced until later?

Again, the available sources reduce us to speculation. The earliest usable evidence for homosexuality in Sparta (I exclude Diod. 8.21) is provided by the Partheneia (Maiden Songs) of Alkman, who flourished around 600 BC.⁶⁰ But these were sung in a female and aristocratic ambience; and although there is reason to suggest that the education of Spartan girls was in some respects modelled on that of the boys, Alkman's evidence is insufficient to justify the inference that pederasty was universal and

institutionalized in his Sparta.⁶¹ Indeed, some lines of the rather earlier Spartan poet Tyrtaios (fr. 10.27-30 West) have been taken to point in the opposite direction, though I do not think they can be so pressed.⁶² In short, there is no unambiguously positive evidence, literary or otherwise, for pederasty of any kind in Sparta before the late fifth century.⁶³ However, consideration of the conditions potentially favouring the incidence of male homosexuality there may suggest that pederasty could have been institutionalized within the developed *agôgê* sooner rather than later.⁶⁴

In general terms the variables conditioning the incidence of homosexuality in different societies have been found to include the following: mode of child-rearing, segregation of the sexes, availability of partners of the opposite sex, age of marriage, polygamy, concepts of chastity and of sexuality, institutionalization of sexual activity, and concepts of status-role.⁶⁵ In the reorganized warrior community of Sparta from the seventh century onwards the emulation generated by the 'Greek contest-system' reached a pitch of intensity rarely paralleled elsewhere.⁶⁶ I return to the 'politics' of Spartan pederasty in my final section; but in this connection it is worth noting here what ethologists call the 'rank-demonstrating significance' of the pederastic sexual act.⁶⁷ The next relevant variable is the gap in time between the onset of puberty in the average Spartan male, probably at about the age of fourteen,⁶⁸ and his usual age of marriage, at about twenty-five. During this interval there was no absolutely rigid segregation of the sexes, it is true, and Spartan girls and women did enjoy certain freedoms denied to other Greek females.⁶⁹ But if all Greek cities were in a sense 'men's clubs', in Sparta probably the 'atmosphere of masculine exclusiveness was even more intense' than elsewhere.⁷⁰

Next, there is the point insisted upon by Plato's Athenian in the *Laws* (1.636b; cf. *Theaet.* 162b, 169ab), namely the role played by gymnasia as hotbeds of homosexuality. The Spartans put a premium on gymnastic exercise; and, if Thucydides (1.6.5) is to be believed, it was they who invented the universal Greek customs of exercising stark naked and rubbing down with olive oil. In Sparta therefore the cult of the nude male body is likely to have been pushed to extremes, as it is known to have been in other less gymnastic Greek cities;⁷¹ the festival of the Gymnopaediai, instituted in 668 BC (Pettersson 1992), would seem to confirm this presumption. Finally, it is certainly the case that would-be Spartan *erastai*, freed from the daily round of productive toil, had the leisure required for the observation and courtship of potential *erômenoi*.

None of these conditions favouring the incidence of homosexuality and its early institutionalization in the form of a pederastic code is wholly peculiar to Spartan society, but their presence in combination suggests that the integration of institutionalized pederasty into the *agôgê*, whenever precisely it occurred, will at any rate not have been awkward.

IV

In this final section I turn from the nature of Spartan pederasty as reported by the sources (Section II) and from its possible origins and development within Spartan society (Section III) to the functions it may have fulfilled in its institutionalized form. I concentrate on what may for convenience be called 'the age of Xenophon', the later fifth and earlier fourth centuries, both because this is in general the best documented period of Spartan history and because it is only from this period that we have detailed information on specific pederastic relationships between Spartiates.⁷² Both involve King Agesilaos II, before and after his accession, who was an exceptional figure in many respects but not wholly so in this regard.

If we are to believe Plutarch (*Ages.* 2.1, *Lys.* 22.6), Agesilaos in his youth had become the *erômenos* of no less a figure than Lysander. There was admittedly a tendency in antiquity to invent homosexual ties between great men;⁷³ and Plutarch is our only source. On the other hand, Plutarch was unusually interested in Agesilaos and proudly advertised the original research he had done into a detail of his subject's life (*Ages.* 19.10). His account, moreover, is circumstantial. For he tells us that it was when Agesilaos was 'in the so-called *agelai*' (the 'troops' or 'herds' into which Spartan boys were organized in the *agôgê*) that Lysander took him for his *erômenos*; and Plutarch informs us, again uniquely but plausibly, that Agesilaos was exceptional for a Spartan king in having gone through the *agôgê* (since he had not been expected to succeed to the Eurypontid throne) (*Ages.* 1.4).⁷⁴

How should we interpret the significance of this pederastic relationship between two members of the Spartiate elite? Plutarch is naturally anxious on principle to deny any physical element to it whatsoever and alleges that Lysander had been 'struck' (*ekplageis*) by the propriety of Agesilaos' nature. But Lysander was in any case unlikely to have been smitten with the physical beauty of the congenitally lame and (for a Spartan) unusually short Agesilaos; so even if it is accepted that Lysander's motives in pursuing the royal prince were chaste and high-minded, physical consummation of the relationship once it had been established is not to be ruled out.⁷⁵ However, ought we to take Plutarch's account of Lysander's motive at its face value? I suggest rather that the relationship is best explained in the context of the Spartan 'contest-system'.

Sparta was a quintessentially agonal society, permeated with ambition, envy and distrust. Even citizenship, synonymous with membership of the hoplite army, was the prize of long years of competitive struggle and came only with the satisfaction of conditions above and beyond legitimate citizen birth, including election to a common mess. It would be remarkable, to say the least, if institutionalized pederasty had not been somehow linked to and expressive of the Spartan contest-system.

Xenophon gives pride of emphasis to the tutelary and educative function of Spartan pederasty, representing the older *erastês* by implication as a model and guide to his younger *paidika*. This is undoubtedly an important part of the truth. But he also speaks, if in idealized terms, of a friendship between the two, and this may be a significant clue. For in the ultra-competitive environment of Sparta pederasty could have been a way of enabling men 'to resolve their ambivalent orientation to men and to establish close relationships with some of them'.⁷⁶ The bond thus created could have been strengthened by physical consummation.

That seems to me a plausible account of how pederasty was linked through the nexus of friendship to the contest-system, and the longer the pederastic relationship lasted the more plausible it becomes. However, Spartan pederasty will also have been expressive of the contest-system. Despite Plutarch, competition between would-be *erastai* cannot have been eliminated, and the status of the successful *erastês* will have been enhanced in proportion to that of his *erômenos*. There were few bigger fish in the Spartan sea than the adolescent Agesilaos, and there can be little doubt that it was because he was such an outstanding catch that Lysander courted him.

In the late 430s, when their relationship will have begun, Lysander for all his cunning is perhaps unlikely to have anticipated his later rôle as kingmaker for Agesilaos (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.14). But the potential utility to his future career of becoming the closest *philos* of Agesilaos and so linked intimately to the Eurypontid royal house will not have been lost on the exceptionally ambitious man who proverbially knew how to piece out the lion-skin of Herakles with the skin of the fox (Plut. *Mor.* 190e, 229b). Indeed, the connection will have recommended itself particularly, if, as seems to have been the case, Lysander had himself started life in somewhat reduced circumstances.⁷⁷ Pederasty, in other words, could have acted at Sparta in the age of Xenophon, as it certainly did in fourth-century Crete,⁷⁸ as a means of recruiting the political elite, the inner circle of those Spartans whom Herodotus (7.134.2) characterizes as 'the first in birth and wealth'.

That would be one aspect of the politics of Spartan pederasty in a narrow sense. Another, I believe, is to be detected in the *locus classicus* for all Spartan sexual politics, Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.20-33. In 378 BC the high-ranking Spartiate Sphodrias was arraigned on a capital charge before Sparta's supreme court. There was no doubt of his guilt, and Sphodrias in effect condemned himself by disobeying the Ephors' summons to stand trial. Yet Sphodrias was acquitted, thanks to the decisive vote of Agesilaos who at first and for good personal reasons had favoured condemnation. What caused his change of mind? Xenophon's unusually detailed narrative of the episode reveals that Sphodrias' son was the *erômenos* of Agesilaos' son Archidamos (the future Archidamos III) and vividly describes how Archidamos eventually plucked up the courage to intercede with his father on

behalf of his beloved.⁷⁹ However, Xenophon is at pains to make clear that it was not because of his son's intercession that Agesilaos relented but because of Agesilaos' own fixed conception of the national interest: Sparta could not afford, in his view, to lose soldiers of Sphodrias' calibre.

