Sparta

Bruno Cariou on July 1, 2019 by Elements of Racial Education

Introduction

After so many centuries, the name of Sparta still evokes, with a memory of glory, an example of austere virtue. In this city, an ideal of military courage, frugal living, obedience and discipline is embodied, which is too apparently accompanied by a perfect disdain for the complexities of intelligence and the elegance of speech. Ideal somewhat off-putting, which could not fail to raise dislikes! On the Acropolis of Athens, Renan, enamored of all these games of thought over which Pallas Athena presides, proclaimed his hatred for a Sparta, "mistress of dark errors". At least he implicitly recognizes that she has brought a teaching to the world, even if he himself is loath to this teaching. Other thinkers have been more docile to the lesson of Sparta: to build his ideal city,Plato borrowed many features from the still living city, but already affected by decay, which presented Greece with its face both proud and gloomy.

The interest which early philosophers and political theorists showed in Sparta does not facilitate the task of the historian. They knew little about the past; they linked it by a line too straight to a present distorted by the insufficiency of observation and the too uncertain demarcation between reality and ideal conceptions. The most stubborn mind of Greece, Aristotle, was not exempt from these theoretical views which were to prevent him as well from following exactly the various stages of the Lacedaemonian state as from perceiving the true aspect of Sparta. contemporary. As we go down in time, the disease worsens. Under the thick sediment of moral dissertations and uplifting anecdotes, the character of the authentic Spartan thickens and disappears.Sparta as a State is no more than a shadow or the shadow of a shadow: the city roughly forged by the legislator Lycurgus continues its theoretical existence to which the facts no longer even bring the half-effectiveness of their denial.

It would therefore be easier to write the fictionalized history of Sparta, or to boldly link, according to illustrious examples, to the principles which inspired the more or less hypothetical legislator of Sparta certain conceptions of the State, formulated and almost realized in the Europe of our time, than to claim to find the truth about the origin and the development of singular institutions of which we have only a very incomplete knowledge. Yet it is this task that we have preferably proposed here. In the Greek world, as a whole so different from ours, Sparta has its own physiognomy that we must try to explain, without detaching it from this world to which it often seems to oppose.Such a study can show for sure that the Dorian city has kept its originality by maintaining in all its own a passionate faith in certain collective beliefs whose immutable value can still be celebrated today [In the old Latin language , thepietas , on the other hand, belonged to the domain of the sacred, designating in the first place the relations that Roman man had with the divinities, secondly his relations with other realities linked to the world of tradition, including the State himself. -even. Towards the gods, it was a question of a calm and dignified veneration: feeling of belonging and, simultaneously, of respect, of grateful agreement, of duty and of adhesion too, like reinforcement of the feeling which gave birth to the severe figure of the pater familias (which also explains the pietas filialis ). The pietas could also manifest itself in the political domain: pietas in patriammeant loyalty and sense of duty to the state and the party. In some cases, the term in question also connotes the meaning of iustitia . The one who does not know the pietas , this one is also the unjust, almost the impious, the one who wants to ignore the place which is his and which he must occupy within the framework of a higher order, both human and divine. "(Julius Evola, L'arc et la massue , Pardès, 1984, p. 43-44)). We will not say that this observation is incidental to us; but it can only have significance if one has first examined, without preconceived opinions, the nature and form of an evolution which only well-defined conditions have made possible.

We now agree to recognize that Sparta first participated in the general development of archaic Greece before turning in on itself and giving itself, for the needs of its defense, the harsh organization which made its greatness. Doubtless Sparta did not proceed with this organization all at once. But, if the dates which mark its development are too often uncertain, they all belong to an era prior to that in which the flourishing of classical Greece took place. On the other hand, what one could call the reform of Sparta consisted in part, like any reform, only of an interpretation and an adaptation of the past to which one wanted to give a definitive character. This is why it has been possible to declare that in the fifth century BC,the organization of the Lacedaemonian state already appeared to be an anachronism.

It is notable, however, that the institutions of this state were regarded by so many Greeks as one of the purest creations of the genius of Greece, attached to tradition. Let us do, as we have said, very large part in idealization. The common opinion of antiquity must be taken into account more than our doctrinal preferences. The development of democracy, which the city of Athens represents, not without failures, is countered in Greece, not only by material forces, but also by ideal tendencies whose roots plunge deeply into the Hellenic spirit. It was neither the philosophers nor the aristocratic parties who invented the idea of ​​a privileged class of defenders of the State; Sparta is not the only city that has tried to achieve it. Circumstances created the antithesis of Sparta,Athens. In studying Sparta, we will not forget that the Greeks, who put the notion of freedom in the foreground, firmly believed that, sheltered from the legislation of Lycurgus, it had been able to develop fully in order and dignity.

Laconia and Messinia. The city of Sparta

In the descriptions of the Laconian landscape, and also in the more or less rapid allusions that the most diverse authors, poets or prose writers, make to Sparta and Laconia, two geographical names keep coming up: Eurotas and Taygetus. The river where the Spartan ephebes bathe, the mountain at the foot of which "the race of the Heraclids" lives.

The famous Eurotas is one of the most important rivers in the Peloponnese, but it comes only after the Pamisos of Messinia and the Alpheus, whose source is close to its own. Its length and flow are also modest. He was born in a canton of Arcadia, the Belminatis that the Lacedaemonians long owned, first crosses a mountainous region, enters the plain five kilometers north of Sparta, leaves the Sparta basin through a narrow valley through the hills of schist and limestone, then reached the sea through a marshy plain. It is fed mainly by sources which come out of Taygetus and never runs dry. At the height of summer, trickles of cool water circulate in a large bed of gravel where oleanders grow.

The Taygetus which limits the basin of Sparta to the west is a vigorous massif, stretching from north to south, perhaps more imposing than Olympus, home of the gods and throne of Zeus. It erects a crenellated rampart with several floors that seem to be set back one on top of the other. Its advanced buttresses first form a confused heap of hills which invade the plain and which are cut by deep gorges. Above, a few areas of forests and rock faces whose escarpment appears vertiginous. Finally, there is the series of peaks, almost always snowy indentations which culminate at two thousand four hundred meters. The mountain range stretches for more than one hundred and fifteen kilometers, from the plateau of Arcadia to Cape Matapan; but the main mass overhangs the conch of which Sparta occupies the northern end,the region that Homer called the "hollow Lacedaemon"

To the east extends another chain, less elevated and less illustrious than Taygetos, the Parnon which continues the Arcadian chains to the south. The steps in front of it almost touch the left bank of the Eurotas and overlook it by a hundred meters. Their reddish color catches the eye. They were inhabited in prehistoric times. The Parnon itself does not offer prominent peaks; but it is a continuous block which, at the height of Sparta, is not crossed by easily accessible passes. Further south, you easily reach the eastern coast of the Peloponnese.

It usually arrives in Sparta by the northern route, the starting point is Tripoli, the capital of Arcadia district, city that dates back at XIV th century AD. The road passes through Tégée and enters the mountain. After the Clisoura pass, we discover Taygetus, then the plain of Sparta with the mounds that surround it, its forests of olive trees, its well cultivated fields, its orange orchards, fig trees and mulberry trees, its cypresses. . The vine ripens on the slopes of the hills.

This rich plain, almost entirely situated on the right bank of the Eurotas, measures only eighteen kilometers in length by ten in width. The shadow of Taygetus extends there an hour before sunset and spreads a sudden freshness. We have often noted the contrast between the somewhat feverish softness of this abundantly irrigated depression and the salutary harshness of the mountain. Sparta is camped on a few hillocks that hardly dent the plain, but has managed to escape its pernicious influences.

The middle valley of the Eurotas formed like the center of Laconia which included other districts, usually less privileged. The rugged region, which from Taygetus to Parnon barred the plain of Sparta to the south, was very poor. On the other hand, the coastal plain of Helos, at the mouth of the Eurotas, provided the best harvests. The eastern and central points of the Peloponnese, occupied by the last ramifications of Parnon and Taygetus, were of poor relation. The coast of the Gulf of Laconia was poorly suited to maritime traffic. Along the plain of Helos it was low and marshy; the harbors which opened in the two mountainous peninsulas were away from all communication. Navigators feared the approaches to Cape Malée and Cape Ténare (Matapan). However, before the Dorians arrived,a sanctuary of Poseidon had been established near the latter; and, opposite Cape Malea, the island of Kythera was a point of release for the pre-Hellenic navies. The Lacedaemonians, becoming more and more a land people, had at least on the gulf the scale of Gytheion which served them as a port of war.

Geographical conditions only partly explain the characters is recognized, at least from the VI thcentury BC, in the Lacedaemonian state. Neither the isolation in which he enjoyed himself, nor the almost exclusive practice of war and hunting for the Spartans, of agriculture for the lower classes, is justified by consideration of the framework in which the State s 'is trained and the resources available to it. Laconia is surrounded by mountains; but it has access routes to the North and to the East. In the West, in an effort to conquer, the Lacedaemonians even crossed Taygetus. Agricultural products are the country's main wealth; breeding can be practiced on the high plateaus of Taygetos and game abounds there; but neither marble, nor iron, nor wood, nor clay are lacking. For an export trade there were wider possibilities than in other parts of Greece;they have been deliberately neglected after having been used for a time.

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A few words should be said about Messinia, whose destiny was inexorably linked for several centuries to that of Laconia. It occupies, beyond Taygetos, the southwest corner of the Peloponnese. Its quasi-proverbial wealth which attracted the greed of its neighbors to the East came mainly from the abundant fertility of two alluvial plains: the lower plain, crossed by the Pamisos and extending to the Gulf of Messinia; the upper or northern plain, watered by several tributaries of the Pamisos, where, it is said, Stenyclaros, the capital of the ancient kings, was located. The vegetation was the same as that of the plain of Sparta, with an even more luxuriant character. The mild climate now makes it possible to cultivate even bananas.

The two plains are separated by a row of hills. At the western end of this threshold stands the legendary mountain of Messinia, the Ithome, a natural acropolis whose steep slopes facilitated defense. From the main summit, which reaches eight hundred meters, the view extends, over the Arcadian plains, to Taygetus and, to the north, to the mountains of Arcadia, the Lycée, the Erymanthe. On the southwest side of the Ithome was built in the IV th century walled city of Messene.

The entire western part of Messenia was hardly developed during the time of Sparta's domination. The mountainous region, between the plains and the coast, formed pastures and hunting grounds. Along the coast, a few fertile cantons, but located away, had to be cultivated. There were rare Periecal towns which perhaps occupied the sites of Mycenaean agglomerations; but the site of the Homeric Pylos, the city of Nestor, was abandoned. The deep harbor covered by the island of Sphacteria was hardly frequented when an Athenian general settled down, during the Peloponnesian War, on the promontory of Coryphasion or Pylos, which ends it in the north. This qu'illustra bay XIX th century the battle of Navarino is nevertheless an excellent anchorage for a large fleet.

The development of Messinia was stopped by the conquest. No more than in their Laconia, the victors did not exploit all the resources. Their main objective had been the acquisition of cultivable land. Thus the possession of this new country, which could have offered maritime outlets on the Gulf of Messinia or towards the West, only reinforced the tendency of the Lacedaemonian State to stick to an exclusively agricultural economy. But geography has contributed very little to it.

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Greece is divided into small states: Laconia, enlarged by Messinia, measures 7,500 square kilometers. It is three times the area of ​​Attica. Sparta therefore has a territorial base which allows it to play a leading role. Between its own domain and that which is attached to the so-called pericec cities, the distinction is made in law, as we will see. Sparta maintained it because of its political constitution; but the cities and their territory are in its dependence.

The city itself was vast: the historian Polybius estimated its perimeter at forty-eight stadia, about nine and a half kilometers, and recognized it as having an area double that of Megalopolis, the great city of Arcadia. The archaeological exploration, carried out from 1906 to 1910, then from 1924 to 1929 by the English Archaeological School of Athens, made it possible to recognize at various points the route of the defensive wall which dates overall from 188 BC. -Christ, whose oldest parts can not go back further than the end of the IV th century, because until that time, Sparta was an open city.

At the dawn of XX ecentury, Maurice Barrès roamed the site where was "the Sparta of the Heroes"; he was looking for the tomb of Leonidas and, "over thirty irrigation canals, through half-marshes, in the middle of arbutus and succulents", tried to recognize, between the Eurotas and the Magoulitza, the site of the ancient Platanistas, where the ephebes and the virgins of Lacedaemon were practiced. Then he wrote with discouragement: "Nothing authentic can be found on the undulating mounds of Sparta." Late remains appeared among the olive trees: Roman constructions, Byzantine walls, remains of churches. The layout of the theater was recognizable: it was at least a landmark, since it was leaning against the lower acropolis of Sparta. From the top of this acropolis,Châteaubriand had already tried to identify the miserable ruins scattered around him, mixing in his archaeological study the romantic meditations inspired by the solitude of these illustrious places and the passionate evocations that the memory of Leonidas gave birth to in him.

If the research of the English School, limited and hampered by the crops and the fruit trees which cover the plain, could only specify a few topographical points and only unearth a few buildings, among others the famous sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, in the Marais district (Limnai), at least they allowed in these points to go back under the Roman remains to the most distant past of Sparta. It would be pointless to discuss here the situation in different parts of the city or to claim, following the description of a traveler of the II th century AD, Pausanias, to a route. The attempt would appear to be premature. But we will retain excavations which may shed light on the ancient life of the city.

The settlement of Laconia and the Dorian migration

At the origin of the Lacedaemonian state, as at the origin of all the states of ancient Greece, there is the obscure problem of the settlement of the Balkan peninsula. What distant migrations brought to the South of the Peloponnese the men who, in the classical period, had in the valley of the Eurotas the center of their domination? What peoples did they meet there? What degree of civilization had these peoples reached? What was the attitude of the newcomers to the first occupants? These are the essential questions which should be resolved by using, alongside the ancient tradition, all the resources of archeology, ethnology and linguistics. It is far from being able to answer it with certainty.

The ancient tradition, despite a few differences, is fairly uniform and fairly straightforward, too simple for sure. She linked the Spartans to the Dorians whose arrival in the Peloponnese she dated from a period somewhat after the Trojan War. Previously, they had wandered in Macedonia, in Thessaly, in all of Northern Greece, where a tiny state, Doride, not far from Delphi, remained as a witness of their passage. They had even made a first and futile attempt on the Peloponnese, with their leader Hyllos, son of the national hero Heracles. The second expedition, commanded by three chiefs, Temenos, Aristodemos, Chresphontès, who were attached to Hyllos, was called: the Return of the Heraclids. It resulted in the occupation of three cantons of the Peloponnese, Argolida, Laconia, Messinia,shared by the Dorian chiefs. The vanquished who did not expatriate were driven back to the mountainous regions or reduced to a kind of serfdom. The Lacedaemonian State, where the conquerors would have maintained with particular rigor the integrity of their race and the principle of their superiority, represents in its purity the Dorian spirit. Herodotus, despite his sympathy for Athens, goes even further: between Dorians and Hellenes, he establishes a sort of equivalence. The Spartans would thus come to personify this primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium before Jesus-Christ, brought in Greece, in the chaos of the native populations, a new order and a true regeneration.The Lacedaemonian State, where the conquerors would have maintained with particular rigor the integrity of their race and the principle of their superiority, represents in its purity the Dorian spirit. Herodotus, despite his sympathy for Athens, goes even further: between Dorians and Hellenes, he establishes a sort of equivalence. The Spartans would thus come to personify this primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium before Jesus-Christ, brought in Greece, in the chaos of the native populations, a new order and a true regeneration.The Lacedaemonian State, where the conquerors would have maintained with particular rigor the integrity of their race and the principle of their superiority, represents in its purity the Dorian spirit. Herodotus, despite his sympathy for Athens, goes even further: between Dorians and Hellenes, he establishes a sort of equivalence. The Spartans would thus come to personify this primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium before Jesus-Christ, brought in Greece, in the chaos of the native populations, a new order and a true regeneration.it establishes a sort of equivalence. The Spartans would thus come to personify this primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium before Jesus-Christ, brought in Greece, in the chaos of the native populations, a new order and a true regeneration.it establishes a kind of equivalence. The Spartans would thus come to personify this primitive Hellenism which, towards the end of the second millennium before Jesus-Christ, brought in Greece, in the chaos of the native populations, a new order and a true regeneration.

There is no doubt that reality is infinitely more complex. Without studying the succession of peoples and civilizations throughout Greece in prehistoric or protohistoric times, let us see in the Peloponnesian domain, where the Dorians settled, what archaeological research has taught us.

Since the resounding discoveries made at Mycenae and Tiryns, everyone knows that Argolida was the main center of the so-called Mycenaean civilization in which new elements, of a Nordic character, it seems, mingle with the still predominant influence of Crete de Minos. It is difficult to explain the mixed character of this civilization without resorting to the hypothesis of a penetration into the Peloponnese of immigrants from a northern region and settling among a population undoubtedly Mediterranean. This penetration, the details of which are unknown to us, predates what is called the Dorian invasion. It may have started at the beginning of the second millennium BC, and there is reason to believe that the newcomers were Indo-Europeans who brought their language with them,some of their techniques, perhaps also their own organizational methods. They were given the name of Achaeans after an ethnic group used by Homer; but they are also called Proto-Hellenes to mark clearly that no difference of race separates them from Dorians or Hellenes who came later.

In the valley of the Eurotas, the vestiges of the Mycenaean civilization are not lacking. If the same site of Sparta has delivered no document which was earlier than the IX th century BC, in the east, on the hill of Lakonia which dominates the left bank of the Eurotas, Therapne was inhabited before Dorian period. The same is true for Amyclées, a few kilometers south of Sparta. Two masterpieces of Mycenaean goldsmith's work, golden goblets representing the hunting and domestication of wild bulls, come from a domed tomb discovered at Vaphio, not far from Amycleae. It is therefore certain that the Achaeans preceded the Dorians in Laconia; their capital was perhaps Amyclées who for a long time stubbornly resisted the new wave of invaders.

We would like to draw from the Homeric poems, which are the oldest literary monument in Greece, some indications on this Achaean state on the banks of the Eurotas; but neither the Iliad nor the Odyssey gives us an exact picture of the Mycenaean world: with reminiscences of a very distant past are associated features borrowed from contemporary reality. Ménélas, the husband of the divine Helena, reigns in Laconia; he has his stay in Sparta or in Lacédémona where he receives the visit of the son of Ulysses, Telemachus, come from Pylos of Messinia. He led against Troy, on sixty ships "those who held the hollow Lacedaemon, those of Pharis, of Sparta, of Messa agreeable to the doves, and those who inhabited Brysees and the charming Augées and Amyclées and Helos, city of the sea, and Laas and Œtyle ”. All of this epic geography is obscure and seemingly inconsistent.And Menelaus, King of Sparta, can hardly be considered a faithful representative of the Achaean monarchy. Already the Dorians have passed that way; and, on the west coast of Asia Minor, where the Homeric poems were formed, there is, of their establishment in the Peloponnese, an implicit knowledge which distorts the traditions of this heroic era when the Trojan fighters are supposed to live, to fight and die.fight and die.fight and die.

These conquerors, to whom we give the somewhat conventional name of Dorians, appear to us as the backbench of the invaders who, in successive waves, descended to the depths of the Peloponnese. They found before them, at the same time as states already formed, peoples endowed with a complex civilization, because they were the result of crosses pursued for centuries: pre-Hellenes who are believed to originate from Asia. Minor, Proto-Hellenic whose Indo-European character is hardly disputed. The struggles which marked their penetration into Laconia remain obscure. Perhaps they arrived there from the east, after having crossed the Isthmus of Corinth and occupied the Argolis, by crossing the Parnon by this defile of the Clisoura which the modern road from Tripolis to Sparta still takes. Of the two Mycenaean localities, one, Therapne,whose houses show traces of fire, had to be ransacked: in the classical period, there will only be sanctuaries on the heights of Ménélaion. The lot of Amyclées was better: there was annexation after a prolonged conflict; but recognition of equal rights was granted to the former inhabitants. The conquest of all the territory between Taygetos and Parnon had to be done gradually. Towards the south, at the mouth of the Eurotas, Helos, in its marshy plain, was finally submitted, and the ancients linked to this obscure town the origin of the name Helotes given to the inhabitants enslaved by the Dorians.there was annexation after a protracted conflict; but recognition of equal rights was granted to the former inhabitants. The conquest of all the territory between Taygetos and Parnon had to be done gradually. Towards the south, at the mouth of the Eurotas, Helos, in its marshy plain, was finally submitted, and the ancients linked to this obscure town the origin of the name Helotes given to the inhabitants enslaved by the Dorians.there was annexation after a protracted conflict; but recognition of equal rights was granted to the former inhabitants. The conquest of all the territory between Taygetos and Parnon had to be done gradually. Towards the south, at the mouth of the Eurotas, Helos, in its marshy plain, was finally submitted, and the ancients linked to this obscure town the origin of the name Helotes given to the inhabitants enslaved by the Dorians.

The name of Lacedaemon, which Homer uses as well to designate a territory as a city, can go back to the Achaean period. The etymology is entirely uncertain. The Dorians adopted it and subsequently the state they founded will officially be called the state of the Lacedaemonians. The very city which is its center will be called Lacédémona or Sparta. This last name does not seem to precede the arrival of the last invaders: their ethnic pride is expressed in the term Spartans by which the inhabitants grouped in the capital city, the only ones who soon enjoyed civil rights in all their fullness, opposed the other inhabitants of the region. Sparta, which perhaps means the city of sown land, was born, it is said,of the reunion of four villages of the plain where the Dorians were first distributed and whose names have survived to designate districts of the city: Pitanè in the North-West, Mésoa in the South-West, Cynosoura in the South-East, Limnai in the North East. At some distance to the South, Amyclées will be like a political and religious dependency.

The fact of the conquest is readily explained by the social differences that are subsequently observed in Laconia. Périecs and Helots, whose inferior condition we will see, would be the representatives of the vanquished, treated unequally according to the circumstances of submission to the victors, some accepted as citizens of lesser rights, others deprived of all rights. In fact, it fails to demonstrate that the Periecs were not Dorians and that the serfdom of the Helots resulted exclusively from land grabbing for the benefit of the invaders. Between the ruling class and the rest of the population, it was not possible to identify any feature of differentiation which justified such a hypothesis. The very language used by both is the Dorian dialect and,if we cannot see indisputable proof of their community of origin, let us at least recognize that in order to question this community, any positive argument is lacking. From the end of the second millennium, where it is customary to place Dorian migration until the time when we know the system of the Lacedaemonian state, many facts of a political or economic nature have been able to determine the social regime. manifested there.

Already the Achaean State must have been far from presenting a very coherent ethnic unit; but, while it is admitted that the Indo-European immigrants had merged there without difficulty with the natives [This is only a supposition of the author, which is not based on anything and of which the opposite is most plausible and probable], we want the new clans, who arrived subsequently, to be fiercely careful not to mix their blood with foreign blood. It is however certain that from a religious point of view, they largely borrowed from their predecessors [which proves nothing]. On the other hand, certain families who held an eminent place in Sparta were not attached to a Dorian stock. At the end of the VI thcentury before Jesus-Christ, in Athens, a Spartan king, Cléomène, to whom the priestess of Athena wanted to prohibit the entry of the sanctuary by arguing of his origin, answered him: "I am not Dorian, but Achaean". As will be seen, what characterized the dominant caste in the Lacedaemonian state was not origin or descent, but the uniform education which it had received [This is only an opinion which is not based on anything which it seems to go against the truth]. There is nothing to show that in the early days these immigrants, whose numbers we do not even know approximately, were stricter on the necessary purity of race [And nothing shows the contrary].

There is no denying that V ecentury BC, a certain conception of Dorian virtues, represented mainly by Sparta, has already been forged; but we are not allowed to project this idealized image of pure and proud warriors into the past. The very idea of ​​a Dorian race, whose features can be described, is singularly arbitrary. Certain historians have not failed to describe to us these Nordic barbarians, enamored of discipline, aristocrats by nature, hostile to the vain games of thought, who were called by a quasi-providential mission to renovate the Mycenaean civilization, weakened by too many concessions to the effeminate influences of Crete. We must abandon assumptions in which dangerous concerns appear too much.Even if the history of the origins and the first times of Sparta cannot be reconstructed without forming certain hypotheses, one will endeavor, by choosing them, not to give in unduly to the Dorian mirage [On this subject, see Karl Earson,Nordic Hellas , <https://www.theapricity.com/earlson/history/hellas.htm> ; Wilhelm Sieglin, Die blonden Haare der indogermanischen Völker des Altertums: Eine Sammlung der antiken Zeugnisse als Beitrag zur Indogermanenfrage ] .

The Lacedaemonian expansion

Multiplied struggles, a gradual but continuous territorial extension, this is what ancient testimonies tell us for the early days of the Lacedaemonian State, that is to say for the entire beginning of the first millennium before Jesus Christ. The part of the legend is such that the historian hesitates to engage in the almost inextricable thicket of fabulous stories and heroic genealogies.

Even before having completed the conquest of the Eurotas plain, the Spartans push offensives to the East and to the North. In the east, they soon overflow the Parnon and advancing towards the coast through the high country of Cynuria, they come into conflict with Argos. It is the beginning of a tenacious hostility in which the two Dorian States will confront each other; for centuries, the coastal region and the eastern foothills of Parnon, Cynuria and Thyreatid, will be disputed between Sparta and Argos.

When it comes to rivalries between States, the origin of which is lost in the night of the first ages, we can hardly pose the problem of responsibilities. The ancient admirers of Sparta felt that the primitive pact by which the Dorian kings, established in the various regions of the Peloponnese had promised mutual aid and assistance, had been violated first by the kings of Argos and Messene, infidels to the Dorian spirit both in their internal government and in their relations with their brethren. To this retrospective view, one cannot attach any value. The Dorians of Argolid certainly had periods of power and expansion and could claim, over the Peloponnese, a hegemony that the epic itself seemed to confer on them. For a while,they possessed the entire eastern coast of the Peloponnese as far as Cape Malea, and held the island of Kythera. It is at VIe century only, after many alternatives, that the fate of arms will turn to their detriment. Held in respect and diminished, they will be full of hatred: their sulky policy will always be contrary to that of Sparta, even though Sparta will represent the general interests of Greece. Thus an irremediable fatality early sowed in the Peloponnese the seeds of a division which was fraught with disastrous consequences.

In the North, the Spartans come up against the Arcadians, either in the North-West, they go up the upper valley of the Eurotas, or in the North-East, by the desolate plateaus which surround Sellasie, they gain the Clisoura pass. and descend to the plain of Tégée. Arcadia, this mountainous retreat located in the heart of the Peloponnese, does not seem to have been affected by the Dorian invasion; it preserved its former inhabitants and perhaps even took in a notable part of the populations which lived in the Achaean States. The populations have preserved their language there, a Greek dialect once spoken as far as Asia Minor, at the time when the Mycenaean civilization flourished on both sides of the Aegean Sea. The rites they practiced, which often took on a mysterious character, only continued very ancient religions.If the newcomers could hardly think of flushing them out entirely from the isolated and difficult regions where they had found refuge, at least they wanted to possess the approaches and fortify their borders against any return offensive.

No continuous mountain range separates the domain of the Laconian Eurotas from that of the Alpheus of Arcadia. The transit regions, Belminatis and Skiritis, once considered Arcadian, were held by the Spartans. The Arcadians were weakened by their own divisions. Delayed in political forms favored by the very nature of their country, they grouped themselves into small communities or autonomous towns, too often hostile to each other. The common cult of Zeus worshiped on Mount Lyceum united them only by a very loose bond. When the cities were formed, rather late, they tended to pursue their destinies separately: Tégée which was the oldest, Mantinea, Orchomene are generally found in opposite camps. It was not until the VI thcentury that one believes to perceive a first outline of confederation which is marked by a uniform currency. It did not last long, and Sparta did its best to maintain the internal dissensions which constituted for her an insurance against Arcadian danger.

Thus, towards the East and towards the North, by the interplay of historical circumstances, the detail of which escapes us, Sparta meets enemies; it will have to guard against threats that are always worrying, whether it has provoked them by the desire or the need to acquire new lands, or that, in conflicts of ambition where the wrongs were shared, these grudges have been formed inexpiable where neighboring peoples vainly use most of their strength. At least, towards the West, nature seems to have provided for the security of the Lacedaemonian State: it has erected this gigantic barrier of Taygetus, a rampart with massive battlements whose ends it is enough to hold to live safe from the invasions. But here the Spartans defied nature; beyond Taygetus, they enslaved Messinia.We can say without exaggeration that this conquest fixed their destiny.

To mark the stages, it is necessary to consult the map at the same time as one refers to these traditions which, as we have said, have a character more legendary than historical. In the south, after reaching the sea at Helos, the Spartans, turning to the southwest, along the coast beyond Gytheion were able to both infiltrate the Tenare peninsula and cross the southern foothills of Taygetus to reach the Messenian coast. They then went north to the city of Pherai that Homer already mentions and which occupied the site of present-day Calamata. They thus held the outlet of the southern plain of Messinia.

It is doubtful whether the Spartans used early, as a passageway, the picturesque but difficult breach which, almost at the level of Sparta, opens in Taygetos, this Langada of Trypi of a savage beauty that modern travelers readily take to travel from Sparta to Calamata. But, further north, the steep front of Taygetus is interrupted over a width of three or four kilometers; by there, one could reach, from the Laconian city of Tripolis, in the two eastern cantons of Aigytis and Denthéliatis, behind the central chain of Taygetus, then pass either in the upper plain or in the lower plain from Messinia. This was the main route of the Lacedaemonian attacks.

Already, during the Dorian migration, the invaders must have known these passes: in the plain of Stenyclaros which corresponds to the upper plain of Messinia, the Heraclides Cresphontès had, it is said, installed his residence. Among the Dorian kingdoms, we can cite that of Messinia alongside the Lacedaemonian and Argian kingdoms. It is possible, however, that Messinia was not deeply gilded: in any case, very early on, the Spartans who coveted its rich land, liked to consider the inhabitants as of a contemptible stock. At least they unscrupulously imposed on them a hard yoke of servitude.

In the II th century AD. AD, the periégète Pausanias summarized for us the Alexandrian epics of Myron of Priene and Rhianos of Crete where the wars of Messinia were narrated with a storytelling in accordance with the laws of the genre. The hero of the first war is Aristodemos; the center of resistance, Mount Ithome which dominates the two plains of Messinia; around this acropolis, fabulous feats take place. After only twenty years, the Messenians succumb; their land is confiscated. Those who do not resign themselves to leaving their country will have to cultivate it on behalf of the victors.

Henceforth the Spartans had to be satiated with conquests: to carry out this first submission of Messenia, which ended towards the end of the 8th centurycentury, they had stretched all their springs. Perhaps from then on they felt the need to give themselves an organization capable of resisting the opposing forces that their very action set in motion. Within its excessively enlarged frontiers, Sparta will have enemies no less dangerous than on the periphery of its domain. Far from disarming them by concessions, it will always claim to dominate them by the superiority of its weapons. Before seeing by what extreme measures, it sought to ensure in all cases this superiority, we must try to represent the Spartan State of the first times, in the new and almost joyful power of this enthusiasm which, without regard and unchecked, dragged it towards increased annexations.

The first institutions of Sparta

Classical Greek historians and philosophers viewed Sparta as a city ruled for centuries by immutable laws. So they hardly enlightened us on the forms of growth of the Lacedaemonian state. At the most, they indicated that originally, in the very distant past, he had been torn by internal dissensions: it would have been necessary, not without difficulty, to remedy the thousand evils which labored the social body. In order to outline the main lines of an interior development which therefore did not go smoothly, we must admit certain analogies between the evolution of Sparta and that of the other Hellenic cities: did not archeology teach us, indeed, that the civilization of archaic Sparta had been that of contemporary Greece? On the other hand,we must mention the conservative spirit which manifested itself in Sparta with more intensity than elsewhere and which is marked in the institutions, even those adapted, more or less systematically, to new ends.

Until the time of Roman domination, this state retained the monarchical form. Genealogy begins with mythical ancestors; the beginnings are suspect; at least they provide frameworks and ensure the continuity of the royal houses. From the VI th century BC. BC, the kings have only retained the remains of their primitive powers: they have never lost certain privileges which go back high in the past and which suggest the absolute character of the primitive monarchy.