This momentous and far-reaching decision of Agesilaos admirably expresses his influence in Sparta and nicely reflects the shortage of Spartiate manpower that was becoming critical.⁸⁰ But it has another, less immediately apparent significance too. For Sphodrias was not just an outstanding Spartan soldier but also a member of the Spartan political elite and, even more to the point, a member of the entourage of the other Spartan king, Kleombrotos. Now, Xenophon tells us in his post-mortem encomium of Agesilaos (Ages. 7.3) that it was his hero's studied policy to behave towards his political opponents in the city like a father towards his children. If we translate that pious simile into the language of practical political reality, it means that Agesilaos sought to nullify domestic political opposition (of which there was a good deal throughout his long reign), and if possible to turn opponents into friends, through the dispensation of patronage (cf. Cartledge 1987: ch. 9).

I therefore find it hard to believe that it was merely a coincidence that his son should have been the *erastês* of Sphodrias' son, even if the latter really was 'the most handsome and reputable of his age-group'. Agesilaos will surely not have squandered the opportunity to make the pederastic system work to his own political advantage by fostering this relationship, as I imagine Agesilaos' father Archidamos II had fostered his son's with Lysander. For it gave him an intimate line of communication to the opposing royal circle and, through his decisive role in the acquittal of Sphodrias, a hold over it that was to be put to excellent effect in the increasingly bitter struggle to control and direct Sparta's foreign policy during the 370s. Earlier in the *Hellenika* (5.3.20) Xenophon had related that Agesilaos, by then aged at least fifty, had enjoyed engaging in *paidikoi logoi* with Kleombrotos' predecessor: I doubt very much that this was just idle chit-chat.⁸¹

To conclude: much of this essay, especially in the final section, has been speculative. The nature of the ancient evidence makes that inevitable. But I hope readers will at least agree that Spartan pederasty is a topic whose significance is by no means to be confined to the erogenous zones.⁸²

Spartan Wives: Liberation or Licence?

Introduction

The ultimate source of this chapter is a paper delivered before the Oxford Philological Society in November 1976. I received helpful comments from members of the large audience, in particular Pierre Vidal-Naquet (the origins of a lasting friendship) and the late Simon Pembroke. The published version of that paper appeared in 1981, soon enough to provide a target for an entire American doctoral thesis: Kunstler 1983 (summarized in Kunstler 1987). What divided us chiefly, and divides scholars still, is the issue of the extent to which adult Spartan women (to all intents and purposes, wives) were – if the phrase may be excused – masters of their own destiny. We are all now today even more aware than some of us were twenty years ago of the extent to which Classical Sparta is a construct, or fabrication, of our Athenian or Athenian-influenced literary sources. A key part of that construct was the ‘liberated’ Spartan woman, both liberated, that is, from ‘normal’ male controls and liberated in her lifestyle within and yet more strikingly outside the household (‘home’ doesn’t seem quite the right word): see recently Millender 1999. In gender terms, as we should now more easily put it (cf. Introduction to the previous chapter), the Spartan women were seen as ‘natural’ women, allowed by the curiously uxorious men of Sparta to indulge freely their innate female emotions and passions to such an extent as to overturn the equally ‘natural’ hierarchy of male sexual and social domination. This constructed Sparta of the non-Spartan imagination was a reversed world, with the women on top, fulfilling in fact a Delphic prophecy delivered jointly to the Argives and Milesians that was intended surely as counterfactual: ‘when female conquers male and expels him ...’ (Hdt. 6.77, trans. R. Waterfield).

I tried to suggest in 1981, what I still believe today, that it is necessary to correct significantly this misleading impression given by the sources: in my view, Spartan women did indeed enjoy certain freedoms, including legal freedoms, that were denied to their Athenian counterparts, but they were not, to put it mildly, as liberated as all that. Broadly speaking, Zweig 1993 prefers to follow Kunstler – and before him Pomeroy 1976 (see esp. n. 112, below) – in allowing for greater female initiative than I would,

whereas Dettenhofer 1993 inclines more to my position. Thommen 1999 is a useful recent review, adding little but providing a very helpfully up-to-date bibliography.

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I

A quarter of a century ago, the neologism ‘sexist’ gained entry to an Oxford Dictionary, *The Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, third edition (1974); it was glossed as ‘derisive of the female sex and expressive of masculine superiority’. Thus ‘sex kitten’, which is still defined in exclusively female terms in the latest, tenth edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1998), finally met its lexicographical match.

This point about current English usage has of course a serious, and general, application. For language reflects, when it does not direct, prevailing social conceptions. It is not accidental, for instance, that there is no masculine counterpart to the word ‘feminism’. ‘Male chauvinism’, the nearest we have come to coining one, is more emotive than descriptive and so involves ambiguity; while ‘sexism’, even when it is given an exclusively masculine connotation, is still, formally, sexually neutral. ‘Feminism’, by contrast, unequivocally denotes the striving to raise women to an equality of rights and status with men – or should do, anyhow.¹

It has been suggested that there were inchoate feminist movements or tendencies in the ancient Greek world, for example in the Classical Athens of Aristophanes and Plato (where, as we shall see, they would certainly not have been out of place).² But feminism in the contemporary sense did not really emerge before the eighteenth century; and in Britain, for instance, it was only with the passage in 1975 of the Employment Protection, Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts that women raised themselves on to an all but equal footing with their male fellows – at any rate in the technical, juridical sense.³

Despite such advances, there is obviously still ample room for controversy over precisely what counts as sexual equality, and over the ideas and practices consistent with its achievement or maintenance. What is not controversial, on the other hand, is that scholarly interest in all sorts and conditions of women has run at unprecedentedly high levels since the 1960s. Predictably, if somewhat belatedly, some of this interest rubbed off on students of the ancient world. In 1970 Ste. Croix could still legitimately complain that ‘ancient historians, one may think, too readily forget that women are, after all, half the human race’.⁴ But since then the steady trickle of studies on women in Graeco-Roman antiquity turned into a small flood,⁵ and in 1976 there first appeared a scholarly work which ventured to cover and summarize the whole field.⁶

The women of ancient Sparta, however, form something of an exception

to the rule of oblivion suggested by Ste. Croix. The reason for this is, I think, fairly straightforward. As Winwood Reade nicely expressed it in the high Victorian era, 'In Greece a lady could only enter society by adopting a mode of life which in England usually facilitates her exit'.⁷ In other words, the female citizen population of Sparta were not Victorian 'ladies'. They enjoyed the extraordinary and perhaps unique distinction of both being 'in society' and yet behaving in a socially unacceptable manner. Or so it seemed to non-Spartan males from at least as early as the sixth century BC, though the particular aspects of female Spartan behaviour which have excited hostile comment over the centuries thereafter have varied greatly according to the epoch and outlook of the individual contributors to the far from moribund 'Spartan tradition'.⁸

On the other side of the fence, however, from at least the late fifth century BC onwards there have been male 'Lakonizers', admirers of all things Spartan, who have found Spartan sexual mores and institutions worthy of both praise and imitation.⁹ Indeed, following the rise of modern feminism, the ideal of female emancipation has joined the ranks of 'the most diverse ideas ... formulated or recommended with Spartan aid'.¹⁰ Thus, what to the sixth-century BC Sicilian Greek poet Ibykos and his like-minded successors had seemed outrageous or at least unseemly in the behaviour of the Spartan 'fair' or 'gentle' sex has also been portrayed in recent times as a shining example of women's liberation in practice.¹¹ The main aim of this chapter will be to try to strike a balance between these extreme attitudes – so far, that is, as this is possible for a male ancient historian largely dependent in the end on exclusively male literary sources.¹²

My secondary aim is to provide, space permitting, a complete and accurate account of what we can (and cannot) know, or reasonably assert, about the social and economic position of adult Spartan women of citizen status in the sixth to fourth centuries BC – or, what comes to the same thing, about the position of those of them who entered the estate of matrimony.¹³ For although they have earned a regular place in the scholarly literature on Greek women as a whole and on Spartan history in general, justice is rarely done, it seems to me, either to the importance of the subject¹⁴ or to the complexity, variety and, not least, the fragility of the evidence.

One final preliminary point of method: in a stimulating Inaugural Lecture delivered before Oxford University the distinguished Americanist Carl Degler asked whether there was a 'history of women'.¹⁵ He was responding to a certain 'political and polemical' feminism that was then prominent, and by his question he meant to ask whether there was a history of women in the same sense that there is a history of, say, blacks in America or of any other 'minority' group.¹⁶ That is, can a purely sexual difference be regarded as in and of itself historically significant, or are women, for all important purposes, so inextricably tied to men that

'women's history' cannot be conceived of as a separate and autonomous subject of study? Degler's own answer went as follows (1974: 31):

Women are different from men, both in the roles they have been assigned or have assumed historically and in their biological make-up. History, in short, affects them differently from men, just as they affect history differently. Their past cannot be subsumed under the history of men. What we need to recognize is not that women and men are the same – as certain political and polemical goals might suggest – but that they are different. For it is that difference that justifies, indeed requires, a history of women.

The extant evidence for the women of ancient Sparta regrettably does not allow us to consider in much detail the factor of 'biological make-up' on which Degler rightly places great emphasis. However, although I think I agree in principle that there could be a history of women such as Degler delineates, I would argue that even women's biology may be conditioned if not determined by their society's existing gender-power relations (cf. Scott 1986) – anatomy is not always, quite, destiny; and so I am far more concerned than perhaps he would be to show that the real significance of the Spartan women under study here flows from their integral place within the structure and ideology of Spartan society as a whole.

II

I select as a map and compass the views on Spartan women expressed in the third quarter of the fourth century BC by Aristotle in the *Politics* (1269a29-1271b19), for three main reasons. First, Aristotle was unquestionably the greatest sociological thinker of Antiquity.¹⁷ Second, despite his attendance at Plato's Academy, he was singularly free from that 'Lakonomania' which infected certain upper-class circles in democratic Athens.¹⁸ Third, however, he fully shared the dominant Greek male conception of women as inferior in his society; and, as Theodore Besterman has remarked of Voltaire in a different connection, his language 'was the language of his time, and we must not expect even the greatest of men always to rise above their environment'.¹⁹

Following an examination of the ideal states proposed by Plato and two others, Aristotle turns in Book II to the three polities which had generally been accounted the best of those actually existing – Sparta, Crete (treated as a political unit for theoretical purposes) and Carthage. He prefaces his discussion of Sparta with the observation that all polities must be evaluated in accordance with two different kinds of criterion. According to the first, any positive law shall be adjudged good or bad in the light of the laws of the ideal state – Aristotle's own version of which is exposed later, in the seventh and eighth Books. According to the second, a law shall be adjudged good or bad according as it is, or is not, consonant with the idea or postulate (*hypothesis*) and character of the constitution (*politeia*) set

before the citizens (or, following a variant MS reading, himself) by the lawgiver.

As for the first type of criterion, Aristotle self-confessedly follows the Plato of the *Laws* (1.625c-638b; contrast *Rep.* 8.544c) in adjudging the *hypothesis* of the Spartan lawgiver reprehensible on the grounds that it is one-dimensional and deals with only a part of virtue, the military part (1271a41-71b10).²⁰ How well, then, does Sparta measure up when evaluated according to the second kind of criterion? Poorly, is Aristotle's categorical answer – a judgement he seeks to substantiate by discussing in turn the seven main areas in which he finds it especially faulty, viz the Helots, the women, the Ephorate, the Gerousia, the common meals, the system of naval command, and public finance. (His aspersions on the dual kingship seem to me to fall rather under the first type of criterion: see Chapter 5.) I shall restrict myself to the second item, the prominent placing of which cannot be accidental, and scrutinize Aristotle's seven specific criticisms of the Spartan women.

The first of these is addressed to *hê peri tas gunaikas anesis*, which could mean either 'the licence permitted to the women' or 'the licentiousness of the women' (the Greek is formally ambiguous). Such licence or indiscipline (*anesis*) is deemed deleterious both to the general intention of the constitution and to the happiness or well-being of the state. Since women constitute half the citizen population of any state (cf. *Rhet.* 1361a10-12), in *politeiai* where their condition is degenerate half the state must be considered unregulated by law – an exaggerated conclusion hardly entailed by the premisses, but one that, again, accords with the views of the Plato of the *Laws* (1.637c, 6.781a, 7.806c). In what, then, does this degeneracy consist? Whereas the state is hardy as far as the male citizens are concerned, the women abandon themselves utterly to every sort of intemperance and luxury.²¹ Once more, this is at the very least a sweeping generalization, perhaps to be read in light of Simone de Beauvoir's plausible claim that 'fear is always mixed with the blame attached to woman's licentious conduct'.²²

The consequence of the women's intemperate luxury affords Aristotle his second ground for criticism, namely that in Sparta wealth is (too) highly valued.²³ The damage this caused was aggravated by the third ground of complaint, the fact (as he sees it) that the Spartan men were ruled by their women. Aristotle takes this (unnatural) state of affairs to be typical of all military and warlike peoples, with the exception of the Celts and a few others who openly place a high value on male homosexual intercourse. Then, after some further general remarks, Aristotle comments vaguely that at the time of Sparta's domination – that is, before 370 BC and perhaps specifically from 404 to 371 – many things were managed by the women.²⁴

Another consequence of the women's intemperance (*akolasia*), and Aristotle's fourth ground for criticism, is that they exercised an extremely

harmful influence even over the daring of the state. For example, during the Theban-led invasion of Lakonia (370/69 BC) they were not merely useless, like women in other states,²⁵ but actually produced more confusion than the enemy – yet again, somewhat of an overstatement, although the women's poor showing is attested by the well-informed and usually pro-Spartan Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.28; cf. *Plut. Ages.* 31.5-6).

Aristotle now pauses to consider how the indiscipline of the women came to be. It was, he says, only to be expected. For during a series of wars against their Peloponnesian neighbours the men were away from home for long periods and were made ready for the lawgiver, Lykourgos, by their military mode of life. The women, by contrast, traditionally succeeded in resisting the attempt of Lykourgos to submit them to the laws.²⁶

It is the women themselves, therefore, according to Aristotle, who are responsible for their indiscipline, though he implies that the men and their lawgiver deserve the blame for it. Apparently recapitulating what he has just said, he then states that the degenerate condition of the women not only gives the constitution an air of indecorum but also engenders material avarice. Actually, that is by no means a straightforward résumé of his immediately preceding remarks. The charge of avarice may indeed be regarded as specifying the general statement that wealth is highly valued in Sparta. But the accusation of indecorum is entailed only if a crucial hidden premise is interpolated. This premise is the view expressed earlier in the *Politics* (1254b13-16; cf. *Poet.* 1454a20-2), that women as a sex are by nature inferior to men and marked out from birth for subordination to and rule by them.²⁷ Hence, the indecorum of the Spartan polity follows from the fact that the men are ruled by the women (*gunaikokratoumenoi*), since the latter have stolen the men's birthright. For in Aristotle's thoroughly conventional masculine opinion, as expressed in his *Rhetoric* (1361a6-8), female excellence was not properly political but consisted (merely) in bodily beauty and physique, sexual self-control and modesty, and liberal industriousness.

Mention of avarice leads Aristotle understandably to his fifth ground for criticism: the unevenness of the distribution of private landed property in Sparta. The women's contribution to this was that by the time Aristotle was composing the *Politics*, around the 330s,²⁸ almost two-fifths of the whole country (that is, Lakonia, since Messenia had been lost to Sparta in 369) was in their control. In fact, for three reasons, ownership of real property was concentrated in a few Spartan hands (cf. 1307a34-6): first, the laws did not prevent the gift or bequest of land; secondly, there were many heiresses (*epiklêroi*), who might be married off at the discretion of their father or his nearest male relative; finally, dowries were large.