Its origins are complex: the kings of Sparta may have been first warlords, the leaders of these armed bands which gradually occupied the whole of Laconia and exceeded its natural borders. But their authority had to be reinforced by traditions in force in the country where they settled. Since the prehistory of Greece is better known to us, we are forced to admit that from the second millennium BC forms of government functioned there, far removed from the rudimentary simplicity we imagine in dawn of civilization. The palaces of the Cretan Minos, those of the masters of Mycenae and Tiryns were the residences of strong rulers whose powers were consecrated by religion. The Dorian kings, descendants of Heracles,were in part the continuers of dynasties that they dispossessed at the same time as the monarchy retained features in which it recalled the warlike period of migrations.

In Sparta, royal power was always exercised simultaneously by two characters, representatives of two great families, that of the Agiades and that of the Eurypontides. This double kingship, thus shared between two families, is peculiar to this city: no satisfactory explanation could be found [“The couples formed by the Spartan kings were not conceived by Lacedaemonian thought as formed of two homologous elements. : the study of the names of both dynasties and the examination of the facts attributed to each of the kings, in particular in the global presentations of Pausanias, reveal that a bipolar opposition governed the representation of the couple Agiades / Eurypontides : to the former its reports all the problems tackled in Spartan political life concerning relations with the outside; to the seconds,relate to the internal problems of the city. This is a highly structured model, generating an indefinite number of variants. This structure is integrated into a fundamental theme of Greek thought, the opposition of movement towards the exterior and immobility within, and at the same time it extends the Indo-European conceptions of a “First Function”. "Split between a" Varuna aspect "and a" Mitra aspect ". »(See Bernard Sergent,and at the same time it extends the Indo-European conceptions of a “First Function” split between a “Varuna aspect” and a “Mitra aspect”. »(See Bernard Sergent,and at the same time it extends the Indo-European conceptions of a “First Function” split between a “Varuna aspect” and a “Mitra aspect”. »(See Bernard Sergent,The Spartan representation of royalty , <https://www.persee.fr/doc/rhr_0035-1423_1976_num_189_1_6283> )]. The Dorians seem to have been divided originally into three tribes: Hylleis, Dymanes and Pamphyloi, which undoubtedly corresponded to military divisions. Two tribal chiefs, having played a leading role, ousted the third and reigned side by side? Or does one of the kings represent the old rulers, masters of this city of Amyclées which retained its independence for so long? This last hypothesis would explain the traditional rivalry between the two royal families: between them, there was never any matrimonial union. But, in addition, they claim to be of the same divine descent and the origin of their prerogatives seems identical.

Beside Heracles, Sparta has for protectors and patrons two other sons of Zeus, the twins born of Leda whose symbols, two wooden beams, are worn on the battlefields: these are the Tyndarids or Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux . The terrestrial monarchy reflects in a way this duality: without the kings having embodied these divine essences, they owe them the special character, which, even after the fall of the monarchy, is marked in the funeral honors that are rendered to them. The death of a king was announced by horsemen throughout Laconia. In Sparta, women roamed the streets beating cauldrons. All the families were to participate in the mourning of the State: Spartans, Periecs, helots, gathered on the Agora, beat each other and lamented.It was said that the late king had been the best of kings. After the funeral, the Agora was dusted with flour and for ten days, assemblies and elections were suspended. According to Xenophon's testimony, Sparta thus manifested that she considered her kings not as men, but as heroes.

Military powers, religious powers, which are closely related to judicial powers, kings hold them in the same way by the effect of their divine investiture. They decide on peace or war: anyone who wants to oppose an expedition ordered by them would be treated in sacrilege and banished from the city. They march at the head of the army; they are the last to leave the battlefield. A corps of one hundred elite men formed their guard.

They are the supreme priesthoods of Zeus Lacedaemonian and Zeus Ouranien. In all public sacrifices, followed by feasts, they are given the first place and a double share; the skins of the victims return to them. In war, religious acts are associated with all military operations: both belong to kings.

Not only do they have areas of their own; but it appears that they once had an eminent right over the entire state soil. It is pointed out, almost as a curiosity, that in every litter of sows, an offspring was reserved for kings. It is a survival worthy of note: in the past, they had to enjoy multiple benefits, which allowed them to support a whole people of companions, those we called their Laos .

When a wandering tribe settles down in a stable abode, the military chief's companions soon become his vassals. It suffices for this that the chief assigns them areas whose royalties, previously raised by him, now become their prerogative. Thus was born a nobility, endowed with income and enjoying a privileged status, but also bound by military obligations and preserving the customs of the old companionship. This nobility does not necessarily form either a closed caste or a hereditary class. The king can welcome there at his will, without original meaning, those whom he pleases to have in his entourage. He can keep the usufruct of their land to owners who owned the land when the tribe was installed and who are thus placed on the same footing as the companions of the chief king.

We are reduced to more or less plausible conjectures concerning the political role that could have played alongside the kings either the members of this appanaged nobility, or all the warriors who took part in the conquest. The oldest evidence on the constitution of Sparta is provided by a document as curious as it is obscure that Plutarch has preserved for us. He calls it a rhetra, which is, properly speaking, a law or a prescription. This would have emanated from the god of Delphi and, in cryptic terms, would have paved the way for a legislator who, for Plutarch, is none other than Lycurgus: “Founds a sanctuary of Zeus Skyllanios and Athena Skyllania; distributes the tribes; round the arrondissements ( obai); institutes a Council, thirty elders with the supreme chiefs; from season to season, gathered the assembly ( apella ) between Babyca and Cnakion; thus consults and dissolved… ”. A last phrase, unintelligible without corrections, seems to have defined the rights of the people who would have had the last decision. Later, a king introduced an amendment: "If the people decide wrong, the elders and the supreme chiefs will adjourn the meeting."

We will not be surprised that the exegesis of such an enigmatic text has led to contradictory results. The very authenticity of rhetra has been challenged by good arguments; yet in the verses of Tyrtée that there is hardly any reason to suspect, one has some like a poetic paraphrase:

“In the councils, at the head, the kings loved by the gods, these kings who care about Sparta, a charming city. And the old men; then the men of the people who must obey the just laws. "

It is at least the outline of a constitution which would go up until the VIII E or VII E century before J. - C.; but it remains strange that at such an ancient time, we have already attributed to the people such a power that it was necessary, subsequently, to limit it. Many other points remain obscure. What are these tribes in question? If it is about the tribes which grouped the families, they had existed for a long time. For cons, the institution of local tribes, the VIII th century seems an anachronism. The districts ( obai ) seem to correspond to the old villages where the Spartans were grouped. The rhetrahas sometimes been regarded as the organic law of the city which arose from the reunification of these villages. In any case, it supposes among the Lacedaemonians a conscious work of political organization where one wanted to see a mark of their own genius, but which does not leave that surprising if one is not decided from the start. to recognize in them a predestined people.

The Council of Elders will continue to play an essential role in Sparta. The elders were never heads of family clans. The very name that the Council bears remains ambiguous, because it comes in two forms, Gérochia and Gérousia and if the origin of the second is certain (the Geronts designate the old people), it is not certain that the first does not in itself only a dialectal variant and does not mean "the assembly of the privileged", the word Geras applying to a legal privilege, to an honorary share reserved for certain individuals. Let's recognize, if we like, in Gerochiaprimitive a sort of crown council whose members were arbitrarily taken by kings from among the great vassals. The rhetra would have fixed the number at twenty-eight to which were added the two kings qualified as supreme chiefs. It was a first limitation of royal arbitrariness, perhaps a first conquest of the nobility which was the prelude to a progressive forfeiture of the authority of kings.

As for a plenary assembly of all free men able to bear arms, one could already induce the existence of it from the similar assemblies that make known the Homeric poems or which continued to be held in certain parts of Greece, for example in Macedonia. The Spartan apella , referred to in the rhetra , must derive from it. It is planned that it must meet on regular dates, in a place determined by the name of a torrent, the Cnakion, and, it seems, of a bridge, the Babyca Bridge. Whatever the powers of the primitive apella , dark forces will never allow it to flourish. Sparta may have had parts of democracy; it will never obey a democratic assembly.

In the primitive state, more than the political institutions, it would be important to know the modes of distribution and occupation of the ground and the conditions of the people. Almost insoluble problems which must at least be taken care not to mask by theoretical constructions. Plato, giving a cavalier view of the arrival of the Dorians in the Peloponnese, thought that they had achieved equality of property the first time. He writes confidently: "The land was divided without dispute among the Dorians and their debts were neither considerable nor old". The very wording of this passage shows that the philosopher was blinded by concerns of a time when the equitable distribution of land ownership and the abolition of debts were the watchwords of all reformers in society. We will not admit with him,as an immediate consequence of Dorian immigration, the division of the land into equal or equivalent plots. The established regime could not equally favor all the conquerors. In the conquered soil, large estates and small lots have been cut up. On the other hand, if the fate of the old rural populations must have had nothing enviable, the total dispossession of the vanquished is only attested to Messenia. It is by a questionable anticipation that one speaks of a general enslavement of cultivators from the beginnings of the Lacedaemonian state: the so special condition implied by the term helote is the result of a long evolution. A class of small tenants, of free condition, was able to group both the least advantaged of the victors - they were undoubtedly the most numerous - and a large contingent of peasants who,previously already, lived on a piece of land.

We must stick to these very general considerations since we do not know both the social state of Pre-Lorean Laconia and the exact number of newcomers. To make a comparison that is needed, it will be recalled the many questions posed by the establishment of the Barbarians in Gaul after the great invasions of the IV th and V thcenturies: however, we have documents on Roman Gaul which are entirely lacking here. Starting from the fact of the conquest without exaggerating or attenuating its scope too much, we probably recognize in primitive Sparta a powerful monarchy, of feudal character, a class of vassals, representing a military element endowed with a privileged status, small owners of various origins whose rights were perhaps subject to certain restrictions and were not identical. The exploitation of the great estates had to be ensured by slaves, serfs or colonists coming from the subjected population. Finally, a place must be made for the craftsmen: the excavations have given us back at least specimens of their works. In a word,it is probable that the Lacedaemonian state hardly differed from the other states of archaic Greece.

The warlike spirit of the Spartans is not enough to explain this need for conquests which pushed them to cross the limits of Laconia on all sides: the population of the country had to increase in considerable proportions. Emigration to the Dorian Islands, Melos, Thera, Cos, Rhodes and as far as the Doride of Asia Minor was undoubtedly only a palliative to the scarcity of land. It was then that Messinia was attacked; but it seems that, already at this time, social conditions had begun to change in the Eurotas valley. The brutal annexation of Messinia was made for the benefit of a class which derived the main benefit from it.

Under the name of Lacedaemonians, in the classical period, one understands at the same time citizens of full right, gathered in the city of Sparta and others, who, obliged to the military service, are, in Sparta, deprived of all rights. political, but live in other cities of the territory where they are administered freely. These are the perièques (literally: inhabitants of the periphery). The distinction between the land owned by the Periecs and that which is reserved for Spartans or complete citizens, will be rigorously established in the so-called Lycurgus constitution.

Now this distinction seems to have already existed at the time of the conquest of Messenia. There, the expropriation of the vanquished was rigorously executed. About a century later, the poet Tyrtée could say of the Messenians: "Like donkeys weighed down with heavy loads, they had to bring half of their harvests to their masters". The whole heart of Messinia, at the foot of Ithome and Taygetus, was divided into domains, cultivated by the enslaved Messenians. The southern coast and some parts of the western coast are excepted: one finds there Periecal cities: Pérai, Asinè, Méthonè, Kyparissia.

So what are these periecs, in Laconia as in Messinia? No ethnic difference separates them from the Spartans. There is therefore no reason to see them as Predorians to whom the conquerors would have left possession of their cities and a certain autonomy without complete assimilation. The theory seems all the less admissible as the periecs are established on the borders of the Lacédémonien state: the protection of their own territory would thus have been left by the Spartans to non-native subjects. What is most likely is that Dorian groups, organized around chiefs, established themselves among the “Achaean” communities which were already forming centers of habitation. Relegated to the ends of the country, weaker than the group established in Sparta, also possessing land of lesser quality, they fell,vis-à-vis the main agglomeration, in a relative dependence which, no doubt, hardly weighed on them. In their own cities, a social hierarchy was certainly formed; but one should be careful not to believe that authentic Dorians were always at the top of this hierarchy: the proportion of the native Dorian element must have been very high and class distinctions were not based on an origin long forgotten.the proportion of the gilded native element must have been very high, and class distinctions were not based on a long-forgotten origin.the proportion of the gilded native element must have been very high, and class distinctions were not based on a long-forgotten origin.

Sparta, residence of the kings, is the political center of the Lacedaemonian state. The appanage nobility who owns the rich lands of the plain settled there around the kings. Its influence continues to grow: it will restrict more and more the royal authority, according to the process observed elsewhere in Greece. For her sons, who were then numerous, she wanted estates and it was she who, not content with the poor cantons torn from the Arcadians or the Argives, wanted fat Messinia. As well, war and hunting are his occupations: it is still the period of chivalrous warfare where elite combatants, mounted on tanks, meet their opponents in duels, on the front line, while the bulk of the army remains spectator.Relief vases unearthed in Sparta represent these war chariots. The noble cavalry only continued the traditions of tank fighters.

This Spartan nobility had traditions dating back to the time of migration. The companions used to sit at the royal tables: the use of communal meals was not lost and later would only expand. Generally speaking, living together had remained the rule; in the many expeditions that the Spartans undertook after they had become sedentary, this practice could only be reinforced still. The noble life, that is to say the life of warriors, sharing the same meals and the same lodgings, united in preparation for combat, in the works of war and in the pleasures of peace, will be the model that will always impose itself on the conscience of the Spartan.

Originally, this life, which is not exceptional in Greece and which imposes itself quite naturally, was neither austere nor gloomy. It is also reserved for an elite. If it is impossible to assess its importance, at least we can see that alongside the military caste, other elements made up the population of Sparta and satisfied its needs, which were numerous and varied. In the times before Lycurgus' reform, we are told, the Spartans experienced luxury: this meant that industry and commerce were practiced without restrictions. But, before showing what Sparta may have been in the past and the striking contrast it seems to present with classic Sparta,we must try to trace this political and social reform, the consequences of which were not immediately perceptible on the economic and intellectual development of the city.

Tyrtée

The conquest of Messenia had already shown the preponderance of the Spartan nobility who had allocated the best and the largest part of the booty. At the very end of the war, a singular episode reveals deep disturbances. A whole generation, born of free unions during the war, would have been deprived of civic rights; after having tried in vain to recover them, these "sons of virgins", as they were called, had to emigrate. They went to found Taranto in Italy. We thus glimpse the existence of a class of malcontents and, at the origin, a land grabbing for the benefit of an oligarchy.

But the situation seems to have worsened especially in the second part of the VII th century when Messinia, harshly exploited, rose against their oppressors. In the meantime, the Lacedaemonians had not ceased to lead the struggle against their neighbors, with varying success. Argives and Arcadians stood up to them. In the western Peloponnese, the Eleans, allies of Sparta, were trying in vain to get their hands on the great sanctuary of Olympia, included in the territory of Pisa. When the Messenians revolted, they could count on multiple help: Pantaleon, king of Pisa, and Aristocrates, king of Orchomene of Arcadia, joined them.

The leader of Messenians was Aristomenes which the Messinian tradition, renewed the IV thcentury, attributed prodigious feats. He swayed the fortune of Sparta for a long time: "In the plain of Stenyclaros and up to the top of the mountain, Aristomenes pursued the Lacedaemonians". These verses which, according to poetic legend, the women of Messinia sang while throwing flowers at him, evoke the memory of the hero's triumphant returns. He would only have succumbed to treason: at the battle of the Ditch, the king of Orchomene, sold to Sparta, was the cause of his defeat. The Messenians then withdrew towards the borders of Arcadia, on the almost inaccessible height of Hira: they would have resisted there eleven years, not without leaving this refuge and without carrying the devastation until Laconia. After the fall of the fortress, they were welcomed by the Arcadians; others emigrated to Magna Graecia and Sicily.Aristomenes would have died in Ialysos of Rhodes.

With this second Messenian war is associated the name of Tyrtée whose war songs exalt the courage of the Spartans. Some fragments have been preserved: they are the first specimens of patriotic poetry. As such, they have been repeated throughout Greece and the strength of their inspiration is still felt in souls today. But also, in the history of Sparta, these calls to soldiers have a singular value: they are the witnesses of a time when the harsh and powerful ideal of the city seems to have been developed.

What was the origin of Tyrtée? The Athenians claimed it: at the request of the Spartans, desperate for their setbacks and advised by an oracle, they would have sent them this man who was at the same time a leader, an educator and a poet, who led them to victory, taught them to form youth and through his warlike poems, taught them bravery. Thus expressed the orator Lycurgus, in the Athenian tribune, the day after the disaster of Chaéronée (338 av. J. - C.) This public attestation is not enough to guarantee the truth of a tradition which expresses itself too clearly. the pride of Athens. If Tyrteus came to Sparta from outside, like so many other poets, it was undoubtedly from that Ionia where, among the other muses, the warrior muse, at that time, made her accents resound and inspired Callinos of Ephesus. In any case,he became a Spartan by adoption; he appears to consider himself a citizen of Sparta; he has encamped for posterity the type of the Spartan soldier.

“Let everyone stand firm on their legs apart,

Let them fix their feet on the ground, bite their lips with their teeth.

Let him cover his thighs and legs, his chest and shoulders

Under his belly with his vast shield.

Let his right brandish the strong lance,

Let him wave the dreadful egret on his head. "

In this description, many features are borrowed from Homer and it is in the language of the Ionian epic, not in the Dorian dialect, that Tyrtée composed his warlike elegies. Yet with him appears a new conception that one barely glimpsed in Homer: that of the soldier-citizen fighting side by side with his comrades in arms to defend the soil of the fatherland. A profound change has taken place in the Hellenic world: through the transformation of tactics, individual exploits are of much less value than the disciplined and coherent strength of united combatants.

This revolution in military art seems to have accomplished the VII th century BC. From now on the heavily armed infantryman, the hoplite, decides the winning of the battles; the role of the rider is only incidental. These duels that the Homeric heroes engaged in, after having drunk copiously with insults, disappear from the dark plain where Ares is rife. Two compact groups collide, advance and retreat without ceasing to present a united front, coordinating their movements as long as the military superiority of one of the two is not asserted. Then it is the rupture of the line of battle, the flight of the vanquished, the pursuit of the victors, if their pride is not satisfied with the mere rout of the adversaries.

Aristotle had previously noted that the new tactic had resulted in political changes, including the accession of more people to state government. We will have to come back to it. In the poems of Tyrtée, in relation to the intense effort imposed on all Lacedaemonians by the Messenian revolt, a definition of virtue is given which is no longer valid for an elite of heroes, but for a group of citizens. Only a few lines allude to what is at stake in the struggle: the subjugation of the Messenians appears as of right; the territories conquered by the ancestors, in three generations, have become a sacred heritage. Also Sparta did not risk losing this precious acquisition: it experienced defeat; it has been threatened, it seems, even in its own domain.A civic ideal can thus be forged in a war at the origin of which there was conquest and spoliation.

The theme therefore develops quite naturally:

“It is beautiful to die, falling in the first row, like a man of heart who fights for his country. Leaving his city, his fertile fields, begging while dragging his mother, his old father, his grandchildren, his young wife, this is the most abominable fate ... So let's fight courageously for this land, let's die for our children without more to spare our lives. "

The duty is the same for all; but it is particularly necessary for young people who must blush to see the elders fall in front of them, whose knees have lost their flexibility. The fervor of the whole city surrounds the warrior fallen in the fray, and confers on him the immortality of glory; the homage of the city is the reward of the victorious warrior who will receive throughout his life the marks of unanimous respect. Courage in the face of the enemy is the supreme virtue before which all the advantages which man can enjoy are eclipsed.

The verses of Tyrtée express the necessities of a time of trial: he preaches a narrow and tense morality which the state of war alone seems to justify; he demands from individuals an abnegation which one can only achieve intermittently, in a violent outburst of the soul. A law had prescribed that at the time of an expedition, all citizens should be summoned to the king's tent and read to them the poems of Tyrtée. But if, at the moment of danger, they were thus reminded that the city demanded of them total sacrifice, in daily life, the ideal which inspired Tyrtée was not relegated to the dark depths of consciousness. A whole system of customs, mores, traditions and laws seems to have been restored or established, as if on purpose, to submit the individual to the community and to oblige him as Tyrtée wanted,not to put anything above the virtue of war. This is called the constitution of Lycurgus.

Lycurgus

We must resign ourselves, however regret we may feel, to seeing in Lycurgus only a name and a symbol [More precisely, the existence of Lycurgus is considered semi-legendary]. Certainly we do not dream of denying that the strong will of certain individuals may have had a decisive action in the life of peoples and modify their destinies. On the other hand, in the institutions of Sparta, one often thinks one perceives the deliberate design to adapt to a clearly conceived end the customs and practices which go back to the most remote antiquity. It would be tempting to bring in a genius legislator who would have known how to safeguard from the past everything that could serve the greatness of his people and at the same time would have protected them against the danger of pernicious innovations.

The Greek theorists who speculated on the constitution of Sparta, thus well understood the role of Lycurgus. Since the V thcentury, the contrast was so marked between Sparta and Athens, driven by its political and economic transformations towards an entirely different type, that they thought that the old legislator had deliberately taken the opposite view of the conceptions which reigned in his time already in the Most of the cities of Greece. It would have been easy to believe that Sparta had remained attached to the customs of yesteryear while in Athens, there would have been a growing alteration of ancestral customs. Such a feeling was no stranger to Greeks inclined to celebrate the good old days. Yet the most widespread opinion seems to have been that a voluntary effort of reaction, opposing the influences which had begun to be exerted in Sparta as in the rest of Greece,erased the first effect of these influences to give the city a quasi-archaic physiognomy.

But the very uncertainties of ancient authors no less than historical data force us to conclude that it is as difficult to determine the epoch in which Lycurgus would have lived as to define his own work in the establishment of a regime which cannot have was built in one piece.

Do we want to move back Lycurgus, as Herodotus and Xenophon invite us to do, until the beginning of the first millennium BC? Or, at least, if we agree with Plutarch that the rhetra relating to the organization of tribes, the gerousia and the apella, emanates from this legislator, inspired by Delphi, or, with Aristotle, that he saw the beginning of the Olympics (776 av. J. - C.), will one place it before the first war of Messinia? It would then be necessary to singularly reduce his work and recognize that what we have been accustomed to regard as his own mark, in particular the collective training [Or, rather, the education] of youth, does not belong to him, since still at the time of Tyrtée, the Spartan discipline seems only in the process of being realized. In fact, it is locked in a dilemma: the regime attributed to Lycurgus had to be completed that during the VI th century. If we follow the tradition by placing the legislator claimed somewhere between the X th and VIII thcentury, nothing can be said about its legislation. If we deviate from it, we are led to arbitrary combinations. That this hypothesis recently proposed: the VI th century ephor Chilo would have under the name and patronage of a legislator of the past, Lycurgus, a series of reforms which he is the inspirer and that gave the Spartan state the rigid framework that we know him.

On the very character of Lycurgus, Plutarch, who has examined the ancient writings, declares that he cannot say anything certain: "His origin, his travels, his death and above all the laws and the constitution he would have established. , are reported contradictorily ”. We did not even know which of the two royal families he belonged to: from that of the Eurypontides, he passed into that of the Agiades. He himself would never have been a king, but guardian of a young king. Various intrigues lead him to leave Sparta; he learns about the sound laws of Crete and the faulty regimes of Ionia. Recalled to his homeland, he relies on thirty notables and on the authority of Delphi to change the entire form of government; but far from considering the drafting and publication of laws as necessary conditions for the good police force of a State,he voluntarily sticks to those unwritten rules which seem to emanate from a divine source. Plutarch tries without much success to put some order in the details of the institutions of Lycurgus: creation of thegerousia , land sharing, proscription of gold and silver coins, luxury industries, institution of public meals, regulation of marriage and education of children, etc. To ensure the immutability of such beautiful laws, he pledged his fellow citizens to respect them until his return, went to Delphi, obtained the sanction of Apollo and, without returning to Sparta, killed himself by abstaining. of any food. The Spartans raise a temple to him where, every year, they offer him sacrifices as to a god.

Like a god. Already during her lifetime, the Pythia hesitated to say it was man or God; but, she added:

"I am inclined rather to say god to you, Lycurgus. "

It is tempting, according to this statement, to deny the personal existence of Lycurgus about whom it is clear that nothing was known. His life is as poor in precise facts, of a graspable reality, as it is rich in legislative measures, accumulated to his credit. A human legislator would succumb to strain; Is Lycurgus only a divine hypostasis? The theory has been supported, and there is no paradox in supporting it. It doesn't matter. Lycurgus' face can neither relive nor light up for us; he cannot escape the sanctuary where the Spartans venerated him to become in our eyes a historical figure and the architect of a regime of frugality and virtue, such as J.-J. Rousseau and, after him, the men of the Revolution delighted in imagining it.

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In the absence of an individual will, it was thought that the persevering action of a class would have made slowly, but surely, the Lacedaemonian State, this robust organism which entirely seems tended towards the defensive. The nobility, which had restricted royal power, initially shaken by the revolt in Messenia, would have emerged with a new prestige, due to an incomparable faculty to reform and adapt. A desire for domination and the warlike instinct possess and animate it. She understands the new laws of war and renounces the horses or war chariots which were her pride. While in the other states of Greece, the mounted nobility will leave the main defense charge to a peasant militia and, as a result, will be increasingly forced to relinquish large parts of their authority,the Spartan nobility organized itself into heavy infantry and maintained both its military preponderance and its right to command. At the same time, it must submit to a brazen discipline which extended to all moments of life and by this agreed constraint, it becomes the living rampart of the city. It would be the brilliant manifestation of an aristocratic caste which, by virtue, would be akin to both religious and military orders of the Middle Ages.It would be the brilliant manifestation of an aristocratic caste which, by virtue, would be akin to both religious and military orders of the Middle Ages.It would be the brilliant manifestation of an aristocratic caste which, by virtue, would be akin to both religious and military orders of the Middle Ages.

There is no doubt that the city of Sparta knew a military and social organization which imposed on its members a singular abnegation and instilled in them by constant surveillance and appropriate training [Or, rather, education], with the physical qualities which were required of a good soldier, the cult of bravery, respect for leaders, obedience to the laws of the city. But if we find here what may have been at least in part the ideal of an aristocracy, let us recognize that it did not remain the monopoly of an aristocracy. The verses of Tyrtée had already shown us; other facts, too neglected, confirm this to us.

It is first of all the number of Spartans who, living in the city, are subject to the same obligations and consequently enjoy the same rights. We do not know at what time, they took this name of Egaux ( Homoioi ), of Pairs, which is known to us by some texts; but the theoretical equality of all the citizens of Sparta is the very principle of the constitution. The figures are questionable: at the beginning of the V thanother century, Sparta seems capable of supplying 7 or 8,000 hoplites. It is difficult to see in them the descendants of the ancient nobility, grouped around the kings in the valley of the Eurotas. Since no distinction in principle now appears between these comrades in arms, it must be admitted that at a certain time, an assimilation no doubt imposed by imperious claims which we echo for the time of Tyrtée, made the nobility disappear. Or if you will, in a certain sense, it is all the citizens of Sparta who have joined an enlarged aristocracy, adopting its customs and participating in its privileges not without changing its spirit.

The new distribution of land that Plutarch attributes to Lycurgus suggests the same hypothesis. The operation, as Plutarch imagines it, is almost childish: pooling of land, division into rigorously equal lots, so that at harvest time, throughout Laconia, the millstones are identical size, "as in an inheritance that several brothers would come to share". What seems probable is that the reconquest of Messenia provided the opportunity to allocate lots of land to a number of Lacedaemonians whose services had been required to subdue the rebels. The war must have caused cruel losses: it could therefore lead to a reorganization of land ownership in which a certain equality was tended. We are told of a division of the soil into 9,000 lots ( cléroi) and if the figure has been disputed, it seems clear that the representatives of the old nobility mix, in a large proportion, newcomers, like them appanage, with them forming the phalanx of the hoplites. These newcomers had been able to be free tenants until then, cultivating the soil themselves; but a new hierarchy is established. Some become soldiers who devote themselves solely to the profession of arms; the others are reduced to the status of the helot and feed the new warrior caste.

Plato, with wonderful intuition, recognized in his Republicthat a new state was born when "those who previously defended their fellow citizens as free men, friends and foster-parents, reduce them to the condition of serfs and slaves and continue to deal with war and the care of defense. This is what he calls the timocratic state which is the prototype of the Lacedaemonian and Cretan states. It is characterized by respect for magistrates, by the aversion of warriors for agriculture, manual arts and lucrative trades, by the establishment of common meals and the practice of gymnastics and exercises of war. , but also by a penchant for violent and simple men, made for war rather than for peace, full of esteem for the tricks and stratagems of war and accustomed to always having the weapons in hand.The description is strikingly correct, and, as Plato saw, by transposing his observation on an ideal plane, the customs of the classic Spartan can only be explained poorly by his original nature; they are above all the result of a social transformation which was fraught with consequences.

A democratic movement was at the origin of this transformation: perhaps it was led by the ephors, these five magistrates whose origin is uncertain, but who were always considered as the representatives of the people even though they enjoyed their rights. 'autocratic power. It resulted, as it often happened in ancient Greece, in the constitution of an enlarged class of privileged people in which a new hierarchy was formed. First of all, it was limited to Sparta: the other cities, which nevertheless belong to the Lacedaemonian state, the Periecal cities, have their own conditions vis-à-vis Sparta, which is the guiding city. They provide hoplites, but they are initially ranged in separate formations, alongside the Spartan militia.

In Sparta, this militia adopted at least in part the traditional habits of the nobility, common life, common meals, common exercises, which present so distinctly archaic features. This explains the ambiguous character of the institutions of Sparta which, on the one hand, delve deeply into the past, but on the other hand seem artificially arranged for purposes of social conservation. Has the adaptation taken place by insensible degrees or have energetic wills, at different times, translated into decisive acts the aspirations of the warrior class? We do can decide, but it seems undeniable that this adjustment was completed at the end of the VI th century or even in the first half of the V th century, when we see the frightening separation established between the military class and the rural population who maintain it.

One remark is in order, which will become clearer later. Respect for leaders, which Plato considers proper to the timocratic state, seems to have led the Spartans to easily abandon their rights in the hands of a narrower oligarchy whose action we constantly believe to be discerned. There is an element of mystery - and almost terror - in the constitution of Sparta: free citizens are tyrannically led and accept it. Among the puzzles presented by the strange city, this one deserves to be examined more closely.

The Spartan: education and the family

Let us neglect the external features with which the Athenian verve was able to brighten: the long beard, the thick hair, the coarse coat and the club that the cynical philosophers would later borrow. Abroad, the citizens of Sparta amaze and often offend by a quiet confidence in their superiority. They were known to be incomparable soldiers; their civic pride commanded respect; the simplicity of their mind was often compensated by a gift of repartee which Plato admired. “If you happen to converse with the most ordinary of Lacedaemonians, you often find him mediocre in his words; then, during the interview, he suddenly utters a striking word, brief and heavy with meaning, like a skilful archer: the interlocutor no longer looks like a child in front of him. "

To preserve through the generations the qualities now considered Dorian, we did not rely on nature or on example, which is only a supplement. A hard constraint, a laborious exercise formed souls and bodies. The development of civic virtues is an ideal that the Spartans were not the only ones to propose in ancient Greece. Each of the tiny states that made it up, born in struggle and continuing its existence in the midst of bitter rivalries, tends to demand from its members an extreme subordination to the community. But nowhere does the state's stranglehold on the individual begin so early and is so absolute only in Sparta.

This sovereign disposition asserts itself from the birth of the child. It is not for the father of the family to decide in the last resort whether he will bring up the newly born son. A council formed by the elders of the tribe intervenes; the child is presented to him. If it is considered weak or counterfeit, it is thrown mercilessly to the Apothetes, a pit close to Taygetus. The father is only allowed to feed the offspring where we see the promise of a hoplite. This one, until the age of seven, is left in the care of his mother. Then he is taken to the home; the ties which united him to his family are, if not broken, at least singularly loosened. He will live in a group, with children of his age: already begins the learning of the military profession which merges with the training of the citizen.

The agoge sought the attention of educational theorists from the IV th century BC. They made a conception of it which has nothing historical about it, not only because they brought it together as a whole to an ideal teacher, Lycurgus, but above all because they understood it as a mounted machine. with meticulous care to curb individualistic tendencies. The study of ancient societies has sufficiently shown that the individual emerges only little by little and with difficulty from the collectivities which first embrace him. What in Sparta is called agogè, that is to say the common training [Or, rather, education] imposed by the laws on future citizens, rests on a primitive fund of institutions where at all times those who counted in the tribe were supervised and trained .

The Spartan child, according to the ancient system, passes through a series of age groups whose names are defined. Without losing ourselves in the detail of this classification which goes from seven to twenty years, we can mark stages which seem to have been considered as essential in the life of the child and which correspond to changes in the discipline to which he is subjected. . First of all, under the supervision of the paidonome and young people, the children organize themselves among themselves and have a leader of their age, a "gang" conductor ( agélè or boua, expressive names that apply to herds and livestock). They get used to playing, to working together, to obeying without murmuring. The age of twelve marks a first step in this complex hierarchy, where the agogè makes its embrace more and more felt: it is the beginning of a period when, under the direct and constant command of older leaders, the young boy, born of infancy and grown thick , dressed in a simple coat, lying in a dormitory on a straw mattress, picked up for every fault, copiously whipped, insufficiently fed, trains himself in daring and also in the trick by stealing a supplement of food as best it can.

In this period too, begin to be authorized between children and adults those loving, if not sensual relationships which seem necessarily linked to the common and separate life of young males. Law and opinion authorized them by imposing on them, it seems, certain limits which are very difficult to draw [On the alleged pederasty of the Spartans, see James W. Neill, The mother goddess and her homosexuals , note ix bis , <https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2016/12/22/la-deesse-mere-et-ses-homosexuels/>]. A close solidarity was established between the lover and the child he had distinguished; the lover served as both a tutor and a model, and these bonds of such a special nature, which we find in other Dorian peoples, created an emulation which served to further develop the warlike value.

The passage from childhood to adolescence took place around the age of sixteen, at the time of puberty, and adolescents, known by the general name of irènes, were also divided into age groups. They went through successive initiations which took the form of endurance trials and which were also marked by dances and masquerades that we will find as an essential element in the festivals of Sparta. One of the trials is particularly well known: it is the beating of the ephebes at the altar of Artemis Orthia. But, in its spectacular form, the ordeal seems late; it does not, perhaps, precede the Roman period when they wanted to revive the old discipline by still bidding on its brutality. In ancient times, it was a fight between two groups of children to steal cheese, rustic offerings placed on the altar. So it's one of those boys battles,one of those kidnappings accompanied by blows that punctuate Spartan education and, in a rivalry of resistance, bring antagonistic groups into conflict. On the Platanistas, a place shaded by plane trees and cut off by canals, regular struggles that dated from Lycurgus, also opposed the ephebes.

A final ordeal, the strangest certainly for our mentality, preceded the moment when the young Irene was going to be counted among grown men. This is the famous cryptyabout which we have discussed so much. It seemed to include a time of retirement during which the young man led a wandering life outside the city; he lived on theft and hid himself from all eyes; in the night he could surprise the pilot lingered in his field and kill him. Ethnographic parallels have made it possible to relate crypty to primitive, widespread practices according to which young people of manhood retreat into the forest and return to the community only after having shed blood. Helot hunting was undoubtedly regulated in Sparta and perhaps it was only practiced by an elite among the irenes. Despite the uncertainties that cannot be entirely dispelled, we can see here the background of primitive barbarism in which Spartan education was born.

During this life together, of which the roughness and frugality appear above all, the child, then the young man, had to practice certain exercises and receive certain notions. The whole system had been developed little by little with a view to acquiring the warlike virtues: it was to give the young Spartan the indelible mark which all members of the military community were proud of. Together movements were the basis of all tactics since the phalanx dominated the battlefields. If the Spartans excelled in carrying out apparently very complicated evolutions, in following without fail their leaders, in reforming their ranks in the tumult of the combat, it is because recruited very young, they were all subjected together to the incessant practice. of a kind of rhythmic gymnastics.We all agree that they were no less passionate about music than they were about war. The cadence of well-regulated choirs is indistinguishable from that of well-disciplined battalions; for both, individual training must be replaced by collective exercise, submission to an order, that unanimously agreed docility from which each draws additional strength and exalts his pride.

There was little room for proper intellectual training. The Spartans, says Plutarch, learn their letters only for need; but they are trained in a biting way of speaking which is not without grace, where a few words enclose a lot of meaning. In fact, they were taught notions of traditional morality in the form of short, sharp sentences, often in verse, and the judgments they passed had to conform to this model. A self-confident wisdom, that of the primitives and the simple, readily translates into aphorisms, the very terms of which seem to clash and sparkle: eloquence or philosophy imitate this clicking. This is the origin of this famous literary laconism that cynical philosophers cultivated with delight. The child of Sparta,subject to a categorical imperative which knew neither relaxation nor accommodation, could not experience any embarrassment in formulating in well-defined terms a conception of honor and virtue for which a catechism transmitted orally, from the old men to the irenes, provided him with all the elements .

The age class system was not limited to children and adolescents. Up to the age of thirty, young warriors had certain restrictions: they continued, even if they were married, to live together; access to the agora was forbidden to them and it is not certain that they enjoyed full political rights. Family life does not begin until after thirty years of age, still hampered by the custom of public meals. At sixty, finally released from military service, the Spartan can be part of Gérousia: he still spends most of his time in gyms and chat rooms. He attends the children's games and the fights of the ephebes, excites them to emulation, offers them noble examples. He enjoys a prestige and an authority that no one disputes. Also in religious ceremonies [Or, rather, rites] where age categories were simplified, a tripartite hierarchy was established which was reflected in three choirs. The old men sang the song:

We were once brave warriors.

The grown men resumed:

We are: who wants to try the experiment?

The children's choir ended:

We will one day be much superior again!

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The communal meals in which only men took part are an indication of a society in which the separation of the sexes is strongly marked. We have seen its aristocratic origin. But the male population of Sparta has adopted the custom, so that one ceases to be a full citizen of the day when for some reason one ceases to take place in the messes where warriors and ancient warriors sit. Children are only admitted as listeners, to receive fine examples and hear noble words or learn to endure mockery.

Regularly, you enter at twenty. Each table, made up of fifteen guests, has the right to co-opt; as it corresponds to a military unit, it is natural that one sought there the closest union. But the ages appear to have been mixed up as in the phalanx and the principle of distribution cannot have been entirely arbitrary. Each provides their monthly allowance: barley flour, cheese, dried figs, wine, a little meat, all in specific quantities. You can bring game, produced from hunts, or parts of victims when a sacrifice has been offered. But the favorite dish was, it seems, that famous black broth that old people preferred to any other food: it was a kind of strong stew in which pork, blood, vinegar and salt entered as ingredients.

This communal meal, to which the kings themselves were to appear, took place only once a day, in the evening and did not continue in drinking. Those who had a regular home, that is to say, men over the age of thirty, went home without light. Once they had crossed the threshold of their court, private life, family life would have started for them, if it is true, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus said, that the state had no concern. of what was done in the houses.

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Ancient Sparta ignored neither family nor private life; but it is indisputable that the Spartan institutions hardly tended to strengthen the family or to develop private life.

Early male children are taken from their mothers and live together; the men form a society, meet at least once a day to eat together and find themselves willingly in premises of their own. The separation of the sexes gives to the woman a singular place, very different from that which she occupies in the other Greek cities.

Already young girls did not live inside a gynaeceum: they practiced physical exercises outside; in races, fights and dances, they hardened themselves with fatigue. The freedom of their gait was surprising: a tunic open at the side barely veiled their body. In certain ceremonies, they appeared naked; and if the good Plutarch judges that this nudity was nothing to be ashamed of, because virtue served as their veil and removed all idea of ​​intemperance, many Greeks were more severe. The poet Ibycus joked the young girls of Sparta who show their thighs. Euripides exclaimed: “If she wanted to, a girl could not be wise in Sparta; with the young people, leaving the house, bare thighs and loose tunics, they share the stadiums and palestres,something intolerable to me. "

In fact, young girls were not usually mixed with boys: they practiced among themselves; at feasts, they formed separate choirs. There was a sort of antagonism between the two sexes: there was an occasional exchange of taunts and banter. The common life of young people responds to a certain extent to the common life of young girls: the two groups only face each other in a few ceremonies.

The practices of marriage and the life of women also show this kind of emancipation which goes hand in hand with the separation of the sexes. The marriage, preceded by the kidnapping of the fiancée, keeps a furtive character and does not mark the beginning of family life. The groom, stealing from the common table, secretly joins the one with whom he is uniting. Then he retired and went, as usual, to sleep with the young men. He thus continues for a long time to know his wife in secret and at night. He had children before he really started a home.

A Spartan was not allowed to remain celibate: every year, an infamous ceremony covered with shame those who had not married. This is because a good citizen should procreate children; but the marriage bond remained rather loose. The Spartans liked to say that adultery was unheard of among them, in reality there was no vigorous community reaction against marital offenses. Let us follow Plutarch again: "People did not care," he said, "of resorting to murders and wars to ensure the unions a strict character, excluding any sharing. It was permissible for the old husband of a young woman, if he had affection and esteem for a handsome and good young man, to introduce him to her and then to recognize as his own the offspring of this generous blood. It was lawful also to an honest man,admiring the merit and fecundity of the wife of others, to know her with the consent of her husband, to sow this excellent soil and thus to have good children born from an irreproachable crossbreeding. The intention was declared: it was not a question of ensuring the continuity of the family, but the vigor of the race. On the other hand, it did not seem strange that three brothers had the same wife in common. Considering a notable exception that a King of Sparta had two legitimate wives, irregular unions with inferior women were frequent. The state of the family in Sparta differed notably from that of other Greek cities [It would be interesting to know when these practices date back and if they are not likely symptoms of degeneration].

A legend envelops the women of Sparta, irreproachable matrons and heroic mothers. On this point, Plutarch was already in trouble with Aristotle, a judge less informed than he. The philosopher - I mean Aristotle - sharply criticizes the regime of extreme freedom enjoyed by Spartan women. While men never escape the grip of discipline, the sports education of young Spartans, which should have resulted in making them Amazons, seems to have come to an abrupt end with adolescence. She leaves to the woman, at the same time as the Spartan pride which she seems to have shared with the men, the taste for independence and even the desire for command. For Aristotle, the Lacedaemonian state is almost a gynecocracy because of the empire that women exercised over their husbands. Certainly,the economic circumstances ensured to the women of Sparta, towards the IVth century BC, a privileged location. But it appears that very early on, they held, especially in their homes, but also in the State, with the voluntary consent of the men engaged in their war exercises, their hunts, the routine of their military societies, a place preponderant: we will see the consequences later [This pernicious situation was partly responsible for the decline of Sparta. See, David Astle, Sparta, the Pelanors, Wealth and Women , <https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/sparte-les-pelanors-la-richesse-et-les-femmes/> ].

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Sparta therefore appears to be the type of a city where family groups had only a secondary importance. Social distribution is made according to a principle which often runs counter to that of the family. Age and sex create distinctions which, far from fading over time, appear to have been systematically maintained, sometimes even reinforced by legislative effort. Certain comparisons were already evident to the minds of the ancients. Sparta was either a vast warrior camp or a beehive where the common interest closely grouped the bees around the chiefs [the comparison is misguided given that the hive is a matriarchal society, while Sparta was a patriarchal community]. But the hive evokes the idea of ​​a productive activity; the ideal of Sparta is turned in another direction.The state itself is erected as the supreme end and all the civic virtues have no other effect than to ensure its magnificent immobility: a caste of guardians, basing their claims on their warlike works and their military talents, demands an organization of the company which allows them, not without personal abnegation, to devote themselves entirely to these works and to exclusively develop these talents.

Property and the lower classes of the state

The citizen of Sparta has the right neither to trade, nor to exercise a trade; even working the land is forbidden to him. The Homeric hero, Ulysses for example, knew how to draw a straight furrow with his robust hand; the Spartan warrior does not touch the soil. The earth must nourish him without his cultivating it. To ensure its subsistence, a suitable soil regime is needed; other men must relieve him of all occupations which are considered incompatible with the profession of arms.

In most of the Greek states, the ownership of land was reserved only for citizens who directly exploited it or secured it. Sparta knows a distinction between the land of the citizens and the land left to a population which in the State does not exercise political rights, one cultivated by serfs, the helots, the other, on the periphery, held by the periecs.

Geographically, we can delimit, not without great approximation, the land reserved for citizens. It is not only the fertile area located in the middle and lower valley of the Eurotas, between Taygete and Parnon, reaching to the north the cantons of Pellana and Sellasie, perhaps including, at the mouth of the river, some coastal districts ; but still the whole heart of Messinia. In the whole extent of this domain, there is almost no agglomeration; the land of the citizens is divided into lots or cleroy assigned to the Spartans. They do not reside there, but are concentrated in the city. They should be seen less as landowners than as soldiers receiving land royalties for their maintenance, the very amount of which is determined.

On this quota, which is indicated to us by Plutarch, many precarious calculations have been made. No inequality of output would have been taken into consideration: year in and year out, each Spartan was to receive 72 barley medimnes for himself, 12 medimnes for his wife, about 4,000 kilograms in all; fruits, olives and grapes especially, in proportion. Even if we admit the accuracy of the figures given for barley by Plutarch, we can at most estimate the extent of sown land which is necessary to produce this royalty, that is to say four hectares. Everything else is uncertainty, as well the total extent of the clerosthan the number of serfs who lived on each of them. The very area of ​​the land shared between citizens could not be fixed by indisputable figures: the differences go from simple to double. It is better to confess ignorance.

If we want to legally define the rights of the Spartan over the clerics , we also come up against many uncertainties. The eminent property of the State appears to be implicated in certain restrictions placed on the rights of individuals: prohibition to alienate or engage the clerics ; prohibition of drawing an income higher than that which has been fixed once and for all and considered sufficient to ensure an honorable existence, but without pomp. On the other hand, according to the best established tradition, the clericis hereditary; it is still unclear whether it passed entirely into the hands of the eldest son or whether the younger children had a common enjoyment with the eldest in so far as the estate allowed everyone to pay their share of meals together. But a text by Plutarch throws a new indecision: to each child recognized worthy of existence, a lot would have been assigned from his birth; it is the very heredity of the cleros that is in question.

It would be very pointless to seek here the intentions of the legislator: we are not unaware that the system leads little by little to disastrous consequences. Even before an express measure had authorized the free disposal of clerics , the institution was responding poorly to the subject of coherent legislation. If one sought above all to maintain a class of warrior-citizens to ensure the defense of the State, it was necessary to free oneself from the hereditary principle or at least to correct it and limit it by preventing the transmission of a cleric.to a daughter dropped two lots in the possession of the same citizen. It seems that in Sparta, whatever may have been said, no precaution was taken against this danger. The birth rate was encouraged; the greater the number of male children, the stronger Sparta would be. The father of three sons was discharged from military service and exempt from taxes. But if one of the three sons was unable to bring the ecot provided for by law to the common table, he was inexorably excluded from the number of citizens. There was an internal contradiction here that later theorists clearly saw. It must be attributed above all to the family spirit which, despite being counterbalanced in Sparta by other tendencies, worked to the detriment of the essential principles of the State.

The clerosproduces an invariable income, paid in kind, from which the Spartan takes the products required for participation in the common mess. This is hardly, it seems, a fifth of income. The resident must allow him to eat at home, since only one meal is taken outside, to feed his wife, his young sons, his daughters and to obtain the manufactured objects, essential to himself and to his household. He is forbidden to trade: but he must practice the exchange or obtain a monetary equivalent of his superfluous commodities. Gold or silver coins are prohibited. There is only one iron currency, inherited from the past, heavy and inconvenient, which must be used for internal use. Trade with other Greek countries is thus made very difficult. Local production is sufficient for consumption.

But the development of private property was never hindered in a systematic way. If, in the land of the citizens, the restrictions tended only imperfectly to prevent the formation of a large property, there remained the other parts of the Lacedaemonian state where the land could be acquired at will. We do not know the details of the means by which the citizen of Sparta, who was to be only a warrior, succeeded in enriching himself: but behind a facade of frugal uniforms, one distinguishes great differences of fortune, the secret luxury of a minority, the greed of the greatest number. There is a snobbery of simplicity and the state does not demand anything else. An ideal was formed, maintained by an appropriate education, ideal of a warrior class,who worship physical vigor and want to ignore all refinements in clothing or food. Xenophon, narrow-minded, still lets himself be taken in; but Plato detects some hypocrisy in it. The art of "gathering pleasures in secret" that he denounces among the Spartans is undoubtedly not a recent import: it brings the Superman of Sparta to the common level of humanity by sometimes making him run the risk of fall below [The Spartans never claimed to be “supermen”, a Nietzschean concept. Friedrich Nietzsche himself had a pejorative conception of Sparta].The art of "gathering pleasures in secret" that he denounces among the Spartans is undoubtedly not a recent import: it brings the Superman of Sparta to the common level of humanity by sometimes making him run the risk of fall below [The Spartans never claimed to be “supermen”, a Nietzschean concept. Friedrich Nietzsche himself had a pejorative conception of Sparta].The art of "gathering pleasures in secret" that he denounces among the Spartans is undoubtedly not a recent import: it brings the Superman of Sparta to the common level of humanity by sometimes making him run the risk of fall below [The Spartans never claimed to be “supermen”, a Nietzschean concept. Friedrich Nietzsche himself had a pejorative conception of Sparta].

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The Spartan occupies the high end of the social ladder. At the bottom, there is the pilot whose condition is linked to this soil regime that we have recognized in the land of citizens. The clerics , burdened with a fee for the benefit of a separate class, is cultivated by a peasant class which does not even enjoy freedom.

Although no distinction can be seen within this class, which is not well known, the origin is perhaps not uniform. The Messenian helots were reduced to their fate by conquest. In Laconia, on the other hand, the helots do not necessarily represent in their entirety the former enslaved population. It has often been observed that serfdom was not based solely on "the right of the spear". An economic development can lead to this when small owners, too heavily burdened, fall into dependence on their creditors. However in Sparta, it is necessary to admit an intervention of the State giving to the helots the particular character which we will recognize them; but, as certain indications give to believe that the hostism did not immediately follow the Dorian conquest there,the intervention may have taken place late enough, perhaps after the first Messinian war, to impose a fixed form on a state of affairs. To decide, we would need more light on the first centuries of Spartan history.

Helots are not slaves. We even tried in vain to prove that a personal link of dependence existed between the helots of a cleric and the one who received the pension. As far as we can define their condition, we will preferably see them tenants attached to the soil and, for the most part of their precarious rights, depending more on the community than on individuals.

A few helots are attached to domestic service; as such, they were sometimes referred to as slaves. But usually, they do not live in a master's house: they have their huts in country estates and devote themselves above all to work in the fields. The work involves a personal profit: once paid the fixed royalty which goes to a citizen of Sparta, the pilot can freely dispose of the surplus. Any improvements he makes to rural farming will be profitable for him.

The master of a domain cannot tear off a helot by selling it; neither can he free it. The State reserves the right to it and uses it in the event of war, when it has employed the helots in the service of host, among the light troops or the hoplites, and that it wants to reward their bravery. But we are afraid to encourage their value. The dilemma is posed by Aristotle: “If we let go of them, they become insolent and claim rights equal to those of the masters; if we hold them roughly, they are plots and hatred ”. Sparta is not out of this dilemma: if the helots of Laconia, perhaps insensibly accustomed to serfdom, have often united with their masters, those of Messinia, brutally fallen under the yoke and always more suspect, have not ceased. on every occasion to rally to the enemies of their masters.

These Messenians were undoubtedly particularly targeted by the strange declaration of war that at the beginning of each year, the ephors addressed to the helots. We have already seen that during the cryptic period, young Spartans could with impunity kill those who fell under their hands in the darkness of the night. It is also a question of the ignominious treatment that the helots underwent on occasion: they were forcibly intoxicated to display before the eyes of young people all the turpitudes of drunkenness; they were only allowed obscene songs and grotesque dances. To the apprenticeship of bravery, which the Spartan reserved for himself, responded, as in a diptych, the methodical degradation of a people of serfs.

This picture can be taken to black: some of the practices that are reported to us are apparently exceptional and can no doubt be explained by uses or rites that escape us. More than these picturesque details, we would like to know the legal status of helots. We naturally think of the serfs of the Middle Ages; but the comparison, from the outset inaccurate, since the serf attached to the soil did not appear in France until late, cannot in any way be pushed, for lack of documents. We have neither customary nor franking charters. On each clerosdid the helots form a kind of community with a chief responsible for the prescribed fee? What was their family right? Antiquity has paid very little attention to this lower category where the historian Ephorus sees, in a certain way, slaves of the State. She especially accuses the harshness of the Spartans in whom "slaves know the maximum of slavery". It is manners, not institutions, which make the helot a pariah; fear contributes to it.

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All around the land of the citizens, that of the periecs which includes above all mountainous regions or coastal regions: in the north the cantons which border Arcadia or have been torn from it, to the east the edge of the Parnon and the entire territory that will yield Argolida: Cynuria, Skiritis, Thyréatide, and the island of Kythera, to the south the peninsulas of Tenare and Malea, in Messenia finally, the southern coast and various points of the western coast. In all this area, the yield of the soil is usually less than in the plains of Eurotas or Messinia. It was once thought that the Spartans, reserving the best land for themselves, had systematically left the ancient Achaean population a territory so narrow and so bad that it was difficult to live there. There is something like an error of perspective.We have already seen that the periecs could not be assimilated to the ancient Achaeans. The distinction between Spartans and Periecs was made first of all because the one, in their installation, had been more favored than the other; it became clearer later and determined a political inequality.

It seems that on the land of the Périèques, a subdivision was operated, as on the land of citizens, and that there are helots. But towns and villages abound there, each undoubtedly the center of a fairly small area: there were up to a hundred. They have their autonomy vis-à-vis Sparta, which does not even appear to intervene through its representatives in their administration; but in the political order they depend on Sparta. The perecic hoplites constitute bodies in the Lacedaemonian army and are required to participate in any expedition that the magistrates or the assemblies of Sparta decide to undertake.

We have no information on participation in the right of citizenship in the Periecal communities. The class which supplied the hoplites may have had a marked preponderance: but to what extent did it submit to the training [education] which made the excellence of the Spartan hoplite? Nearby lived merchants and craftsmen; but, if the Periecal cities must thus have acquired a monopoly of industry, commerce and navigation, it does not follow that the representatives of these professions, prohibited to the Spartans, were treated in these cities on the basis of equality. The regime seems to have been more liberal than in Sparta; but the Periecal cities are Lacedaemonian cities and the example of the capital could not fail to act on them.

The periecus, in Sparta, has no rights; he does not participate in the assembly; he cannot exercise a function there; in the army itself, access to high ranks is prohibited. Everything happens as if in the Lacedaemonian state there was a ruling aristocracy; but in principle this aristocracy is an entire city which has withdrawn into itself and refuses to receive newcomers into its midst. It is therefore natural that, in the land of the citizens, a peric could not have acquired a property which would have qualified him to become a Spartan. On the other hand, in the territory of the Perieces, the Spartans retained rights: not only areas were reserved there for kings and gods, but on various occasions, the Spartans settled there in whole bands of foreigners driven from their country:people of Asine or Nafplion of Argolida, inhabitants of Aegina. They can even, individually, acquire rural goods; and as the strict rules which weigh on the land in the valley of the Eurotas do not seem to have been in force among the Perieces, they took advantage of this greater freedom to ensure their descendants, outside thepatrimonial clerics , appreciable incomes.

The periecs, these second-class Lacedaemonians, do not seem to suffer from their fate. They long resigned themselves to political inequality. The military superiority of the Spartans is not enough to explain this apathy. It is probable that the internal regime of the Periecal cities contributed greatly to this: solidarity was established between the Perecic and Spartan hoplites and fostered, in the cities, a social hierarchy with which the beneficiaries were satisfied. Dependence on Sparta, which hardly translated itself into military service, weighed little on a class which no doubt also maintained a military tradition. The spirit will only change with the growing selfishness of the Spartan oligarchy.

The political constitution: Kings and Ephors

By the education they receive, the Spartans are docile and respectful of the authorities. Political institutions of a certain simplicity seem to suit this disciplined people. In fact, the organs of government in Sparta have rudimentary features which, however, exclude neither complications due to historical development, nor mystery. We often have the impression that hidden springs move the whole machine and that the assemblies or the magistrates obey a direction whose source escapes us.

The political theorists who praise the government of Sparta, both Plato and Aristotle, recognize in it a happy mixture of institutional forms which served to preserve the state. Democracy and aristocracy would have combined there. The authority of kings was limited to a fair measure; among the magistrates who control it, one is chosen by the people, the others can be chosen from the people. Each class therefore has a share in government; it is a condition of stability.

There was for a long time an incontestable stability in the Spartan State, by which it stood out among all the States of the Hellenic world. One can doubt that it came from a harmonious balance of the constitution. Plato's lyricism does not conceal the antagonisms that one finds there even when these antagonisms must merge into an agreement over which a divine will presides.

“A god,” he wrote, “watched over you, Lacedaemonians, and foresaw the future; he implanted in you double kingship, instead of a simple monarchy, and he thus moderated its power. Then a being, at the same time a man and a god, noticed in you still a swelling of the authority; he therefore associated the moderating virtue of old age with the presumptuous force that birth gives: the suffrage of twenty-eight old people, in the supreme decisions, counterbalanced the power of kings. A third savior came: he saw that, in spite of everything, the authority retained insolence and anger and he put a brake on it, the power of the ephors ... "

They are like the stages of a constitutional development which are thus retraced; in the end, we end up with the balance of forces which has been achieved by successive miracles. We have already seen that the various saviors who perhaps intervened in the destiny of Sparta are no longer for us, alas! only elusive and almost unreal personalities. It remains true that the authority of the Council of Elders and Ephors grew at the expense of royal authority, weakening itself through conflicts between the two associated kings. The downfall of kings was not carried out smoothly. The most apparent fact, which dominates the whole history of Sparta, is the great opposition of kings and ephors. It is not equally sensitive to all the periods of this story: the V th and IVhe centuries, the power of the ephors has imposed itself sovereignly. But in the second half of the third century, a king will rise to denounce the usurpation. He will give the abolition of the ephorate as a return to the constitution of Lycurgus who would not have known this magistracy.

The list of ephors dates back to the middle of the 8th centurycentury. And undoubtedly, magistrates of this name existed before this date, since one finds them in other Dorian States or in very old colonies of Sparta. Their primary attributions are uncertain. An attractive theory in fact, originally, religious officials, observers of heavenly signs, already invested with a rather formidable power if it is true that, every nine years, kings could be suspended from their office when the signs were unfavorable. This religious supervision does not surprise in Sparta where recourse to the gods, in particular to Apollo Pythien, are so numerous. We also understand how the ephors could have gradually acquired broader rights of surveillance, arbitrated disagreements between the two royal houses, even represented the kings in their absence.Finally the ephora Asteropos would have succeeded in ensuring them a power before which the kings themselves were going to bow. This ephora is unfortunately still one of those uncertain figures, without date and without history, which inhabit the past of Sparta: its very name perhaps recalls the ancient function of the ephors.

In the Spartan state, if the ephors became the antagonists of the kings, what interests did they represent against those of the kings? They form a college of five annual members, a number which seems to correspond to that of the communities or ôbaiforming primitive Sparta. However, there is nothing to indicate that each community had its delegate in the college. Whatever was first the mode of designation of the ephors, - certain texts give to believe that the kings formerly named them, - in the classical period, they are taken by the election in the whole of the Spartans who have the full rights of citizens. All of these eligible citizens apparently had to be voters; but the very process by which the election took place is described as childish by Aristotle. Perhaps it was a cheer, as in the case of the Ancients which we will see. And in any case, the ephors seem to represent the democratic element in the constitution: they would therefore have been, against kings, the defenders of popular rights.

But the people in Sparta are these men accustomed to hierarchy and military command. They do not exercise over the magistrates they designate the strict and always anxious control that is exercised in ordinary democracies. They let them adopt autocratic habits and discretionary powers. In the college of the ephors, authoritarian traditions are perpetuated which meet only weak resistance. The ephors pitilessly watch over the kings; but they control with no less rigor the public and private acts of citizens.

In the name of the people, the ephors bind each king to his accession by a solemn oath, perhaps recalled each month. The king swears to govern according to the laws: the people undertake to respect the royal authority if the king keeps his oath. The king's word does not create blind confidence: the ephors, who alone among all the citizens do not rise up before the kings, can reprimand them or impose fines on them; they intervene in their private life and restrict their political action. Even in the military domain where the kings have the responsibility of the operations, the ephors tend more and more to make weigh their authority. They despatch formal instructions from Sparta; later, two of them will be delegates to accompany the king to his camp.

With respect to the citizens, they are the implacable guardians of social discipline. Their first act, when they take charge is symbolic: they enjoin the Spartans, by a proclamation, "to shave their mustache and obey the laws". The laws, in this country where one avoided to put in writing the legislative measures, it is all the system of the customs and the traditions which regulate even the external behavior of the individuals. Reprimands and fines punish the lightest offenses: the ephors dispense them without control or recourse. They supervise the education of children, the relations of men and young boys, the conduct of men, but rarely that of women whom Lycurgus himself, it is said, was not able to submit to the yoke of the law. On the other hand,the control of the ephors extends to all the officials who are at their mercy and owe them accounts upon leaving the charge. They themselves are accountable only to their successors, linked to them by a deep solidarity. Censors of morals, judges and police at the same time, administrative inspectors, the ephors exercise in a continuous way, in spite of the annual change of people, an authority which in antiquity already is said to be a tyranny. On the periecs and on the helots, it is still rougher; the formalities, which, in the case of a citizen preceding the death sentences, do not seem to apply to the periecs. The reason of State authorizes to make disappear by the shortest means any suspect helot.It also allows the ephors to expel any foreigner whose stay in Sparta appears prejudicial to the interests of the city and to the maintenance of the social ideal which makes its strength and pride.

One may be surprised at the formidable role played in Sparta by a college whose composition changes every year and whose members are often obscure citizens. At the time of Aristotle, the ephors were at the service of this oligarchy which, little by little, monopolized all the land ownership. Poor, they are open to corruption; the life they lead is in open contrast with the frugality imposed on the people and with the misery which overwhelms the mass of Spartans. Democratic revolutions will be against them. But at the VI th and again at the V thcentury, the ephors must have been neither the agents of a nobility then non-existent nor the representatives of an aristocratic ideal. As far as the development of their authority can be followed, they have imposed themselves not only against royalty, but also against any nobility of race or fortune. It is under their aegis, it seems, that this community with an egalitarian tendency was born which inhabits Sparta. For a long time they really expressed more or less conscious wills. The annual election does not interfere with the continuity of their leadership: all the institutions which allowed the Greeks to say that Sparta was the most democratic city in Greece, the similar education of all the children, the common meals, are by them maintained in force. Cicero compares them to the tribunes of the plebs;they appear rather as the all-powerful delegates of a military people, who, imbued with respect for tradition, impose it if necessary by constraint, but most often obtain the voluntary submission of their fellow citizens, enamored of the same faith .

A singular example of a society giving itself guardians who are its masters while they are in charge. Should it be admitted that an energetic and constant minority, under the changing government of the Ephors, guided the destinies of a few thousand men who, without it, would not have known how to discipline themselves? This is one of the enigmas of Sparta. It is necessary to see whether the bodies which hold, among other things, legislative power imply the existence of a similar minority and how one could explain its formation.

The political constitution: People's Council and Assembly

The rhetra that Lycurgus, it is said, had brought back from Delphi, did not name the ephors: in front of the kings, it recognized the powers of the Gerousia or Council of the Elders and of the People's Assembly or Apella .

We have already seen that the Gerousia was to include twenty-eight members, plus the two kings who sat by right and were represented in their absence. Age conditions were first required: it was necessary to be released from the obligations of military service, that is to say to have reached sixty years. On the other hand, the title of senator was to be reserved for merit: it was, both Demosthenes and Aristotle declare, "a prize for virtue." It was thought that wealth and birth entered into the composition of this virtue: the members of a narrow aristocracy could therefore alone have been part of Gerousia.. But, to be sure, it was not always so. The oligarchic character that we recognize in this Council comes mainly from the fact that the members, once appointed, were irremovable: they remained in charge until their death.

Let us recognize, however, that the very system of designation did not exclude singular maneuvers and the capture of office by a political clan. First, there was an intense campaign where ambitions were unleashed and where votes were bitterly solicited. The people's assembly proceeded with the choice, not by vote, but by acclamation. Near the place of the assembly, chosen men, we do not know how, locked themselves in a house: they could not see or be seen, but they heard the clamor of the electors. Each candidate presented himself before the people, in an order determined by drawing lots. The judges, ignoring this order, noted on tablets the intensity of the cheers which greeted each of the candidates, designated by his presentation number.Whoever had been the loudest acclaim was proclaimed elected. It appears too well that this archaic process, disdainfully described as childish by Aristotle, could allow many frauds. The judges' decision seems to have been final, even if the impartiality of their judgment was not without suspicion.