This apparently dominant position of rich women in the Spartan land-tenure regime occasioned Aristotle's sixth criticism, which was directed against the critical shortage of male Spartan military manpower (*oliganthrôpia*). In a country capable in his view of supporting 1,500 cavalrymen

and 30,000 hoplites – he must now be thinking not only of Lakonia but also of adjacent Messenia, which the Spartans had controlled from c. 650 to 370 BC – the adult male citizen body sank to less than one thousand. As a result the state could not withstand a single blow, the defeat by the Thebans at Leuktra in 371. Sparta, to put it laconically, was destroyed through *oliganthrôpia*.

Aristotle next reports a tradition that in the days of 'the ancient kings' citizen numbers had been maintained by extending the citizenship to foreigners; allegedly, the citizen body had once numbered as many as 10,000. But the correct way to have ensured adequate manpower, in his view, would have been to keep landed property more evenly distributed. Instead – and this is Aristotle's seventh and final criticism of the women, although he does not spell out what their active role in this may have been – the Spartans had a law designed to stimulate the production of (male) children (*teknopoiia*). Under its provisions the father of three sons was exempted from military service, the father of four²⁹ from all state burdens. However, given the unequal distribution of landed property and – what Aristotle tacitly assumes – the normal Greek system of equal patrimonial inheritance by sons, many sons inevitably fell into poverty. That is, they became too poor to fulfil the condition of full Spartan citizenship which Aristotle faults a little later on (1271a26-37), the contribution of a minimum quantity of natural produce to a common mess.

III

Just how accurate or apposite these criticisms are, and to what period (if any) in the development of Spartan society they are peculiarly applicable – these are perhaps the two most important questions under consideration here. First, however, it must in fairness be pointed out that Aristotle's seemingly devastating critique would not have, or did not in fact, cut much ice with two authors on whose work, *faute de mieux*, we are bound to lean heavily.

Aristotle need not have read Xenophon's selective and mistitled essay on the Spartan constitution, the *Lakedaimoniôn Politeia*.³⁰ But Xenophon, if hardly objective, was at least a 'participant observer' of Spartan society in the first half of the fourth century, and his essay very likely offers a representative sample of the kind of pro-Spartan arguments Aristotle may have been seeking to rebut. The indefatigable Plutarch, on the other hand, who was writing in about AD 100, follows Xenophon's general 'line' on Sparta, at least as he conceived Sparta to have been down to c. 400 BC. He had certainly read not only the *Politics* but also the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Spartans*;³¹ and in his biography – or rather hagiography – of Lykourgos he felt constrained to reply explicitly to what he regarded as Aristotle's unfair or misplaced criticisms.³² Clearly, the moralizing apologists Xenophon and Plutarch are far from unimpeachable witnesses to the

truth about Spartan women, but, as will be seen, their testimony can at least be used to modify and supplement that of the (in some respects) more scientific and objective Aristotle.

IV

I propose now to discuss the many controversial issues in developmental terms, that is, by tracing the lives of Spartan women in the sixth to fourth centuries BC from the womb to (in some cases) the tomb. I use the vague term 'Spartan women' advisedly. The available evidence does not permit inferences of a statistical nature about the experience of a 'typical' Spartan woman, although in some contexts it will be necessary and possible to distinguish that of rich women. Besides, the literary sources who provide the fullest pictures are, as I hope has already been made clear, highly, and consciously, selective, and they are all non-Spartan and male. Their selectivity and bias may, however, be offset to some extent by tapping sources of evidence, in particular inscriptions and material objects, which they themselves did not see fit, or had not devised the techniques, to utilize.

The evidence for the weaning and rearing of Spartan girls is scanty and not worth discussing in detail.³³ But an objection must at least be lodged against a modern inference drawn from an anecdote in Plutarch's *Lykourgos* (3.1-6), that all girl-babies in Sparta were normally reared.³⁴ This would have been extraordinary, I think, in terms of general Greek practice at all periods,³⁵ quite apart from the evidence suggesting that in Sparta the exposing of neonates was fairly frequent and that women were, if anything, in relatively short supply.³⁶ But we are not in any case bound to attribute a universal validity to the passage in question nor indeed to accept the construction placed upon it by (e.g.) Lacey and Pomeroy.³⁷

It is necessary, however, to dwell rather longer on two cardinal aspects of the childhood and adolescence of Spartan women. First, whereas the Spartan boy left the parental household for good at the age of seven to embark upon the gruelling system of state education known as the *agôgê*, the Spartan girl – like her counterparts in other Greek states (cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 520) – resided with her parent(s) until marriage. More specifically, she continued to reside with her mother, for the matricentric character of a Spartan girl's domestic life was heavily accentuated by the fact that her father was expected to spend most of his time living communally and in public with his male peers – indeed, all of his time, should he have become a father before the age of thirty (below, Section VII). This may help to explain the alleged incidence of female homosexuality involving an older woman and an adolescent girl reported by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 18.9).³⁸

Second, however, unlike girls in all other Greek states, Spartan girls were also given some form of public education. Whether or not we accept the attractive suggestion of Nilsson³⁹ that they underwent a course of training parallel to the boys' *agôgê*, Spartan girls undoubtedly were edu-

cated in a sense other than trained to perform sedentary, and in ancient Greece exclusively feminine, tasks like weaving (Xen. *LP* 1.3-4; Plato, *Laws* 7.806a) and baking (Herakl. *Lembos* 373.13).⁴⁰ The running races mentioned in Xenophon (*LP* 1.4) and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 14.3; *Mor.* 227d) and paralleled in other sources (Theokr. 18.22; Paus. 3.13.7; Hesych. s.v. 'en *Driónas*') very likely had a ritual significance,⁴¹ as certainly did the choral dancing in which Spartan maidens participated both in Sparta and at sanctuaries elsewhere in Lakonia and Messenia.⁴² But the throwing of the discus and javelin, and the trials of strength or wrestling also attested by Xenophon and Plutarch, presumably had a mainly secular character. It is, though, a little hard to credit the evidence of Euripides in his *Andromache* (597-600) that the girls wrestled naked with the boys.⁴³ This looks too much like a deliberate travesty in line with the view of Euripides – or strictly of Peleus, father of Achilles – (595-6) that it was impossible for a Spartan maiden to be sexually modest (*sôphrôn*).⁴⁴

Such an accusation does, on the other hand, appear to have some basis in Spartan actuality. For both total nudity in public (at religious processions: Plut. *Lyk.* 14.4-7) and the wearing of a revealingly slit mini-chiton (Pollux 7.54-5)⁴⁵ – hence the opprobrious epithet 'thigh-showers' first known from Ibykos (fr. 58 Page)⁴⁶ – are strikingly confirmed by a series of Spartan bronzes, mostly of the sixth century.⁴⁷ These figurines and mirror-handles portray girls or young women with underdeveloped or de-emphasized secondary sex characteristics. It is not, I think, fanciful to associate this feature with the strongly homosexual orientation of the average Spartan male.⁴⁸ But what is most significant is that in Greek art generally the nude female figure is not at all frequent before the fifth century and is then normally reserved for women of low social status. The shock felt by non-Spartan, and especially perhaps Athenian, males at such uninhibited – indeed, indecent because almost masculine – exposure may be comprehended the more readily if, as I believe possible, Spartan girls appeared publicly before males in the nude (or at least scantily clad) even after reaching puberty.⁴⁹

According to Xenophon and Plutarch, the Spartan girl's education was confined to physical exertions and designed to serve exclusively eugenic ends, that is, to produce strong mothers of healthy infants and to alleviate the pangs of childbirth (in which, we infer, maternal mortality was not infrequent).⁵⁰ No doubt, eugenic considerations were important, particularly perhaps after c. 500 when, as we shall see, official steps were taken to further citizen procreativity. But there is also evidence to suggest that the things of the mind were not entirely neglected.