The Gérousia studies and prepares the projects which will be submitted to the people's assembly; if the amendments made by the assembly to these drafts seem to it inappropriate, it may no longer take its own proposals into account. It shares to a certain extent the right of initiative with kings and ephors. It does not belong to him to convene the assembly, this right returns to the ephors who are also in charge, since the kings lost the prerogative of it, to convene the Gerousia .

The Gérousia has judicial powers: it is competent in all cases involving the death penalty or the loss of civil rights. The ephors translate the accused before her. With the ephors, it forms a High Court which judges kings.

Between the various orders of power, executive, legislative, judicial, there is not a very clear line of demarcation. The Gérousia participates directly in the government of the State. It rules in all matters of importance and is responsible for the highest interests of the city. The authority of the Ancients is defined in almost the same terms as that of the Ephors: they are the absolute leaders of the masses. They have no accountability. “In Sparta, the price of virtue is to become the master of government, along with one's peers. "

A close collaboration seems to exist between the Ancients and the Ephors. Yet authority conflicts could easily have broken out. The extreme respect enjoyed by the old men in Sparta must have entered as an element in this concert of wills in which they represented par excellence the hold of tradition. The presence of the ephors somewhat attenuated the gerontocratic character of this Council while the Council, which was renewed only slowly, brought to the successive ephors this unity of direction that we were surprised to find among them. The association certainly did not protect the leaders of the Spartan community from a narrow-mindedness which turned to the detriment of Sparta. For having had too much confidence in the wisdom of old people, for not having recognized with Aristotle,that there is an old age of the mind as there is an old age of the body, the city has become stiffened, pushing social conservatism to fanaticism and finally confusing the interests of an increasingly restricted class with the interests of the state. But the initial abandonment of essential rights in the hands of the Elders, a survival of a distant past where the social prestige of the old man was immense, is accompanied by a nobility and a seriousness which marked Spartan society and which still shines through in the moralizing anecdotes of a Plutarch.a survival of a distant past where the social prestige of the old man was immense, is accompanied by a nobility and a seriousness which marked Spartan society and which still shines through in the moralizing anecdotes of a Plutarch.a survival of a distant past where the social prestige of the old man was immense, is accompanied by a nobility and a seriousness which marked Spartan society and which still shines through in the moralizing anecdotes of a Plutarch.

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On the assembly of the people, the Apella , we can be brief. Perhaps the "people" of Sparta had, in almost mythical times, the right to decide sovereignly; but he soon let it slip away and, for centuries, did not seek to recapture it. The assembly, deprived of any initiative, is led by the Ephors and the Elders.

It is reduced to the Spartans only: the Lacedaemonians from the Periecal towns do not participate. Even thus restricted, it could originally have a large number of members, all those Equals who, from the age of thirty, have full civic rights. The rhetra of Lycurgus fixed them as a place of meeting the space between the bridge of Babyca and the Cnakion. The situation is unknown: we only know that the place was devoid of any construction. No porticoes, no sanctuaries; nothing that looked like an agora. We would sit on the floor; we deliberated in the open air. Later, the assembly meets in a circular room, a sort of odeon, which adjoins the agora. The building, named Skias, dated from the VI thcentury; but several centuries could pass before it was used for this new use.

The kings presided over the assembly; the ephors succeed them. Regular sessions, perhaps monthly, are planned; but on occasion the ephors convene extraordinary assemblies. Decisions are proposed by the kings, the Elders or the Ephors: in the discussion that begins, they alone speak. No written law has undoubtedly ever established this custom; it is none the less obediently observed. We vote by acclamation; sometimes we invite those who are of the same opinion to go to the same side. It is an exceptional procedure intended only to make a suffrage more manifest. The vote of the assembly does not commit the authorities: the Gerousia can always decide contrary to the wishes expressed by the people.

As we have seen, the election of the main magistrates is also done by acclamation, without control or guarantee of any kind. Therefore, it appears sufficiently that the Appella has no effective role in government or administration. Its sluggishness is the immediate consequence of the extraordinary powers left to magistrates. Under certain conditions, he is allowed demonstrations which usually strengthen the authority of the leaders and, at least, never endanger it.

In an emergency, even when it was a question of taking very serious decisions, the people's assembly could be substituted by a "small assembly" to which allusion is made only once, at the beginning of the 4th century. century. Sometimes, too, we see the appearance of a sort of committee of citizens who discuss questions of peace or war, of interest to the entire State. Like the recruitment of Gérousiaseems on the other hand, in reality, if not in law, to have been made in a limited circle of citizens, one is led to believe, as has already been indicated, that a small number of men held in hand authority. It goes without saying that their action is not exercised in accordance with clearly defined constitutional principles. Also Sparta has always been averse to any constitution logically built and functioning in broad daylight, according to duly drafted rules.

Playing a oligarchy is responsive to the IV th century; but let us repeat that this is already a time of decadence. Wealth won out. But we cannot reject outright the testimonies according to which, in the heyday of Sparta, everything was given to merit. Idealization perhaps, but which must contain some truth. Merit in Sparta is above all military merit. The selection which distinguished among the Equals of chefs and masters had to be made first on this basis.

Spartan education is not only intended to make all citizens equally fit for military labors; it aims at the formation of an elite. Xenophon should be quoted here: “Lycurgus judged that, if he could bring young people into a rivalry for virtue, they could reach the height of virile valor… Among them, the ephors chose three who were accomplished; we call them hippagretes. Each of them puts a hundred names on a list, indicating why he prefers some and rejects others. Those who do not obtain this honor are at war with those who excluded them and those who were chosen in their place; they watch each other to see if any honor is committed. Thus is born this rivalry dear to the gods, principle of civic virtue ”. The three hundred young men, who are under the command of the hippagretes , bear the name of hippeis(cavaliers or knights), although they form an elite troop fighting on foot. This name recalls the old nobility. In the democratic community of Equals, the new knights seem to form a nobility based on value. And since in Sparta, the link is close between civil authority and warlike virtue, they naturally had to take a preponderant place in the State. A hierarchy was formed early; over time, the very principle of this hierarchy may have deteriorated. But we can see how, at all times, Sparta has had an oligarchic government.

Old and new aspect of Sparta

If we seek to define the deeper meaning of the transformation which took place in Sparta from the second Messenian war no doubt and continued until a date that we cannot specify, we could say that 'There was at the same time an enlargement of the body of the privileged, but the institution or reinforcement of a system of obligations prescribed to these privileged persons and of a system of constraint weighing on the other classes of the population. It is natural that such a regime should have modified even the aspect of the city and given a particular character to the manifestations of common life.

The aristocracy which had had the preponderance in Sparta seems to have allied with the practice and with the love of the things of the war a certain taste for the joyful life and even for various forms of art. This is not an arbitrary deduction from what happened in the aristocratic cities of the Greek world. We have been able to group together a whole bundle of facts, concerning archaic Sparta, which lead to this conclusion; archaeological research has made a significant contribution to this.

The buildings have been decorating the city to VIII th and VII th centuries BC, we are well known. On the acropolis, the temple of Athena Chalkioikos, whose location has been found at least, was decorated with bronze reliefs by the sculptor Gitiadas, a native of Laconia. On the banks of the Eurotas, the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia contained only a modest temple and an altar. The very aspect that the city presented can be guessed. Thucydides, at the end of the V thcentury, wrote: "If one day, Lacedaemon were to become deserted and only the sanctuaries and the foundations of public buildings remained, posterity would hardly believe that its power had lived up to its reputation." An Athenian of the time of Pericles might be surprised at this humility. But at the VII th century, which city of Greece proper had a monumental? The cities were formed there, like Sparta, of a cluster of villages where the graves of the dead often mingled with the dwellings of the living. There was as yet no search for austerity in the architectural simplicity of Spartan constructions.

As well there was a spartan art, which we discovered the origins VIII th century votive offerings unearthed in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, or on the acropolis, or on the hill of Lakonia. The most valuable are ivory figurines and plaques; others are of bone or lead. The representations vary ad infinitum: deities, warriors, animals. An overflowing imagination, sometimes strange, composes complex creations. Along with the rest of Greece, Sparta came under the influence of the East. Neither the circle of mountains which surrounded it, nor the difficult approach to the Laconian coast prevented it from reflecting the successive modes in which the Greek world was able to indulge. The factories of Corinth imported their pottery to Sparta from the 8th centurycentury. And Sparta, while putting itself in their school, will know how to produce an original pottery, first with geometric decorations, then with oriental patterns, this pottery that has long been brought back to Cyrene before the multiple specimens, unearthed in Sparta itself, revealed the unmistakable provenance.

Thus, under the authority of the kings or the aristocracy, Sparta is welcoming to innovations and maintains constant relations with the outside. The ruling class takes a large part in the Pan-Hellenic contests as soon as they are founded. The first victory of a Spartan competitor at Olympia dates back to 720 BC, and thereafter in the catalog of victors the Lacedaemonians abound. At the same time, in Sparta, the religious festivals, celebrated with splendor, attract foreigners. The lyric choir, which originated there, seems to develop thanks to musicians and poets from outside, not only from Crete, a Dorian country which always had affinities with Sparta, but also from Asia Minor. At the origin of the festival of Gymnopédies, one called Thalétas de Crète;but the first winner at that of Carnéia would have been Terpandre de Lesbos, the inventor of melodic music.

We like to see the poet Alcman as one of the representatives of this civilization where indigenous peculiarities mingle with distant influences. He was originally from Sardis in Lydia, but settled in Sparta where he had the function of training the choirs of young girls who sang and danced in honor of the gods. He composed parthenies for them, or virginal songs: mythical heroes have their place; but the alternating choirs also playfully celebrate the beauty and the merits of the two coripheas, Agido and Agésichora. Graceful comparisons multiply. There is nothing hieratic or stilted in this poetry. According to the testimony of the ancients, Alcman had known how to use the somewhat harsh dialect of Sparta harmoniously. He actually created a composite language, whereby he preludes all Dorian lyricism. Compare him to the courtly poets of the Middle Ages: like them, he must have appealed to an aristocratic class.

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However, another poet, hardly more recent than Alcman, makes hear in the last part of the VII E century other accents. It is Tyrtée, who appeared to us as the announcer of the reform necessary for the salvation of the Spartan city. There is every reason to believe that he was listened to; but Sparta did not suddenly break with its past.

The large sculpture, which grows mainly in the VI thcentury, is represented by statues, votive and funeral bas-reliefs. Towards the middle of the century, one believes to detect there Ionian influences which give more breadth to figures a little thin and dry. It is the moment when Sparta seems anxious to raise to its gods monuments worthy of them and calls on foreign artists. Samien Théodore built this rotunda called the Skias near the agora, a religious building which survived the earthquake of 464 and was later used for assemblies. In Amyclées, center of a cult, stood an ancient idol of Apollo, bearded and helmeted: Bathyclès, of Magnesia of the Meander, was not only responsible for decorating the base-altar which supported the statue; he built all around a complex set of porticoes and chambers, with caryatids, acroterions,superimposed friezes where a thousand mythical themes were represented. We do not have here to determine exactly the Ionian contribution. What should be remembered is that at VIth century, there is a Spartan style, that in this area Sparta, as we have said, "gives and receives", that, if it brings in foreign artists, artists from Laconia will work in the other cities of Greece. In the V th century alone, the loss will be found.

In the sanctuary of Artémis Orthia, renovated around the year 600, the succession of ex-votos continues, uninterrupted. Pottery, inspired by the Corinthian black-figure gives her finest products in the first half of the VI th century deep cuts, a pinkish clay, decorated outside with garlands of lotus or palm leaves, inside of scenes with figures: such as the beautiful cup known as Arcilaus, where a painter from Laconia, who had traveled, represented, with many picturesque details, the king of Cyrene attending the weighing and loading of the wool. But about 550, Laconia, deprived of its models of Corinth, no longer mechanically reproduce ancient patterns: production stops maybe from the last years of the VI th century.

The spread of Laconian pottery, especially abundant in the VI th century, is instructive: it is found not only in the Peloponnese and Central Greece, but in the islands, Samos, Rhodes, to Asia Minor, Africa , in southern Italy, Sicily and southern Gaul. We will see that around the same time, Sparta maintains political relations with distant countries. It has not yet imposed any absolute restrictions on foreign trade.

The old aristocracy had certainly left the monopoly to men of lower classes; but while disdaining artisans and traffickers, it was very far from showing them hostility in principle. Now, this is the attitude that the warrior-citizens of Sparta will adopt, gradually no doubt. A law attributed to Lycurgus prescribed to use only the ax to make the floors of the houses, and the saw for the doors: it was the proscription of all luxury industries. Let us also remember the forced price of iron money which hampered all transactions. These are the testimonies of the same state of mind, which, towards the end of the VI th century was fatal to any intellectual or artistic life.

There remained religious life and the celebrations that marked it. The piety of Sparta was renowned: his close relations with the oracle of Delphi, which had inspired the legislation, still maintained him in the attachment to a devout [or, rather, ritual] tradition. Of all the cities, it was the most exact and the most scrupulous in discharging its duties towards the gods: history provides ample proof of this.

The Dorians were not satisfied with the gods they had brought with them: many of those who had long been worshiped in the southern Peloponnese are listed in their Pantheon. The Tyndarids or Dioscuri, hatched from a divine egg, had emerged at the foot of Taygetos before Dorian immigration. The great sanctuary of their sister Helena, venerated by young girls and women, always remained away from Sparta, near the Mycenaean sites on the left bank of the Eurotas. The form that the invaders used for the name of the god Poseidon shows that they received it from their predecessors. This god had his temple at Sparta; but his main place of worship was at the end of the Peloponnese, at Cape Tenare. Sparta adopted without hesitation both native and external divinities.We do not know where the cult of Athena came from, which she installed on her acropolis in the "bronze house" which earned the goddess its name of Chalkioikos. Heracles, who is not Dorian, but who became the ancestor of the royal houses of Sparta, arrived from Argos.

A syncretism also takes place: the ram-god Carnos, which belongs to the Dorians, becomes a hypostasis of Apollo. In Amyclées, Hyakinthos was a pre-Hellenic god of vegetation, god who died and was reborn. Apollo takes his place; but his tomb remains sacred and serves as a base for the statue of the new god. Artemis is a complex personality who receives multiple epithets. In the sanctuary of Eurotas, discovered by English excavations, it is called Orthia, which could mean: the one who stands. Artemis and Orthia may never have been completely confused; and the second would be rather Dorian. Before her, the ephebes underwent a famous ordeal; they also took part in competitions where the prize was an iron sickle.

For all these divine persons, the Spartans seem to have given up early on to modify or embellish the representations housed in the temples. They stuck to a few cult images, more or less crude. One noted as a characteristic feature of their religion - and by which it approaches the Roman religion - the facility with which they devoted a worship to abstractions: Fear, Death, Laughter. Symbols, attributes placed near immutable effigies, satisfy their religious imagination. Hélène does not depart from the hieratic pose. The type of the twin Dioscuri, on foot or on horseback, symmetrically opposed, does not vary; but “there are cases where beside them stands a jar, emblem of the domestic abundance that they know how to maintain; coarse pillars, connected by a crossbar,are a symbolic representation of the affection that unites them; the offerings that were placed at their altars: eggs or roosters, decorate the pediment or the lower part of the stele, and, as they are heroes buried in Spartan soil, they are entitled only to the jar, to the coarse pillars, near the offerings, crawls the funeral serpent. Such is the image of Castor and Pollux, which many ex-votos offer, even nowadays, to the view of the visitor, in the small museum of Sparta ”(F. Chapouthier).crawls the funeral serpent. Such is the image of Castor and Pollux, which many ex-votos offer, even nowadays, to the view of the visitor, in the small museum of Sparta ”(F. Chapouthier).crawls the funeral serpent. Such is the image of Castor and Pollux, which many ex-votos offer, even nowadays, to the view of the visitor, in the small museum of Sparta ”(F. Chapouthier).

Thus, in religious life, however intense it may have been, sculpture will not find the opportunity to flourish or to renew itself. The other arts, which in Greece more than anywhere else were closely related to religion, were not favored any more.

Apollo had drawn around his divine person the essential ceremonies of the Lacedaemonian cult: the Carneia, the Hyakinthies, the Gymnopédies were devoted to him. These three festivals, the second of which was celebrated in Amyclées, the other two in Sparta, preserved archaic rites. Initiation ceremonies were associated with propitiations for the fertility of the earth and the fecundity of the flocks. Strange processions marched past. The young girls were carried in procession in antique-shaped carriages, decorated with fabulous animals. There were cavalcades of young boys, battles, dances and choirs.

Sparta had given a large place to all forms of orchestral. Certain dances were accompanied by disguises: men disguised as women, women disguised as men, performing buffoon movements, even licentious parades. These dances appeared as well in the cult of Artemis as in that of Apollo. Celebrants often wore masks. In the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, we have found curious terracotta copies of similar masks, offered as ex-voto. The features are intentionally distorted to make them look silly or scary. These ritual masquerades are stubborn holdovers from primitive religions [of non-Aryan origin].

There were also armed dances, the most famous of which is pyrrhics, which reproduced military developments. At the Gymnopédies, the choirs which performed on the Agora were made up of children, young children and adults. The performers were naked and unarmed, but mimicked scenes of battle or fist fight in violent gymnastics that tested their endurance.

Songs mingled with dances. The lyric choir does not therefore die out in Sparta. It even seems that it should take on a new shine since the religious festivals express the soul of a warrior community and are oriented towards educational purposes. But they were satisfied with traditional peasants and hymns; the verses of Terpandre or Tyrtée were constantly repeated there. Formerly foreigners had been able to give the ritual songs of the Lacedaemonians a literary and musical character which assured them the value of an art production. Subsequently, we defended ourselves so well against all innovations that an ephora cut the strings added to the lyre by the lyric poet Timothée de Milet.

Sparta did not seek to attract large contests of foreigners to its festivals, since it had begun to fear them all and hardly tolerated them in its territory. At the same time, its inhabitants participate more games common to Greece: the Olympic winners lists their names appear almost constantly since the middle of the VI th century. Gymnastics, like music, is subservient to the training of the warrior.

The austere Sparta decidedly takes the place of the amiable Sparta: she will guide Greece in the works of war, but will disdain to educate herself and to instruct others in the arts of peace. The sanctuary of the Muses, which rises in the city, would seem a mockery if, despite the utilitarian conception it has made of music, the Greeks, rather inclined to a similar view, had not continued to consider the music as an art dear to Lacedaemon. It is only to hear Pindar: "There," he said, "excellent the advice of old men, the spears of young men, and also the choirs, the Muse, the festivals".

The festivals of Sparta still stir the imagination of poets. Euripides, who hates Sparta, evokes the solemnity of the Carneia and the nocturnal dances of the Hyakinthies. Aristophanes composes in their honor a lyrical verse in Dorian fashion: "Leave again the amiable Taygetus, Laconian Muse, come, come and sing the god of Amyclées, worthy of our respect, and the goddess in the bronze temple and the valiant Tyndarids , who at the edge of the Eurotas, take their frolics ... Leap, light, so that we celebrate Sparta which loves divine choirs, feet beating the ground, when, like fillies, the young girls leap along the river. Eurotas, raising the dust with their feet ”. The dancing choirs of young girls still make, as in Alcman's time, the poetry of that harsh Sparta. The Laconian virgins figure in the Hyakinthies;for Apollo, they perform processional dances or hyporchemas; at the feasts of Artemis Caryatis, they wear a diadem in the shape of a flared basket and, dressed in a fine tunic, seem to swirl. This is how statuary has often represented them: in the sanctuary of Delphi, at the top of a column forming a high acanthus stem, three of these dancers brushed with their light steps the end of the foliage. But the artist who had sculpted them was not from Lacedaemon.at the top of a column forming a tall acanthus stalk, three of these dancers brushed their light footsteps against the tip of the foliage. But the artist who had sculpted them was not from Lacedaemon.at the top of a column forming a tall acanthus stalk, three of these dancers brushed their light footsteps against the tip of the foliage. But the artist who had sculpted them was not from Lacedaemon.

The conquest of hegemony and the uncertainties of Spartan politics

The resumption of Messenia appeared to us only as the starting point of the internal transformations from which a new Sparta was born. Outside, it did not mark the end of the military operations intended to further enlarge the domain of Lacedaemon. The struggles against Argolida and Arcadia were not of a defensive character: the annexation of Arcadia as a whole was planned. Apollo of Delphi, consulted with deference, pretended to grant at least the Tegeatide:

"Are you asking me about Arcadia?" It is a lot to ask; I will not give it to you… I will give you Tégée to dance there and its beautiful plain to measure it with a line. "

But the god wanted to teach a lesson to the people he loved: Apollo here almost looks like Jehovah. The Lacedaemonians were defeated: their captives had to cultivate the plain of Tégée where the task was measured against them. Later, repeated defeats forced them again to turn to Delphi and this time, Apollo was of good advice: at his instigation, they stole the bones of Orestes, son of Agamemnon, from the Tegeates. These precious relics at least gave them the advantage over Tegeus, to whom they imposed an alliance.

At Argos, the Spartans took off permanently during the V th century the townships east of Parnon to the east coast of the Peloponnese. But the wars of conquest were already coming to an end: the policy of alliance, inaugurated with Tégée, was henceforth to be practiced by Sparta.

The turnaround in Spartan policy seemed so complete that here again we wanted to see the action of an individual. The ephor Chilo, which sometimes puts among the seven sages, have developed the middle of the VI th century an external agenda in accordance with the internal reforms he took the initiative and it was consolidating. Opinions vary on the sheer magnitude of the work he is said to have accomplished. We have gone so far as to believe that, under the mask of Lycurgus, Chilon had been the real author of the profound changes which gave Sparta, with its warlike framework, the simplicity of its manners and the stiffness of its attitudes. Others, without daring to refer to the VI th century the beginnings of Spartan education, gender Homoioi, of the frugality of communal meals and of all civic discipline, admit, however, that he clearly saw the need, which imposed itself on a State where a class dominated, not to increase indefinitely the number of inferiors, helots or peric. Hence the sudden renunciation of any new expansion of territory.

Chilon has more historical consistency than Lycurgus; but, from his political activity, we have just learned that outside he worked to overthrow tyrants and that in Sparta he would have put the ephors on par with the kings. It is possible that this man, the wisest of Sparta, who, after his death, was honored as a hero, played a role of immense importance: perhaps one will judge reckless to draw too clear the meaning and scope of its action. He would have invented the famous adage where we saw the supreme rule of Hellenism: Nothing too much . An admirable basis for a policy of moderation, deliberately hostile to any new acquisition. However, we will hesitate to pull the venerable Chilon out of the shadows to make him the victorious adversary of conquering imperialism.

The force of expansion of a people is limited. An ardent leader, sovereign master, can be carried away by disproportionate ambitions, and for a time, whipping up energies and straining all springs, prodigiously multiply the conquests. This was not the case in Sparta: the authority of kings, who could have been greedy for glory, is jealously watched. Big appetites are satisfied: we think about keeping more than acquiring. But military force allows a policy of prestige. And Sparta, by the very form of its government, attracts other states of the Peloponnese to it.

The Spartan infantry perhaps has definitely acquired a reputation of invincibility that the middle of the VI th century. But, if we must not, with Herodotus, trace the military institutions of the city back to Lycurgus, there is reason to believe that the new tactics of the hoplite found favorable ground in Sparta early on. . The collective life of the children and the ephebes resulted in the enrollment in the heavily armed phalanx. The common meal table brings together the companions who will meet in a military unit. The subdivisions of the army have varied: grouper or mores as upper units, below the pentécostyes , the triacades , the énomoties, comprising a number of men who do not appear to have been the same at all times, nor to have always corresponded to what the names themselves seem to imply. It doesn't matter. One principle remains the same: the Spartan militia is made up of small units in which the different age groups are represented and whose members, from peacetime, are linked by an intimate comradeship.

It has already been said that the education of the Spartans trained them to accomplish the most difficult of all movements. Docile to the voice of their leaders, they quickly passed from the order of march to the order of battle, deployed, executed U-turns and risers at which Xenophon marveled. Dressed in the red tunic, armed with the indented or round shield, they marched into battle to the sound of the flute. On the battlefield, the skillful distribution of men according to age, vigor and experience assured the phalanx an extraordinary cohesion. But also, according to the command, all the men belonging to the same class of conscription knew how to leave the row to repel an attack of cavalry or light infantry. When the regular order of the phalanx was upset,the Spartan was neither astonished nor troubled; he was particularly trained to resume without fail the struggle side by side with his random neighbors.

Such mastery in the art of war was peculiar to the Spartans. The other Lacedaemonians were not to possess it to the same degree; nor could they be mobilized with the same speed. That is why they fought for a long time in separate formations. Later, as the number of Spartans decreases, amalgamation will be necessary.

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This formidable army, which Sparta no longer uses to acquire land, at least gives it the possibility of intervening either in the quarrels which divide the Greek States or which, within the States themselves, oppose rival factions, or also outside the Hellenic world. Can we see that with this help, the city has pursued a clearly defined policy?

Since the VII thcentury, a certain number of Greek cities had known a particular regime: tyranny. Usually it had been established to the detriment of the aristocracy and relied on popular elements to which it brought material satisfaction without providing for their political emancipation. The tyrant, often from the noble class, but turning against it, usurped power while disguising its usurpation by the exercise of some legal magistracy and extended himself in his functions while pretending to respect the forms of law. constitution. In the Peloponnese, the most prosperous cities, Corinth, Sicyon, Megara further north, then Athens, had their tyrants. They strove to make their sovereignty hereditary, but failed to create lasting dynasties. The Orthagorids, in Sicyon,had only five or six representatives who succeeded each other for about a century (mid-7thth century to the middle of the VI th ). The other tyrannies were even more ephemeral. In Corinth, Periander succeeded Kypselos, but his nephew was assassinated: as the Pythia had predicted, the Kypselid dynasty ended in the third generation. In Megara, Théagénès did not even maintain his authority throughout his life. Finally in Athens, we know that the sons of Pisistratus, Hipparchus and Hippias had a miserable end: one fell under the blows of the tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogiton, the other had to go into exile, take refuge with the Great King, lead the war. Median army against Athens.

We will see that in Athens the intervention of Sparta precipitated the ruin of Hippias. Since antiquity, the Dorian city has been attributed a systematic aversion to tyrants: everywhere it would have worked for their downfall. This aversion could be justified. In Sicyon, it appears clearly that the aristocracy considered itself Dorian: the Orthagorides strive to destroy it by breaking its traditions, by distorting its institutions, by abolishing its cults. Perhaps it was the same in Corinth. Yet Sparta only intervened belatedly in Sicyone, at a time when the Orthagorids had long since disappeared. She does not intervene at all in Corinth. But the two cities, where eventually a moderate oligarchy established itself, will approach Sparta.The alliance which is forged with Corinth will have its importance in the destinies of the Lacedaemonian state. The mercantile interests of Corinth, which perhaps already began to assert themselves in VIth century, growing go and lead the Spartan policy.

We are touching here on the origins of this so-called Peloponnesian Confederation where the hegemony of Sparta is marked and strengthened at the same time.

It is primarily a system of bilateral alliances, concluded by persuasion or imposed by force. A previous defeat placed Tégée on the side of the Lacedaemonians; the other Arcadian cities also accepted their leadership. The Elis had received assistance in its war against the inhabitants of Pisa; thanks to Sparta, she had taken over the administration of the Sanctuary of Olympia. We know nothing of the negotiations which linked the cities of Argolida to Sparta, in rivalry with Argos, in particular Corinth. Megara, in a difficult situation between Corinth and Athens, sought his support. Despite the obscurities surrounding the progress of Spartan influence, it can be said that before the end of VI th century, except Argos, irreducible, and Achaia, whose political role is null, all the Peloponnese is possessed or led by Sparta.

One would seek in vain to reconstitute the primitive pact of this last grouping: distinct conventions attach to a master city of the cities which, without opposition, recognize its preponderance. It is a very free and very flexible association in which the more or less lasting will to fight side by side is expressed. It must be seen to the test.

The Hellenic world is not confined to Greece itself. The Dorians had settled in the southwest corner of Asia Minor, on the island of Rhodes, in Cyrene, in Magna Graecia; Taranto is a colony of Sparta. In the VI th century yet, multiple links raccordaient Laconia to these distant lands. Across the seas resounds the call of Greek voices which the barbarians always threaten to stifle. Beautiful mission for the first city of Greece to come to the aid and to drag behind it all those States which are in its wake.

But Sparta is already hesitating. This is the moment when its very civilization appears, as we have seen, to suspend the normal course of its evolution and to close itself off from outside influences. Surrounded by its Peloponnesian allies, Sparta will develop more and more a prudent egoism which will sincerely ally itself with religious scruples. It is doubtful that she then took the clear awareness of a mission that Apollo Pythian reserved for her and that she considered herself the predestined guardian of an order common to the Greek states, based essentially on the aristocratic classes. Certainly, we can note in poetry, in VI thcentury, the echoes of such a mystic. But for Sparta, political considerations, internal concerns, and even individual disagreements act more immediately on his attitude, which, moreover, is not yet immutable.

Around 550, Croesus, king of Lydia, who had subjected the Greeks of Asia Minor to a sort of protectorate, looked for allies among the Greeks in Europe. Its ambassadors, guided by Apollo, addressed the Spartans, because they held the first rank in Greece. They received a very good reception; a treaty of friendship and alliance was concluded. But a few years later, the Lydian kingdom was destroyed by Cyrus: the fall of Sardis was so sudden that the Lacedaemonians did not have time to intervene. It is not certain that they were very eager to do so. When Cyrus marched against the Ionian cities, they refused to assist them. They confined themselves to sending a ship to observe the situation; a deputy went as far as Sardis to "signify to Cyrus, on behalf of the Lacedaemonians, the prohibition of devastating any city in the Greek country;for they would not see it with indifference. Cyrus only laughed. Did the Lacedaemonians have the naivety or the pride to believe in the effectiveness of this threat?

Twenty years later, Sparta, at the request of banished Samians, engages in a war against the tyrant of Samos, the famous Polycrates. After a success they could not exploit, the Lacedaemonians needlessly besieged the city of Samos for forty days, then returned home. It was, says Herodotus, the first expedition that the Dorians of Lacedaemon made in Asia. Missed expedition which they were in no hurry to renew.

Corinth especially had engaged them there: it still found in Sparta itself strong support when it was a question of attempting adventures. One man, among others, was ready to risk great blows, King Cleomena who seems to have dreamed of reconstituting royal authority. He was a partisan outside of a daring policy that contrasted with the timidity of the Ancients, supported by the Ephors. A conflict begins where the king succumbs; but, for some time, he did reign and held in check the forces of his constitutional adversaries.

His activity may have been somewhat muddled. Cléomène engages in multiple companies whose chronology is very doubtful. If we add that the tradition which concerns him seems to have been singularly malicious, we will understand that this king of Sparta, the first who for us is more than a name, is far from being enlightened by the full light of history.

Winner of Argos to whom, perhaps from the beginning of his reign (around 520), he inflicted a crushing defeat without however reducing the depopulated city to Sparta, he intrigued in Attica. The last Pisistratid, Hippias, still ruled Athens: he had had good relations with Sparta, but was also allied with Argos. The Pythia, won over by the political opponents of Hippias, tirelessly urged Sparta to "deliver" Athens. A first attempt failed; but Cleomena himself entered Attica and forced Hippias to capitulate. Sparta had no doubt expected the recognition of the party of emigres which it was returning to power. But, in Athens, the civil struggles turned to the profit of a democracy, very moderate besides, which a representative of the noble family of the Alcméonides, Cleisthenes, established.The rise of Athens begins with freedom.

Cleomenes, by taking sides against Cleisthenes, only widened the gulf between the new regime of Athens and that of Sparta. He had ordered the Athenians to expel the Alcméonides, entered Athens, occupied the Acropolis, banished seven hundred families. A burst of energy ends this intervention which was considered an insult, and almost a sacrilege. The goddess Athena herself forbade the Dorian access to her sanctuary, Cléomène had to evacuate Attica. It was not long before he returned with a large army which included the allies of the Lacedaemonians, ignoring the real purpose of the expedition. When they found out, the Corinthians were the first to protest and proclaim that this interference in the internal affairs of a city seemed to them unjust and intolerable.This principle hardly accorded with the Spartan tendency to support aristocratic governments everywhere. However, the other king of Sparta, Eurypontides Démarate, seems to have supported him too, perhaps out of personal hostility against Cleomena. He commanded the army with him: the opposition of the Corinthians and the quarrel of the kings brought about the retreat of the federal army.

This failure must have resulted in a crisis of extreme complexity: a crisis in Sparta itself where antagonism between kings gave good play to the ephors; crisis in relations between Sparta and its allies. To deal with the most urgent, we put an end to the joint command of the two kings in foreign expeditions, and we took the opportunity to subject the king who was in command to surveillance. To the allies, an important concession appears to have been made which was like the embryo of a federal organization. The allies cannot be required to provide contingents without a prior decision by an assembly to which they delegate representatives: this body becomes sovereign for all that concerns the Peloponnesian confederation, which would henceforth be provided with a real constitution. Kings were thus prohibited from any bellicose initiative:Cléomène's adversaries had to easily rally to a measure which curtailed his ambition.

The consequences were not long in coming: worried about the progress of Athens and its spirit of independence, the Lacedaemonians wanted to restore Hippias. In the assembly of allies, the Corinthians lead the opposition: “Here you, Lacedaemonians, are about to introduce tyranny into the cities. It is the most iniquitous and criminal action that can be committed among humans. They had the vote of the majority; Sparta had to give up changing by force the constitution in a city of Greece.

What then are Sparta's ambitions? They seem uncertain and even contradictory. A brother of Cléomène, Dorieus, leaves with colonists to take Libya from the Carthaginians: this enterprise, which failed, seems to have had official support. However, Ionia revolts against Darius: Aristagoras de Milet, who seeks support in Greece, obtains no audience in Sparta. It is Cléomène himself who refuses to introduce before the assembly a proposal for help in which he sees only madness. Athens will be more generous and more reckless. His intervention will attract the armies of the Great King to Europe; but the combined action of the principal states of Greece in favor of Ionia might have obtained another result.

On the eve of the Persian wars, Sparta, despite its strength, was worried and confused. They have recourse to her as the arbiter of Greece; she does not always take full advantage of this exceptional situation. Athens, which is not without also knowing the reversals and political repentance, brought before the court of Sparta its commercial rival, Aegina, accused of treason for the benefit of the Medes. It is the occasion of a new conflict between the kings Démarate and Cléomène: successively, they must go into exile. While the first asks Darius for asylum, Cléomène remains in the Peloponnese. From Arcadia, a country which accepted only regret the suzerainty of Sparta, he fomented formidable plots as far as Laconia. The helots move dangerously. The Lacedaemonians decide, like the lesser evil, to recall Cléomène;but soon after, the king, gone mad, disappears in a strange suicide, mutilating himself and slashing his stomach with a knife.

Already the Persians had landed in Marathon ...

Thermopylae and Plateaus

In the early years of the V thcentury, Athens and Sparta had come closer. In Athens, Cleisthenes, the architect of the democratic constitution, had disappeared from the scene. The most prominent figure was Miltiades, who while waiting to renew the tradition of a Pisistratus, deals with the parties, but, always suspect to the people, leans more towards the oligarchy. The Laconisants obtained a diplomatic success from Cléomène in the Aegina affair: Aeginetic hostages, deposited in Athens, forced the island to maintain strict neutrality. To thank the Lacedaemonians for having removed the threat of the pirates of Aegina from its shores, the Athenians have linked up with them: they do not contest their hegemony. By mutual agreement, the two cities refused the homage demanded by the ambassadors of the Great King. Miltiades, before Marathon, discount the total competition of Sparta.

This help came after the victory. Let us rule out the suspicion that Sparta, by a calculated delay, wanted to satisfy old grudges or prevent future rivalries. She could not profit from a success of the Persians she had challenged. The reasons given were of a religious nature: a law forbade the Lacedaemonians to set in motion before the new moon. Perhaps we should not look further, in which case it would be enough to admire the state of mind of the scholars who honor this religious scruple of the Lacedaemonians and mock the Jews for not having wanted to take up arms on a Sabbath day. . It is also possible that unrest broke out in Messinia at that time. The schemes of Cleomena had been able to bear fruit, and two texts by Plato expressly accuse Messene of having hindered the action of Sparta in the days of Marathon.A strange reproach for sure if we remember the state of slavery in which the Messenians were held, but which is nonetheless significant.

Two thousand Spartans arrived the day after the battle. They had made the journey in three days, having a great desire to fight. “They wanted at least to see the Medes; so they came to Marathon and beheld them. Then they praised the Athenians and their deed and returned. Athens had the deserved benefit of its victory; she knew how to exploit it.

The Persian danger had only been temporarily removed: in Athens, the foreseeing Themistocles knew how to organize a strong navy. Sparta was always ready for battle; but, when Xerxes rushed on Greece, the conditions of the struggle at first turned to the disadvantage of the city. Against the mass of the invaders, it was necessary to organize successive lines of defense on a ground recognized in advance. The Lacedaemonians, who courageously decide to cover as much of the Hellenic land as possible, will grope and retreat to the isthmus, not without having suffered cruel losses and being covered with glory.

The fault was not theirs alone. At the Congress of Corinth, held under the presidency of Sparta in the fall of 481, a general reconciliation of the states present masked the struggles of interest or ambition. They united in a defensive line by reciprocal oaths. The command of the ground troops was entrusted to King Leonidas, half-brother and successor of Cléomène; that of the fleet, disputed between the Athenians, the Corinthians and the Eginetes, also fell, by a compromise, to a Lacedaemonian, the Navarch Eurybiadas. But there were absences and threats of defection. The defense plan remained uncertain. And Delphi predicted defeat.

In the spring of 480, ten thousand hoplites, under the Lacedaemonian Evainétos and the Athenian Thémistocle leave towards the North to defend the passes which lead from Macedonia in Thessaly. Badly assisted by the Thessalians, ignoring the region, they withdrew without fighting and regained the Isthmus of Corinth by sea, as they had come.

New deliberation: we decide to defend Thermopylae, which, from the Spercheios valley, in the south of Thessaly, gave access to Central Greece. It was at that time a parade of nine kilometers, extremely narrow in several points, between the mountain and the sea. The eastern and western entrances measured less than 15 meters; the parade also narrowed in the central part, near the hot springs to which it owed its name; the Phocidians had built a transverse wall there. The alluvial deposits of Spercheios have modified the whole region so well that it is difficult to reconstruct the ancient aspect. A low, marshy plain of several kilometers now extends between the northern foothills of the Saromata Mountains, ancient Callidromos, and the Gulf of Lamia. But long ago,the passage was easy to keep if care was taken to cover also the mountain roads which, to the west, in the region of Asopos, allowed the Thermopylae to be turned. On the sea side, the Greek fleet, posted north of Euboea, was to prevent an advance of the Persian vessels, which would have made the defense of the passage of land futile.

Leonidas was charged with organizing this defense; but far from being able to dispose of all the Hellenic forces, he was only the leader of an avant-garde which, according to the most favorable calculations, barely numbered ten thousand men, coming partly from the Peloponnese, partly from Central Greece, Boeotia, Locrid, Phocis. Among them, three hundred Spartans formed an elite troop, the small number of which does not fail to surprise.

As in the time of Marathon, religious reasons are alleged to explain the numerical weakness of the Peloponnesian contingents: the feast of Carneia was celebrated in Sparta and it was also the time of the Olympic Games, in which the whole of the Peloponnese participated ardently. Here again, one should not be overly skeptical. Sparta is wronged by accusing it of having reserved its best troops to defend the Peloponnese. But his error was no less serious; Herodotus admits it naively: she did not believe "that one would fight soon at Thermopylae". And while the mobilization was done slowly near the Isthmus of Corinth, the gate of Greece was going to be forced in a few days by an enemy ready for all sacrifices and finally helped by a traitor.

We will not repeat the events of the drama in detail: the attack on the parade, vainly reiterated by the best troops of the Medes and Persians, the learned defense of the Lacedaemonians, the departure in the night of Hydarne and the body of the guided Immortals. across the mountain by Éphialte de Malide, whose name was now abhorred. Leonidas had not committed the imprudence of leaving the high region of Anopaia unattended, where a surprise was possible. He had posted a thousand Phocidians, accustomed to mountainous countries. But the Phocidians were seized with panic or allowed themselves to be disappointed about the intentions of the enemy. They retreated south to protect their own land.

The Persians were able to march through the folds of the Callidromos without obstacle and reach the slopes towards the western entrance of the pass. The defenders of Thermopylae were to be surrounded.

They had been warned of the fate that threatened them and did not agree on what to do. Most, we are told, left or were dismissed by Leonidas. His conduct appeared singular. Shouldn't he also vacate a post he could no longer hold? Spartan honor did not require unnecessary sacrifice, as the example of other strategic retreats executed by Spartan leaders demonstrates. It was therefore suspected that Leonidas would have misunderstood the real situation and would not have noticed the danger until too late. Or else, out of a religious sentiment, he would have devoted his life and that of his Spartans with the mystical hope that he would buy the salvation of his country with the blood shed.

Leonidas was doubtless neither a blind person nor a mystic. He must have been imbued with Spartan principles; but the application he made of it is easily justified. It is difficult to see how the Greek troops, watched from the front by an enemy who was maneuvering at the same time to surprise them from behind, could have evacuated Thermopylae without covering their retreat. Leonidas assigned to the Spartans and a few allies, who had remained with him willingly or by force, the task of fixing the Persians in a fierce defensive, while the main body of the army would drain away. He perished with his family: a king of Sparta could not act otherwise.

Neither the multiplied declamations of an obsolete rhetoric, nor the too conventional representations of a painting or a sculpture fed by clichés should deter us from seeing Leonidas as a hero. Let us not imagine him in the guise of a young warrior who, impatient for glory, throws himself to death with an almost irrational impulse. Leonidas was over fifty when he succumbed to Thermopylae. This is all we know about him: he had reigned in obscurity for about eight years when he was ordered by the ephors to organize the defense of the parade. He left his name and the memory of an action which earned him the incarnation of the ideal Spartan.

Xerxes, irritated by his losses, made, contrary to the custom of the Persians, mutilate and expose the body of the vanquished general. Later, he was buried in Thermopylae, then brought back to Sparta where a tomb was raised to him, near which an annual competition was celebrated. It was not on the site where a so-called tomb of Leonidas is shown today, but was near the theater. In this region, English excavations unearthed in 1925 the upper part of a statue of a warrior, shirtless and head wearing a helmet with ample plume, the bearded face, but without mustache, appears energetic between the covers- cheeks decorated with animals. It is an idealized figure, which must date from around 470 and cannot be related to a specific school of sculpture.It was immediately called Leonidas and we can keep this name.

For the other warriors, fallen in the battle and buried on the spot, the amphictyons of Delphi had two commemorative inscriptions engraved on stelae, one common to all:

“Here, against three hundred thousand men fought four thousand men from the Peloponnese. "

The other reserved for the Spartans:

“Stranger, announce to the Lacedaemonians that we are lying here for having obeyed their decisions. "

The poet Simonides of Keos composed in honor of the dead a hymn of which a somewhat mannered stanza has been preserved:

“Those who fell at Thermopylae had a glorious fate, the most beautiful fate. Their tomb is an altar; no flowers: the memory; no mourning: praise. This tumular stone will not crumble; time which tames everything cannot annihilate it. In this sacred enclosure resides the Glory bestowed by Greece. Leonidas, the King of Sparta, bears witness to this: he left the great monument of its value and its lasting reputation ”.

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Yet make no mistake about it. It was when the Persians had left the soil of Greece that the glorious defense of Thermopylae was duly celebrated. At the time, she did not exalt courage. The flood of invaders spreads without constraint on Boeotia and Attica; Athens is taken. On earth, any resistance test is abandoned until the Isthmus of Corinth. The fleet must have left its position north of Euboea and descended into the Saronic Gulf. The Peloponnesians who now think only of barring the isthmus, do not want us to risk a possibly fatal decision at sea.

The Lacedaemonian Navarch, Eurybiadas, hesitates. Sparta, in the fleet, has only ten vessels, mounted by helots; Corinth asks for retirement. But Athens has the strongest naval contingent; Athenian leader Themistocles firmly believes that in the narrow waters of Salamis, the Greeks will have the advantage. It is by turns urgent, insidious, even threatening. He snatches a precarious promise from Eurybiadas. And when the Lacedaemonian, harassed by the allies of the Peloponnese, wants to break it, it is too late. The cunning of Themistocles forced the Greeks, blocked by the Persians, to fight; it is crowned by a victory of which Athens, rightly, can be proud. In Salamis, the Persians lost control of the sea: at the same time, the immense invasion reached its extreme limit.

But Greece was not saved. If Xerxes returns to his States, his general Mardonios winters in Thessaly with an army of more than one hundred thousand men, which includes the best elements of the Persian troops. In the spring of 479, he will resume the offensive. The divisions of the Greeks also offered a fine field for its diplomacy. The Athenians have returned to their half-ruined city; but, if the Peloponnesians abandon them to themselves, they will be able nothing against Mardonios. But the Peloponnesians procrastinate: they decide to take action only when the Athenians threaten them to accept the unexpected conditions that Mardonios offers them. They are still late: they are celebrating the feast of Hyakynthies. However Athens is again occupied by the enemy; but, in the face of the advance of the Confederate troops,Mardonios abandons the city which he finishes sacking. He chose his battlefield in a plain of Boeotia, not far from Plataea, and settled there at leisure.

The Peloponnesian army is only enlarged by the contingents of Megara, Athens, Euboea and Plataea. It is impossible to assess its importance. The Spartans, perhaps five thousand in number, doubled by five thousand periecs, formed the main force. Each Sparta hoplite would have been followed by seven helots, lightly armed. The general command was exercised by Pausanias, regent for the minor king Pleistarchos, the son of Leonidas. The mediocrity of its strategy is obvious: it is also served by the lack of cavalry and the indiscipline of its troops. But all the tactical initiative goes to Mardonios who removes his convoys, deprives him of water, and forces him to seek a new line of defense towards the slopes of Citheron.The battle of Plataea begins in deplorable conditions for the Greeks, whose army broke up into three sections while it was retreating.

Yet it was a resounding victory: in the clinch that Mardonios, emboldened by the faults of his adversaries, finally dared to engage, the Asian soldiers could not resist the shock of the hoplites. The incredible endurance of the Spartans, who held out unflinchingly under a hail of arrows, and then the irresistible momentum of their massive formation decided the success. To remove the entrenched camp where the fugitives had rushed, the assistance of the Athenians was needed, who already on the battlefield had bravely fought against the Thebans, auxiliaries of the Persians. But no one among the Greeks thought of contesting the exceptional merit of the Spartans. Herodotus, so favorable to the Athenians, declares it bluntly: “Among the Greeks, the Tegeates and the Athenians behaved with courage; but the Lacedaemonians surpassed them in value…;grappling with the enemy's elite, they triumphed ”. Aeschylus, the Athenian poet who fought at Salamis, had Darius predict that “on the soil of Plataea, the Dorian lance will cause a libation of blood to flow. "

A curious episode of the battle, which Herodotus still reports, shows, with perhaps excessive magnification, how far a Spartan could push the point of honor. The execution of the retreat decided by the generals is compromised by the stubbornness of a detachment leader, Amompharétos, who refuses to dishonor Sparta by a movement in which he sees a voluntary flight. A quarrel breaks out between him and the supreme commander of the army; he throws a heavy stone at the feet of Pausanias, exclaiming: "Here is my vote: do not flee from the barbarians". Finally he reluctantly follows the main body of the troops who withdraws, is attacked by Mardonios' cavalry and succumbs. The anecdote can have a basis of truth; but the case of Amompharétos can only have been exceptional: Spartan discipline hardly legitimized such cases of conscience.

The precarious agreement between Sparta and Athens

While the Dorian hoplites crushed the Persian infantry at Plataea and thus removed a mortal peril from Greece, the maritime struggle opened up wide prospects for a future where the whole Aegean would be nothing more than a Greek lake, forbidden to the Barbarians. Sparta at first appeared disposed to act: in the summer of 479, the whole fleet was assembled at Delos; the trières of Athens had joined it since Attica was protected by the troops of Pausanias. It is now a king of Sparta, Leotychidas who commands; and, when a Samian envoy requests him, by representing to him that the Greeks of Ionia will rise up at the approach of the fleet, he yields to this appeal, charmed, it is said, by the happy omen that the name of the solicitor was Hégésistratos, that is to say the guide of the army. The Persians shirk in vain. On the coast of Asia Minor, in Mycale,they dry up their ships, establish an entrenched camp. The camp is forced; the vessels are burnt. Samos, Chios, Lesbos, freed, join the Panhellenic League.

But the fate of the Greek cities of Asia Minor remained uncertain. Without the constant support of Greece itself, they could not withstand the constant pressure of the barbarians of the hinterland. Sparta wanted to give the problem the solution that intervened 2,400 years later: to transplant the Greeks from Asia to Greece. To make room for them, it was enough to dispossess those of the Greeks who had not joined in the struggle against the Persians. This brutal operation, which was initially to lead to atrocious conflicts, would undoubtedly have changed the destiny of Greece. Athens opposed it and, if we are to believe Herodotus, it already gave itself for the metropolis of Ionia and declared that the Peloponnesians did not have to decide the fate of its colonists. She seems to have won it without great difficulty;but the Spartans were not going to delay in leaving him the charges and the benefits of the decision taken.

The whole combined fleet is still sailing towards the Hellespont; but, as the storm had already destroyed the bridges which had allowed the passage of the army of Xerxes, it disperses. Leotychidas brings the Peloponnesians back to Greece; the Athenians prolong their stay to besiege Sestos, then return in their turn to their homes. In 478 again, there is a common effort: Pausanias, the victor of Plataea, seizes Byzantium. His arrogant conduct made him hateful to the allies who turned to Athens. The Spartans recall Pausanias, send at the beginning of 477 a Navarch, Dorkis. The allies decline his authority; he withdrew without any protest from Sparta.

In a few brief and luminous sentences, Thucydides reveals the state of mind of the Lacedaemonians: the Medes; the Athenians seemed to them capable of leading it and, for the moment, there was cordial understanding with them. "

Pausanias is a rather enigmatic character. Above all, we can see the immense pride that the victory of Plataea had swelled. He took all the glory for himself and wanted to engrave his name alone on the commemorative tripod, dedicated to Delphi. It is certain that the Ephors of Sparta distrusted him, and it is probable that he wanted to have his own policy. Did he recognize that the hegemony of Sparta was compromised by the excessive prudence of the Spartan government and sketched out a program of action, opposed to the narrow views of the ephorate and the Elders? His confused negotiations - perhaps moreover exaggerated - with the King of Persia, then his relations with Themistocles, the ladles carried out with the helots rather give an impression of inconsistency.Let us note at least that despite the oriental costume which he wore on occasion, what there was in him of Spartan stiffness made him quite unsuited to found in Ionia a lasting authority.

Sea war is repugnant to Sparta, which has only an insignificant fleet. Among its Peloponnesian allies, Corinth, whose navy still rivals that of Athens, looks more towards the western regions of Greece, towards Magna Graecia and Sicily than towards the ports of Ionia. It will not weigh on Sparta to engage it to thwart the action of Athens of which it will not recognize the danger for a long time. Therefore, left to its own decisions, Sparta will be all the less tempted to expose itself to distant risks as it can always fear, in the Peloponnese itself, immediate perils.

In fact, there is some distrust in the agreement with Athens. When the city begins to rebuild its walls, the Peloponnesians are moved. At their instigation, Sparta unveiled an ingenuous Machiavellianism: outside the Peloponnese, no city should be fortified, because, if the Barbarians returned, the strongholds could provide them with bases of operation. This naive trick is thwarted by Themistocles' cunning, and the walls rise as negotiations, deliberately slowed down, continue. Then the Athenian lifts the mask: the fortified city is in a position to protect its inhabitants. The Lacedaemonians must treat with her on an equal footing and not pretend to dictate her conduct. Like them, she can judge her own interests and those of Greece.Sparta does not take up the challenge and seems to recognize that, if it is allowed to give the Athenians advice suggested by the general interest, it has no right to give them an order.

Natural moderation or else improvidence and indecision? Any policy of meditation can be seen from this double aspect. Later, it will be easy to imagine that Sparta, by its forbearance, allowed the dangerous growth of Athens. But the Athenian Empire was still in limbo. All of Sparta's attention is focused on itself and on the Peloponnese.

Kings have slipped into disrepute. Léotychidas the Eurypontide, in an expedition to Thessaly, fails, is accused of corruption and must go into exile in Tégée. During the minority of Leonidas' son, the house of Agiades is always represented by Pausanias: it is a suspect that the ephors are watching. On his private initiative, he returned to Asia Minor; but the Athenians drove him out of Byzantium. He lives in Colones en Troade, becomes more suspect than ever of medism, is recalled to Sparta where he is imprisoned, then released by suspicious complacency. New intrigues, which tended to change the established order, are skillfully exploited by the ephors. Pausanias takes refuge in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos; the entrance is walled, and the former generalissimo of the Greek army dies of hunger,victim as much of his wanton ambition as of police suspicions.

The death of Pausanias could put an end to an internal crisis which undermined the constitution of Sparta. But, around the Lacedaemonian state, the effervescence continues to grow. Between 478 and 464, he will only restore his authority by two victories, that of Tégée over the Tégéates and the Argiens reunited, that of Dipaia over all the Arcadians, with the exception of Mantinea. Independence movements mingled with democratic reforms. The Eleans themselves are affected; dispersed until then in towns, they founded their capital Elis and gave themselves a constitution which at least limited the powers of the oligarchy. But their interests remained linked to those of the Lacedaemonians. In Argos, on the contrary,the secular hostility against Sparta will be further reinforced following the constitutional changes and the policy of unification that the city pursues in Argolida. But there is no agreement between the Peloponnesian States. The Argians did not help the Arcadians at Dipaia where the Lacedaemonian hoplites once again demonstrated their superiority.

The Pan-Hellenic League, created during the Persian invasion, is not broken. Athens sticks first to organize, on the sidelines of this league, the association of cities that want to continue the fight against the Persians and to fix the contributions in ships or money they must provide. The spontaneous adhesion of the allies invested her in command; Sparta nodded, tacitly. On both sides, we are sure to watch each other; we are not yet in the conflict. In Athens, a party wants, at all costs, to maintain the understanding: it is that of Cimon, son of Miltiades, the conservative party. He had Themistocles banished; then, in agreement with Sparta, who accuses the former Athenian strategist of connivance with Pausanias and of treason, he tracks him down throughout Greece and forces him to take refuge in the States of the Great King.

But, on a capital point, Cimon can not answer the secret desires of Sparta: he has neither the strength, nor even the desire to limit in the Aegean Sea the expansion of the power of Athens. For Athenian imperialism is not the proper work of Athenian democracy which has reaped the benefits and exaggerated its harshness. Even before Pericles' party came to power, the number of allied cities had been increased by military expeditions; and henceforth they were to recognize a suzerainty imposed if need be by force. The League of Delos had, while expanding, taken an authoritarian form where the right of secession was no longer recognized.

From then on, Sparta prepared to intervene in the name of freedom. In 465, Thasos withdrew from the league; Athens immediately sends a fleet to punish this defection. The Thasians solicit Sparta, not to plead in their favor, but to make a diversion in Attica. The reason is noble and the opportunity excellent. Perhaps the Lacedaemonians would have yielded to this call, even at the risk of provoking general hostilities; at least, they were convinced of it in Athens: but a catastrophe stopped them.

The earthquake of 464 seems to have been a disaster, the immediate or distant consequences of which were of singular gravity. In Sparta, only five houses would have been spared; there would have been 20,000 victims among which all the youngsters occupied in exercising in a gymnasium. The numbers, as usual, may have been exaggerated; but there is no doubt that the Spartans, whose number had already begun to decrease, were severely tested by this unforeseen blow.

Their discipline saved them from total loss. As the survivors scoured the rubble of their homes and took stock of the grave, trumpet calls rang out, as if the enemy were at the city gates. He was indeed an enemy who threatened them with the implacable slyness of those who had long been enslaved. The helots wanted to take advantage of the panic to get rid of their masters; in bands, they came running from the fields. But King Archidamos, full of composure, had sounded the rally and the men lined up around him. The rustics, with their makeshift weapons, were powerless against the seasoned phalanx and withdrew. Striking picture of this domination which weighed on Laconia.

But it was not all over. The helots strove to raise the Periecal towns. Most of Messinia appears to have participated in the revolt. In the plain of Stenyclaros, the Spartan Aeimnastos, who, in Plataea, had killed Mardonios, succumbed with three hundred men. However, the insurgents were defeated in the open countryside; they retired on Ithome traditional refuge from the wars of the VIII th century.

The Lacedaemonians had to appeal to their allies: the Mantineans, the Plateans, the Aeginetes had already brought them help. Finally, powerless to force the natural defenses of the Ithome, they implored the Athenians. Despite fierce opposition from the Democratic Party, Cimon ordered the dispatch of a body of troops. "If Sparta were to disappear," he said, "Greece's team would lose one of its two couriers." "

Despite this reinforcement, the seat dragged on. The Lacedaemonians suspected that the Athenians put some softness in it and soon they went so far as to apprehend intelligences between themselves and the besieged. Their misfortunes had further increased their natural distrust and racial prejudices: these non-Dorians were for them the representatives of the revolution. They dismissed them, alone among the allies.

This affront dealt the last blow to the Pan-Hellenic League and to the understanding desired by Cimon. After 462, all the last part of the century is occupied by the conflict between the two great cities of Greece. When precarious truces suspend the armed struggle, each of them, exalting its own ideal, thinks only of definitively destroying the fortune of the other. Divided Greece aligns itself with one or the other camp and the barbarian world will not remain foreign to the quarrel.

Undecided conflicts

Sparta was not ready to face the consequences of the affront it had inflicted on Athens. It was doubtless counting on its maritime allies: Corinth, Aegina, whom the growing power of Athens could not leave indifferent. But Athens diplomacy is active: it turns to Argos, the eternal enemy of Sparta, which is responsible for occupying it in the Peloponnese. It detaches Megara from the Peloponnesian League. She settled the Messenians in Naupactus, on the Gulf of Corinth, when they finally had to abandon the Ithome, following an honorable capitulation. Corinth is restrained. Aegina is under siege.

Faced with this multiplied offensive, Sparta was moved; but his reactions are slow and embarrassed. In Central Greece, she strives to set up Boeotia against the Athenians, to whom she forgives the crime of having made a pact with the Medes. A Peloponnesian army passes in Phocis under the pretext of protecting the sanctuary of Delphi; it entered Boeotia, swelled large contingents there, maintained intrigues with the Athenian oligarchs. The Athens militia, supported by Argiens and by the Thessalian cavalry, meet the Peloponnesians at Tanagra; but the Thessalians pass to the enemy and the Lacedaemonian infantry is still irresistible. Moreover, it only takes advantage of its victory to open the way back to the Peloponnese with the Megarid. Two months later, the Athenians won in Boeotia. Then Aegina capitulated.The maritime war ravaged the coasts of the Peloponnese: in Achaia, defections occurred.

Athens had undertaken too much: she was waging war against both Sparta and the Great King. Egypt, which had revolted after the death of Xerxes, found support in it. But the expedition ends in disaster. And already, we see the appearance in the Peloponnese of Persian negotiators, ready to pay handsomely the Greeks who will thwart the daring of Athens. Sparta had not yet decided to accept such subsidies: to lift its scruples, it would take years of an obstinate conflict in which everything was subordinated to the crushing of the adversary.

At that time, on both sides, we still hesitated before a decisive commitment. In Athens, Cimon, returned from exile, decides his fellow citizens to abandon Argos in order to conclude a five-year truce with Sparta: he thinks only of operations against Persia, which, soon after his death, will end in a compromise. Sparta's attitude is more difficult to determine. Its interests were not directly opposed to those of Athens; for her there was above all a question of prestige. Following a victory in which its military merit was revealed, Sparta usually seems ready to lay down its arms. It is possible that there is some chivalrous conception of war, a test of strength. But we must never forget the internal difficulties either, the threat always present of the helots with the memory of the catastrophe of 464.

Sparta's interventions are readily presented in the form of "sacred wars". Any call from Delphi sets it in motion, and the independence of the Pythian sanctuary is periodically threatened by its neighbors in Phocis. A crusade can hide many selfish motives, and Sparta, by putting itself at the service of Delphi, hopes for a consecration of its hegemony. She is also aware of defending a traditional order established by divine will. This sentiment often serves as a rule in a policy that strong appetites no longer stimulate.

We also glimpse deep disagreements which do not manifest, as in Athens, in party struggles, oligarchs and laconisers against the democrats hostile to Sparta, but, in this state where parties do not exist, in personal rivalries. After the five-year truce, the time seems ripe for a settling of scores. Boeotia rose up against the domination of Athens, overthrew the popular governments, too docile to this domination, defeated in Coronea the troops who came to their aid, finally constituted a confederation from which Plataes alone remained apart and which will strive to defeat Athens to the end. Megara slaughters his garrison; the towns of Euboea revolt. The king of Sparta Pleistoanax, son of Pausanias, arrives as far as Eleusis with his army,as if to deliver the coup de grace to the city from all sides threatened. But Pleistoanax and the advisor who was his assistant, Cléandridas, agree to negotiate and retreat. Athens can ensure the defense of its Boeotian border and reconquer Euboea.

In Sparta, Ephors and Elders, were indignant at the conduct of the king and his advisor who were accused of venality. One was condemned to a heavy fine and, unable to pay it, left the city; he lived nineteen years in exile, taking refuge in Arcadia on Mount Lyceum and was only recalled on the order of an oracle. Cléandridas was condemned to death in absentia. Thus the opposition of kings and ephors continued to be marked; but the latter had not become the partisans of the all-out war with Athens, for, following these events, they eagerly received the plenipotentiaries of the enemy. Athens renounced Megara, abandoned what it held in the Peloponnese. Sparta sacrificed Aegina, while making him recognize an illusory autonomy.Each of the two cities could have its own allies and forbade itself either to debauch the allies of the other, or to support them if they defected. This peace, which established or consecrated a dualistic system in Greece, was concluded for thirty years (445). It couldn't even last fifteen.

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The most fervent admirers of Athenian democracy are obliged to recognize that, by the way in which it has reduced its allies into subjects, it has enabled the Lacedaemonians to pose as champions of violated law and oppressed freedom. During the revolt of Thasos, in 465, they had already wanted to play this role. The situation only got worse afterwards, although Pericles is still putting some form into it. The great statesman has no illusions: he laid down the principle that between the will to power with which the whole Athenian state is animated and the force, still great, but inert, that Lacedemona represents, a decisive conflict is inevitable. So he completed the work begun before him; he brought to its highest efficiency the combined system of democracy and imperialism:the tributary cities support the Athenian people. We were able to break their defensive energy; but it must be foreseen that sooner or later all the latent resentment will manifest itself, will seek support. Is ! Without agreeing to concessions that would blow up the whole machine, we will prepare to challenge the Peloponnesian Confederation which, made up of autonomous states, could attempt to break the old league of Delos, now subject to a regime of tyranny.now subject to a regime of tyranny.now subject to a regime of tyranny.

To tell the truth, Sparta, which directs this Confederation, is not eager to engage, and in the Confederation, another State, Corinth, in 441, when Samos revolts against Athens and asks for help, still gives the opinion let the quarrels between the Athenians and their allies not concern it. The Peloponnesians confine themselves to thwarting by concerted abstention an apparently generous initiative of Pericles: a project for a Panhellenic Conference which was to deliberate on the common interests of Greece. The intention was too apparent, since Athens was the seat of the Conference, to assert at least a moral hegemony there, to which Sparta was not about to consent.

In addition, if the tradition enlightens us on the steps of a Pericles and on the policy of Athens, one is well prevented from following the diplomacy of Sparta in the years which preceded the great conflagration, named the War of the Peloponnese. Did it even have diplomacy? She is undoubtedly worried about the ever increasing audacity of Athens; with all her conscience she condemns the procedures of Athenian democracy; but she hardly acts until the moment when her own allies force her hand.