According to Plato in the *Protagoras* (342d), there were Spartan women who prided themselves on their learning and culture (*paideusis*). He refers specifically to their attainment in speech (*logoi*) – notoriously, Spartan women did have something to say and were reputedly not afraid to say it publicly⁵¹ – and singles out their contribution to quintessentially Spartan

brachylogy. But he also mentions their *philosophia* in this passage and, in the *Laws* (7. 806a; cf. *Rep.* 5. 452a), their participation in high culture (*mousikê*). Not much weight can be placed on the testimony of Plato, the philo-Lakonian or at least unorthodox Greek educationalist, and at any rate in the *Protagoras* passage irony is to be suspected.⁵² But Aristophanes seems to refer in the *Lysistrata* (1237; cf. *Vesp.* 1245-7) to a Spartan poetess called Kleitagora;⁵³ and the late antique writer Iamblichos (*Vita Pyth.* 267) names several female Spartan Pythagoreans. Finally, the epigraphical evidence, though formally ambiguous, at least does not contradict the view that at any rate some Spartan women were basically literate.⁵⁴ Basic literacy, after all, was the most that the ordinary Spartan man was expected to acquire, inside or outside the *agôgê*.⁵⁵

The real significance of this education, in both its physical and its intellectual aspects, is that it reflects an official attempt to maintain some form or degree of parity between the sexes. The chief political function of this apparent equality of treatment, however, was not one that a modern feminist would necessarily approve, but rather to socialize the non-military half of the population in the values of a peculiarly masculine warrior culture.⁵⁶ At all events, it was certainly not designed to promote companionship or partnership in marriage; as we have seen, Aristotle attributed what he took to be the indiscipline of the women, not to the equality of their education, but to the (surely genuine) separateness of Spartan married life. On balance, therefore, I incline to think that the introduction or general enforcement of the male *agôgê*, in the course of the seventh and sixth centuries, diminished the status of women in Sparta.⁵⁷ Thereafter, much as elsewhere in Greece though in a peculiarly singleminded way, the primary emphasis in the upbringing of girls was on preparing them for their future subordinate roles as wives and mothers of warriors.

V

The ostensible purpose of the physical side of a Spartan girl's education may, then, have been to cultivate eugenic strength. It might also be argued, however, that a by-product of her vigorous open-air existence in the demanding Spartan climate was the far-famed beauty of Spartan women.⁵⁸ *Lysistrata*, the eponymous Athenian heroine of Aristophanes' play (*Lys.* 79-83), marvels with considerable comic hyperbole at Lampito's muscular virility; but she praises also the Spartan woman's skin and her wondrously developed breasts.⁵⁹ The other facets of Spartan feminine beauty singled out, for example, by the Spartan poet Alkman in his maiden-songs of c. 600 BC⁶⁰ are less recondite, indeed conventionally aristocratic: above-average height, slim, well-turned ankles, and long, flowing, fair hair.⁶¹ But even the latter has a special point in the Spartan context (below, Section VII). In fact, feminine beauty *per se* may have had

an important function to perform in my next pair of topics, the timing and purposes of marriage.

We are quite well informed about the precise though diverse ideas held by the Greeks on the proper age for a girl to get married.⁶² This diversity is of course only to be expected. Marriage was the most crucial *rite de passage* in any Greek girl's life,⁶³ and different states and thinkers enjoined or advocated different norms in accordance with their evaluation of the status and functions of women. As far as Sparta is concerned, however, our information is disappointingly imprecise.

Lykourgos, according to Plutarch (*Mor.* 228a) set limits to the age of marriage. The existence of an upper age-limit is apparently confirmed by references to a Spartan law against late marriage (Plut. *Lys.* 30.7; Pollux 3.48, 8.40); and Plutarch (*Kleom.* 1) provides evidence for a minimum age too. But these regulations, like the law enforcing marriage itself (below), almost certainly applied only to the men.⁶⁴ No source gives an absolute figure for the age when a Spartan girl in Herodotus's phrase 'reached the season of marriage' (6.61.5), and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15.4) merely says she would not marry before her body had reached its acme. Did her diet, which was allegedly superior, presumably in quantity, to that of other Greek girls (Xen. *LP* 1.3-4; cf. Plato *Rep.* 5.451e), ensure that she attained puberty earlier than the age of thirteen or fourteen, which seems to have been the norm in Greece generally?⁶⁵ Or, alternatively, did her vigorously athletic childhood delay the onset of menstruation?⁶⁶

To give Plutarch his due, he does at least make it clear that Spartan girls married relatively late; and, besides adducing the inevitable eugenic motive also proposed irrelevantly for the men by Xenophon (*LP* 1.6; cf. *Mem.* 4.4.23), he reasonably claims that older brides made for happier marriages. If we tentatively adopt Nilsson's hypothesis of a female educational curriculum running in tandem with the male *agôgê*, then the lower age-limit for a girl's marriage might be set at eighteen.⁶⁷ If we also take account of what may have been the normal Spartan male practice of getting married at about twenty-five⁶⁸ and the general Greek view that the husband should be older than his wife, the upper limit for a bride should float around the twenty mark. Indeed, if we were to press the suggested parallel between male and female education, we might argue that girls normally married at the age when their brothers became fully adult warriors, probably at twenty.

One fact, however, is not in doubt. At least after c. 500 BC all Spartan men were obliged by law to marry (Plut. *Lys.* 30.7; cf. *Lyk.* 15.1; Stob. *Flor.* 67.16 Meineke; Pollux 3.48, 8.40),⁶⁹ and the sanctions of the law were reinforced by an elaborate ritual and customary apparatus (Xen. *LP* 9.4-5; Klearchos fr. 73 Wehrli; Plut. *Lyk.* 15.2-3; *Mor.* 227ef). On the one hand, there was nothing peculiarly Spartan about this. The 'making of children' (*teknopoia*) in marriage could be accounted a form of state liturgy or public service elsewhere in ancient Greece too.⁷⁰ Thus there need not be anything

out of the ordinary in, for instance, the Spartan marble statue of c. 600 or the terracottas of the sixth century which celebrate fertility and childbirth in a ritual context.⁷¹ On the other hand, the *de facto* (and perhaps also *de iure*) exemption by c. 500 of women who died in childbirth from the Spartan prohibition on named tombstones;⁷² the celebrity of the Spartan mother; and the eye-catching insistence of Kritias (88 F 32 D-K) in the late fifth century, followed by Xenophon (*LP* 1.3) in the fourth, on the primacy of *teknopoia* in Sparta – all these do seem to betoken an exceptional Spartan preoccupation with human reproduction, an impression that is amply corroborated by Spartan marital practices (below, Section VIII).

It could be argued that this preoccupation was an inevitable function of the special position the Spartans had placed themselves in since the mid-seventh century *vis-à-vis* their subordinate but vastly more numerous serf population, the Helots. We might then compare the practice in the Mani peninsula of southern Lakonia in more recent times of referring to male infants as 'guns'.⁷³ But the emphasis of Kritias and Xenophon at least could also be a reflection of the extraordinary and critical decline in the male citizen population during the fifth and early fourth centuries (the *oliganthrôpia* criticized by Aristotle, above, Section II). In other words, what deserves particular attention, and requires careful handling, is the question how far, for whom, and at what periods, other reasons for entering upon a marriage besides *teknopoia* were operationally or affectively significant.

The sources do not allow us to discuss personal sentiment with confidence, although Bickerman has rightly noted that our evidence concerning (hetero)sexual affection in Greece begins with the (probably seventh-century) *Hymn to Aphrodite*.⁷⁴ But they do suggest that other motives than *teknopoia* may sometimes have been paramount. There is, first of all, the feminine beauty discussed above, the role of which is most colourfully conspicuous in the Herodotean story (6.61-3) of the deceitful third marriage of King Ariston (reigned c. 550-515) to which we shall return. The difficulty of interpretation here is that, apart from a dubious Plutarchan apophthegm (*Mor.* 232c), the evidence concerns only kings or the *roi manqué* Lysander (Hermippos fr. 87 Wehrli). What we cannot judge is whether feminine beauty was as it were the icing on the matrimonial cake or one of its essential ingredients – unless of course 'beauty' may also be interpreted figuratively as equivalent to ripeness for marriage, as some of Alkman's poems suggest.⁷⁵

We do, however, know of two other ingredients which in some cases at least certainly were essential. The first of these is specific to the inner core of Spartan families distinguished from the rest by birth. This core embraced above all the two royal houses, the Agiadae and Eurypontidae. But it also included the wider category of 'the descendants of Herakles', from which alone the royals were permitted to select their consorts (Plut. *Agis* 11.2); and I suspect that it extended to other 'privileged families' too.⁷⁶