This time, Corinth pushes for a break and Megara the second. Corinth has fresh grievances: Athens has made an alliance against it with Corcyra, a Corinthian colony, which has become a rival of the metropolis; she sent vessels into the Ionian Sea which prevented the Corinthian fleet from destroying that of Corcyra. Corinth's commercial monopoly in the West is threatened by its businesses. In the north of the Aegean Sea, in the vicinity of Chalkidiki, another Corinthian colony, Potidée, entered in the League of Delos, receives the order to break all relation with Corinth and, as it procrastinates, it is besieged by land and by sea. Corinth is injured in its interests; but Megara is threatened in its very existence.A decree closed the ports of the Athenian empire to it and this economic blockade should reduce it to accept the wishes of Athens. It appears as a provocation, launched in cold blood by Pericles to test the solidity of the Peloponnesian Confederation.

Thucydides has drawn an admirable picture of the deliberations which then took place in Sparta. The speeches which he attributes to the Corinthians, to ambassadors of Athens who, by chance, are there, to the king of Sparta Archidamos, to the Ephorus Sthenelaidas, are largely fictitious. But they illustrate with perfect precision and unparalleled intensity the crisis from which the war was to emerge. The Corinthians pay homage to Sparta's loyalty in its international relations, but blame this long-suffering which leaves the adversary time to double his forces before anyone thinks of attacking him. The Spartans, they say, live on outdated principles: they lack any entrepreneurial spirit in front of rivals who think only of entrepreneurship. The contrast is complete between the Athenians and them;it turns to the advantage of the Athenians, at least if one considers, not political morality, but the acquired results. Let the Spartans beware: their allies will break away from them if they abandon them defenseless to enemies who do not disarm.

After the Athenian deputies tried to justify the means of authority which they had to use towards their allies, Archidamos exposes at length the difficulties of a struggle against Athens and warns his fellow citizens against any hope of a quick outcome. Sthénélaïdas's speech is brutal as one wishes: the Athenians are all wrong; they harmed the allies of Sparta. There is no need to deliberate when one is outraged: there is only to vote for war against perfidious aggressors. An overwhelming majority agreed with this view, and proclaimed the Athenians' initial responsibility for the breach of the peace. Later, the assembly of the Peloponnesian Confederation, where the Corinthians again vigorously exposed their claims and the encroachments of Athens, confirmed the decision to war.

But Thucydides, who took care to underline the initiative of the Corinthians, also gives us to believe that the Lacedaemonians had wanted war. They would have yielded less to the solicitations of their allies than to the fear inspired in them by the Athenians, already masters of part of Greece and working to subdue the rest. This assessment does not seem to correspond to reality: Sparta's hesitation is obvious; it will appear again afterwards.

Undoubtedly, the negotiations which still continued during the winter of 432-431 were no more than diplomatic feints, intended to throw all the wrongs on the opposing party and to win the opinion of the neutrals. But, when the military operations began in the spring of 431, the way in which they were conducted did perhaps not only reflect the strategic mediocrity of King Archidamos: Sparta was not yet won over to the idea of ​​a war in which all its forces must be engaged.

Year by year, the Confederate army invades Attica, ravages the countryside, helplessly contemplates the united ramparts of Athens and Piraeus and withdraws. It is a strong and numerous army: the Spartans, now mingled with the Periecs, form its nucleus; the Confederates are under their command. Not only the Peloponnese provided its levies, but the Boeotians, the Phocidians, part of the Locrians entered the league. Without appealing to all the men who can be mobilized, one can dump on Attica 25,000 hoplites before which the 13,000 hoplites of Athens, less well trained, could not stand. But they refuse to fight, and here are the Spartans at the spinning wheel.

Athens, however, mistress of the sea, ravaged the coasts of the Peloponnese. Certainly, his tactics impose severe sacrifices on him and the plague, which decimates the population crowded in the city, irritates the courage. But she does not give in, even after the death of Pericles. By a daring blow, it installs troops on the western coast of Messinia, at Pylos. The Lacedaemonians endeavored to flush them out of this post which could serve as a rallying point for the Messenian helots. They unwisely land 420 hoplites on the island of Sphacteria opposite Pylos. The island is blocked by Athenian vessels; after a long resistance, 292 Lacedaemonians who survive, lay down their arms. There were 120 Spartans among them, and all Greece was astonished that they would have preferred surrender to death.

Sparta was appalled: in Attica, it had been unable to pull a decision; and now, fearing for the lives of her captive soldiers, she did not even dare to enter it. She was also threatened in her own domain. The Athenians installed Messenians from Naupactus in Pylos who led a war of brigandage to Laconia. Sparta would have made peace on the spot, if it had been able to obtain reasonable terms. But, while his adversaries, intoxicated with their success, increased their demands, a Spartan, inaugurating new means of struggle, restored the situation.

Until then, the military leaders of the Lacedaemonians have been inferior to their task and one might think that Spartan education forms courageous and disciplined soldiers, but destroys any spirit of initiative. Brasidas gets away from the routine. In the first part of the war, he proved his worth at Methon, whom he defended against an attack from the Athenians, at Pylos where he was wounded. He was entrusted with a mission in Thrace, from which no brilliant results were apparently hoped; but we must respond to the call of the king of Macedon Perdiccas and the inhabitants of Chalkidiki of Thrace, revolted against Athens. It is also an opportunity to send the dreaded helots out of the Peloponnese. Six hundred of them, armed as hoplites, set out with Brasidas; in addition, it will recruit in the Peloponnese thousand mercenaries.He is almost a gang leader, with only irregular troops. He himself, although having a great reputation for energy, does not seem to have much credit with the Spartan government: his effort will be very poorly supported, and justice will not be done until after his death.

He had a breadth of vision and resources of intelligence, by which he distinguished himself not only among the mass of his fellow citizens, but also among those who were directing the policy of Sparta at that time. Yet he is a good Spartan. On the verge of attacking the Athenians in Amphipolis, he reminds his soldiers that, Dorians, they will fight these Ionians whom they have so often defeated. He has nothing but contempt for states where the multitude rule. Its political ideal is that of Sparta: the government of a minority which owes its privileges only to the virtue of war. But, in his relations with the other Greeks, he displays neither arrogance nor brutality. The Athenians liked to say that the customs of the Spartans were incompatible with those of other cities and that, moreover, each Spartan, once outside his country,no longer followed the customs of his homeland or those of the rest of Greece. Pausanias' example supported their claims and later, too many others will justify them. But Brasidas is not of this kind: everywhere one admires its justice and its moderation. Before his departure from Sparta, he made the magistrates swear by oath to leave independence to all the allies he could win. He himself is faithful to this promise, knows how to put it to use in skilful speeches, and, more than any other, succeeds in instilling the opinion that the liberation of Greece was Sparta's sole aim. The Athenian Thucydides, who saw him at work in Thrace, gives him a non-suspect testimony, because he is, moreover, imbued with a bitter irony: "He inspired everywhere a pronounced inclination in favor of the Lacedaemonians ... As it seemed in every way perfect,we had the firm hope that everyone else looked like him. "

The king of Macedonia, the cunning and versatile Perdiccas, had only called the Lacedaemonians to serve his interests. Brasidas lent himself little to his designs, incurred his discontent in cold blood, and, after a joint expedition against the Lyncestes where the Macedonians abandoned him, quarreled entirely with him. The Chalkidiki of Thrace was its main objective because Athens drew abundant resources from it, especially timber for the construction of its ships. He removed or determined to defection the Greek cities of the region which Athens held under its domination. But his main success was the capture of Amphipolis which commanded the passage of the Strymon. The Athenians were dismayed: they feared a general revolt in Thrace and the triumphant march of Brasidas towards the Hellespont.As they obtained their supplies of wheat in the regions of Pont-Euxin, famine threatened them if the straits were occupied by the enemy.

Brasidas had to form this vast project: he set about building triremes on the Strymon. But Lacédémona did not send him any reinforcement: the conquests of the North were considered just as a bargaining chip to redeem Pylos and the prisoners of Sphacteria. A first truce is concluded: Brasidas hardly takes this into account and provokes new hostilities. He is killed in front of Amphipolis, at the same time as Cléon, the Athenian leader who tried to take back the city. Cléon, politician, treated of demagogue and incapable general by Thucydides and by the comic poet Aristophanes, had represented in Athens the party of war without mercy or respite. In Sparta, Brasidas had a similar reputation; after his death, King Pleistoanax, who had been recalled from exile, made the peaceful solution triumph without difficulty.But the memory of Brasidas remained dear to the Amphipolitans who buried it on the Agora and worshiped it reserved for the founding heroes. Sparta raised a cenotaph to him.

However, she concluded a peace by which she denied all the action of Brasidas: she abandoned the towns of Chalkidiki that in her name he had declared free. There is no longer any question of the fine autonomy program, proclaimed before Greece at the start of hostilities. Athens and Sparta must mutually restore their conquests: it is white peace, the reestablishment of the status quo with all the iniquities that we wanted to eliminate. The old Archidamos had been wise: he had represented to his fellow citizens that they were embarking on a crusade for which they were ill-armed. The demonstration of this insufficiency had been striking and when Brasidas had shown new ways, the weariness of war was already weighing too heavily on the Lacedaemonians. In 421, after ten years of effort,they seem to reject even the concern of their prestige.

Settling accounts

Sparta dealt with; but Corinth, Megara, Thebes, Elis refuse their adhesion, and the Chalcidians prevent the restitution of Amphipolis. The Peloponnesian Confederation appears on the eve of dissolving and Argos is preparing to take over the succession of Sparta. These difficulties initially seem to consolidate the agreement between Lacedaemonians and Athenians: misunderstandings and particular intrigues are not long in compromising it. From the end of 421, the policy of Sparta is led by ephors hostile to the peace treaty. In Athens, Alcibiades machine the alliance with Argos; Elis and Mantinea joined in: it was the definitive union of democracies against Sparta.

Here again, we are much better informed of the political debates which erupt in the very assemblies of Athens than of the bitter oppositions which, in narrow and closed circles, precede the final decisions of Sparta. One of the consequences of the war was to undermine social discipline. When the prisoners of Sphacteria are freed by Athens, it is feared that they will try some movement. The helots who had participated in the Brasidas expedition are released; but they are installed as far as possible, on the borders of Laconia and Elis. Shortly before, during the war, two thousand had been freed for services rendered; then they were made to disappear in a mysterious way. The old apprehensions do not cease: they can only nourish feelings of prudence, a necessary pacifism.

But bursts occur. It is less easy in Sparta than in a democracy to unleash irresistible movements of opinion and fits of fury. However, when King Agis, who was leading against Argos, with the mass of Lacedaemonians, the elite of Arcadians, Boeotians, Corinthians and Megarians, hesitated to give the signal for the attack and ended up disbanding his troops, we was about to raze his house. “The Lacedaemonians,” says Thucydides, “obeyed their first impulse, against their custom. It is because Argos is the hereditary enemy who dares to challenge the primacy of Sparta in the Peloponnese.

The battle of Mantinea soon after gave satisfaction to public opinion. It finally brought the Argiens and their allies from Athens and Mantinea into conflict with the Lacedaemonians, flanked by the Arcadians. And it was a victory according to the rules: the Lacedaemonians, under their king Agis, advancing slowly to the rhythm of the flutes, snapped the accelerated momentum of their adversaries whose tactics had been superior to theirs. Then, in accordance with their tradition, they refrained from pursuing the routed enemy, dismissed their allies and returned home to celebrate the Carneia. “By this single feat of arms, they redeemed the disaster of Sphacteria in the eyes of the Greeks and washed away the reproach of irresolution and slowness. It was recognized that fortune might have betrayed them, but that through courage they were always the same. "

Unwavering strength in the Peloponnese, a rock of bronze: this is how Sparta still appears. Argos, plagued by civil strife, is reduced to impotence. But the blow that struck her only scratched the surface of Athens, which cannot be reached by the same weapons. The victory of Mantinea would even suggest that, if Sparta has lost none of its ancient virtues, it has learned nothing useful for the day when it will again attempt to bring down Athens.

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The disaster of this Sicilian expedition into which Athens ventured so recklessly in the summer of 415, when in Greece itself, so many enemies lay in wait, delivers to these enemies a city more than half disarmed. Sparta is slow to seize the opportunity that presents itself. To the deputies of Syracuse and Corinth who urge her to send aid to Sicily, the Ephors are on the point of making a delaying response. An outcast from Athens, Alcibiades, enraged against the party which has ruined his dreams of ambition, must reveal to them the chimerical and perhaps exaggerated immensity of Athenian projects, open their eyes to their own interests. , finally dictates to them a plan of operations: “Send men to Sicily who will successively work as rowers, then hoplites. Even more useful thing:send a Spartan commander who will discipline the militiamen present and force the recalcitrant to serve… Push the war on Greece. Fortify Décélie in Attica and set up a garrison there: it is the terror of the Athenians. "

The traitor was right: the Spartan leader Gylippos saved Syracuse. And, from the spring of 413, Décélie whose fortifications of Athens itself could be seen, was occupied by troops which rose alternately. The Attic countryside remains uncultivated; dirt roads are cut; the slaves desert. A superstitious fear had long held back the Spartans from openly breaking the peace: they were convinced that, for having taken the initiative in 431, setbacks and setbacks had befallen them.

Shortly after, Alcibiades still had to overcome the hesitations of the Lacedaemonians, still rebellious to the idea of ​​maritime war. From Décélie, king Agis forged relations with Euboea, ready for revolt. In Asia, Ionia is agitated; the satraps of the Great King, Tissapherne and Pharnabaze dispute the alliance of Sparta. Alcibiades indoctrinates the Ephorus Endios, takes advantage of his rivalry with Agis, represents to him that he must do his work of the uprising of Ionia and of the alliance with the Great King. It looks like the exile's evil guidance is unleashing some fettered forces which will all now work to bring down the Athenian Empire.

Sparta first freed itself from its scruples: to wage war at sea, it needed subsidies from Persia. She will now receive them shamelessly [on this subject, see David Astle, Sparta, the Pelanors, Wealth and Women , [https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/sparte-les-pelanors-la- wealth-and-women /](https://elementsdeducationraciale.wordpress.com/2015/10/18/sparte-les-pelanors-la-%20wealth-and-women%20/)]. A treaty forms it binds it with its financial backer: the Greek cities of Asia will be released from the yoke of Athens only to fall under that of the Great King. This treaty was three times revised. The first wording was so vague that it could justify the King's claims on the countries of Greece's own which Xerxes had at one time possessed. A Lacedaemonian commissioner, Lichas, was indignant. Finally, we come to the formula which limited the domain of the King of Persia to Asia. Asiatic Hellenism does not interest Sparta.

Individuals also appear to act with more independence and daring. Of course, maritime warfare was often fought by inexperienced and hesitant leaders. When Alcibiades fell out with the Lacedaemonians, he achieved easy success. But already King Agis, in Décélie, had known how to combine military operations and diplomatic negotiations with consummate art. He had the most extensive powers, raised men and money as he pleased, obtained the obedience of the allies. This authority was not without raising concerns in Sparta; but it was necessary to adapt to the conditions of the new war.

With Lysander, a Spartan of a new type appears, or at least a Spartan to whom circumstances allowed to deploy a powerful personality without constraint. His origin remains uncertain: perhaps he is a bastard from a family of the Heraclides; but he received the Spartan education and enjoys all political rights. A statue dedicated to Delphi represented him with a long hair and a long beard, in old fashion. He was disinterested, but harbored a prodigious ambition. This empire builder, who established Sparta's rule over the Aegean Sea, worked above all for his own glory. To achieve his designs, he knows how to effortlessly woo the powerful: from the young Cyrus, younger son of the King of Persia Darius II and governor of almost all of Asia Minor, he thus obtains the largest subsidies.He is brutal and cruel if he pleases him. Between the truth and the lie, he chooses according to the advantage he hopes for. His greatest victory is due to cunning. What does it matter to him? "Where the lion's skin cannot reach, the fox's must be sewn there. Sparta respected the gods: Lysander consecrates ex-votos in their sanctuaries, but little fears offending them by perjury. He was not the first to use oracles for political ends; but the intrigue which he combined towards the end of his life to prepare himself for access to the throne, is the masterpiece of a mind which, strong in a fundamental incredulity, hopes for everything in credulity and the superstition of others. Perhaps his boundless pride encouraged him to be comfortable with the gods.So he was the first to whom Greek cities erected altars and offered sacrifices.

In 408, he received the command of the Peloponnesian fleet in Ionia: his immediate control is, for us, all the more surprising as his antecedents escape us. Between Cyrus and him a close understanding is formed: the influx of Persian gold makes it possible to bring the pay of the rowers to one drachma, and desertion spreads in the Athenian fleet. Alcibiades is defeated and, suddenly, his unstable popularity collapses in Athens: the only leader who perhaps could have stood up to Lysander disappears. However, Lysander, installed in Ephesus, lays the first bases of the policy which he was going to apply in the future: in all the Greek cities of Ionia, he favors the constitution of small oligarchic groups which will take over the government. .These men whom he supports in their fight against democracy and whom he never disavows despite their crimes, will be completely devoted to his person; he uses them to force Sparta to extend his powers.

But the law wants him to remove his functions at the end of a year: through the care of Lysander, less devoted to his homeland than to himself, his successor Callicratidas encounters a thousand difficulties either in the Greek cities or in the court of Cyrus. He also presented a perfect contrast with Lysander: he does not know how to solicit, he hates barbarians, he refuses to work for the benefit of the oligarchs. Plutarch has great admiration for this personage whom the nobility of his feelings made worthy of Sparta; but fortune is unfavorable to him. At the Battle of the Arginuses, he is beaten and killed. The discouraged Peloponnesians dream of making peace; but Athens still refuses to accept proposals which would save it while taking away its empire. Cyrus and the allies demand the return of Lysander.

The decisive part is played in the Hellespont: it is for Athens the wheat route that must be defended at all costs against Lysander's fleet. But his imprudent generals are deceived by the stratagems of the Peloponnesian. In the straits, near the small river of Aigos Potamos, the Athenian vessels, emptied of their crews, are carried off almost without a fight; sailors and soldiers are captured ashore. And implacable Lysander had three thousand Athenian prisoners massacred, in retaliation for the cruel measures taken by the city at bay. The dice have fallen: the empire of Sparta will succeed that of Athens.

The empire of Sparta and the problem of depopulation

After the battle of Aigos Potamos, the surrender of Athens in April 404 was no more than a dramatic episode. Already Sparta, under the impetus of Lysander, developed its new policy: in all the Aegean Sea, the Athenians are driven out; demoralized democratic governments. The establishment of the regime of the Thirty in Athens, dismantled and reduced to the possession of twelve vessels, is the crowning achievement of the work begun four years earlier by Lysander in Asia.

Personal work perhaps, but which engages the responsibility of Sparta. She went to war with a liberation program. However, Lysander established in the liberated cities the regime of decarchies : ten trusted men, recruited from the oligarchic coteries, act as masters. They are often supported by Lacedaemonian garrisons; a Lacedaemonian governor or harmoste is even enthroned in certain towns to exercise surveillance. And Sparta demands the payment of this tribute, which, more than any other measure, had aroused hatred against Athens.

Lysander is first of all very powerful. Did he not know how to end by crushing the adversary a struggle which even in recent years people had wanted to conclude by a compromise? He could erect at Delphi a proud monument where he was represented among a group of deities while the other leaders of the Peloponnesian fleet surrounded him respectfully. Poseidon crowned the Navarch whose "swift ships had destroyed the power of the Cecropides". But soon, the government of Sparta was moved by an attitude which recalled that of Pausanias after Plataea. The complaints of the brutalized cities had left him indifferent; a Persian satrap, who accused Lysander of having plundered his territory, found more echo. Lysander is recalled from Asia; we are careful not to put him on trial,but he finds a pretext to get away.

If he thus falls into a semi-disgrace, Sparta does not at the same time renounce the system of domination created by him. In the Peloponnese itself, it makes its strength felt: the Elid, invaded and plundered, must abandon its southern cantons. Outside the kings and ephors seek less to react against the methods of Lysander than against his personal influence: the decarchies disappear, but the harmostesremain. Athens could at least take advantage of the enmity of King Pausanias against Lysander to throw off the yoke of the Thirty. On this occasion, the king made a noble figure: he negotiated and imposed the agreement between oligarchs and democrats, withdrew from Athens the Lacedemonian garrison and, despite Lysander, authorized the reestablishment of the old constitution while giving guarantees to the representatives of the fallen regime. This policy of prudence, which took into account both the traditions and the interests of Sparta, is supported by three ephors. But there are such disagreements in Sparta that, shortly after, King Agis, friend of Lysander, accused Pausanias "of having removed from the Athenian people the brake of the oligarchy". Pausanias escaped condemnation with difficulty.

The necessities of the hour would have demanded unanimity of views in the government of Sparta. No doubt personal hostilities do not necessarily cover radical oppositions: on the primacy due to their country, and even on the use of force to maintain it, the Spartans seem to have been unanimous. Rather, their uncertainties stem from the internal unrest that plagues the state and the inability to choose between the mistakes of the past and the innovations necessary to allow Sparta to found and maintain an empire.

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In antiquity, it was often considered that the triumph of Lysander marked for Sparta the beginning of decadence. The constitution of Lycurgus is no longer respected: the gods who had sanctioned the wisdom of his laws punish his fellow citizens for evading them.

In fact, there had long been loopholes in this constitution; what was maintained with obstinacy only served private interests. From the body of the state hung the debris of an archaic and rusty armor which hampered its movements. It had already been seen during the Peloponnesian War; when it comes to maintaining an authoritarian peace, that is to say organizing a hegemony, no longer a hegemony of prestige, but, as Athens had conceived, hegemony of force and profit, Sparta, incapable to reform itself, could remedy its inadequacies only by brutality and hypocrisy.

Moralists of the genre of Plutarch and, before him, of Xenophon, see above all that after the victory of Sparta, precious metals flowed into a State which until then, for its internal transactions, had confined itself to the use of iron money. It was a crisis at the same time economic and moral in front of which the authorities of Sparta showed a singular disarray. The seriousness of the fact appeared when Gylippos, the man who had saved Syracuse, diverted part of the cash which Lysander had instructed him to bring back to Sparta. They deliberated: an ephorus proposed not to receive in the city any gold or silver coin. Finally, it was decided to punish with death individuals who held valuable species. The effectiveness of the measure appears to have been poor. Do we know if, previously already,the law of Lycurgus had been scrupulously respected? The accusations of venality were launched early against kings or magistrates of Sparta. The city was obviously enriched in the IVth century: kings and even individuals will have the reputation of possessing prodigious wealth. Subsequently, moral corruption could be exercised with less concealment.

Frequent contact with the foreign world is also often fatal to the Spartan. It looks like a man who has been too cleverly prophylactic preserved from all fatal germs: when exposed to them, his organism is incapable of reaction. In the past, the Spartans were forbidden to live outside Sparta: now the first of the city are eagerly seeking the privilege of being governors in more or less subject cities. They thus find ample opportunity to develop there a bitter greed and an insatiable appetite for all pleasures, prohibited at least in public in their country.

Perhaps the adaptation could nevertheless have been made between the old customs and the new customs, almost imposed by the conditions of the moment, if Sparta, through her fault, had not restricted the circle of men to whom she confided. his fate.

Sparta, a military city, which had no other ideal than to train its citizens in war, constantly saw the number of its warriors decrease. At the beginning of IV th century, Xenophon contrasts the small number of Spartans and the power of Sparta. At the end of the same century, Aristotle attributed the sudden fall of the city to the lack of men. The fact is therefore well attested; but it is important to see when this depopulation movement began and what were its causes.

At the time of the Persian wars, Sparta was still at its peak: 5,000 of its hoplites were engaged in Plataea and it does not seem that all of its forces appeared on the battlefield. Laconia and Messenia had to be guarded against enemies from outside and inside: a few mobilizable classes, probably the oldest, remained in the Peloponnese. All precise statistics are lacking: the figure of 9,000 clerics , each of whom must maintain a soldier, has been contested. We are hardly mistaken, however, in estimating the strength of Sparta at 7 or 8,000 men.

However, during the Peloponnesian War, Sparta only put 3,000 or 4,000 men in line at most. She is ready to make peace because 120 Spartans have fallen to the power of the Athenians. The austerity measures taken against the soldiers who surrendered were diminishing. Everything proves that civic forces are sparingly spared because they are exhausted with frightening rapidity.

In the IV th century, the fall is vertical: in a country that could feed 1,500 riders and 30,000 hoplites, says Aristotle, barely 1,000 soldiers there are. And the low water level is not yet reached: in the middle of the third century, there is still a reduction of 300 men.

It is not difficult to discover multiple and various reasons which can justify this decrease in the number of the citizens of Sparta by emphasizing more particularly on one and the other. Great importance has sometimes been attributed to the earthquake which, in 464, claimed countless victims among the population, or to the losses suffered in the war and poorly compensated for by an insufficient birth rate. The illustrious Fustel de Coulange thought that a very large number of citizens had been thoughtlessly struck by the loss of citizenship. Spartan discipline, too harsh and almost inhuman, would even have resulted in a search for civic degradation which made it possible to avoid it. Usually, one establishes rather a relation between the fact, pointed out by Aristotle, that the earth had passed in a small number of hands,and the decrease in the number of citizens: since it was necessary to have aclerics and providing one's ecot for common meals in order to be a citizen, one fell into a lower category if these conditions were no longer met. But here an objection arises: legislation, at least until the beginning of the IV th century, did she not acted for a Cleros always talked a soldier?

We have already touched on this problem with regard to the transmission of the cleros : the time has come to deal with it in more detail, since it is the very problem of the decadence of Sparta.

Even if one regards as legendary the subdivision of the land of citizens attributed to Lycurgus and the rigorous equality of shares, and if one thinks that at all times there were rich citizens and poor citizens in Sparta, it must be admitted that the State did not limit itself to imposing an external equality, by the common education of the children, the wearing of the same clothing or, according to a law of Lycurgus, the obligation annually repeated and valid for everyone to shave their mustache. In fact, he seems to have been preoccupied with ensuring for a certain number of men, destined to exercise the profession of arms, the means of existence which leave them "plenty of leisure", that is to say their own. allow them to devote themselves exclusively to their profession. The clerics , bringing in a fixed income, responds to this intention.

The clerics are declared inalienable: the aim of this measure is not to ensure in a family the transmission of a specific part of the patrimony, but to keep the number of clerics and consequently of the citizen-soldiers who live on it invariable . In fact, as we have seen, the cleric is transmitted from father to son without any right of primogeniture; but can we think that it was subdivided ad infinitum among all the living sons or that all the sons, remaining in joint possession , could have lived on a cleric?from the moment when the fixed fee, shared between them, no longer allowed everyone to pay their share for meals together? One was not a full citizen unless one paid this ecot. The state's interest in keeping at least the same number of citizens seems obvious. Therefore, by some regulation, will he not intervene to ensure the clerics his real function, strangely altered if none of the common owners or usufructuaries no longer has civic capacity?

No less than the excessive fragmentation of the clerics , the State must prevent the concentration of several cléroi on the same head. If a Spartan has no male heir, the daughter heir or rather, according to the term of Greek law, epicler, should marry some Spartan not yet provided. In the absence of any descendants, the State should make the attribution. But, by a fall in the birth rate, the number of clerics can become greater than the number of Spartans; in this case, a broad policy is required admitting new elements to the rank of citizens.

The constant intervention of the State in the devolution of a good such as the cleric , of which the State seems to have always had in principle the eminent property, is entirely normal. So it would hardly surprise, in Sparta in particular, where the very existence of the individual is regulated by the community. And yet, it is doubtful whether it occurred with sufficient firmness to act effectively. The indivisibility, at least relative, of the cleros is nowhere attested. The assignment of the girl epicler is made until IV ecentury according to certain rules that we do not know, but which do not seem to have differed from those of other Greek states where the next of kin, or an adopted son, chosen in the parentage, took possession of both the daughter and the inheritance. The authorities, in this case the kings, only intervene if the father has not disposed of his daughter. There is no guarantee that two or more cléroi will never have the same owner.

When a cleric fell into escheat or was taken from a dishonored Spartan, the State had to provide it with a holder. We know that the exercise of civic rights was linked to a double condition: training from childhood through passage through the various age groups, and participation in public meals. Birth out of wedlock is not a case of exclusion. Now there existed in Sparta a class, which seems to have been quite numerous, of bastards, born of a Spartan father and a helot, who received the same education as the legitimate children. They were called the mothaces ; to become full citizens, all they needed was the clerics . It was therefore like a reservoir of strength from which one could draw. On the other hand, at the end of the Ve century and at the beginning of the fourth e , we learn of the existence of another class, serving in the Lacedaemonian army: they are the "new citizens" ( néodamodes ), perhaps freed helots, if not able themselves to to become complete Spartans, since they have not received the necessary education, likely at least to breed citizens who will not be distinguished from others. Let us also add all those who were called "citizens of lesser right" ( hypomeiones) and that the inability to contribute to the common meals relegated to inferiority. The Spartan State is therefore not hampered in finding qualified candidates to have a cleric ; without resorting to the naturalization of foreigners, which he avoided practicing, he can recruit from his own bosom the men who, according to the spirit of the old legislation, will have the duty and the privilege of defending him in the exclusion from any other task.

Yet the class of citizens is emptying. And here at the beginning of the IV th century breaks a law that precipitated the disaster: "A powerful man, but stubborn and rude, became ephor: his name was Epitadeus. He had quarreled with his son; so he had a law passed which allowed any citizen to dispose of his house and his clerics as he pleased.either by donation inter vivos, or by will. It was to satisfy a personal grudge that he proposed this law; but the others accepted it for reasons of avarice and by ratifying it, they threw down the best constitution ”. Let’s play out the anecdote: the futility of the motive that made Epitadeus act can be countered. Rather, the Ephora is the spokesperson for all those who are hampered by the restrictions still hampering the traffic in land. Perhaps they had already wrested many concessions, and state control over the clergy had become almost illusory. We suspected in the previous century his inability to curb a family policy that hijacked the institution of the cleric of its real purpose: henceforth this policy will serve the interests of a smaller and smaller number of families.

It will come as no surprise that, around the same time, a plot was formed to shake off the yoke of a blind oligarchy which did not hesitate to shake the foundations of the State in order to satisfy the interests that its very triumph put in place. Danger. It is possible that previously the holders of cléroi have committed the revenues of the domains which they could alienate. The law of Epitadeus put the seal on spoliation. And above all she removed from all the inferiors: mothaces , néodamoi , hypomeiones, even the hope of ever acquiring land. One of them, the young Cinadon, wanted to group the malcontents together: propaganda was easy. A conspirator, who denounced the conspiracy, shows us Cinadon at work: “He led me to the end of the public square. Count, he told me, the Spartans who are in the place. I counted: the king, the Ephors, the Elders, about forty others; that's all I found. These are the enemies, he said to me; all the others will be our allies: there are more than four thousand in this square. But the police of the oligarchy was well done: Cinadon was tortured.

Cinadon's words are evocative: they show us in Sparta itself a considerable mass of inferiors in which the Spartans are drowned. How does this mass live? Does poverty where it is reduced result in a drop in the birth rate? Questions without answers. Likewise for the periecs and the helots. But the shortage of men is felt especially in the restricted class of Spartans who, having become an aristocracy, is automatically exhausted, like any aristocracy, and refuses to fill its gaps, more to increase its goods and privileges than out of racial pride. . Around the time of the Second Messenian War, the Spartan aristocracy, willingly or by force, expanded to the point that this very name no longer suits it. The entire city considers itself a city of Equals, even if the privileges,common to all are not equally shared among all. The game of family selfishness corrupted institutions that had nothing to do with family organization and recreated an aristocracy based on fortune. The phenomenon can be interpreted in various ways: inadequacy of the precautions taken and, to speak with Aristotle, error of the legislator; or else the irresistible force of certain sentiments against which the wisest legislator can do nothing?or else the irresistible force of certain sentiments against which the wisest legislator can do nothing?or else the irresistible force of certain sentiments against which the wisest legislator can do nothing?

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Thus, at the very moment when Sparta gathered an empire, it did not consent to correct the faults of a regime which had had its greatness, but which was even less adapted than the Athenian democracy to a policy of imperialism. During the war, some leaders had, after many setbacks, shown her the way and assured success over an adversary whose tactics disconcerted her. Subsequently, it is less Sparta, the city of beautiful laws, which requires attention, despite the idealization with which the philosophers are beginning to envelop it, than a few men who come out of its impoverished elite. In them we find in varying degrees the unexpired virtues of traditional education; but, sometimes in agreement with the Spartan government, sometimes against it,they strive to make personal views prevail and to orient the future of Sparta according to their own conceptions.

The weighty authority of Sparta

If the Greeks, very concerned about autonomy, soon realized that Sparta instead of the generous wine of freedom, paid them "a Lacédemonienne piquette", it took some time for the discontent to combine and translate into action. However, Sparta comes into conflict with the Great King: during the war, it had sacrificed the cities of Asia Minor; the opportunity is offered to him for a more generous policy.