What these upper-class Spartans had in common was the desire to contract marriages amongst themselves from considerations of high politics (e.g., Hdt. 5.39-41; Plut. *Kleom.* 1). Parallels from the Homeric epics or the real world of Archaic Greek dynasts are not inapposite.⁷⁷

The second ingredient, on the other hand, was not necessarily thus restricted in its operation, although its connection with the first was intimate. For wealth, as the saying goes, marries wealth. In ancient Greece generally, political power and privilege connoted the possession of considerable inherited landed property. This was not absolutely necessarily the case in Sparta, where manly virtue (*andragathia*) displayed in the *agôgê*, on the training-ground and on the battlefield, and good connections, provided they were backed by the minimum of wealth needed to ensure citizen rights, could take a man like Lysander to the top.⁷⁸ Lysander, however, was very much the exception that proved the validity in Sparta of the general Greek rule about political power and privilege.⁷⁹ That rich Spartans behaved like rich Greeks generally in the matrimonial field, indeed aggressively so, is strongly suggested by the existence of a probably unenforceable Spartan law against 'bad' marriage (Pollux 3.48, 8.40), which Plutarch tells us (*Lys.* 30.7) was principally designed to deter them from contracting marriages for reasons of economic gain.

By the time of Aristotle, and I suspect for at least a century before that, this law was a dead letter; and, as we saw, a crucial part of Aristotle's critique of Spartan women was also a critique of the Spartan property-regime as a whole. Since the latter is a problem of massive proportions, it is impossible to broach it usefully here beyond stating dogmatically my belief that all the land of which Spartan citizens had the usufruct was possessed in the form of private and legally alienable property from at least the mid-seventh century.⁸⁰ It is, however, necessary to attempt to assess the active role of the Spartan women in a property system the defectiveness of which was in Aristotle's view ultimately responsible for the downfall of Sparta as a great power.

VI

By Aristotle's day the distribution of land in Lakonia was massively unequal. In itself this was not very remarkable: the situation could be paralleled in many other Greek states. What was remarkable, however, or so it struck Aristotle, was that almost two-fifths of the whole country – by which can only be meant the land in Lakonia owned by Spartan citizens – was in the hands of women. We do not know how Aristotle came by this figure, but undoubtedly to his (sexist) eyes it was in itself a reprehensible fact. Certainly, too, it presupposed a stark contrast between the property laws of Sparta and those of Athens, in which he spent a considerable amount of his adult life as a resident alien (and so, incidentally, as one

technically debarred from owning real property). It becomes less extraordinary, however, in a broader, comparative perspective.

As Ste. Croix has emphasized,⁸¹ Athenian women of post-Classical times eventually became considerably better off in respect of property ownership than their oppressed forebears of the fifth and fourth centuries had been (below). But if a more direct comparison and contrast be sought, then we may point to the fact that in Aristotle's own day there were maternal inheritances (*matrôia*) as well as patrimonies (*patrôia*) in, for example, Arkadian (and so non-Dorian) Tegea⁸² and, most relevantly, Dorian Gortyn on Crete. Cretan parallels have been too often used as a substitute for the evidence we lack for Sparta. But a case can be made for, if not a direct relationship, at least a parallelism of development between some aspects of the Cretan and Spartan social systems.⁸³ And in the case of women's property rights, the comparative material from Gortyn does seem peculiarly informative, even though it relates to conditions officially in force c. 450 BC, a century or more before Aristotle was composing the *Politics*.⁸⁴

Aristotle noted, in the passage considered in Section II, that there were many *epiklêroi* in Sparta and that *proikes* (dowries) were large. I believe he was seriously mistaken or at least misleading on both counts. In the first place, he was almost certainly technically incorrect to use the Athenian term *epiklêros* to describe the Spartan heiress.⁸⁵ His error, however, may be more than merely one of vocabulary. For in Classical Athens women could not hold and dispose of more than a trifling amount of property in their own right, and the brotherless heiress, who as an *epi-klêros* literally 'went with the estate', was bound to marry her nearest male relative in order to keep the estate within the descent-group of her father. Herodotus (6.57.4), by contrast, calls the Spartan heiress *patroukhos* (literally 'holder of the patrimony'), and this apparently corresponds to the Gortynian term *patrôîokhos*. Now in Gortyn, unlike Athens, women could own property in their own right (*Lex Gort.* 2.46-7, 49-50, 3.25, 32-3, 36, 42-3, 4.26., 5.1-9, 17-22, 7.52-8.30, 9.8-9), and daughters automatically inherited a (smaller) portion of the family estate alongside their brothers (4.46-5.9). So it seems that here Herodotus is the witness to the – verbal and substantial – truth and that in Sparta *patroukhos* meant something like what we understand in our society by 'heiress'.

As to dowries, the evidence from Gortyn suggests that Aristotle is guilty of a similar terminological and semantic confusion. For there is no trace of the dowry at Gortyn, and there is a compelling consensus among our sources, other than Aristotle and a rogue passage in the Plutarchan *Moralia* (775c-e), that there was no dowry at Sparta either.⁸⁶ One of these sources, the third-century BC grammarian Hermippos, paints a fantastic picture of Spartan men and girls of marriageable age being shut up together in a dark room for the men to take pot luck and grab a wife. This flatly contradicts our more sober evidence for the manner in which a

Spartan maiden was taken for a wife (below, Section VII). But the kernel of fact could be Hermippos' unequivocal statement that the captive girl was led away by her prospective husband without a dowry (*aprobikos*).

In other words, what Aristotle calls 'large dowries' were really, I suggest, a form of anticipatory inheritance, that is, marriage-settlements consisting of landed property together with any movables that a – rich – father (or mother) saw fit to bestow on a daughter. If a daughter had no father, or brother of the same father, then she would inherit in her own right as *patroukhos* and as such was a particularly desirable catch. It is thus not difficult to see how, given a decreasing number of legitimate male heirs of full citizen status, landed property could have become concentrated in the hands of women.

Daughter-inheritance, incidentally, would also give particular point to the information conveyed only by Philo, the Jewish scholar of the first century AD (*De leg. spec.* 3.4.22), that in Sparta uterine siblings (*homomatritoi*) were permitted to marry each other.⁸⁷ We know of no actual examples of such a marriage, but we know of no specific Spartan incest-taboo against them either;⁸⁸ and there is evidence that the Spartans, like so many other peoples before the nineteenth century, attributed the active role in reproduction solely to the 'childmaking seed' (Hdt. 6.68.3, with 61.2) of the father.⁸⁹ If we were tentatively to accept the accuracy of Philo's evidence, we would have another, though small, contributory cause of the concentration of Spartan landed property in a few hands.

According to Herodotus (6.57.4), however, the Spartan kings in his day, the mid-fifth century, had jurisdiction over the allocation of *patroukhoi*, in cases where the father had not made express provision for their marriage before his death. A second royal prerogative he mentions was that of witnessing adoptions – which, in view of the alleged Spartan hostility to what we call 'the family', it is not irrelevant to note are 'characteristic of a ... society which thinks in terms of inheritance through the family'.⁹⁰ Yet by the second half of the fourth century both of these prerogatives had been forfeited to the discretion of private individuals, and Aristotle was either unaware of their former existence or perfectly aware that they had not served, even if they had been designed, to even out the distribution of private landed property and maintain male citizen numbers.

Indeed, the kings themselves, despite their monthly oath to obey the laws (Xen. *LP* 15.7), did not a little to further the process of property-concentration. (Here we recall those motives for marriage other than *teknopoiia* considered above in Section V.) Anaxandridas II (reigned c. 560-520), Leonidas I (c. 491-480) and Archidamos II (c. 469-427) all married close consanguineous kin (Hdt. 5.39; 7.239; 6.71); while Kleomenes III (236-222) was married off to Agiatis, the widow of Agis IV (c. 244-241), precisely because she was a *patroukhos* (Plut. *Kleom.* 1; Plutarch, however, naturally calls Agiatis an *epiklêros*). What endows these royal marriages with special significance is that in the mid-third century the mother and

grandmother of Agis were accounted the richest of all Spartans. In fact, by the time of Agis' accession the proportion of land owned by women in Sparta had reportedly increased from almost two-fifths to an absolute majority (Plut. *Agis* 7.4; cf. McQueen 1990; Mossé 1991).