Cyrus, the friend of Lysander, revolted against his brother and sovereign Artaxerxes II, died on the battlefield of Counaxa and his Greek mercenaries must carry out the painful retreat traced in the Anabasis of Xenophon. In Asia Minor, the satrap Tissapherne demands the submission of the Greek cities: they turn to Sparta, eminent protector of all Greece. Two successive expeditions, from 399-397, obtain only mediocre results. The Persians seem to be preparing an attack against Greece. Also operations, with Agesilaus, they tend to take the form of a preventive crusade for the benefit of Hellenism: the king wants to leave Aulis after a sacrifice, as formerly Agamemnon.

Agesilaus had succeeded his brother Agis, at the expense of his nephew, by a privilege favored by Lysander. Although he was short in stature and lame, he had received military training from the Spartan. He prided himself on strict obedience to the laws of his country and to the magistrates who represented them, Ephors and Elders. He remains attached to traditional frugality and simplicity. Reading his panegyrists, one would think that he wanted to achieve in himself the ideal type of the Spartan at a time when this ideal had already undergone more than one alteration. It seems that he had personal qualities which made him sympathetic and his friend Xenophon made him a hero, energetic and indefatigable, patient, respectful, magnanimous; many virtuous or wise sayings will be attributed to him. Without contesting the amiable attraction given to his physiognomy,we will note rougher features. Agesilaus was very concerned about his authority: at the start of the Asian campaign, he set about demeaning his imperious friend Lysander, whose credit he was offended. In the name of the reason of State, it will legitimize reprehensible acts which did wrong to Sparta. Perhaps he even inspired a whole oppressive policy which he no doubt considered essential, but which ended in disaster.but which ended in disaster.but which ended in disaster.

The Asian countryside shows him a skillful and cunning leader, methodically ravaging the territories of Lydia and Phrygia. He had only a rather weak army, 8,000 men of the Peloponnese, of which 2,000 were recently freed helots; the Spartans, numbering thirty, formed only the general staff. Plunder was thus his essential weapon: no stronghold was taken; no pitched battle is waged. Would Agesilaus have wearied the satraps of the king of Persia by this tactic and obtained the freedom of the Greek cities? Perhaps ; but serious events forced him to give up the game.

The Eastern enterprise could only have succeeded if the whole of Greece, without collaborating in it, had at least given Sparta a free hand. But all over the Balkan Peninsula, grudges from war were combined with discontent over peace. Athens is considering revenge. The old allies, Thebes, Corinth, regret having worked for the supremacy of Sparta. Persian diplomacy has a wide field of intrigue. It is a lamentable situation which will make the King of Persia the arbiter of Greece. All the Hellenic States have their share of responsibility. Sparta had won the war with Persian gold; she cannot be astonished that he is now sinking into the coffers of the enemy she has not been able to annihilate or appease and of the friends she has alienated herself.

Apart from Agesilaus, Sparta had two leaders who could act in Greece: Lysander and King Pausanias. But they hate each other. Pausanias thwarted Lysander's policy in Athens. Lysander, also quarreled with Agesilaus, harbored secret ambitions: he dreamed of depriving the two reigning families of the exclusive right to the crown. Bribed oracles, invented prophecies were to recommend to the Lacedaemonians to grant kingship to the most worthy, regardless of birth. The plot, long combined, came to an end. It was not revealed, it is said, until after Lysander's death; but his revolutionary project transpired sufficiently to arouse many mistrust.

However, as soon as disturbances broke out in mainland Greece, he was entrusted with an army which had to operate in Locrid and in Boeotia; Pausanias, for his part, was to attack from the south and join Lysander. He lingers, perhaps on purpose. In front of the Boeotian square of Haliarte, Lysander is killed. Pausanias concluded an armistice with the Boeotians which was deemed dishonorable. He went into exile in Tegeus and this Spartan king did not disdain to compose pamphlets in which he perhaps advocated a renunciation of Lysander's policy and a return to the constitution of Lycurgus, restored to its original purity.

It only remained to recall Agesilaus: the threatening attitude of Greece imposes the liquidation of the eastern adventure which ranks the Great King among the enemies of Sparta. Athens, Thebes, Corinth, Argos have formed a quadruple alliance; other states of central or northern Greece join. The allies, pushed by the Corinthians, propose to attack Laconia to "destroy the wasps before they leave the nest". But in Nemea, the Lacedaemonians once again proved their military superiority (394). The immediate danger was over. Agesilaus arriving from Asia, receives the order from the ephors to go to Boeotia without delay: he too is victorious in Coronnee, but the Theban infantry has shown a singular tenacity. Agesilaus, wounded, dedicates the tithe of his Asian booty to Delphi and returns to the Peloponnese.The coalition of enemies of Sparta is not broken.

The naval victory of Cnidus, won on the same date by the Athenian leader Conon, at the head of the Persian fleet, ruins the authority of Sparta in Asia and the Aegean Sea. Now Athens can rebuild its walls and already prepare a new maritime league. In the Peloponnese, Sparta is as if blocked by the close union of Argos and Corinth; it is exhausted in vain operations around Corinth. A military reform to which the name of the Athenian Iphicrates is attached threatens the supremacy of the hoplites formed by Sparta; troops of light infantry, the peltasts, armed with a small shield, lance and sword, in rapid maneuvers, harass the phalanx. In 391, they annihilated a body of six hundred Lacedaemonians.

As the struggle continued, the rivalry between Sparta and Athens came to the fore. Sparta offered some concessions, but opposed any restoration of an Athenian empire, however limited. One of the Athenian negotiators, Andocide, whose speech has been preserved to us, strongly praised before the assembly of the people this moderation of the Peloponnesian city. He encountered the hostility of all those who had been ruined by the collapse of the empire. From then on, the rapprochement, already attempted, was to be made between Sparta and Persia, unwilling to support long an Athens whose policy could only lead to intervention in Asia. It is operated by the Navarch Antalcidas and shortly after (spring 386), the military situation allows the Great King to dictate the terms of a general peace that the Greeks must accept.By the renewed abandonment to the Persian domination of the Greek cities of Asia, Sparta obtains to have a free hand in Greece where the recognition of the autonomy of the cities does nothing but deliver them all, isolated, to the insolence of its companies. Such was the King's Peace.

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Under the pretext of applying its clauses, Sparta deliberately violates the principle. If it intends to the Thebans the order to recognize the independence of the Boeotian cities, if it breaks the close union concluded between Corinth and Argos, it arrogates to itself the right to punish those of its allies whose loyalty appears to it suspect. The Mantineans had to abandon their city and live in four unfortified towns where recruiting officers from Lacedaemon laid down the law. Phlionte is accused of having banished those of her citizens who had Lacedaemonian sympathies. The Ephors consider that the situation "deserves correction"; they demand the reinstatement of the banished, then take advantage of the inextricable disputes that ensue to carry out a military execution with which Agesilaus is responsible. After twenty months of siege, the city capitulated;the enemies of Sparta are suppressed, the constitution modified; the acropolis, occupied by a garrison.

The police force of Sparta is exerted outside the Peloponnese, until the borders of Thrace. The Greek cities, always hostile to each other, provide it with pretexts. Acanthus and Apollonia complain about Olynthus who wants to incorporate them into the Chalcidean league: they magnify with pleasure the dangers that this league presents, its strength, its resources; they invoke the sacred right to autonomy. Sparta summons its allies, makes them vote according to its own desire, sends an expedition. The war dragged on for three years: against the Greek city, Sparta allied with the King of Macedonia. She finally obtains the dissolution of the Chalcidean league.

On this occasion, we see both the obligations that Sparta imposed on its allies and the transformations of the federal army. The decrease in the number of citizens had already imposed the increasingly extended use of the periecs; but it was only a palliative. The use of mercenaries appeared as early as the Peloponnesian War: it was to increase. Sparta allows its allies to substitute for their contingents cash payments commensurate with the size of the contingents. It was the system that Athens had used. Any city which does not obey a mobilization order must pay a fine of two drachmas per man per day.

All resistance seems to give way to the grip of Sparta. “Thebans and Boeotians are subject to him; the Corinthians show the greatest fidelity; Argos is humiliated; Athens tamed; the allies who had hostile inclinations were brought back to duty. The authority of Sparta appears to have been established for the best on firm foundations. This is the assessment that Xenophon complacently presents. Sparta even gave the beginnings of organization to those states which seem to be its dependencies and form its empire: it divided them into ten military districts, from the Peloponnese to Chalkidiki. Here again, we believe we find the inspiration of Athens.

The repeated intervention of Sparta in the affairs of the Hellenic cities has often been attributed to the actions of Agesilaus. And there is no doubt that he enjoyed great credit in his homeland and that in various cases he clearly manifested his opinion and made it triumph. But usually he agrees with the ephors. The policy of Sparta does not obey vital necessities: the city does not need an increase in territory. To maintain a prestige that is weakly disputed with it, it would hardly need a display of force. We are astonished at the relentlessness of a ruling class in throwing over the whole of Greece the tight network of its domination.

There is no doubt that she found ample profits there; but she was also able to believe, very often, that her interests were aligned with the common interest. His interventions are usually solicited; even though they seem blatant attacks on the rights of nations - and this was the case in Thebes, as we shall see - a party in the cities which are victims of them provoked them and is ready to justify them. It does not matter that this party is a minority: has Sparta ever ratified the law of the majority? In the fight against Athens, she relied on "honest people" to overthrow the "demagogues", favorable to her enemy. No doubt she disowned Lysander who had installed men everywhere ready to wage a war with a knife against democracy. Pausanias, in Athens, favors a compromise between oligarchs and democrats.The fact remains that, throughout Greece, the oligarchs are turning to Sparta, that they are incessantly asking for it, that they harbor furious grudges and excel at pitying conservative opinion on the fate of the men of the United States. order, persecuted, banished, despoiled by the revolutionary rabble. It would have taken extraordinary coolness and an impossible liberation from political passions to resist these fiery appeals or to arbitrate disputes impartially.It would have taken extraordinary coolness and an impossible liberation from political passions to resist these fiery appeals or to arbitrate disputes impartially.It would have taken extraordinary coolness and an impossible liberation from political passions to resist these fiery appeals or to arbitrate disputes impartially.

In fact, the very elite of Greece, hostile by nature to democracy or tired by its excesses, wants to see in Sparta only the guardian of order and, in its interventions, only police operations, necessary and necessary. elsewhere claimed. Plato's ideal conception of Sparta has hardly been altered by contemporary events: it only provides a starting point for speculations on the perfect state. Xenophon, who is more attached to the facts, will only condemn, timidly and in a particular case, the conduct of Sparta, when a catastrophe has demonstrated to him that the gods had taxed the city of excess and had wanted to punish it, without yet, he believed, to dispossess it forever of its hegemony.

The collapse of Lacedaemonian domination: from Leuctra to Chéronée

In the policy of force followed by Sparta, the occupation of Cadmée, citadel of Thebes, stood out as a symbol of iniquitous violence. A Spartan commander, Phoibidas leads a detachment to Thrace. He encamped near Thebes, an allied city, but rebellious and divided. The leader of the party favorable to Sparta, Léontiadas, who was one of the two main magistrates, talks with him and opens the doors of the Cadmée to him, which Phoibidas takes possession, without striking a blow, on a feast day. He had acted without orders; this was the only reason for which he was accused in Sparta, and King Agesilaus quite rightly alleged that if this initiative was considered useful to the State, one should, according to the precedents, forgive him for having it. taken.Leontiadas exonerated him by incriminating the intrigues of the opponents of Sparta led by his colleague Isménias. In principle, Phoibidas was sentenced to a fine; but Isménias was condemned to death and the Cadmée remained occupied. Under the protection of the Spartan garrison, Léontiadas governs Thebes as a dictator, but for the greater benefit of the Lacedaemonians.

The importance and the ancient illustration of Thebes, perhaps also the circumstances of the occupation, gave a great impact to this act which fits naturally among the arbitrary actions of Sparta. But above all the events which followed charged him with a formidable significance.

More than three hundred Thebans had taken refuge in Athens, which refused to deliver them and protected them as best it could against the hired assassins of Leontiadas, operating in the middle of Athens. Three years after the capture of the Cadmée, the banished, by a stroke of audacity, liberate Thebes and force the Lacedaemonian garrison to capitulate (379). Sparta wants revenge; but a retaliatory expedition, unable to take the city by surprise or to lay siege to it, turned back. However, Thebes, intimidated, would consent to compose; Athens, which has unofficially helped her, is also trying to avoid open conflict. An emulator of Phoibidas, the governor of Thespies Sphodrias attempts a night march against Piraeus, miscalculates his distances and withdraws by devastating the surroundings of Eleusis.He is acquitted in Sparta and Agesilaus himself is compromised in this scandalous acquittal.

Athens, thus pushed to extremes, concludes a close alliance with Thebes. It strives to reconstitute a maritime confederation by avoiding the errors made in the previous century, by giving its allies guarantees of independence and also by excluding the cities of Asia to spare the Great King. The slogan of Sparta during the Peloponnesian War became that of Athens: the cities unite so that “the Lacedaemonians leave the Greeks free and autonomous, possessing their territories in peace and security”. The Athenian fleets, victorious in the Cyclades and the Ionian Islands, have regained control of the two seas. During this time, Thebes, which repulsed in 378 and 377 two attacks of Agesilaus, fortifies Citheron and behind this barrier, remakes under his suzerainty the unity of Boeotia.

From 374, Sparta seemed discouraged: it could not stop the progress of Thebes; in northern Greece, a Thessalian tyrant, Jason of Pheres, is building a dangerous power; lastly, his own allies are weary and complain against the conduct of operations; but the maritime war, wanted by them, brought only failures. A peace is concluded, to which the Great King collaborated. But the Spartans hope to receive the support of Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse, perhaps subsidies from Persia, and to regain the advantage at sea. They take advantage of a rather thin pretext to break the treaty. And these are three more years of futile struggles, where Thebes alone finds its account since it consolidates its situation in Boeotia while Sparta and Athens fight. In 371, a congress met in Sparta where are represented,at the same time as most of the Greek states, the king of Persia whose mediation was again requested, Dionysius of Syracuse, Jason of Pheres, Amyntas, king of Macedonia. Wise words were spoken by the Athenian Callistratos: the prolonged opposition of Sparta and Athens leads to a catastrophe. The two cities must contract a lasting friendship by sharing the hegemony, since the Spartans have the best army, the Athenians the best navy. Peace seemed to more or less explicitly sanction this principle, which was not new. There is still talk of autonomy, and Sparta recalls the garrisons and governors it has put in the cities. But it retains a sort of primacy over its allies, and the legitimacy of the Athenian confederation is in fact recognized,even if each of the allies of Athens adheres to the peace on their own account.

Athens and Sparta agree; but does peace also give satisfaction to Thebes? Yes, if, for her too, we interpret autonomy in such a way that it remains the master in Boeotia. The Thebans, through the voice of one of their deputies, Epaminondas, asked for express confirmation. King Agesilaus obstinately refuses to do so and his angry words show that Thebes is for him only a city between the Boeotian cities. And, as Epaminondas maintains his position and invokes the example of Laconia, entirely governed by Sparta, in front of all the silent delegates, Agesilaus erases from the peace treaty the names of these arrogant Thebans.

He had played the destiny of Sparta: the attack of Phoibidas was going to be avenged a hundredfold.

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Thebes was herself worried about her daring: she remained alone in the war and alone had to bear all the weight of the Lacedaemonian weapons. King Cléombrotos was in Phocis with an army of ten thousand infantry and a thousand cavalry: Sparta, taking responsibility for imposing the execution of the treaty without prior consultation with the other signatories, ordered Cléombrotos to dissolve the Boeotian confederation by force. The king, by a long march in the mountain, turns the line of defense of the Boeotians and penetrates as far as Leuctra, south-west of Thebes. The Boeotian army retreated and faced the Peloponnesians. It numbered only seven thousand men: its cavalry was better than that of the enemies; his infantry had already shown their worth. Epaminondas decided the other chiefs to accept the fight.On the battlefield of Leuctra, the new tactics which he adopted gave him the advantage. He ranged the elite of his men on the left wing fifty rows deep and threw this wing against the phalanx placed to the right of the battle line and evenly distributed over twelve rows.

The Lacedaemonians, after heroic resistance, yielded under this formidable shock. Their losses were cruel: they lost a thousand men, more than a third of their strength. Four hundred Spartans out of seven hundred succumbed. The king himself was brought back dying. The allies, on the left wing, fell back on the camp (July 371).

There was then a tragic deliberation. Many Lacedaemonians, formed by a long tradition of military honor, did not resign themselves to defeat. They wanted to take away by force their dead left in the plain and prevent the adversary from erecting a trophy. But the responsible leaders understood the dangerous uselessness of this effort: the Lacedaemonians had been tested too much; the allies were recalcitrant. We recognized the Theban victory by asking for a truce to raise the dead.

The ephors received the news while the Gymnopédies were being celebrated. They did not interrupt the party and prohibited women from demonstrating pain. And, according to the ancient custom, the relatives of the dead at least feigned pride for their glorious end; those of the survivors displayed humiliation.

Agesilaus was ill; his son Archidamos was responsible for leading reinforcements in Boeotia. The mobilization was done without difficulty: the towns of the Peloponnese still obediently submitted to the wishes of Sparta. The Boeotians had not dared to attack the enemy camp. Jason of Pheres, to whom they asked for assistance, turned them away from driving the vanquished into a desperate struggle. The defeated army was able to retreat by the coast in Megaride where it joined that of Archidamos. Both retreated to Corinth and the allies were dismissed. Thebes had complete freedom of action.

However, in the Peloponnese, revolutionary movements burst which were accompanied by territorial claims. The Elis reclaims part of its southern districts. The Arcadians tend towards union: Mantinée rebuilds its walls and becomes a city again; Tégée approaches her and even proposes the constitution of an Arcadian league. Athens would like to take advantage of this troubled situation to lower both Thebes, which it now fears, and Sparta, which it continues to distrust. Instead of the Dorian city, it would become, with the consent of the Great King, the guardian of autonomy. It was too vast a program for its forces: most of the Greek cities, with appetites to satisfy, were not prepared to sincerely sign a collective security pact. The Arcadian League, barely born,wants to wrest Orchomen's membership: Sparta considers the opportunity good to break the league. The Arcadians first seek the support of Athens; Seeing her full of reluctance and procrastination, they turned to Thebes. It is now the territorial domain of Sparta which will be dismembered, a situation four times secular which will be modified.

Thebes responds without delay to the call of the Arcadians. Epaminondas, at the end of the year 370, left for the Peloponnese. From Arcadia, already evacuated by the enemy, he pushes his offensive. With the Argives, Eleans, Arcadians and his allies in Central Greece, he has fifty thousand men under his command; in the middle of winter, it pours them into the valley of the Eurotas through the various passes that lead to Laconia. Leaving Sparta on his right, he walks along the river, crosses it in the vicinity of Amyclées. The plundering hordes of the Arcadians are wreaking havoc throughout the plain.

Sparta did not have a wall. Epaminondas perhaps expected that internal disturbances would deliver the city to him. In fact, King Agesilaus quite easily succeeded in stifling conspiracies and putting down the malcontents who were agitated. Periecs and helots defected; but the mass did not move. Defenders could even be recruited from among the loyal helots, and the Periecal towns sent contingents. Epaminondas barely sketched an attack; he could not persuade Agesilaus to abandon the heights to wage a pitched battle. This necessary prudence greatly affected the king himself and the Lacedaemonians still attached to their ideal. But the women of Lacedaemon denied their reputation: at the sight of the flames which devastated the countryside, they ran like madmen through the districts of the city.Despite all this tumult, the defense of the city was assured; but Laconia was sacked as far as Gytheion and Helos.

The allies of Sicyone, Corinth, Pellana hastily send reinforcements. Even Athens was moved and decided to send troops under the command of Iphicrates. The army of Épaminondas was melting: all the looters were in a hurry to return to their country and to secure the booty they had gorged themselves on. But before leaving the Peloponnese, Epaminondas was going to leave the Spartans with a memory of his passage, more lasting than the ruins that can be raised and the ravages of fields and orchards where mutilated trees grow green again. He freed Messinia, remained servile earth from the VIII th century despite renewed revolts.

The descendants of the Messenians who had gone into exile were called back to their country; with the freed helots, they regained possession. Epaminondas himself laid the foundations of the fortified town which was to serve as a center of resistance. It was established on the slopes of the Ithôme, which was already a natural defense; but the most learned methods of the art of fortification were also applied there: the remains of the walls with their beautiful foundations, of the towers which flank them, of the powerfully defended gates which open there, still arouse admiration. It was a place of refuge whose enclosure had a perimeter of nine kilometers: the efforts of the Lacedaemonians would break on this rampart.

Thus the rich plains of Messinia, from which the warrior class of Sparta drew a large part of its subsistence, were torn from it. Already reduced, it could have come to terms with this loss by better management of the land which it still possessed and which many Greek States must have envied. Aristotle at the end of the IV th century, yet he felt that Laconia could feed fifteen hundred horse and thirty thousand hoplites? But for more than a century, Sparta will not even attempt an effort to reform itself and on the other hand will exhaust itself in claiming its former conquest.

To tell the truth, she was encouraged to do so by the mad policy of those even who could still fear her ambitions. The intervention of Epaminondas did not establish in the Peloponnese a lasting order of which the Arcadians, strongly united with the Messenians, Eleans and Argives would have been the defenders. It was in vain that the Arcadian Confederation gave itself a new center, the immense city of Megalopolis whose territory encompassed all of southern Arcadia, including the cantons which had just been taken from Sparta. It will not be able to maintain its own unity and will thus promote all intrigues.

For a time, Thebes leads the game; it systematically strives to weaken Sparta, takes away its allies, becomes in its place the champion of the King of Persia in Greece and receives the subsidies; Sparta sees with pain its former ally recognize the independence of Messenia (367). She seeks an understanding with Athens, which fears Thebes. But Athens hardly thinks of supporting the claims of Sparta; still very recent memories there maintain incurable suspicion. At most, she would gladly play the advantageous role of arbiter between the Peloponnesians. Sparta, distraught, now has the support of the tyrants of Sicily: they provide it with mercenaries who help it to take back at least from the Arcadians, on its northern border, Sellasia who kept one of the accesses to Laconia.King Agesilaus engages in the service of a satrap revolted against the Great King: the military leader of the Spartan state acts as a condottiere to provide his homeland with money.

In the Peloponnese, Eleans and Arcadians are at grips and the Eleans, despite an alliance with Sparta, even lose the presidency of the Olympic Games. But the Arcadians are divided: North against South, Mantinea against Tegeus and Megalopolis, the first with Sparta, the others with Thebes, Argos and Messene. Epaminondas reappears in the Peloponnese: he tries to surprise Sparta, but fails. Before Mantinea, his tactics were close to giving him victory over the Lacedaemonians, the Mantineans and the associated Athenians; but he is killed. The battle remains undecided; the hegemony of Thebes succumbs with Epaminondas.

Sparta hardly profits from it; the following years are for her without glory. As it persists in claiming Messenia, it excludes itself from the general peace concluded shortly after the battle of Mantinea (362). But she is powerless: the public treasury is empty. A system of taxes and loans annoys the Periecs and the Spartans themselves. King Agesilaus, at the age of eighty, embarked for Egypt with thirty Spartans and mercenaries. He will defend the independence of this country against Persia. Noble task, but Agesilaus, who indifferently supports the Egyptian kings Tachos and Nectanebo, aspires less to glory than to money. Dismissed after having established the throne of Nectanebo, he received two hundred and thirty talents for his homeland. The citizens of Sparta have long since not been sufficient for military operations;the periecs have become reluctant; the allies provide troops if they are paid; the mercenary armies replace the militias. But throughout the Greek world the military tactics of the Spartans are still famous; their services as chefs and coaches are readily hired. Agesilaus, who died in Africa before having returned to Sparta, was the first in a long series of captains who took up service abroad and monetized their war value with varying degrees of success.who died in Africa before having returned to Sparta, was the first of a long series of captains who took up service abroad and monetized their war value with varying degrees of success.who died in Africa before having returned to Sparta, was the first of a long series of captains who took up service abroad and monetized their war value with varying degrees of success.

In this troubled time, when the States which, in turn, led Greece, Sparta, Athens, Thebes, are weakened, but not yet prepared for definitive renunciations, when Macedonia, in the hands of a king of genius, Philip II, begins to rise to the rank of great power, Sparta, like the others, clings to certain traditions, but also throws overboard ancient attachments. The devotion to the Apollo of Delphi is only a troublesome memory since Thebans and Thessalians lead the amphictiony. When the Phocidians seized the sanctuary of Delphi and its treasures, thus unleashing the war that was called “Sacred War”, Sparta sided with the sacrileges. It only brings them rather poor support, firstly because it always aims to restore its situation in the Peloponnese,but also by the superstitious fear of compromising oneself too openly with impious people. Philippe, who ensures the crushing of the Phocidians (346), will be considered the champion of religion. And it is to him that will pass, in the Peloponnese, the tutelage of the peoples who, rightly, never cease to fear Sparta: the Arcadians and the Argives will be his faithful friends.

At the same time, Sparta, whose projects he thwarted, which he called on to respect the independence of Messene, manifested a certain hostility towards him; but this hostility is inert. In 343, King Archidamos, son of Agesilaus, left for Magna Graecia where Taranto, colony of Sparta, was threatened by the Italic peoples. His own taste led him to seek adventure; but one had to be blind not to see that in Greece Philip's ambition could at any moment precipitate a conflict in which Sparta, as in the days of the Persian wars, would have found profit and glory. Archidamos was killed in 338, on the same day, it is said, when the fatal battle of Chéronée was fought. Thebes and Athens, the two enemies, had finally allied themselves against the king of Macedonia; but Sparta, embarrassed by the absence of its king, insensitive to its own interests,had not joined the coalition.

However, in Chéronée, Sparta can be counted among the conquered cities. She refuses to compose with Philippe; this then completes the work of Thebes: not content with devastating the valley of the Eurotas, he reduced Sparta to the possession of Laconia, between Taygetus and Parnon. All the territories that it had disputed for so long with its neighbors of Argolida, Arcadia, Messinia are taken from it. But she takes pride in suffering defeat without recognizing it. She refuses to enter the Panhellenic Confederation, concluded in Corinth on the initiative of Philip. When the son and successor of Philip, Alexander the Great will lead his expedition against Persia and will first pretend to act as delegate of Greece, Sparta will not recognize this title. Alexander, after his first victory in Asian soil,will dedicate an ex-voto with this dedication: “Alexander, son of Philippe, and the Hellenes, with the exception of the Lacedaemonians. "

The reforms of Agis and Cléomène. The disaster of Sellasie

From the year 338, Greece decidedly lost the direction of its own destiny. But the cities which had known glory days and the pride of the command sometimes rushed under the yoke. History records the successive failures of their efforts: there is still some greatness - and some teaching - attached to these obstinate attempts, too often incoherent.

From the departure of Alexander for Asia, Sparta thought of abolishing by arms the decisions which mutilated its territory. No bond attaches him to this Macedonian; there is no wrongdoing in soliciting against him the subsidies of this Persia which he claims to destroy. Its first successes can only hasten the movement which is preparing. Sparta finds some allies in the Peloponnese; but its king Agis III meets near Megalopolis the superior forces of the governor of Macedonia Antipatros. He remains on the battlefield with more than five thousand of his people. The battle had been fierce; the wounded king, carried by his companions, was joined by the enemy; he dismissed those who accompanied him and alone, fought on his knees until he was overwhelmed under the features. Sparta had to deliver fifty hostages; but the city was not occupied.

During the wars which followed the death of Alexander, Sparta remained on the sidelines. But by the end of the IV thcentury, it surrounds itself with a fairly primitive rampart, now renouncing one of the features that distinguished it between the Greek cities. Demetrios the Taker of Towns laid siege to it in 294 and, it is said, would have taken it had he not been in haste to interrupt operations to secure the Macedonian throne. Against his son, Antigone Gonatas, Sparta, under the leadership of an energetic king, Areus, made an attempt to restore the ancient Peloponnesian League. We can regret that this period is so poorly known; for the first time, Sparta minted money. On the coins that are issued, appears the portrait of Areus, wearing the diadem like the Hellenic rulers. It seems that this character who had reigned since 309 had formed vast projects;he even dreamed of resuming towards Delphi the policy of deference and protection which had formerly been practiced by Sparta. He led a campaign against the Aetolians who now ruled Delphi. His crusade failed, and the Peloponnesian League soon dissolved.

In Sparta, rival ambitions were unleashed: against Areus stood his uncle Cleonymos, removed from the throne. At the end of the IV th century, it was called Tarentum, as before Archidamos: use stood the princes of the royal families in allassent in the West to try their luck. Cleonymos' brother Acrotatos himself had left for Syracuse in 314. But Spartan education still formed whole and rough characters; outside, these men were soon hated tyrants. Acrotatos had to leave Sicily, after being removed from his command; Cleonymos evacuated Corcyra where he had settled. The latter, returned to Greece, puts in his interests the king of Epirus, Pyrrhus, hot-headed, always ready to embark on war expeditions.

This affair, which brought Sparta on the verge of ruin, was told at length by Plutarch: the sudden and disloyal entry of Pyrrhus into the territory of Sparta, his arrival in front of the city, the relentless work of the inhabitants to strengthen the fortifications. , the cooperation of old men and women, the repeated assaults of the enemy, the sudden return of Areus who was then in Crete, the final collapse of Pyrrhus. The bravery of the men of Sparta is painted there in vivid colors; and even more, that of the women who, the alarm passed, seeing that they no longer needed to join in the fight, returned to their homes. In the absence of King Areus, his son who was called Acrotatos, had defended the most threatened points of the enclosure.

But Cleonymos' disappointed ambition was mingled with the annoyance of an outraged husband. His wife Chilonis had fallen head over heels in love with the young Acrotatos. While Pyrrhus and Cleonymus attacked Sparta, she, who had remained there, held a lace to strangle herself so as not to fall into her husband's hands if the city was taken. When the exploits of Acrotatos had averted the imminent danger, the Lacedaemonians envied Chilonis who had such a valiant lover. And some old men followed the prince, shouting: “Come on, gentle Acrotatos, work well Chilonis; but make beautiful children in Sparta. The anecdote is not improbable: we know that the marriage ties were quite loose in Sparta. In the general picture of this heroic and simple city, there can be an element of truth; but we must remember,out of prudence, that the women had shown more weakness a century or so before, when Epaminondas had invaded Laconia.

After Pyrrhus withdrew and was killed before Argos, King Areus again allowed himself to be drawn into grand political plans. Egypt was chiefly there; she wanted to use the Greek states to keep Macedonia at bay. Areus was the agent of his designs and won Athens there. The alliance concluded then recalls in a moving way the battles fought jointly by the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians to preserve the Greek cities of slavery. Now the time has come to attack, in agreement with Ptolemy, the destroyers of Hellenic freedom. But Antigone Gonatas, who was targeted, was quick to retaliate: in 264, Areus succumbed while trying to force the lines of Corinth. The defeat of the coalition affected Athens more severely than Sparta. Acrotatos, successor to Areus,can still try to take Megalopolis; his failure and his death put an end for a time to the vast thoughts.

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In Part III of th century reformers appear kings Agis Eurypontides of the house, that of Cleomenes Agiades. It is one of the most curious episodes in the history of Sparta.

Since the law of Epitadeus had in fact allowed free traffic in land, the social and economic condition had rapidly worsened. The whole of Greece suffered from the same evil: the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a small number of people. In Sparta, all had favored this concentration is the development of personal wealth at the end of the V th century, the loss of Messinia in the middle of the IV th. In a country deprived of commerce and industry, the only possible investment of capital was the acquisition of land. The small owners sold their estates to free themselves from the debts that new needs had pushed them to contract. A few hundred families had thus come to possess the whole territory of Sparta; women, in particular, had huge properties because, for a long time, they had served as nominees for all financial transactions prohibited to their husbands.

The owners themselves were not all in a prosperous position. The simplicity of ancient customs had disappeared: public meals were deserted both by the rich, who no longer wanted to participate, as by the poor who could not make their contribution. The more frequent contact with foreigners had quickly given the Spartans a taste for easy life and luxury. Some kings, Areus among others, had given the example of a splendor borrowed from the Hellenistic courts. Also mortgages heavily burdened many estates belonging to this aristocracy plundering. Between the poor, deprived even of their civil rights, and the privileged, living in the insecurity of the next day, at least temporary coalitions could be formed.