However, it is of course a separate question whether the ownership of property by rich Spartan women automatically entailed property-power exercised in the political sphere, or (if they are distinct) the 'gynecocracy' criticized by Aristotle. If we are to make a judgement on this and so on the responsibility of the women themselves for the concentration of property in their hands, we must now turn from the theory to the practice of Spartan marriage.⁹¹

VII

Herodotus, we suggested, was probably precise in his use of the term *patroukhos*. But was he also technically correct to employ in the Spartan context the normal Athenian word for 'betroth' (*engudê*), and were all Spartan daughters (whether *patroukhoi* or not) 'betrothed' by their father or his male heir acting in the capacity of legal guardian (*kyrios*), as Aristotle apparently believed?⁹² In other words, did a Spartan daughter have no more say in the choice of her husband or the terms of the marriage-contract than an Athenian girl, or did she have the room for manoeuvre (to put it no higher) enjoyed by her counterpart at Gortyn, where the *kyrieia* (legal guardianship of a female by her nearest male relative, usually her father in the first instance and then her husband) did not exist? The evidence is slight and not clearcut.⁹³ However, one passage – Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 9.5, which seems to say that no Spartan would ask a Spartan legally adjudged to be a coward (literally 'trembler', *tresas*) for the hand of any unmarried female in his household – tilts the balance in favour of the existence of the *kyrieia*.⁹⁴ If that is so, then we cannot automatically infer that ownership of property conferred on Spartan women personal independence, let alone political power.

Another well-known Herodotean story (6.65.2) provides less equivocal evidence for the next stage of the nuptial process. Damaratos (reigned c. 515-491) is said to have frustrated the marriage plans of his relative (second cousin?) and royal successor, Latychidas II (c. 491-469), by (literally) anticipating him in seizing the girl to whom Latychidas was 'engaged' and 'having' her as a wife.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is at this juncture that the already powerful temptation to introduce comparative anthropological evidence from 'primitive' or 'non-state' societies is often found irresistible.⁹⁶ It is therefore necessary to state briefly why comparison of this kind involves additional dangers here, over and above those attendant on the use of any form of comparative material.

In the case even of Archaic Greece, we are dealing with societies sensibly more complex, not least politically, than most of those studied by

social anthropologists. Thus it is simply begging the question to label each seemingly 'primitive' feature of the historical Greek world a 'survival' from an earlier stage of culture. The correct principle, it seems to me, was well expressed long ago by Starcke:⁹⁷ 'If we are able to trace the cause of a custom in existing circumstances, we must abide by that cause, and nothing but a definite historical account of the prior existence of the custom can induce us to seek for another explanation.'⁹⁸

As to 'marriage by capture' in Sparta, we lack the evidence to construct a 'definite historical account' of its prior existence. All we can say for certain is that a capture like the one effected by Damaratos is not incompatible either with a previous 'engagement' or with the non-existence of the dowry and that, at least in Plutarch's version (*Lyk.* 15.4-5), the capture had a purely symbolic significance.⁹⁹ None the less, the symbolism is in itself not insignificant – quite apart from its being peculiarly appropriate to a military society.¹⁰⁰ For, if the sources can be believed, the girl who was 'seized' played decidedly the passive role. Furthermore, although marriage at Sparta began, as at Athens, when the bride entered the house of the groom (or his parents), a Spartan marriage seems to have been conceived, not as the bilateral 'living together' or 'founding a household together' (*sunoikein*) of Athens, but rather as a one-sided 'having' of the wife by the husband (*Hdt.* 5.39.2; 6.57.4, 65.2; *Xen. LP* 1.8; *Plut. Kleom.* 29.3).

The wedding-night involved a strikingly bleak ritual.¹⁰¹ First, the bride's hair was cropped by a (presumably married) female bridal attendant (*Plut. Lyk.* 15.5). This haircut or shave was, I am sure, intended to signal the bride's irrevocable transition from the status of virgin (*parthenos*) or girl (*korê*) to that of woman and wife (*gunê*), since she was not again permitted to wear her hair long.¹⁰² Thus the capillary experience of the new bride offers a perfectly symmetrical antithesis to that of the newly adult male warrior, who on achieving manhood was required to grow his hair long (in so far as that was within his control).¹⁰³

To reinforce the inverted quality of the ritual, the bride was then dressed up in a man's cloak and sandals and laid on a pallet in an unlit room to await the nocturnal attentions of her 'captor' (*Plut. Lyk.* 15.5-7). This masculine get-up, which is somewhat paralleled by the donning of a false beard by brides at Argos (*Plut. Mor.* 245f), has been explained as apotropaic cross-dressing.¹⁰⁴ But it is also worth pondering the suggestion that the bride's appearance was designed to ease the transition for the groom from his all-male and actively homosexual *agôgê* and common mess to full heterosexual intercourse.¹⁰⁵ Let us, however, consider also the feelings of the bride. Even if we should prefer not to believe that Spartan maidens enjoyed tutelary homosexual relations with older women (*Plut. Lyk.* 18.9), the bride had undoubtedly been reared and raised in an almost exclusively female domestic environment. The shock of sexual violation by an older and probably already battle-scarred man cannot have been

greatly diminished by the chill and unfamiliar scenario into which she had been forcibly thrust.

If the husband was under thirty when he 'took' a wife – as he perhaps usually would be (above and n. 68) – he was not allowed to cohabit with her, and his infrequent home visits were supposed to be conducted under cover of darkness, in conspiratorial secrecy from his messmates and even from the rest of his own household.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, if we can trust Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15.9), several children might issue from this clandestine 'affair' before a man had seen his wife in daylight. I do not myself believe that an attempt was made, as has been argued, to keep the marriage itself secret; at any rate, aristocratic brides seem to have been hymned on the morning after their wedding-night,¹⁰⁷ and Pausanias (3.13.9) records that mothers made sacrificial offerings to a venerable wooden cult-image of Aphrodite-Hera on the occasion of a daughter's marriage. But it is possible that the Spartans customarily practised a kind of 'trial marriage', which was not necessarily counted as official and binding until the wife had conceived or possibly even safely given birth.¹⁰⁸ We should note, though, that King Anaxandridas II at least did not repudiate a barren wife (*Hdt.* 5.39-40). However, for him and his elite peers *teknopoia* could have been subordinated to other considerations. It could not have been so as a rule, and this has to be kept in the forefront of the mind as we turn to what appeared to some non-Spartan contemporaries to be extraordinary, and even immoral, marital practices.

VIII

It is noteworthy that Aristotle reserved his criticisms of Spartan females for those who had crossed the threshold of matrimony. But at least he austere restricted himself to disparaging their luxury-loving avarice, the power they wielded over their menfolk, and their disproportionate ownership of real property – and this despite his declared abhorrence of adultery (*Nic. Eth.* 1107a10ff., *Pol.* 1335b38-36a2). Rather less self-denying were his inferior successors, who indulged in wild flights of journalistic fantasy. For example, the late lexicographers defined 'the Spartan way' alternatively as buggery and pederasty or as the practice whereby the women, who were not closely guarded (cf. *Cic. de rep.* 4.6.6; *Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom.* 2.24.6), offered themselves sexually to guests or strangers (*xenoi*; cf. perhaps *Nik. Dam. FGrHist.* 90 F 103z.6).¹⁰⁹

The factual basis of these allegations appears to have been the various forms of what might be described as plural marriage and polykoity that are attested by Herodotus, Xenophon, Polybius and Plutarch, and are paralleled somewhat in both the ancient and the modern worlds.¹¹⁰ Herodotus was firmly convinced that the bigamy of Anaxandridas II was 'totally un-Spartan' (5.40.2; cf. *Paus.* 3.3.7), and that may indeed be so.¹¹¹ However, according to Polybius (12.6b.8), writing in the later second century BC, it

was an 'ancestral custom' and a 'current practice' for three or four men (or more if brothers) to share one wife and for their children to be counted as belonging equally to all. Polybius then makes the apparently separate point that, when a man had produced enough children, it was both honourable and customary for him to pass his wife on to a friend.¹¹²

Now, the best friend of King Ariston was at first blissfully unaware of this second custom (Hdt. 6.62), and the alleged custom of adelphic polyandry may have been but a temporary expedient in a crisis.¹¹³ But Polybius' evidence still seems to me valuable for two reasons: first, it makes explicit the notion of female passivity that we saw embedded in the marriage transactions; second, it serves as a reminder that 'the institutions commonly described as marriage do not all have the same legal and social concomitants'.¹¹⁴ To put that another way, monogamy within what we call the 'nuclear family' is only one among many possible pairing relationships contrived for the procreation of legitimate offspring and so for the transmission of hereditary private property.¹¹⁵

This potential variety emerges clearly from a passage in Xenophon (*LP* 1.7-9), which is expanded, though with revealing divergences, by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15.11-18). It might happen, says Xenophon, that an old man had a young wife.¹¹⁶ Lykourgos, therefore, in order to abolish jealousy – glossed as 'womanish' jealousy by Plutarch – made it legal for such an elderly husband to introduce into his house a younger man whose physique and character he admired, for the latter to beget children by his wife (in a kind of anticipation of our A.I.D. system). Xenophon does not say for whom the children are to be begotten, but one assumes (with Plutarch) that it is for the older man, since Xenophon then cites the reverse situation of a man who does not wish to marry and yet does wish to discharge his procreative duty to the state. Such a man – more likely a widower than a confirmed bachelor – was permitted by Lykourgos to select a fertile and distinguished woman, by whom, if he could persuade her husband (literally 'him who had her'), he might have children.¹¹⁷

Xenophon's explanation of the latter arrangement is that the wives wish to possess or run (*katechein*) two households, while the husbands wish to obtain for their existing sons brothers who will have no claim on the paternal inheritance.¹¹⁸ It is also, however, worth noting a modern suggestion, that these practices are based on the idea attested elsewhere that the 'noble seed' (Plut. *Lyk.* 15.12) of the warriors should be distributed as widely as possible throughout the community.¹¹⁹ This suggestion is at any rate not contradicted by Xenophon's tantalising claim to know of many similar – but undescribed – pairing arrangements in Sparta. All these would of course have been in keeping with the seemingly concerted effort to depreciate family life in Sparta. But, to repeat, depreciation of family life was far from tantamount to depreciation of the family *tout court*.¹²⁰ And the overriding consideration behind these arrangements was reproduc-

tion, in particular of legitimate male children, in line with the legal compulsion placed on male citizens to marry (above, Section V).

It is perhaps significant that Xenophon makes no reference to adultery in Sparta.¹²¹ By contrast, Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15.16; *Mor.* 228bc) felt bound explicitly to deny its occurrence. As far as sexual relationships between citizens are concerned, Plutarch seems to have been technically correct, and this is a remarkable comment on the emphasis laid on the extramarital maintenance of the male citizen population at Sparta. None the less, it is certain that adultery in the sense of sexual intercourse between a citizen and a non-citizen who were not married to each other did occur.

The alleged paternity of the evanescent hero Astrabakos (Hdt. 6.63-9) and that of the distinctly corporeal and mortal Alkibiades,¹²² in each case involving the wife of a king, do not particularly concern us here. The complex and confused evidence for the so-called Partheniai illuminates Greek attitudes to the proper relationship between the sexes, and between the free and the unfree,¹²³ but this mysterious group is attested only in connection with the foundation of Taras (modern Taranto) in c. 706. There is, on the other hand, good evidence for other specially named categories of men in Sparta which undoubtedly is relevant to the position of Spartan wives in our period. Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.3.9) refers in a context of 380 BC to bastards (*nothoi*). Later sources (Phylarchos *FGrHist.* 81 F 43; Plutarch, *Kleom.* 8.1; Aelian, *VH* 12.43) mention the category *mothakes*, to which lexicographers and scholiasts add that of the possibly identical *mothônes*.

These disparate sources have been collected and well discussed, and the identification of at least some members of these categories as the offspring of Spartan fathers and Helot mothers seems virtually certain.¹²⁴ Such liaisons are at any rate a more cogent explanation for the lack of evidence for female prostitutes in Sparta (at least before the third century)¹²⁵ than alleged 'free love' among the Spartans. We cannot, however, say how frequent such liaisons may have been nor what psychological effect they may have had on Spartan wives – a salutary reminder of the inadequacy of the ancient evidence.

IX

It will be noticed, finally, that very little has been said directly on the subject of gynocracy (and nothing about 'matriarchal survivals'). My silence is the measure of my disagreement with Aristotle (and Bachofen)¹²⁶ – tempting though it would have been to cite as a perfect illustration of Aristotle's view the huge, probably Spartan-made bronze mixing-bowl and lid of the sixth century found at Vix in France.¹²⁷ To a quintessential sexist like him, however, anything remotely approaching sexual equality, let alone female emancipation, both of which he thought he detected in Sparta, must indeed have seemed like the world turned upside down.

Moreover, his criticisms really apply only to rich Spartan women, who were of course a minority of the women under study here.

But if for once it is easy to set aside the opinions of Aristotle, it is far harder to 'hold the balance with a steady and equal hand' (an expression of Edward Gibbon) in the longstanding controversy over the general social position of Spartan wives in the sixth to fourth centuries BC – not least, as has been shown, because of the nature of the ancient evidence. To be consciously anachronistic, a modern feminist might perhaps approve their equal though separate education, which may have included an intellectual element; their frankness of utterance; their liberating attire; their freedom from sedentary and stultifying domestic chores; their control and management of their household(s); their public valuation; and above all their property rights. On the other side, however, the modern feminist is unlikely to be over-impressed by the way in which they were 'seized' and 'had' as wives in the domicile of their husbands, who could 'lend' them for extra-marital procreation and probably had at least a say in the management and disposition of their property; finally, and perhaps least of all, by the overriding emphasis placed upon the women's child-bearing potential and maternal roles by the men who monopolized the political direction of a peculiarly masculine society.

For what it is worth, my own view coincides roughly, and for rather different reasons, with that of Simone de Beauvoir: 'such examples as Sparta and the Nazi regime prove that [woman] can be none the less oppressed by the males, for all her direct attachment to the State'.¹²⁸ At all events, I hope that I may at least have made readers hesitate before seeking to enlist the women of ancient Sparta as allies in the just cause of feminism.

Rebels and *Sambos* in Classical Greece: A Comparative View

Introduction

The original version of this chapter was published in a Festschrift (Cartledge & Harvey eds 1985) which I co-edited for the late G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, one of the most distinguished students of ancient Greek and Roman slavery in the past half-century. For him, slavery and other forms of unfree labour constituted the basis, in a marxist sense, of Graeco-Roman civilization and culture, and he had devoted his powerful mind to studying them in all their manifestations, ideological as well as material, since his undergraduate days in the late 1940s as a pupil of A.H.M. Jones at University College London.

Slave revolt, or rather its apparent absence from the world of chattel slavery in Classical Greece, which is this chapter's theme, is just one aspect of a vast subject, the importance of which remains in my view still somewhat underappreciated, or at any rate understudied, by historians of ancient Greece. Hunt 1998 is a shining recent exception to that general neglect.

My chapter was also an evangelistical exercise in comparative method (cf. now Golden 1992), owing most in its original form to the work of Eugene Genovese (1979) on slave revolt in the Americas and something to that of Orlando Patterson (1982). Since 1985 an important study has appeared on the three slave revolts that occurred during the Late Roman Republic (Bradley 1989), and the theses of Genovese and others have been subjected to renewed scrutiny (Williams Myers 1996), providing further opportunities for reviewing my essay. I have not attempted systematically to incorporate references to the most recent literature on slavery in the Americas, which is vast, but see Berlin 1998 and, bibliographically, Miller ed. 1993-8.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first and longer part I attempt to apply systematically to Classical Greece those of the criteria for successful servile revolt elaborated by Genovese that I deem relevantly applicable. Here I am attempting to account for a null case, the *non*-occurrence of servile revolt – as opposed to servile *resistance*, which is to be assumed and can be documented. In the second part of the chapter I