It is therefore not surprising that one of the inspirers of the reform was the uncle of King Agis, Agesilaus, who, we are told, had contracted immense debts. But Agis brought to it all the ardor of generous youth. He shared the partly utopian conception that one had gradually formed of the constitution of Lycurgus; the salvation of Sparta seemed to him to depend on a return to this constitution. In fact, he displays a clearly revolutionary program: equalization of fortunes, abolition of debts: but he adds to it the restoration of public morality, and in the very detail of his reform, he believes himself to be linked to the great legislator of the past.

In fact, the essential article of the reform was the distribution of the land, in the valley of the Eurotas, into four thousand five hundred lots, reserved for the citizens of Sparta; of the rest of the soil, in fifteen thousand lots. In this way, alongside the periecs, the former body of the Spartans was reconstituted by bringing in those who had been deprived of their rights, a certain number of periecs and even foreigners. These various elements would be subject to traditional education and discipline; participation in public meals would be imposed again. The virtues of yesteryear would flourish again, for they were based not on race and origin, but on mores shaped by institutions [institutions are precisely an emanation of race]. On the condition of the helots, nothing had changed: the Spartan state could not exist without them.Agis obviously dreamed of renovating the military strength of Sparta by re-establishing a class dedicated exclusively to war and nourished by servile labor.

There was only an apparent anachronism here. The regular Lagid army was not far from being based on the same principle in this Egypt where the native peasant almost played the role of helot. But on the banks of the Eurotas, expropriation was difficult. In vain, Agis' grandmother and mother, who owned immense estates, offered to set an example. The opposition was led by the king's colleague, Leonidas, who had lived for a long time at the court of Syria and hardly dreamed of returning to the customs of the ancestors. He was supported not only by the nobles threatened with their property, but also by all those shocked by the excessive increase in the number of citizens. The council of elders rejected the project. The ephors, favorable to Agis, succeeded in dethroning Leonidas. But, from the following year (243),the new college opposed and had to be deposed illegally. The mortgage titles were then solemnly burned, at the instigation of Agesilaus: the burdened owners were relieved. But they obtained that the division of land was postponed, supposedly for reasons of prudence. The people began to whisper.

Agis wanted to seek military glory abroad in order to strengthen his credit. Sparta was then combined with the Achaean League, which formed at the beginning of III ecentury, grouped together certain cities of the North Peloponnese. A common campaign, waged against the Aetolians, eternal plunderers who had invaded the peninsula, ended without a fight. In the absence of Agis, the government of Agesilaus raised general complaints. Act, compromised with him, met only hostility. King Leonidas, a refugee in Tégée, was recalled. Agis sought asylum in the venerated sanctuary of Athena. A ruse delivered him to his enemies who put him to death. His mother Agésistrata and his grandmother Archidamie, considered to be his accomplices, were strangled on his body. Never before had a hand been laid on a king. The Spartan oligarchy, in its decline, to defend its authority, did not shrink from the most atrocious executions.

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The other reformer, Cléomène, was the very son of that Leonidas who had thwarted Agis' plans. His father had given him in marriage the widow of Agis, the beautiful Agiatis, who was one of the richest heiresses of Sparta. She used, it is said, all the influence which a very lively passion gave her over her second husband to induce him to take up the plans of the first. But Cléomène is a prince of a different stature than Agis. Without doubt, circumstances made him the architect of the ultimate disaster; but he was on the point of restoring his preponderance to Sparta at the same time as he was correcting some too glaring vices in his constitution.

By the time he comes to the throne (235), the Achaean league has reached its peak. The hereditary enemies of Sparta, Megalopolis and Argos joined it. Sparta could have, and perhaps should have, entered into an alliance with this league, which led the fight against Macedonia. But the traditions of hegemony were still alive. It is also doubtful that the leaders of the league made great efforts to spare the susceptibilities of the ancient state.

Cléomène seeks to rally around Sparta the Elis and the cities of Arcadia hostile to Megalopolis, Mantinea, Tégée, Orchomene. More serious thing: it approaches the Aetolians, sworn enemies of the Achaeans. Conflict becomes inevitable. Cleomena was not averse to it: a happy war could give her undisputed authority in Sparta.

The ephors see his game and seek to suspend or at least limit hostilities. Without entering into direct opposition with them, Cleomena succeeds in forcing their hand. He was very successful near Megalopolis; no longer fearing the Achaean army, he left his Lacedaemonian troops in Arcadia, whom he was wary of; he leaves for Sparta with his mercenaries.

The coup was successful: four of the Ephors were killed along with ten of their supporters; eighty citizens, exiles. The ephorate is abolished and by a symbolic gesture, Cléomène causes the seats where these magistrates were sitting to be overturned, except for one of which he takes possession. Before the people, he justifies his conduct, throws on the ephors the responsibility for the violent measures he had to take, shows that this magistracy was born out of usurpation; then he sets out his social program: new distribution of land, abolition of debts, increase in the number of citizens through a reasoned system of naturalization. On all these points he met with Agis: both were inspired by doctrines then professed in Sparta.

The name of one of the theorists of the reform is given to us: Sphairos of Borysthene, Stoic, long established in Sparta, master of Cleomena. He had meditated on the institutions of Lacedaemon which he dealt with in a few works. He collaborated in the reforms of Cleomena, which did not all remain on paper. The body of citizens was increased to four thousand by the admission of the periecs; each of them had their share of land, but had to do military service. We saw the reappearance of the system of regular training and public meals, centers of military fraternity. Cléomène tried hard not to appear as a tyrant: he shared the kingship with his brother Eucleidas. The rivalry between the Agiades and the Eurypontides thus ended (227).

Sparta is therefore reformed: it remains to recreate the Peloponnesian confederation. The Achaeans do not stand before the army of Cleomena; they are close to recognizing the hegemony of Sparta. But the league was led by Aratos, a mediocre general, a cunning diplomat. A disease of Cléomène allows him to carry out delicate negotiations at leisure. Until then, his entire policy had been directed against Macedonia, the eternal enemy of Hellenic independence. He prepares the turnaround, shows the dangerous ambition of Cléomène, recalls the ancient tyranny of Sparta. Even Sparta, in the old days, offered support to conservative governments. Now a king has given the signal for revolution there: he has divided the lands and abolished the debts. In all the cities of the league, the advanced parties will conceive a new daring.A choice is needed: the Achaeans, left to their own strength, can do nothing against the King of Sparta. If they do not want to submit to his will, they must resort to their old enemy, the King of Macedonia, Antigone Doson. New successes of Cléomène support these remarks: almost all Arcadia is subjected; Argos is busy. Democratic movements are breaking out everywhere: the lower town of Corinth is handed over to Cléomène. The federal assembly of the Achaeans, under the impulse of Aratos, deals with Antigone: it gives him as pledge the citadel of Corinth, the key of the Peloponnese.New successes of Cléomène support these remarks: almost all Arcadia is subjected; Argos is busy. Democratic movements are breaking out everywhere: the lower town of Corinth is handed over to Cléomène. The federal assembly of the Achaeans, under the impulse of Aratos, deals with Antigone: it gives him as pledge the citadel of Corinth, the key of the Peloponnese.New successes of Cléomène support these remarks: almost all Arcadia is subjected; Argos is busy. Democratic movements are breaking out everywhere: the lower town of Corinth is handed over to Cléomène. The federal assembly of the Achaeans, under the impulse of Aratos, deals with Antigone: it gives him as pledge the citadel of Corinth, the key of the Peloponnese.

From then on, the empire of Cleomena collapsed quickly. In the cities, the oligarchic party, encouraged by Macedonian aid, prepared the defection. The hopes that the popular masses had placed in Cleomena were not realized: the king had not dared to proclaim the abolition of debts. Argos was the first to abandon it. Soon he had to withdraw to Laconia and defend its passes, not without making daring forays into the neighboring countries. He had freed two thousand helots for money and armed them in the Macedonian way. But he lacked money; the king of Egypt, Ptolemy III, who had supported him against Antigone, seemed to take no interest in the struggle.

The decisive battle began fourteen kilometers north of Sparta, at Sellasia. Cleomena had entrenched himself there on two hills with twenty thousand men. Antigone had thirty thousand Macedonians or allies under his command: his skillful maneuvers and the compact strength of the Macedonian phalanx decided the day. Cléomène, flushed out of his strong position, had to engage in the melee in which the Lacedaemonians succumbed (222).

In the midst of the general rout, Cleomena, with a few horsemen, left the battlefield where, among the corpses and broken weapons, lay the last hopes of Sparta. He did not linger in the city that he could no longer defend and himself advised submission to the Macedonian. Plutarch, in unforgettable lines, portrayed this return of the vanquished king: “The women ran to meet his companions in flight, took their weapons, brought them drink. He himself returned to his house: since the death of his wife, he had kept a young captive there, of free birth, whom he had taken in Megalopolis. She approached him to give him the care she had accustomed to give him on his return from combat; but he wanted neither to quench his thirst, although he was tormented by thirst, nor to sit down, although he was fed up with fatigue.Fully armed, one hand resting on a column, his face resting on the crook of his elbow, he remained motionless for some time: in his thoughts, he went through the various positions he could take. Then, with his staff, he launched at full speed on the road to Gytheion, and all embarked on vessels which had been kept ready and which immediately weighed anchor. "

This departure was often accused of desertion: a king of Sparta should not have survived his defeat. But Cleomena, who in the present could do nothing for Sparta, hoped for the future. He left for Egypt where he believed to find a support to recover his throne and raise the fortune of his country. This calculation was neither cowardly nor absurd a few years later, it could have come true. But Cleomena had already perished, betrayed by Egyptian diplomacy who refused him any assistance, held him captive and finally forced him into a mad attempt to escape his prison by calling on the Alexandrians to a freedom they did not even know the name of. (219).

With Cleomena disappeared the last champion of the greatness of Sparta. In the work he had attempted, memories of the past had strangely mingled with the necessities of the hour that he had not ignored. He had not counted on the forces of the city alone, whose military power he had worked to restore; he had hoped that the already traditional policy of the Lagides, opposed to any increase in Macedonia, would help him get his hands on the Peloponnese. But, with insufficient support from Egypt, he had to face the alliance of the Achaeans and Macedonians, concluded by the will of Aratos. This was the real cause of its failure. We should not be too hasty to accuse the Achaean chief. In a Greece torn apart by centuries-old distrust, it was difficult to adopt a policy that was both wise and generous.Memories of Lysander's Sparta hardly guaranteed that Cleomen's Sparta would use its suzerainty for the greater good of the Greek states.

The last days of Sparta

For the first time, in 222, an enemy army occupied Sparta where it encountered no resistance. Antigone Doson abolishes the reforms of Cléomène, suppresses royalty, obliges Sparta to enter the Panhellenic Confederation which he had just reconstituted, the last term of a submission that neither Alexander the Great nor his father Philippe had been able to impose.

Undoubtedly the city does not take long to free itself from external constraint, less by its own strength than by favor of the disorder unleashed by the death of Antigone. We see the reappearance of double kingship, but Sparta, agitated by civil dissensions, will especially experience a tyrannical regime under which the last vestiges of the ancient constitution are erased.

The most famous of the tyrants of Sparta was Nabis, besides endowed with the royal title and distant descendant of this king Démarate who had exiled himself in Persia before the Persian wars. Curious and disturbing figure that we know only from the testimony of her deadliest enemies. He accomplishes a social revolution, also claiming the constitution of Lycurgus and the example of Cléomène, but in fact, without any concern for principles or theories. He kills or banishes a large number of rich Spartans to confiscate their property; he freed helots to increase his army; he brings his mercenaries into the body of the citizens without worrying about their origin or their past.

The duel between Sparta, represented by this Nabis, who is made a chief of brigands, and the Achaean league, now ruled by the brave and integrating Philopoemen, resumes with new ardor. But the Roman intervention now blurs all the traditional data of the Hellenic conflicts. In 197, the Republic and Philip V of Macedonia are at war. Nabis first approaches Philippe: Argos is abandoned to him; he dispossessed the rich there, shared the land, eliminated debts, imposed military service. Then he turns to the Romans and supplies them with mercenaries.

He was wrongly expecting their recognition. Once peace has been concluded with Philippe, King Nabis is nothing more than a pirate for them. Did he not arm ships, join party with the Cretans and, from Gytheion, wage race war? As he wants to keep Argos, we see in him the violator of Greek freedom, solemnly recognized by the Roman general Flamininus at the Isthmian Games in June 196. By mutual agreement, the Greeks and Romans march against him. Laconia is plundered; coastal towns, including Gytheion, removed. An assault on Sparta is repulsed with difficulty, it is necessary to burn down parts of the city to stop the attackers. Nabis capitulates: the coast of Laconia, detached from the Lacedaemonian territory, is put under the mandate of the Achaean Confederation. It is a new and serious reduction in Sparta.

Nabis had been spared by Flamininus: he remained master of Sparta and soon resumed his dangerous pursuits. But the Aetolians, with whom he had joined in part, distrusted him, and had him assassinated (192). Philopoemen rushes up, occupies Sparta, puts it in the Achaean Confederation. It is truly the end of its independence; the city will be detached from the Confederation only to become the fairy of Rome.

The Achaean Confederation then embraced the whole of the Peloponnese; but Rome saw the development of her power without pleasure, and Sparta endeavored to take advantage of this distrust to free herself from it. His pride was not the only one at stake; many new citizens feared the return of the banished and the recall of the measures taken by Nabis. In 189, the city entered into open revolt against the League and wanted to put itself directly under the suzerainty of Rome: by a sad privilege, it was the first Greek city to take this step. But Philopoemen, on his own initiative, carried out a military execution: not content to put to death all those responsible for secession and to expel or sell as slaves the new citizens made by Nabis, he wanted to destroy even the last remains of the Lycurgus institutions,to "cut the nerves of the city". Sparta was no more than an Achaean city; Spartan education had to disappear.

However, with the consent of the Romans, the city was able to return to its ancient form of government, without however reestablishing royalty. What remained of traditional pride in Sparta did little more than precipitate the savage rush of legions on the Peloponnese. Can we even speak of pride in the last conflict which, after peaceful years, arose between the Lacedaemonians and the Achaean Confederation and led to the intervention of Rome? The Spartan Menalkidas, who was accused of having fomented secession, was a strategist of the Confederation and his name is involved in a corruption case. His accusers do not seem more honest than he. They all lead shady intrigues and personal struggles. They multiply the procedures with the Roman Senate;but they do not even await his decisions and dangerously agitate popular passions, ready to ignite either for the independence of Sparta, or for the intangible rights of the Confederation. Finally, after many procrastinations, the Senate seemed determined to break up the Confederation, whose indocility gave it offense. It was then the mad war against Rome, the rapid crushing of the Achaeans, the destruction of Corinth. Sparta had neither to boast nor to rejoice in a success thus purchased, to which its arms had not even contributed (146).It was then the mad war against Rome, the rapid crushing of the Achaeans, the destruction of Corinth. Sparta had neither to boast nor to rejoice in a success thus purchased, to which its arms had not even contributed (146).It was then the mad war against Rome, the rapid crushing of the Achaeans, the destruction of Corinth. Sparta had neither to boast nor to rejoice in a success thus purchased, to which its arms had not even contributed (146).

Also, this success consumes its downfall. The Achaean Confederation is dissolved; but the Lacedaemonian State has also disappeared, and there is only the city of Sparta, a free city, freed from tributes apart from the services it grants, subject however to Roman supervision. The ancient Periecal towns, in particular the coastal towns, detached from Sparta, form a kind of union, the union of the Lacedaemonians whose religious center is the sanctuary of Poseidon at Cape Tenare.

For the city thus reduced, there is no longer any question of political life. It still disputes with its neighbors of Messinia some cantons of Taygetos; but, in this constantly reviving dispute, the Senate and later the emperors are the appointed arbitrators; their decisions are changeable, but always obeyed. On the 1stcentury BC, the civil unrest which agitated Italy had its repercussions in Greece. Sparta sided with Pompey, but Caesar seemed to have disdained to seek revenge. After the death of the dictator, she takes sides against her murderers. Cassius ravages the coast of Laconia; Brutus promises his soldiers the plunder of Sparta. Two thousand Lacedaemonians fight at Philippi, and, during the first battle, are taken in Octavian's camp and massacred. But Octave triumphs; he becomes emperor. Roman peace extends over Greece.

We are then witnessing a curious return to things of the past. The civic body in Sparta has undergone the most profound modifications for four centuries. First reduced to a few hundred privileged people, enlarged by various elements, mutilated again by massacres and banishments, reconstituted by what means we do not know, he attaches himself to a tradition and wants to revive it, throughout to the extent that it is compatible with the new state of affairs created by the grip of Rome.

Among the institutions that gave the ancient city its strength and originality, many are dead forever. The periecs have become independent; the helots no longer exist. The Spartans are landowners or peasants: they claim their estates or cultivate them themselves. They have slaves; but the system of serfdom, assigned plots of land, fixed royalties, long obsolete, had no reason to exist now that Sparta no longer had to organize its defense. No one thought of reinstating it. Neither is the Spartan prohibited from trading; but Sparta does not have direct access to the sea. Even though imperial favor returns it to some coastal towns in Messenia and gives it the island of Gaudos, the provincial city will preferably devote itself to agriculture.

The ephorate, which Cléomène had suppressed, was restored and preserved throughout the imperial era. But we also kept the patronomes , instituted by the same Cléomène and it is the name of the oldest of these magistrates which appears at the top of the official documents. The responsibilities of the two colleges cannot be determined. We find the Council of Elders, the assemblies of the people that are held in the Skias, the distribution of citizens into tribes and obai. Under the first emperors, a family held extraordinary power in the city. One of its representatives, Euryclès, had fought in Actium; he took the name of Caius Julius Euryclès, and played in a way the role of governor; among his descendants is a Caius Julius Lacôn who minted coins. But these characters only derive their authority from the goodwill of the emperors: Augustus and Tiberius have sometimes struck them out of favor.

If in the political organization of the city, we had to make many sacrifices, the conservative spirit was able to manifest itself with all its intransigence in the institution of children. Multiple inscriptions, which belong to the first centuries of our era, list the age groups with their complex nomenclature, the competitions in which different groups of children participate. Religious festivals were celebrated with the accompaniment of games and dances which kept an archaic character. All the youth of Sparta had a role in it; she still proved her discipline and her endurance. Under the influence of Stoic doctrines, a way had been found to bid even on the harshness of ancient times. The flagellation of the ephebes, near the altar of Artemis Orthia, did not take its final form until Roman times.It was a bloody spectacle to which the city was invited. To receive assistance, in the third century AD, a theater was built that included the facade of the temple of the goddess and her altar. The priestess still presided over the ceremony; but the religious sense was obliterated. Under the eyes of the crowd, the young people displayed a fierce emulation; some, it is said, perished under the blows. The most resistant received the title of "winner of the altar".the young people displayed a fierce emulation; some, it is said, perished under the blows. The most resistant received the title of "victor of the altar".the young people displayed a fierce emulation; some, it is said, perished under the blows. The most resistant received the title of "victor of the altar".

The training of children and ephebes trained them formerly in this military discipline to which the Spartan, throughout his life, had to comply. But now, out of the ephébie, citizens are no longer bound by the constraints decreed by the old legislation. We pay a cult to Lycurgus who sometimes occupies in title the office of patronome; we interpret the customs we relate to it. But public meals bring together only a few officials. Sparta is no longer a camp. The description given by Pausanias in II th century after Christ leaves the impression that within its walls, amounted notable buildings, which were up to fairly recently. The theater whose remains were unearthed may not have predated the end of the 1stcentury before Jesus Christ; but it was several times reworked and embellished. Tragic and comic representations were given there. Some intellectual life was developing in Sparta.

But she was extremely careful to keep her distinctive features. The Spartans still considered themselves to be the purest representatives of the Dorian race. The notable families were attached to the gods, Heracles, the Dioscuri, Poseidon; they bore the names of the great heroes of past centuries. Above all, Sparta endeavored to revive its old dialect. At a time when, throughout the Hellenic world, a kind of common language was tending to establish itself, it sought to reproduce as faithfully as possible, with all its peculiarities of syntax or pronunciation, the speech of the ancestors where contemporaries had noted already, with curiosity or amusement, features of a strange archaism.

In classical times, the manifestation of the conservative spirit in the field of language had been tempered by the indifference of the Spartans for all that touched on the expression of thought. On this point, they were resistant to innovations by nature more than by system. But, in the first centuries of our era, their attitude is quite different: there is a conscious and thoughtful effort to renew a tradition, often floating: we want to speak and write in Laconian. The language thus recreated is partly artificial, but only partly: in the countryside of Sparta, the use of the dialect must have been maintained through the centuries. To restore it to its dignity as a national language, it took scholarly work which sometimes resulted in questionable creations. However we could say that this language,far from being a "pretentious patois" had had something alive. It was the last expression of that stubborn particularism which, in Laconia, has survived political debasement.

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After noting this partial revival of laconism, we can quickly glide over the last days of the history of Sparta. The tradition that the city claims to represent commands certain attitudes from it: thus it will enter into rivalry with Athens for the direction of the Pan-Hellenic festivals which still commemorated the battle of Plataea. On the other hand, a real or apparent respect for this tradition will inspire the attitude of the Roman emperors or of the more or less autonomous States towards Sparta. Tiberius does not like Sparta; Nero does not visit her, out of hostility, it is said, against the spirit of Lycurgus' constitution, which made men free. On the other hand, Hadrian, enamored of the past, stops there twice; it gives it a large place in the amphictiony of Delphi.A last echo of the military glory of Sparta is perceptible at the time of Lucius Verus and Caracalla, in the wars against the Parthians: a contingent which takes part in it bears the name of the battalion of Laconia and Pitane.

Former colonies of Sparta will do their honor to recall the family ties which united them to their metropolis. The noble traditions which surrounded the name of Sparta had early spread far and wide. One of the most curious consequences of this broadcast was, perhaps from the third ecentury BC AD, the establishment of a bond of friendship between the Lacedaemonians and the Jews: it seems to have lasted until the ruin of the Jewish state [one cannot say that the Spartans were able to draw from this state of affairs, if it were true, a claim to fame]. Documents, which are not all suspect, even allege a kind of kinship between the two peoples [which is a mystification]. We compare the legislation of Lycurgus and that of Moses [which is incongruous]. In the Mediterranean world, the prestige of the well-polished city still lasts and, as a consequence, maintains among the last descendants of the Spartans the cult of the past.

The second invasion of the Goths of Alaric in 395 marks the ruin of ancient Sparta. The location will be permanently abandoned at XIII th century; but nothing more connects the Byzantine agglomeration to the city of Lycurgus. Then the Frankish and Byzantine city of Mistra will be populated at the expense of Lacédémona whose site we will hardly know for a long time. When Châteaubriand was traveling the Peloponnese in August 1806, he could still claim that common opinion confused Sparta and Mistra and thus give himself the undeserved honor of having, by careful observation of the place and by reasoning, identified the ignored remains. “One of the most famous cities in the universe”.

The idealization of Sparta

We know that idealized image of Sparta began to develop in Greece even from the V thcentury BC The first lines were drawn in the party struggles that tore the cities apart: those who were called the oligarchs celebrated the regime of the Dorian city. But this partisan favor would not have survived the circumstances which created it if it had not been for philosophers and political theorists to give it a kind of durability by freeing it, at least in appearance, from immediate quarrels and by attempting to establish it on a rational basis. Plato wants to build a perfect city, or, if he abandons his intransigence, the best city that it is possible to imagine taking into account human possibilities: he borrows very largely from the institutions of Sparta, such as he them. designs. The real features and the partial retouching intertwine inextricably.

After the reign of Alexander the Great and the formation of the great Greco-Macedonian states, political life gradually died out in the Greek cities. Philosophers may accidentally be called upon to advise kings; they no longer legislate for free cities. Their ideal will change. Some, seeing the conflicts that oppose the different classes in the cities, will seek a remedy for social inequalities: Lycurgus brings them an ideal of equality. The others, more preoccupied with individual destinies than with the happiness of communities, will pretend to train wise men, insensitive to the threats of fortune and death. Sparta again will provide them with its support. During the imperial period, it only kept from the past, as we have seen, what concerns the education of children.But Xenophon already tended to give Spartan education a universal value, almost independent of the political form for which it had been arranged. We then bid on this design. Sparta is no longer a city; it is the school of frugality, endurance, temperance, in a word of virtue.

Plutarch collects the disparate data which come from these various sources and gives a gallery of the celebrities of Sparta: he writes a life of Lycurgus, a life of Lysander, a life of Agesilaus, a life of Agis (the reformer), a life of Cléomène. He would have written a life of Leonidas, if he had known anything other than the death of the hero. Its very conception contradicts the ideal of old Sparta, which is loath to the preeminence of an individual. He is also often very embarrassed to realize his point and he covers up with legends and anecdotes the overly gaping gaps in his documentation. It also collects the notables of the Lacedaemonians, a collection of apophtegmas in which the virile and sententious soul of a people of sages must be expressed, with the appropriate brevity.

A contemporary critic, reading the translation justly famous as the Hellenist Amyot given the XVI th century, the Livesof Plutarch, sums up his impression of Sparta and its legislator as follows: “The laws of Lycurgus are dreadful, and this much-vaunted Sparta appears a colony of Quakers who should have horrified the Greeks, so friends of liberty. The Quakers, who go so far as to deny the right of self-defense, would have made singular Spartans; but the fact remains that the spirit of conformism which reigned in Sparta shines through in Plutarch. Now, not only the Greeks, who knew this spirit, did not ordinarily consider that it was incompatible with freedom; but the reading of Plutarch served in particular to warm the enthusiasm of posterity towards Sparta, Lycurgus, and the Lacedaemonians. Montaigne, among many others, can serve as a guarantor. Amyot's translation was a bedside book for him:he declares himself "imbued with the greatness of these men"; he admires "the excellent Lycurgus font"; finally, he found so many rare examples in Spartan history that he considered it "all miracles."

It would take a long time to list the testimonies. Many relate only to the simplicity of life of the Spartans and their disdain for the sciences which soften courage. But philosophers who, in the XVIII thcentury, want to outline the plan of a constitution, turn to both Rome and Sparta; in Sparta, they find above all the fundamental principle of equality and freedom [which is completely false]. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lycurgus is the radical reformer whom he opposes to the menders, the one who begins "by cleaning the area and removing all the old materials ... to then raise a good building"; Sparta is the city that he will "never have cited enough for the example that we can draw from it"; it is a "republic [which Sparta was not] of demigods rather than men, so much their virtues seem superior to those of humanity". They knew how to be free; their institutions, the ephorate for example, only became tyrannical when they became corrupted.Even hilotism was justified or at least excused by Rousseau: "There are such unfortunate positions where one can only preserve his freedom at the expense of that of others and where the citizen can only be perfectly free. slave is not perfectly slave. Such was the position of Sparta. Voltaire showed less indulgence: he did not like Sparta which, according to him, had done Greece no good and had produced only "a few captains, and even fewer in number than the other cities". He has little knowledge of Sparta's land tenure system; but his clear mind sees the link between this regime and the hilotism which he harshly denounces: "Lacédémone avoided luxury only by preserving the community or the equality of goods [" More contemporary of Fustel de Coulanges,it is Karl Marx who takes the Spartan model as an example and sees in it a primitive communism. Against this idea, the professor demonstrates in his lessons that private property does exist as well as inequalities between Spartans. The myth of a primitive communist city is thus dismissed, with supporting sources. Closer to us, some would put forward the austerity of the City or its educational system as models to follow, the historian to qualify this. "(Sylvain Bessone," Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges,some would put forward the austerity of the City or its educational system as models to follow, the historian to qualify this. "(Sylvain Bessone," Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges,some would put forward the austerity of the City or its educational system as models to follow, the historian to qualify this. "(Sylvain Bessone," Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges,Lessons on Sparta ”, <https://journals.openedition.org/lectures/11894> )]; but it will only keep one or the other by having the land cultivated by a slave people. It was the legislation of the convent of Saint-Claude, except that the monks did not allow themselves to assassinate or to knock out their mainmortables ”.

Voltaire is an exception. During the French Revolution, Sparta was at the pinnacle; Lycurgus is a great legislator. But, as it has not left any written laws and it even prohibits any written code, it is invoked more than it is imitated. Only a few extremists dream of equality of fortunes. We often limit ourselves to very simple formulas in which the ideal of Sparta remains rather vague: in its book of grievances for the States General of 1789, the Third Estate of Bar-le-Duc asked that a national school be established which , as in Sparta, formed men and citizens.

A historian of Sparta, Claudio Janet, writing in 1873, was distressed at this naivety: “These false notions about ancient societies were not without influence on the development of our national character, which proves once again that no historical error is absolutely indifferent. Contemporary scholars believe that their criticism has led them to more accurate notions about the institutions of Sparta and the alleged legislation of Lycurgus. Would we like to conclude that the history of the Dorian city can no longer nourish an ideology, all inspired by contemporary realities?

To answer this question, it will suffice for me to translate the advertisement placed inside the cover of a book published in Leipzig, in 1937: Sparta , by Professor Helmut Berve.

"Education of youth, esprit de corps, military form of life, the right place assigned to each individual after a test reaching heroism, duties and values ​​for which we are fighting even today, all this seems to have found in ancient Sparta an exceptional achievement. Many features of the idealized image of Sparta that we carry within us may not withstand confrontation with reality. Yet the effective struggle to preserve oneself in a differently organized world shows us a life of tragic grandeur. The lofty sentiment with which a divine ideal has been pursued in almost ascetic self-denial, as well as mastery in open struggle, have for centuries made Sparta, almost without dispute, the regent of the common interests of Greece.The stubbornness with which the order desired by the divinity, expressed by the voice of the Apollo of Delphi, has been preserved, even in decadence, by a class of men who was constantly diminishing; the stubbornness with which an aristocracy full of its dignity closes itself, for the salvation of its lofty ideal, to a world given over to an external prestige, commercialized, democratized, is deeply moving. And we are reconciled to some extent with the will of the gods when we see that it is not these false values ​​that brought down Sparta, but that it found its dominator in the kind of combat which, from the beginning, was appropriate for her nature, that she ultimately succumbed on a battlefield. "by a class of men which was constantly diminishing; the stubbornness with which an aristocracy full of its dignity closes itself, for the salvation of its lofty ideal, to a world given over to an external prestige, commercialized, democratized, is deeply moving. And we are reconciled to some extent with the will of the gods when we see that it is not these false values ​​that brought down Sparta, but that it found its dominator in the kind of combat which, from the beginning, was appropriate for her nature, that she ultimately succumbed on a battlefield. "by a class of men which was constantly diminishing; the stubbornness with which an aristocracy full of its dignity closes itself, for the salvation of its lofty ideal, to a world given over to an external prestige, commercialized, democratized, is deeply moving. And we are reconciled to some extent with the will of the gods when we see that it is not these false values ​​that brought down Sparta, but that it found its dominator in the kind of combat which, from the beginning, was appropriate for her nature, that she ultimately succumbed on a battlefield. "And we are reconciled to some extent with the will of the gods when we see that it is not these false values ​​that brought down Sparta, but that it found its dominator in the kind of combat which, from the beginning, was appropriate for her nature, that she ultimately succumbed on a battlefield. "And we are reconciled to some extent with the will of the gods when we see that it is not these false values ​​that brought down Sparta, but that it found its dominator in the kind of combat which, from the beginning, was appropriate for her nature, that she ultimately succumbed on a battlefield. "

We will not comment on this announcement which accords with the spirit of the book. But we must conclude.

History has been able to criticize the sources from which our knowledge of Sparta comes to us and show the uncertainties and sometimes the romantic. She was able to question the unity of the legislation attributed to Lycurgus and the very existence of the legislator. It was able to attack, with particular vigor, the alleged regime of community and equality of property, which Sparta would have known at the dawn of time and which would have made it the perfect model of a democracy. Leaning on archaeological findings, she was able to reveal VIII e , the VII th and again in the sixth ecentury BC, a Sparta very different from the warrior city that only our fathers knew. Calling on comparative ethnography, it showed the primitive character of certain institutions and an American scholar compared, in a very suggestive way, the military system of the Spartans and that which developed among the Zulus in the first part of the 19th century. th century, the kings Djaka and Djingaan [this comparison is inappropriate].

History cannot - and doubtless never will - shed a full light on the origin and the progressive action of the forces which determined the so original evolution of Sparta. On the value of these forces, it does not comment. And Sparta, mysterious and secret, after having fed the thought of Plato and Rousseau, gives birth to a new mysticism.

Pierre Roussel, Sparte , Éditions de Boccard, 1960.